

# ESCOM Journal

September/October 2022



*Emeritus Students  
College of Marin*

*Lifelong Learning*

*Lifelong Doing*

*Lifelong Friendship*

Photo: Laura Milholland

## *From the President*

Welcome to the latest edition of the ESCOM Journal. August 15 marked the start of a new term at the College of Marin and the staff is ready to proceed on a steady course. ESCOM's Clubs and Spotlight Presentations via Zoom have been on target as much as possible throughout the last three years. We all hope that this coming term will bring us back to "normal" in a world that wants to come back.

As of August 1, the College of Marin has a new Director of Community Programs. Lori Friedman has replaced Carol Hildebrand. Lori's functions are a little different from Carol's, but she is our go-to person in the College of Marin administration. Welcome aboard, Lori.

On the not too distant horizon is ESCOM's 50th anniversary (Our official beginning date was October 29, 1973). We are already starting to plan for our Golden Anniversary celebration in 2023. The College of Marin will also celebrate an anniversary, its 100th year, in 2026. I believe this shows our tenacity, our pride and our commitment to lifelong learning in a changing world.

Our new ESCOM brochure states our beliefs: "Lifelong Learning, Lifelong Doing, Lifelong Friends." I just attended a meeting of our Digital Camera Club, which meets in person at the Indian Valley Campus ESCOM Center. This club has been active for 13 years, going on field trips to many different parts of the Bay Area to take photographs,

while alternately meeting to discuss the different theories of great pictures. It was most rewarding to meet again in person.

Now that we are opening the ESCOM Centers again, we need volunteers to host these centers, which provide opportunities for in-person relaxing, reading, studying, enjoying friends and being active with our clubs. We will soon open new art exhibits in our ESCOM Centers as part of our sprucing up for the fall semester. If you want to get involved, please send us an email to [escom@marin.edu](mailto:escom@marin.edu). We will help get you started. I hope your summer has been healthy and happy and satisfying.

-- Gary Gonser, President



Laura Milholland



Elaine Thornton

### Please Note

Monthly Trivia, which was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month, will no longer be held on Zoom. Club leader, Janis Luft, said that she hopes to soon resume in-person contests at a local library.

## Our Graying Days

These cloudy days when sea and  
sand seem borderless and gray -  
it's fragments washed up on  
the sand that occupy me now.

Bright shells, hollow logs, beached  
crustaceans - littered remains  
of former living things - gutted,  
freed at last from tidal grip.

Let go the splintered shards you've  
gathered, leave it for another's  
kindling. Free your arms to keep  
your balance in the shifting sand.

Remember what do to when  
drowning. Turn, face up, and float.  
Don't thrash about, about  
the seamlessness of days.

Embrace this boundless sky while  
giving up the form of things.

Face up, and feel the warmth and  
rhythm of what still holds you.

-- Brady Bevis Boyd



## The Egg

She'd been dead  
nearly a year when I found it  
nesting in her mending basket  
its juniper green glaze crazed  
like fine Ming porcelain  
its weight consoling  
in the palm of my hand.

Winter afternoons  
I'd watch  
her polished fingertips  
coaxing the egg  
inside sweater elbows  
blue jean knees  
Argyle toes  
teaching me to mend  
life's random tears.

In a dream the egg splits wide  
releasing her —  
architect of surprizes and delights  
my wellspring of mid-century wisdom.  
She sits cross-legged on the living room floor  
rolling the egg to me on the other side.

-- Lynn Arias Bornstein



*Penny Hansen*

*"Pear," watercolor, Patty Young*



## My Muse

Like a cat, she comes & goes  
On her own accord  
Depending on her mood  
Think about it  
Like a cat she doesn't much like  
People on machines  
Or drunks  
Or dogs  
She wants your undivided  
Attention or maybe even love  
Then she just might take a nap  
On your lap

-Marcia Taylor Smith

## Mariupol, Ukraine, March 2002

Snowflakes fall gently, frigid winter air, mountain tops blanketed white.

Masses huddle in rainbow-colored parkas at train station.

Mariupol Mothers Weep.

Waiting patiently, single bags, breathing desperation, hearts racing.

Women, children crying, leave on the rails of widowed and orphaned.

They run, hide and survive at unknown destinations.

Heaven's doors close to pleading hearts as bullets, rockets, bombs fall.

Where snowflakes of white once dwell, blood-stained snow has stories to tell.

Birthing mothers lie in terror. Pregnant bodies shred and torn.

Unborn babies will never play. They will not see the light of day.

Mass burials for fractured bodies, tethered by rainbow-colored jackets.

No time for caskets. No time to mourn or say goodbye, as they cart by.

They plead: *"Don't let my crumpled body parts lie in cold-slippery black bags!"*

*Don't let me die unknown, alone. Take me home, take me home. Bury me next to my kin, where I belong."*

Who will stand for mothers, and babies, departed?

Who will stand for the tattered-shattered?

Who will stand for fractured rainbow bodies in mass graves?

Mariupol mothers weep.

We weep.

– Ray Fay



Tami Tsark

## I See Red

I am held hostage by the hot headed Red  
Whose goal is to ensure no fetus dead.  
Even though by force I lost my virgin's crown  
When my stepfather pulled my panties down,  
They allow me no in between common ground.  
These right-wing religious *ties that bind*,  
These do-good monsters here on earth  
Dressed in righteous human skin  
Took my body, took my mind.  
I never did invite them in.  
Outdated political playbooks  
Are surfacing once again,  
And I am forced to say AMEN,  
Compelled to release my womb  
And bear a child condemned to doom.  
With no help, no money, no job, no home  
Me and this bastard I'm forced to hold  
Will live on the streets out in the cold.

-- Carol Allen

Kathi Stewart





## Captain Kirk

When I moved to Marin from the City in 1996, I did a ride-along with an Animal Services Officer. One of our calls was for a deer that had been hit by a car, resulting in two broken front legs. We found her lying in some bushes in front of a house, scared and hopeless. The officer, Jim “Captain” Kirk told me the danger was that she would try to run; he couldn’t allow that. Now I understand why he was so insistent. Everyone in the Field Services Department eventually hears *that sound*, a “hit-by-car” deer, freaking out on adrenaline, running on the stumps of her two broken front legs. It’s a hollow sound, bone on concrete. Feet flapping like potholders. The impossible sight and sound of it. Something you never imagine till you witness it. Jim had a .30 caliber carbine with a scope.

In those days Marin County was different. It wasn’t the Wild West, but euthanasia by rifle or pistol was an everyday thing. The officer would get on the radio and let the 911 dispatcher know s/he was going to discharge a firearm at that location. It was answered with a routine 10-4.

Jim quietly explained to a few gathered neighbors that neither the State, the County, nor any other organization had the funds to repair and rehabilitate seriously injured wildlife. He explained what he was about to do, and they obediently withdrew. He got close to the doe, not enough to panic her, but she was looking right at him when he fired. The gun’s report was loud, sharp, and final. There was only one shot. It went through her skull. She never saw a puff of smoke or heard the gun. She did not suffer, but I was not used to seeing this, and had to think it over that evening.

Jim had made the decision, done the mourning for her, when he came on scene and evaluated her. The tightness in his voice and on his face when he saw how bad it was, was her benediction. “Don’t worry honey, it’s gonna’ be ok”. The job takes courage, to be the one who goes to these terrible events, to experience and feel the animal’s pain, then remain composed and act to resolve it.

The deer was suffering. As soon as Jim realized there was no hope, there was no delay.

Captain Kirk was in his 30’s, an average looking guy. He grew up in Georgia, hunting game with his dad. He’d been a butcher for Raley’s before this job. He was what some folks call a redneck. He once wisecracked that the solution to problems in the Middle East was to “Nuke ‘em all, and turn their deserts into glass!” But he knew all about deer, and was more in tune with them than a lot of conservationists.



Laura Harrison

The best story about Jim was the time he had gone down to Tiburon, for a call regarding a buck that wouldn’t leave a backyard. Normally we wouldn’t respond to a call like this if the deer isn’t hurt. We just tell the caller to leave the gate open and the deer eventually leaves, but in this case the caller was very old, so Jim had gone down to shoo the buck out of the yard.

He had made a mistake though. He engaged an aggressive animal without something in his hand. This was fall, when the bucks are in “rut”. They’re full of testosterone, necks swollen up with muscle. If they smell females near they are territorial and quick to anger.

Jim went in the yard. The buck looked at him, put its head down and charged. Full rack, big mature animal. Jim had no time to run. Grabbing the antlers as they enveloped him, he found himself flat on his back, the buck’s nose in his groin, and the antlers on either side of his ribs!

No one around to help. He had to wrestle the damn thing. It finally gave a few snorts and relaxed. He pushed it off, then backed away. I was in the room when he told this story the next day. He brought the shirt he was wearing—it had holes on one side where the antlers had gone through. If he’d been bigger, or the buck’s rack had been narrower, he could have been a bloody mess.

Soon after that, Jim left the state to get married and I never saw him again.

-- Mike Holland

## Pruritus: pruritus

*an unpleasant sensation of the skin, provoking the desire to scratch or rub it*

It begins with an increased sensitivity on my dry, papery skin before I'm fully awake, followed by a crawling sensation on my scalp, which I try to ignore. *Trying to sleep here.* Then the itching: the back of my arms, one maddening spot on my left thigh. Fire ants march across my back. My scalp is no longer prickling – it's burst into flame. I want to sink my nails in and scratch till it bleeds. But I don't, of course. *No scratching allowed.* Instead, I reach for the soothing ointment that leaves a sticky residue on all my clothes. Apparently, it's tasty; my cat likes to lick it off. If the itching is really bad, I opt for the topical steroids. *Gotta' be careful with it because it can damage your skin even more.* When I'm having a particularly horrid day, I apply ice packs, which provides some temporary relief.

Time for a quick shower, and I do mean quick – two minutes tops – in lukewarm water. No soap. I shampoo with a mild soap used for washing babies. Exiting the shower, I carefully leave my skin as damp as possible, then apply handfuls of moisturizer, starting with my feet, up the legs, the arms - lots and lots on the arms, which are the most damaged - my shoulders, and what I can reach of my back. I count all the lesions as I am doing this. There are a few new ones today, and the rest have apparently decided to stick with me indefinitely. They may fade away, but when I think that they're finally gone, nope, they're back.

Choosing what to wear is a daily challenge. Certainly nothing that bares my arms, because of the thickened red patches that sometimes ooze or even bleed. No tee shirts, no shorts. No cute little summer shifts, either. Bathing suits are definitely out. Can't possibly get in a pool or hot tub and subject my delicate, damaged skin to chemicals. If the lesions on top of my feet aren't too inflamed, I can wear sandals; otherwise, it's socks and sneakers. *Perhaps a burka?*

Pedicures, which have always been my favorite form of self-care and pampering, are now... fraught. Salon pedicures are definitely out because of the hot water and the embarrassment of watching the manicurist stare at the lesions on my legs. I hurriedly explain that it's not contagious. She nods with a politely dubious expression. No lotion, no leg massages.

Eczema. Atopic dermatitis. It's common, so common that dermatologists don't find it very interesting. It's chronic and incurable. Babies and toddlers get it. Old people can get it, too, as our skin gets thinner and drier. My diagnosis came on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, a gift I sure as hell never asked for and would like to return.



*Medusa Tree, Steve Lovette*

Online, I read everything I can find about atopic dermatitis. (Facebook, in their creepy way, keeps posting articles on the latest miracle treatment for Eczema on my feed.) I learn that this disease can be brought on by stress, family history or allergies, spicy food, Jewish space lasers, or an overactive immune system. I join an online support group, where fellow sufferers lament that they've had eczema for 30 years and nothing, *nothing*, has ever helped. One woman lamented that she hasn't had a date in four years because she'd be too mortified to have to undress in front of anyone. Oddly enough, it does not make me feel any better because other people are miserable too. It's not cancer, I remind myself often. Lots of people have worse problems. Everyone has *something* to deal with.

I hear my mother whispering in my ear, "Self pity is the most destructive of all emotions."

"No, it isn't, "I whisper back. "There are worse things, Mom."

"Did you expect to reach old age with perfect skin and all your teeth?"

"No, of course not. Well, maybe."

Tonight, I'll reapply all the moisturizer, wrap my arms in Saran Wrap, and tuck my sticky

self in bed, looking forward to a few hours of blessed relief. Hello darkness, my old friend.

-- Nancy Frease



## The Base Sides

I see how you feel  
Do you feel a new deal?  
I need to be clean without disease,  
Offer assets that live without malignancy.  
Let the maiden sleep  
Wash yourself where the rivers hide the peep.

Are you safe at night and warm?  
Can you make a basic a safe form?  
Are your feet truly the best way to drive your head?  
Are evil guns the game that replaces what we  
dread?

Hot and cool,  
Tub to pool.  
In and out with waves  
Ker plop as we play.  
Elemental success for all sides  
Makes work and play easy to abide.

Are you safe at night and warm?  
Can you make a basic a safe form?  
Are your feet truly the best way to drive your head?  
Are evil guns the champion game that replaces what  
we dread?

-- Karen Arnold



*"The Masquerade," Michelle Gantos*



*Harvey Abernathey*

## Love Beyond

An infant's first cry prompts a tear in the eye,  
a sound one can never forget.  
A final goodbye to a father on nigh;  
his proud smile cloaks a parting regret.

A small bird in flight to its nestlings on high,  
in a tree bending slowly in breeze.  
With tender and caring each nestling is fed  
with food, warmth and love 'till release.

A doe nuzzles her fawn through night until dawn;  
trees covertly shade a young bough.  
A dolphin and calf swim away from the shoal -  
the bonding a quest to avow.

This reach throughout life beyond laughter and tears,  
instinctively hard to define.  
And yet there's a glow, and the urge to bestow  
in the warmth of your hand in mine.

-- deidre silverman



Laura Harrison

## Flores de Mayo

*An annual festival held in the Philippines to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary. It features the ritual pageant with the town's beauties held on the last day of May.*

Stringed lights line the road to the plaza where the *banda* plays the last dance. Reina, my older sister and jewel of the family, leads the candlelight parade. White fragrant *sampaguitas* crown her black hair, her cheeks flush from the warm night air. Town folks gather like flies frantically fanning themselves with decorated *abanicos*. Then the crowd hushed, even the candles held their breath.

Reina steps forward, full lips the color of peonies, her brown eyes round with wishes. Wrapped in her gossamer gown, is May's full bloom with the incandescent glow of youth.

Almost midnight, Reina combs my curly hair in front of great grandma's gilded mirror, a wedding gift from the Spanish envoy. Reina touches her cheek and recalls the Mayor's son's soft lips. We chatter and chirp like small birds before sunrise. Her embroidered handkerchief collects red stains from her muffled coughs.

After the rains, it was time to plant the rice. She wore a gown of gray burlap and white muslin to lead her last parade to the edge of town. I follow behind, my white shoes caked with mud from the road.

I climb the hill where the dead reside and flowers bloom from granite slab. May is the cruelest month of all.

-- Grace Angel

## This Is My Body

Pyramid builder, field hand, lazy prince.  
 Quadratic equation, presumption of innocence,  
 partner of the impatient.  
 Ungraspable grasper, Studebaker in neutral  
 on a rainy day.  
 Receptacle of northern tattoos and  
 the longing to be seen.  
 Blushing spelunker, jiggly-legged dragon  
 scoping the war torn land on Sabbath.  
 Tree hugging fool in love  
 with old men casting blessings and  
 native women star-singing mojo  
 by backyard fires.  
 Gawker of pedicures, snub nosed aching  
 for language that seeds open the field.  
 Wrinkly-assed lover of the vertical and wide.

-- Stewart Mintzer



Amazon Water Lilies, Marilyn Bagshaw



## Letting Go

He bought the hat at Sears--red, blue, yellow plaid cotton, the sort of hat his father might have worn playing golf with his cronies in Miami. I didn't object to its purchase, although it was not my taste. It wasn't exactly ugly, just ordinary. It clashed with most of his shirts.

I kept the hat on the closet shelf, with his worn, faded jeans and wallet. After two years, I could still detect a slight scent when I buried my nose in the fabric. It was not the same as his shirts, which had turned neutral months earlier, thus, allowing me to finally wash and donate them to the Cancer Society thrift shop.

No, the hat gave out a sadder smell. It somehow encompassed the quiet dignity of his suffering as he endured years of surgery, chemo, and radiation. There were travels in the periods of remission. Plans made, parties given. Hope gained, hope lost, hope re-gained. And, finally, lost forever.

He wears the hat in many photos of that summer. Crowds of friends and family came to call, or so it seemed; old buddies from his grad student days at UCSF; former grad students whom he had mentored; family from everywhere. They came from London, from Wisconsin, Virginia, New Jersey, Washington State, Washington D.C.

They came to say farewell, of course. But he would have none of it. He insisted on playing Hearts, did his card tricks, told old jokes. The photos tell their stories. One last bear hug. Smiles all around. They stayed too long. Wore him out. Made me frantic with worry. I couldn't send them away. Their need was too great.

I realized that, in time, I would part with the few items of his clothing that remained in the back of the closet. And the well-worn jeans, and the wallet, molded from years in his back pocket. I slept in the soft shirt I bought him at Costco. He looked so good in it. Sleep came more easily in that shirt.

As the memories became more deeply engrained

in my heart. As the garment woven from the days and nights of missing him became more comfortable. As my life took on new shapes--some so foreign to our life together that I could not fathom them yet, I would let go--his blue velour bedroom slippers, his scuffed Birkenstock sandals--all would go.

Except for the hat -- the tasteless, plaid Sears Roebuck golfer's hat. The hat would stay. The hat would not go.

-- Susan Mines

## A Thought

Unintentionally

Some brain chemical

Generates electrical signals

In neighboring neurons

That propagate like a wave

To thousands of neurons

That fire and create a thought

And the thought becomes

A concept that becomes

An obsession

A flurry of images

Then words

And I jot them down

And jot and jot

And work and work

Until I have a poem

Barbara MacDonald

## The Rustle of Fall

Late summer morning  
Low sunny morning  
Trees nudge each other  
into endless patterns of light

Taupe oak leaves  
from rustling branches  
scamper across a stone patio  
They are the first to fall

Hustling fluff-tailed squirrels  
look like they're at play  
But they feel autumn  
in their grey fur

They fly then scurry over bark and lichen  
and watchfully squirrel away their cache  
They seldom rest  
There is work to do

They squeal and jump and cavort  
as they collect jaunty capped acorns  
They find a hollow  
then another  
to trove their treasures

"Fall Tree," watercolor, Ayris Hatton



Leaves are ablaze  
in vermillion and gold  
Sunshine is filtered through trees  
  
The earth is tilting  
The air is hinting winter  
and today ushers in  
the bustle and rustle  
of fall.

-- Ayris Hatton



Laura Milholland



## The Hunter

Hitchhiking, I was dropped off well after dark near a highway summit in the Blue Ridge mountains, western Virginia. I pitched my tent a ways down a trail and went to sleep after midnight.

I opened my eyes the next morning to clear, crisp autumn sunlight pouring into my tent. I pulled back its flaps and gazed upon an illuminated hardwood forest full of yellow, orange and red leaves shimmering in a light breeze. It was the peak of fall and there was a rich smell of forest earth.

I edged out of my tent and spotted a human figure about thirty yards away. He appeared as in a frieze, seated unmoving with a shotgun cradled in his lap. The hunter, wearing a plaid wool jacket and cap, did not look my way. His gaze was trained upwards into some nearby trees.

"Son, you've overslept", he said in a low voice, maintaining his fixed posture. "Almost too late in the morning to get squirrel".

I replied, "I'm not here to hunt, I'm hitchhiking to California".

The hunter flinched just an iota at this statement. I quietly packed up my campsite and walked silently back down the trail. The hunter kept his pose, silent as well.

-- Nate Nealley

## Reflection on the Current Debate on Life and Rights

*Is my body really mine own?*

*for I did not create it.*

*If I did, I would want it formed differently -*

*for I learned to be critical.*

*It's a gift, I might say.*

*Oh, and how many - without a child - be over-joyed  
to have a baby, "not biological"?*

*A wondrous gift, just the same, I'd say...*

-- Jean Lee



Laura Milholland

## WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL?

**NEXT DEADLINE IS October 15**

Please send your **final** draft to  
[denizespringer@gmail.com](mailto:denizespringer@gmail.com)

### PLEASE ADHERE TO THESE SPECIFICATIONS

Submit only one piece of final, proofed work. Changes, unless absolutely necessary, will not be accepted after submission.

Include your name in the file name and on the page of your document. **You must be an ESCOM member. Membership is free but is no longer automatic with class registration. To join, go to:**  
<http://escom.marin.edu/join-escom>

**WRITTEN WORK (750 words MAX):** must be single spaced, left margin oriented, and ATTACHED as a Word doc. Do not submit PDFs of written work (as these cannot be properly transferred or edited).  
**Please submit only one piece per issue.**

**ART and PHOTOGRAPHY:** Borderless images only in file size no larger than 300 kb and attached to the email in the .pdf or jpeg format (not imbedded in email message). **Images larger than 300 kb or saved as a tif file cannot be considered.**

**POEMS: (50 lines MAX including the spaces between stanzas)** If your poem must be centered, please note this.

Misspellings, grammatical errors and erroneous line breaks could be mistaken as the author's intent and not corrected. Proof your copy before sending it in.

Information for "In Memoriam" must be verified with an obituary that appears in an official resource such as a newspaper.

*ESCOM (Emeritus Students College of Marin) is a student organization of active adults affiliated with the Community Education Department of College of Marin. Founded in 1973, ESCOM provides diverse opportunities for lifelong learning, lifelong doing, and lifelong friendships.*

## ESCOM Journal

Editor, Denize Springer

Web Content Manager, Richard Jensen

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### ESCOM Council

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### ESCOM Centers

**Indian Valley campus:** 1800 Ignacio Blvd., Bldg. 10 Rm. 40, Novato, CA 94949 415/457-8811, x 8322

**Kentfield Campus:** 835 College Ave., Kentfield, CA 94904 (ESCOM office is temporarily occupying the Deedy Lounge in the Student Services bldg.) 415/485-9652 or [escom@marin.edu](mailto:escom@marin.edu)

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