

ESCOM JOURNAL

July/August 2021



Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Doing

Lifelong Friendships

Photo, Marilyn Bagshaw

Redefining Life After COVID: Questions in a Post Pandemic World

How will you live now that you have more freedom with your days?

What will get you up in the morning? What will matter to you the most?

Would you like to change your life in some way but are not sure how?

Do you find yourself thinking about an opportunity you haven't pursued yet?

Many challenging questions surface when we take stock of our lives, especially after sheltering-in-place for over a year.

These types of questions can lead us to thoughtful reflection and a desire to explore new directions. Or they might just nudge us to stop, take a breath, and get our bearings.

Why not start this exploration by volunteering a small part of your time at ESCOM? We could use your talents, skills and life experiences. We have open Council and committee seats to fill, publications in need of volunteers with production and digital skills, Zoom wizards and more.

Soon we will be moving back into our centers at Kentfield and Novato COM campuses and could use volunteers to help us reset after the pandemic by greeting our members and visitors.

Tell us what you are good at doing and you can be sure that we will have a task, project or committee that is looking for someone exactly with your talents. How about leading a club? Are you a retired professor or lecturer who would enjoy sharing your love of the arts? Or a scientist or researcher who

can help us understand the world?

If you are looking for engagement and a place to contribute, ESCOM is looking for you. Connect with others who are also considering how to enhance and fulfill their lives.

What's in it for you? Studies show that volunteering and contributing increases longevity, reduces physical decline, gives us a sense of purpose and greater life satisfaction overall.

If you have lost any personal momentum during this past difficult year, let's talk. Sometimes it takes others to help nudge us along our path. Join us in contributing your skills to ESCOM. Please send us a message. Our email address is escom@marin.edu.

-- Luanne Mullin, President



Thriving Outside the Greenhouse, oil, Tami Tsark



Laura Harrison

MEMORIES OF COM

ESCOM is a gift awakening the roots of my graduation from COM in 1959. Born at Ross General Hospital, growing in Mill Valley with my family who arrived there from England before 1900, there was never a need to leave my hometown. All our needs could be met there.

Since the Richmond/San Rafael Bridge wasn't opened until September 1, 1956, attending UC Berkeley was out of the question for a small town girl. I had only travelled to the East Bay by boat, a continent away.

My Dad bought a used 1949 Ford for me to drive to COM. We didn't know our classmates' names, but we knew what they drove. In 1957 we parked up near what was then the library. Between classes and at lunchtime we congregated with friends around or in our cars. Some of us installed Bermuda Bells in the floor, near the clutch. We could step on it to send out a ring signifying we were present.

I signed up to take fencing as the physical ed requirement. So few did, the class was not given. I took golf instead. I was not a success, hitting my left foot when teeing off. Never finding the ball once I finally struck it.

Fond memories of Clarice Ball who taught French; Mr. Bruff who taught Geology, taking us on field trips to West Marin explaining layers of rock; Mr. Cadigan who taught Art. Family Life – a good class, excellent points made, but some of us married anyway! At that point in time women didn't need careers. It didn't take 2 salaries to buy a house and raise a family as it generally does now.

Wanting to be an electrical engineer, I took pre-engineering. I was the only girl in a class of boys. I was too shy to go to UC Berkeley. I married instead and have two fine adult sons with university masters degrees. Their wives reminded me they are old enough to join AARP. I'm still working on growing up.

COM has a big place in my fond memories.

-- Marilyn Bagshaw

FICTION

Memory

He/she seemed somehow familiar, although I couldn't quite tell if they were a he, or a she. Her hair was long. It was styled like a pageboy, shoulder length silver grey hair with the ends turned in. Her eyebrows were tweezed and her lips colored in a bright red lipstick. She was about my age, eighty-seven. The clothing is what threw me. He wore a man tailored shirt and chinos with a belt. The shoes were plain men's brown leather loafers. The smile is what seemed familiar.



Mono Lake, Laura Milholland

They walked towards me in the parking lot as if I too looked familiar, or that they knew me for sure. I said hello and was met with a strong hunkered down hug. This person was about 6' tall and I'm only 5'2". The embrace was both feminine and masculine. How that was felt can't be explained. Maybe it was the combination of perfume and strong fingers against my back.

I wasn't sure what to say, or do next. I clearly couldn't place this person and they didn't seem to realize my quandary.

They began to speak about people I knew and asked how everyone was. I answered but couldn't reciprocate. It was getting pretty awkward.

The discomfort finally came through and he, or she, laughed. "You don't know who I am do you?" I didn't answer right away. I kept looking into their piercingly beautiful eyes hoping for recognition. I was stumped. "No." I answered. "I don't. I'm sorry."

Just then, a kid rolling a shopping cart filled to the brim came careening towards us, his mother screaming after him to stop. He didn't, or couldn't. There was way too much speed and the weight of the contents just increased the velocity. It barely missed me but hit my new acquaintance head on throwing her over; her

head banging hard on my car's bumper and then again on the pavement. I turned away as blood circled around her silver crown and came in spurts over her already red lips.

The ambulance arrived within five minutes but it was too late. She, or he was dead. The cops asked me if I knew the victim. I said no but that she/he looked familiar and seemed to know me. I asked them if they could let me know what they find out. I gave them my information. They said they would but never did.

I'm forgetting so much these days. I have been for a while. I try not to let it wear me down. What I can't forget and probably never will, are those beautiful eyes and that familiar smile.

-- Fawn Yacker



Marilyn Bagshaw

Maple moss lichen, Harvey Abernathy



LEMONS

Three lemons announced
their arrival as morning yellow

After dreaming
Of being left on the tree

They sit a bit uncomfortable
As lemons might

Sometimes more sour than sweet

In a blue bowl
On the table in shrouded sun

Last night's green tinge
Lingers on their fragrant skin

The furious July winds
Knocked them off before ripening

In this galaxy of ways milky
Everything eventually

Finds home
Even these lemons

Perhaps to brighten a sauce
or become pie

The north star leads us
Until nothing is left behind

But echoes and rinds

-- Marcia Smith

A While Ago

It wasn't often that a delegation of more senior lawyers — in this case two, as many as could fit in my space— found its way down the narrow side corridor to my office. Ben, a senior associate, and John, a young partner, exuded bonhomie. Neither of them had spoken to me since I had joined the firm as a new, and the first woman, associate. It was November 1969, my third month at the law firm.

I was working at my desk, my back to the double hung window that lit my office. I wasn't used to visitors. They looked as if they needed each other for support but hadn't agreed on who was to talk first. There was a long silence. Finally, John said, "We're here about the lawyers Christmas party." Instant flash through my mind: they're going to ask me to plan the menu, maybe cook. Neither idea was upsetting as, despite the fact that I was a lawyer, I was a child of the 1950's. The idea that I might be asked to do what women do seemed like acceptance, somewhere between flattering and slightly amusing. Appalling didn't cross my mind.

I waited. Ben, the partner, stepped in. "The party is scheduled for December 13," he said, "and we wanted to know whether you plan on coming."

Oh, I thought, it's important to them that I be there since I'm the first woman associate in the firm. They probably want to be sure I feel included and welcomed at what they assumed would be an awkward event . . . all male lawyers and me. I stammered a little before saying that I couldn't be sure, I would have to check with my husband, but that I appreciated their letting me know.

They looked sheepish — and I give them credit for that. "It's important that we know as soon as possible whether you can come."

I was somewhat confused. "That's flattering," I said, "I'll let you know soon. "

"You don't understand," Ben said, taking charge in a rush. "We need to know today because today is the last day to reserve the Pacific Union Club for the party, as we always do, but if you come, we can't hold it there. They don't allow women in the room we always use. If you are going to come, we will have to go to the International Club — it's ok, but not as good as what we're used to."

"Oh," I said, still on the brink of the 1970's. I took the leap: "I will certainly be there."

-- Jean Gleason Stromberg



Dragon Fruit, pastel on paper, Carol Allen

On Borscht

It is summer and I am dreaming of borscht.

When I was growing up my mother served a small bowl of borscht, either spinach or beet with a swirl of sour cream on top before dinner every evening. It was served so cold there were slivers of ice floating in it. This was in the Midwest, and was a summer treat. My mother was a marvelous cook, a skill she did not impart to her daughter whose only interest in the kitchen was getting in and getting out as fast as she could. No easy task among three hungry brothers and a father.

It was easy to understand how the peasants of Eastern Europe discovered borscht. The ingredients were easy to come by. They were easy to grow and cook, very healthy and easy to store without refrigeration.

Recently we were invited to have lunch with friends who had made Sorrel (schav) soup. They had grown this wonderful perennial vegetable themselves. I had never eaten it before. It tasted exactly like the spinach borscht my mother used to make. I relived my childhood as I inhaled every mouthful of that delicious broth. They have promised me a plant.

My husband, who is Viennese, will not even taste borscht. I contend if it were served in a silver bowl (coupe') by a waiter in a starched white shirt, black coat, white towel over arm, priced \$16.00 on the menu, he might be persuaded to taste a spoonful, but truth be known, he still would not like it.

Me, I'm off to the market, spinach or beets, I'm not sure. I shall inspect all of the vegetables very carefully before I make a decision. All borscht is delightful.

This is dedicated to my mother, the best cook in the world, who could not teach her daughter.

Here's my recipe:

Cold Beet Borscht

3 lbs beets, washed peeled and halved

½ teaspoon lemon juice

1 onion chopped

1 tablespoon of sugar

10 cups water

1teaspoon salt

Boiled potato or sour cream as garnish

Boil potatoes, onion and beets until beets are soft. Remove beets and cut into strips. Strain out onion. Return beets and beet juice to pot. Add lemon juice and sugar. Adjust seasoning to suit your palate. Garnish with sour cream or a slice of boiled potato.

-- Iris Tandler (*Posthumously*)



Marcia Summers

Landing the Plane

Rob finally died. Well, he didn't *really die*; he took the pill, the hemlock. His cancer had spread to his brain stem, and it was moving right along. He decided to kill the cancer before it killed him. I thought that was reasonable, but I don't know that I would have had the guts to do it to myself. I'm conflicted: on one hand I'm sorry to see him go. On the other, I'm glad he's dead. I would not have wanted to see him suffer. I saw a PBS special on cancer where a strong, vibrant doctor got prostate cancer. They kept him alive till he was about ninety-five pounds; he looked at the camera, put his hand to his mouth, and cried in a high, woman's voice. I think they were treating him with female hormones.

Rob had the big C for twenty-one years, first astrocytoma, then a glioblastoma that made the astro look like a cold. Twenty-one years. I would whine if I had arthritis for six months. Not Rob. His father was a WWII bomber pilot who flew maybe a hundred missions and survived to become a Madison Avenue exec. Died of a heart attack when Rob was nine. Rob had shoes to fill.

He went through chemo, radiation, more chemo, surgery, experimental chemo, and at least one more protocol. Never gave up. I never saw him discouraged. He might have been knocked out from the drugs but I never saw weakness or doubt in his eyes. Years ago he lost his driver's license, also had to give up his passion, road bikes. He made it through months of treatment,

and I could not believe, got his license back! He was also back on his road bike. Seemed like he always thought he was going to put the cancer behind him. Even a year of that would have broke me for good. But not Rob.

What he did with his life was to squeeze cancer by the throat for 21 years, like a big snake. Even during his second-to-last year he was attracted to women and they were attracted to him. This from a guy who'd had cancer for 19 years. Might have had something to do with his teeth. He was in his mid-sixties but had the white teeth of a teenager. Bleached, I guess. I'm going to have to try that and see if it gets me anywhere.

Rob had worked some high-powered job, leasing out large office buildings in San Francisco, high stakes. I think he made big dollars but I don't know. I do know his company kept him employed through all of this: he'd work when he could, take some time off for brain surgery, for instance, go back to work, and on like that for years.

Eventually, Rob exhausted all avenues of treatment. He started having seizures again, just like when I first met him eight years ago when he said, "if I have a seizure, roll me on my side and don't worry." This time there was no new cutting edge, experimental treatment to join. He was at the end of the trail and the cancer was getting aggressive. He lost ability to move his right side, arm, leg, and said it was a matter of time till the left went as well.

One has to administer the pill oneself. No fair having a doctor do it for you. I visited him three times at the hospice, and I knew he wasn't



Laura Harrison

going to wait to lose the ability. He'd been in charge his whole life, vowed he would hang on until his two sons graduated college. The older, Andrew, had completed school; the younger, Miles graduated with a degree in international business in Switzerland and is now working in Sweden.

He could stop worrying about his sons.

I went to his memorial, and was invited to say something at the open mike. I quoted Mary Oliver: "What will you do with your one wild and precious life?" Rob lived by his own ideals with real courage. There were so many stories about him, from his friends and his sons. For 21-plus years he never gave up.

I have a short list of other folks who've passed away, that I won't forget. I'm adding Rob to that list.

-- Mike Holland

The Snood

Do you brood for the age
when the snood was the rage
with which women would garnish their hair?
That bawdy, course netting
would doubtless thwart petting
begetting some cautious male stare.

When platforms were strolling
in ankle-strapped mooring,
and cotton corsages meant flair,
the snood was a classic -
a jazz-aged Juraissac,
resplendent in molding the hair.

Though styles come and go some
the snood was a tiresome
depiction of devil-may-care.
part floozie, part flimsy,
designed on a whimsy
to coddle and cosset the hair.

Please don't tell your mother
the snood may recover
as *Me-Too* is having its say.
Just smile and remember
a style short on splendor
reflecting an earlier day.

-- deidre silverman

In an Out House

Sat down
tore out a *Yellow Page*
from a book once helpful,
now obsolete and brittle with age.

Through a slit in the door,
across the highway
I watched farmers and mules
harvesting hay.

And suddenly the ad
I held in my hand
tickled with relevance,
and made a demand.

So, I reflected and read.
I finished my wee. Well,
they'll just have to understand
at Old Bailey's Tack 'n Feed.

-- Denize Springer

Elaine Thornton





Laura Harrison

Wise Women Dream

Wise women dream
 Of past and present
 Of future possibilities and promise
 hidden yearnings-
 promptings to become more themselves
 Nurturing those parts forgotten or neglected
 Unknown or unimaginable.
 Wise women dream
 Embracing and cradling the small child they once were
 Mothering themselves and believing
 There is more to come
 More to uncover and enjoy
 More to be
 And time to rest
 Content in that being
 Dream on wise women
 Dream of a world that honors
 us all and reveres our collective wisdom.

-- Anne Mulvaney

Day 355 (The Bartolini Gallery)

The morning began
 Like the previous three hundred fifty four
 Sheltered in place
 Reciting Psalms
 Prayers for healing
 For Gabriel and me.

Coffee with
 Chocolate almond milk
 And cinnamon
 But not too much
 Out of fear of needing
 Strange restrooms.

I dressed in real clothes
 Not sweat pants
 Jeans (zippers and all)
 My brightest aloha shirt
 Fuschia, orange, green
 And gold.

My socks tan, orange
 And gold too
 With winged birds and angels
 Saying "Give 'Em Hell"
 In black letters
 Reminders of who I really am.

I braided
 My gray hair in pigtails
 A woman-child surrounded
 By fellow educators celebrating
 Our special day together
 The first of two March jabs.

Balloons, posters, proclamations
 Of "Way to go!" and "Flatten the curve"
 A volunteer took my picture at the exit
 With my iPhone
 And plenty of hand sanitizer
 It was my first shot of hope

In a long while.

-- Cindy Ross

Retire Quickly

All pyros know
the instructions on Black Cat firecrackers:

Light fuse and retire quickly.

I should have lived my life like that.

Light the fuse in adolescence.

Live a wild and reckless adventure.

Explode as many myths as legally possible.

Push the envelope, and more.

Hit all the highs and the lows.

Settle into normalcy

for a while.

Play your part.

Pay the mortgage.

But then

when you finally do retire,

light that fuse one more time.

Do it in the middle of an important meeting,

while your control-freak boss

demands, blames, self-justifies,

the pompous ass he is.

Time the explosion just right,

while he's in mid pontification:

You arrogant and insignificant loser, I am done.

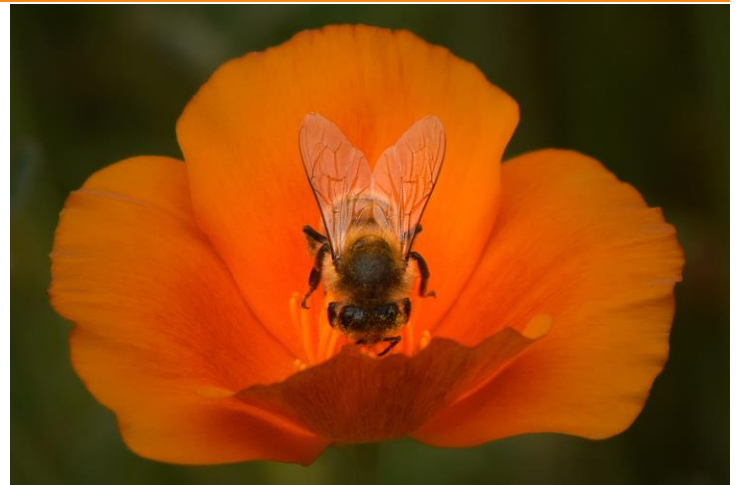
I am retiring from your tyranny.

Then pull out your roll of Black Cat firecrackers,

the one you've saved for this,

the five hundred fingered roll

of red tissue, silver dust and hope.



Laura Milholland

Brandish it.

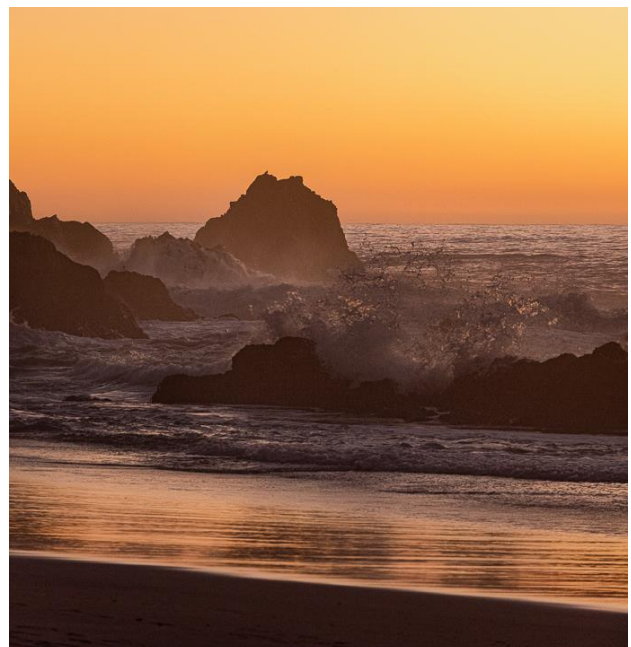
See the moment turn
from surprise to confusion to terror.

Light it, and quickly retire
to the elevator.

Laughing all the way down,
where security police are waiting.

They will understand.
They will form an escort.

-- Patrick Ritter



Golden Hour, Harvey Abernathy

Nature

I look out my front window at Nature, then I check the temperature and see that it is 55 degrees and decide not to go out in Nature. Instead I will admire Nature from inside my 75-degree house. I have a beautiful Maple tree outside my front window.

The tree is presently threadbare so it does nothing to stop the soot from the passing cars on Route One from wafting up and depositing grime on my windows. This is April so three plus threadbare months in this year along with three threadbare months from last year makes six plus months of soot on my front windows passing right through my Nature Maple.

My Nature Maple will soon produce some flowers, which will then quickly drop off all over my front yard. The pollen from these flowering growths will not do me much good with the lung issues that I already have. Leaves will soon replace the flowers. The beautiful broad leaves will appear and block the soot from the passing vehicles. I will then have 5 months of a beautiful Maple tree that effectively cuts down on automobile soot. If only I could last until everyone has an electric car I would be happy with my six plus month bare Maple. The summer months will quickly pass and those big beautiful leaves fall all over my front yard.

Prior to my Nature Maple getting bare for the winter it produces helicopter seeds which will also drop all over my front yard. The helicopter seeds stick to the pavement so they are impossible to sweep up. An outside vacuum cleaner is needed or some hired hands that will typically blow those things into piles and raise dust all over the front windows.

Maybe I can walk through the traffic spewing exhaust fumes, walk around the construction equipment in the vacant lot across the street, navigate my way through the shopping center and get to the hiking trail so I can saunter through Nature. I will consider that but first I have to describe the summer Nature experience.

We're having what is called global warming and that, evidently, is nature enhanced by man. This global warming has created problems across America and the world but right now I am focusing on my Nature experience. Global warming has limited rainfall in my region, which has resulted in drought conditions.



Grey Rose, Harvey Abernathy

This means that when Nature in my yard needs some watering I am restricted from providing the required moisture to keep Nature alive. This creates brown things that burn. I am then required to cut nature away from my house so the brown Nature things do not burn down my house.

We have many forests in the area which are great for cavorting in Nature but they also turn brown in a drought. The utility company has been blamed for creating forest fires during this browning experience in our normally beautiful green Nature forests. The utility company has been sued for their lapses so now they take it out on me by shutting off my electricity when we have some Nature winds. This does not stop the fires since in the summer we also have lightning storms. The last summer saw multiple lightning storms, which then created the forest fires that I had my electricity shut off to prevent.

We are now surrounded by forest fires for the summer because we can hardly contain a Nature phenomenon, never mind *stop* a Nature phenomenon. The forest fires lead to smoke filled skies so now that I have a fully functional Maple tree to keep the soot from wafting up to my windows the soot falls directly down from the sky. This somehow is even more efficient since it now covers the entire house rather than just the windows in front.

Maybe I could consider a nice summer walk in Nature since I have the warm weather and the nearby beautiful forests. The only problem is the forests are on fire and the soot falling from the sky makes it totally unhealthy to experience Nature. The advice is to stay inside, close the windows and keep Nature outside. Stayed tuned for some future uplifting Nature stories.

-- Bernard F. Cookson

Fiction

English 101

Dear Professor Carroll:

Yesterday afternoon, I was in Bradbury Library working on your assignment when six loonies showed up in the park across the street. Oblivious to a howling wind, they selected a table and used picnic baskets and back packs to secure a checkered tablecloth in place. Everyone seemed to have a bottle of wine. It made me wonder: “Who are they?” An eclectic group meeting during the Covid shutdown, drinking outside in a gale, clutching sheets of paper like life vests . . . it had to be a bunch of writers! I laughed at their lunacy but was fascinated.

A tiny woman in a bright red shawl passed out pink pages and started reading. She made the mistake of opening her arms to gesture and the wind filled her wrap and carried her off still clutching her angst. No one seemed dismayed. She must have been the token poet in the group, a lightweight.

A frou-frou poodle on a long leash and a woman with equally curly hair were the next to go, a pair of dandelions caught on a spider’s strand. As they swirled past the window, I heard her wail, “It’s so not fair. It’s my turn to read . . .”

The remaining writers huddled closer and uncorked another bottle. Wine glasses had been swept away, so the group drank from a bottle, passing it hand-to-hand, all the while clutching the table. Then a strong gust billowed the tablecloth like a spinnaker. Baskets and packs tumbled. The table began to wobble. A few, quick slashes of a switchblade, wielded by a sullen dude with a long, gray ponytail, sent the checkered cloth soaring. Unfortunately, a white-haired woman had become entangled, and she, too, sailed off, Mary-Poppins-like, scribbling notes as she went.

The ponytailed dude and a woman in blue hospital scrubs gestured. Apparently, each wanted the other to read first. They became increasingly agitated, until the woman snatched his manuscript and threatened to toss it to the wind. He had been holding on with one hand



Laura Milholland

and anchoring the woman with the other. So, when he let go of the table to reach for the pages, they soared off together still arguing about who should read next.

The remaining writer, drinking from his own flask, never reacted. Apparently, he was weighted down by thoughts so dense that nothing could move him. As the day faded, he remained in place, waiting, perhaps, for someone to discover him . . . or to lead him out of his darkness.

Good/bad . . . famous/not . . . who knows what they were? I envied them and wished I had their ability to find things to write about. But they were so distracting that I never finished today’s creative writing assignment. I’m sure you’ll understand.

Respectfully, Steve King

P.S. I know I could write good, creative non-fiction if you could suggest an interesting idea. Or maybe, I could start with something easy? How about poetry?

—Erik Cederblom

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL?**NEXT DEADLINE IS AUGUST 15**

Please send your final draft to
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 friends.

ESCOM Journal

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