

ESCOM Journal

The Literary and Visual Arts Publication of the Emeritus Students College of Marin

January/February 2026



INSIDE: Our Coast in Winter, A Paris Valentine, Netting Lives, New Beginnings

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Paris New Years

(Excerpt from a longer piece)

Valentine slowly drifted into consciousness and squinted at the clock resting on the small bedside table. 10:30 A.M. in the new year. Not surprising as they hadn't crawled into bed until three. He listened for sounds from Louisa's room across the hall. None. He eased out of bed and quietly opened his door and walked down the hall to relieve himself. He gathered slivers of soap from a small jade bowl carved in the shape of a frog. The frog dish always held only slivers although there was a whole bar in the bath.

He smiled, remembering asking Louisa a few weeks ago, "Louisa, with all the wonderful soaps in France, won't you let me buy you a few bars? Lavender, verbena, rose? What would you like?"

Giving her lovely low laugh, she'd replied, "I keep the slivers to remind me."

"Remind you?" He had held her gaze quizzically.

Her smile faded. "Of the women in Naples who suffered so in World War II," she began, "they virtually had next to nothing, not enough to eat, no soap, they cleaned themselves with charcoal! Can you imagine washing yourself with charcoal?"

Louisa continued, "I photographed the women Rosie interviewed for her story. Hearing about their experiences during the war broke our hearts."

Continuing down the hall Valentine turned into the small kitchen and set about making coffee. Carrying a cup to the sofa in the salon he heard Louisa stirring. He loved this room with its high beamed ceiling and overflowing bookshelves, four floors above Rue St Louis. He settled into the sofa cushions, his mind reliving yesterday. He'd arrived with caviar from Petrossian and a small terrine of Comtesse du Barry's fresh foie gras. What a wonderful store is Petrossian, Russian and Iranian caviar, beautifully painted ostrich eggs, nesting dolls, smoked salmon and sturgeon and champagne. Everything one needs to celebrate. He'd been unable to resist buying an ostrich egg as a New Year's gift for Louisa. She'd purchased baguette, bite sized pate a choux for the caviar and champagne. The feast for after the fireworks was complete.

Louisa joined him on the sofa, coffee in hand. "Oh Val, what a decadent lunch. I'll never forget it."

He'd made reservations way back in October at The Grand Vefour requesting Colettes' table. Enjoying a view of the entire restaurant they'd ordered Kir Royals and marveled at the 18th century decorative art. Colorful, fanciful paintings covered every space that wasn't mirrored, including the ceilings. They were sitting in a jewel box.



Jami Ellermann

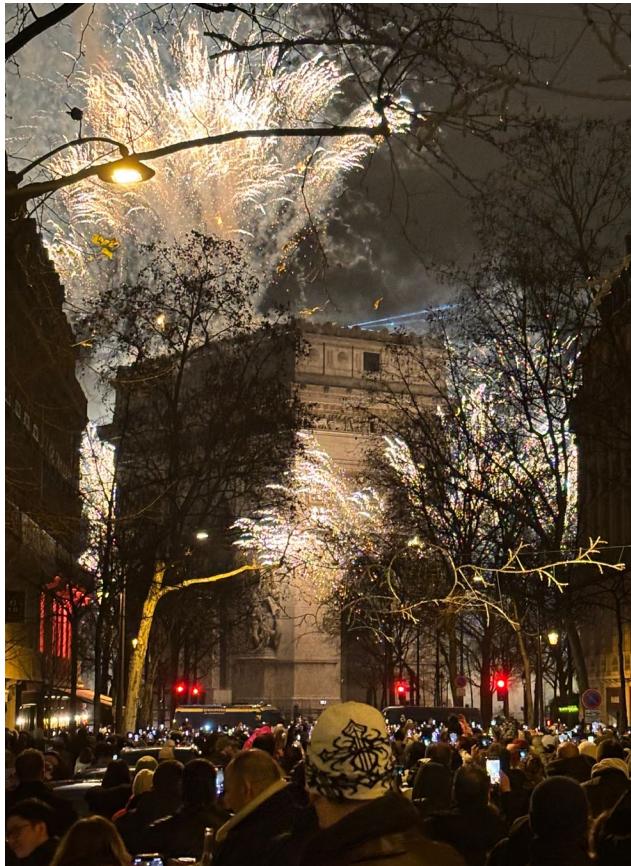
Louisa started with a soup of wild pink mushrooms (girolles) in a bouillon enriched with cream and Val had frog legs sautéed in butter to a golden-brown outside, tender and white on the inside. Louisa had chosen the ris de veau (sweetbreads) in a truffle sauce for her main course and Val had the Langoustines. They had epoisse for the cheese course and the dessert had been three petit pot de cremes, one vanilla with rose essence, one coffee and one dark chocolate. They were accompanied with a green apple sorbet to cleanse the palate between each. Then a tray appeared with petit pastries, a slice of orange flavored cake and an array of chocolates.

Three hours later they staggered out and strolled around the wings of the Palais Royal. Back at Louisa's they put their feet up until it was time to join the crowds heading for the Champs Elysees. It was closed off to cars and every tree on both sides were illuminated with white lights all the way to the Arc de Triomphe. They looked like giant tulips. The Ferris wheel just outside the gates of Jardin des Tuileries had each spoke outlined with white lights so from a distance it seemed to be made out of crystal, the colored lights in its center changing like a kaleidoscope.

Val had taken Louisa's hand to keep from being separated in the crowd. In a wonderfully appropriate way, many of the French carried bottles of champagne which they madly shook during the countdown, uncorking them on the dot with loud bangs. Holding them like Tommy guns, they sprayed their nearest and dearest while the fireworks exploded over the Arc de Triomphe. On the walk home a fire boat sped along the Seine, cutting close to the quai, spraying two lovers with its wake. High spirits were everywhere!

"I never expected to feel this happy again." Louisa's eyes shown with tears. "Happy New Years Val."

Susan Connelly



Susan Connelly

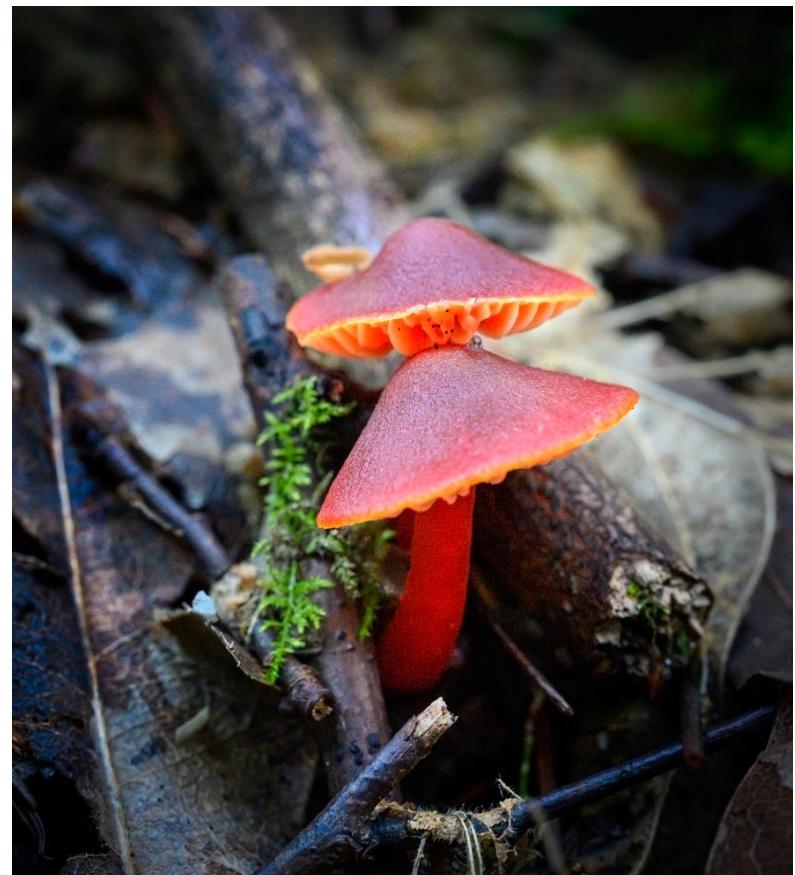


Crepe Paper Flowers, Grace Alexander

Justice

Drums of hope beat through our time,
Dreams take flight in steady rhyme.
Leaders rise where shadows fall,
Their voices sing, for justice all.
Langston's brush paints skies anew,
Betty, Gloria—strong and true.
Mandela's faith, unbowed, unbent,
Peace and love his testament.
Sandra's gavel, Ruth's bright flame,
Baldwin's truth still calls our name.
Gandhi's peace and Chavez's fight—
Freedom burns through every night.
King still dreams, his voice a drum,
Zelensky stands—new dawns to come.
Raise your hearts, let courage dance,
Justice lives in each advance.

Ray Fay, M.D.



Harvey Abernathay

The Net Effect

I was standing in a safety net stretched underneath a work scaffold three stories below the bottom of the Golden Gate Bridge. A slight breeze was blowing in from the west. I turned my head toward the ocean and let the cool air from the Pacific waft over my face. *Is this how it feels to be a bird in flight?*

I stared at the net and blinked. My attention shifted from the thin black strands of rope under my feet to the swirling waters of the Golden Gate Strait 200 feet below. I clipped the lanyard of my fall-protection harness to a safety cable that stretched above my head.

My job as a rotating shift electrician for the Bridge District afforded me the opportunity to be in the safety net on this day shift. For the record, I was “inspecting” a run of conduit on the bottom of the scaffolding.

My heart rate slowed as I mentally adjusted to my new point-of-view. After a few shaky steps I was able to reset my internal gyroscope and gain my balance. I felt like a child walking on a very soft spring-coil mattress. Unlike a mattress, I had to watch each step and ensure that I was not about to put my foot into the hole between the strands of netting. Each of those squares of high-tech nylon rope looked as big as the floor of an old-fashioned phone booth.

From 1936 to 1937 the men who built this bridge had a manila rope safety net that ran the length and width of the bridge as the steel beams were put in place and the concrete roadway and sidewalk slabs were poured. During the construction of the bridge, 19 men accidentally fell into the net. Their lives saved, they formed The Halfway to Hell Club.

At the time the bridge was built, the rule of thumb for such a project was that one life would be lost for every million dollars spent. The Golden Gate Bridge was priced at \$35 million dollars—35 lives. The first fatality in 44 months of work was Kermit Moore, killed in October of 1936. He was decapitated by the boom of a falling crane.

My thoughts turned to a man I worked with in 1982. Dan Casey was the son of Tom Casey, one of three men who

survived the worst accident in the history of the Golden Gate Bridge. On February 17, 1937—3 months and 27 days after Moore’s death—a moveable stripping scaffold with 13 workers aboard broke loose and fell into the net.

Tom managed to leap from the scaffold, grab an overhead beam, and hold on while 2,000 feet of net, along with the 5-ton scaffold and 12 co-workers, ripped loose and plunged into the water below. Two of the men in the water survived, 10 were lost. A rope was lowered to Tom, and he was pulled to safety. Although the net was credited with saving the 19 lives that day, it was not designed to support the weight of a 10,000-pound scaffold.

We owe these men a two-fold debt today. In life, they helped build an engineering masterpiece that serves the needs of thousands of daily commuters. In death, they served as the tipping point for an ongoing effort to revise the national Workers’ Compensation system. Tom Casey never returned to work on the bridge, but he did testify before some congressional investigative panels around the country.

In his book, *Forty Tales from the Afterlives*, author David Eagleman says, “There are three deaths: the first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.”

On the southwest side (of the Golden Gate Bridge there is a memorial plaque inscribed with the names of the 11 men who lost their lives building the bridge. My hope is that the memory of these men does not slip away and get lost in history for future generations.

- *Died October 21, 1936: Kermit Moore*
- *Died February 17, 1937: C.A. Anderson, Chris Anderson, William Bass, Orrill Desper, Fred Dummatzen, Terrance Halliman (corrected to Hallinan in 2012); Eldredge Hillen, Charles Lindros, Jack Norman, Louis Russell.*

Allan Smorra

Smorra was an electrician for the Golden Gate Bridge for 15 years.

Little Slice of Heaven

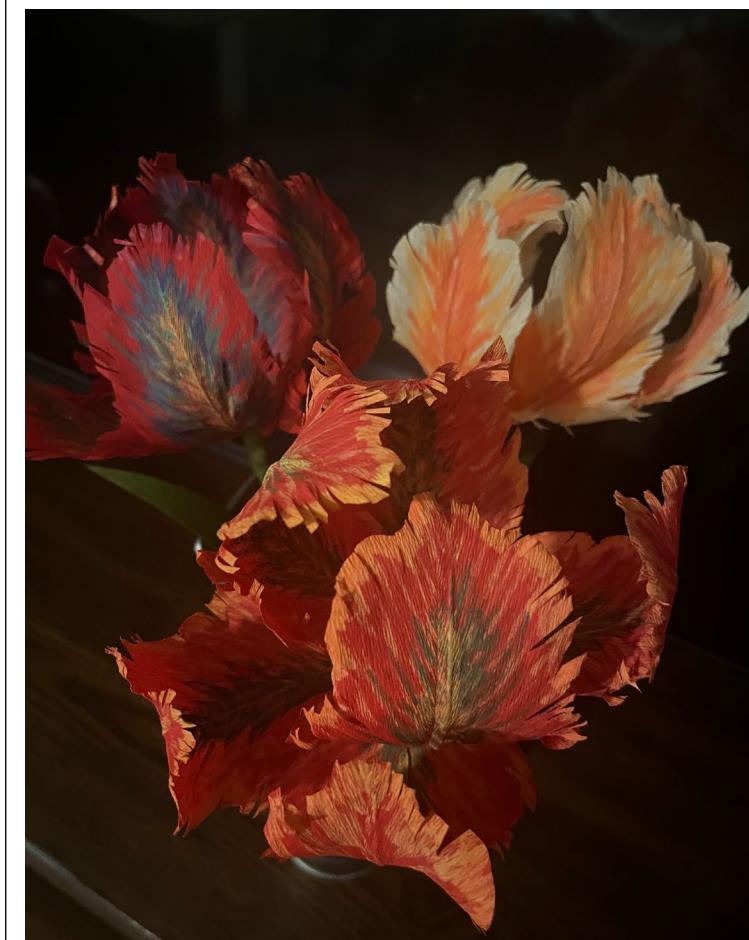
This morning, dusting bookshelves, I came upon a cassette lodged between a stack of timeworn CD's; its label penned in Don's challenging scrawl: *Tunes for Valentine's Day*. It was raining, that long ago February, when he handed me the small oblong box—cache of his own words and music, wrapped in wispy white tissue, ineptly tied with red ribbons.

Thirty years and more have gone since he was laid to rest, achingly soon after what turned out to be our last *Lover's Day*. Old St. Hilary's, packed with familiar faces, voices quivering in eulogy to their absent friend.

After the funeral I played the cassette every day—until I couldn't. Now, long tempered to the fact of his death, I insert the cassette and there he is: agile fingers over the keyboard, whispery voice, half singing, half speaking, the one he wrote just for us: *A Little Slice of Heaven*.

lynn quist Bornstein

Crepe Paper Flowers, Grace Alexander



A Day in the Life (A Lyrical Poem)

I'm with you, my love, the light's shining through

on you, it's the morning and just we two

*I love you in the morning our kisses deep and warm
your hair upon the pillow like a sleepy golden storm*

*Good morning, Starshine, the earth says hello
you twinkle above us, we twinkle below*

It's a beautiful morning, think we'll go outside

a while and just smile

Saturday in the park, people dancing, people laughing

a man selling ice cream, singing Italian songs

Sitting cross leg on the floor twenty-five or six to 4:00

Heavenly shades of night are falling, it's twilight time

It's a marvelous night for a moondance with the stars

up above in your eyes

All we need is music, sweet music, there'll be

music everywhere

She's wondering what clothes to wear, she puts on

her make-up and brushes her long blonde hair

Cool town, evening in the city, dressing so fine

and looking so pretty

It's a supernatural delight, everybody's dancing

In the moonlight



Harvey Abernathay

A smile's on my face, the engine hums a happy tune,

driving home with her beneath the silent moon

And then I tell her, as I turn on the light

my darling, you were wonderful tonight

And so this day draws close to its lyrical end

so, too, this shameful rearrangement of

others' words and my foolish clowning around

But before closing the door, I invite everyone in

for a final night cap because—after midnight,

we're gonna let it all hang down!

we're gonna let it all hang out!

Larry C. Tolbert



Nancy Outerreath

Goblins in the Night

Night turns off the light of day,
but daytime thoughts don't go away.
Like Goblins, they keep my mind lit,
unwilling to let it rest a bit.
It took me years of sleepless nights
And searching many a book and mind
to rid those goblins and put the day behind.

I climb into bed letting go of all thought
knowing holding on only leads to naught.
They'll be there tomorrow when I arise
and not as goblins, to my welcome surprise.
If a thought chooses to pop in my head
I fly it right through and out of my bed.

My mind clear of all thoughts, falls asleep
and I don't find the need to count sheep.
This flight system I didn't learn overnight
It took years of practice to get it right
And still on occasion it's a hell of a fight.

Carol Allen

Rain

The air smells clean
washed by raindrops that sparkle and cling
to persistent rosebuds stubbornly resisting
the dormancy winter demands,
brazenly facing the dim sunlight
that occasionally breaks through the leaden clouds-
specks of color against a grey sky.

There are puddles in the garden
and the birdbath is overflowing
happy birds sip and splash,
while on the street
little rivulets run past the curb
as water in the nearby creek rushes noisily
to its destination, jumping over obstacles.

The long hoped for, prayed for, danced for rain
has come and promises to stay. Hooray!

Anne Mulvaney

Green Gulch

The valley of green gulch is a sight to see
 I have walked the path often with Molly
 out for a jaunt on delightful days
 More peacefully under the fog's haze
 The flowers were blooming while the benches were few and old
 We had little to say while being awestruck in nature's fold
 In our senses we were connecting through sights and sounds
 pleasures
 On the hike it felt like we were where we needed to be
 The yellow and orange pumpkins were basking in their grand
 reverie
 Their sides bulging full of orange puree
 Yet pumpkin soup is not tasted by all
 And flowers for some are only seen from behind a wall
 Still the moon will shine at night while gleaming
 While full coffee cups get mixed with sugar that is sweet
 After leaving my senses were full
 I was glad that we connected in the garden plentiful

Cynthia Rovero



Laura Milholland



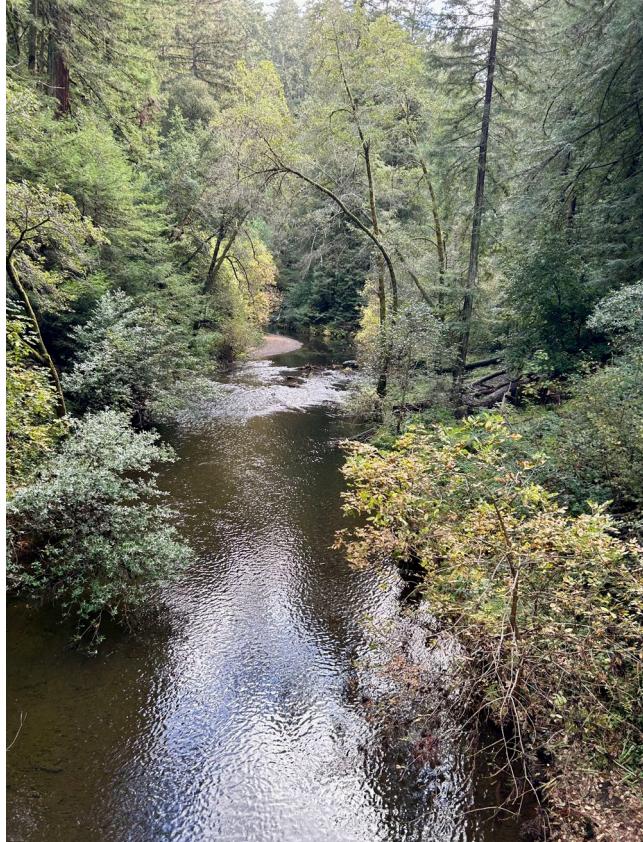
Harvey Abernathy



Kathi Stewart



Alexander Brebner



Kathi Stewart

Opinion Page

I take the parchment to the type
 Foils on sin's emotional scar
 Dreaming of hype
 For apothecary's jar
 Replacement abounding with goodies
 Handling healthy presentation
 Smiles beneath top hats and hoodies
 Strings swinging to the new cooking sensation.

Rock doc cleaning soul with chord of death
 At home sweet breath of steam cleaning
 Those at the rock show don't notice we left
 Good life is better with at home decorating.
 New coffee and teacups not safe for microwaving
 From the White House Historical Society
 Supporting healthy lifestyles, the folks and the nation
 Foil, parchment paper, cooking downsize.

Ecological vacuuming, sustainable
 Researching quality of competition
 Makes the best attainable
 With quality decision.
 On my sweet floor
 Swept off the feet
 Some silver lore
 Lifting out from golden seat.

The social dog walk is a sidewalk disease
 Aimed at delight Yo Yo trick lettered walk the dog
 Now publicly let's lose the dog hog.
 Sunny days complement our self-charging way
 Clouds that cool the sun shadow eyes
 Icebergs block floods cities in valleys remain
 Beneath shade of caps protection is wise.
 Let's fly our kites
 Water gun down red clown noses
 Show for all that we delight
 Plant our shamrocks and roses
 Luxury, though at times vicarious
 Returns as Simba, as smiles
 Allowing mention, a store of courageous
 Live in 3 D turmoil beguiles.

Karen Arnold

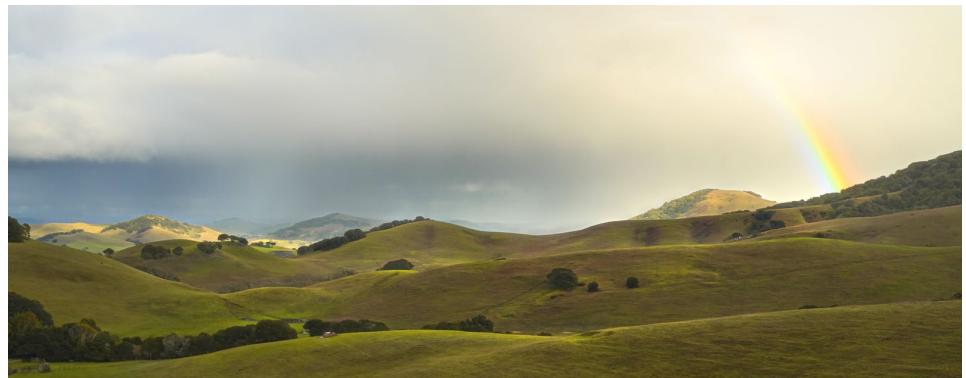
**In
This
Chill**

Tiny birds
footing the edges
of the ceramic bowl

I fill with nuts &
seeds & boiled
black rice
to keep them
warm
until the
passing
of the winter

angel
draping
frost
everywhere

Joan Taschian



Harvey Abernathy



Tom Gannon



Laura Harrison

Charming and Child-Like, A Bunny Tail Tale

I enjoy the art shows at the Belvedere Tiburon Library. They're never pretentious—just interesting work, friendly people, and usually some cheese cubes and something fizzy in a cup. You can stroll, snack, look, and think. Or not think. That's a pleasure in itself.

One afternoon last year, I wandered into a quiet side hallway where a few smaller pieces were hung—set apart from the main gallery, as if they wanted to be discovered the way you find a good book in the wrong section.

I stood there enjoying the hush, when voices drifted in from the main room. Two women. One said, "Charming." The other added, "Child-like." Now, those are words that can complement or confuse depending on who's listening. Naturally, I grew curious.

So, I headed back into the main gallery. And there it was on the wall—a bunny. Or rather, the idea of a bunny. A wonderfully exuberant scatter of colors that suggested one if you approached it with an open mind: a pinkish blotch that read as ears if you tilted your head; a swirling patch near the bottom that might have been a tail—if you were in a tail mood. It was gloriously abstract, joyful, and entirely unbothered by realism. And as I studied it, I noticed the artist standing right beside the painting, smiling—waiting, almost, for someone to connect the dots.

She was small. I bent down to talk with her—She was a child. Maybe seven years old, holding a cookie and wearing sparkly sneakers that had opinions of their own.

As if we were two painters comparing notes, I smiled at her and said, "I like your painting. It's charming... and child-like."

She lit up and said, "That's what they said, too!"

As I slowly walked away, I thought that sometimes art is exactly what it looks like—joyful, honest, and utterly itself. And sometimes the simplest description really is the truest one. Charming and child-like. Indeed!

Joseph Cillo



Ema Drouillard

New Beginnings

Tiny toes in a cradle of white,
soft as first snow, warm as a whispered hope.
Two rings rest gently where the world begins—
a circle of promise,
a vow carried forward
on feet not yet steady
but already blessed.

Here is the quiet miracle:
love becoming lineage,
story becoming future.
The smallest touch,
the lightest breath,
and suddenly a family grows—
held together
by faith, by tenderness,
by all the beginnings
that choose us in return.

Ema Drouillard



Laura Milholland



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Emeritus Students
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ESCOM Journal

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The ESCOM Journal is published on alternate months online at www.marin.edu/escom. A limited number of printed copies are available in the ESCOM office, Building 10, at the Indian Valley campus or the College of Marin Welcome Center in Kentfield. ESCOM members are invited to submit news items, or creative works, such as original art, photography, poetry, memoir and fiction. Consult the submission specifications on this page before submission. The deadline for each issue is the 15th of the prior month. Please send submissions or questions to the editor at denizespringer@gmail.com.

Production of the ESCOM Journal is supported by the Joan Hopper Trust.

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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.

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