

ESCOM Journal

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

July/August 2026



Nancy Outenreath

Inside: Watermelon Days, Horse Rustlers, A Desert on Fire, A Soviet 4th



Laura Harrison

Sweet Integrity

The punch begins with watermelon pieces
 Cut and seedless
 Into the bowl
 Our fruit goes.
 Ginger ale surrounds with digestion sweetness
 Watermelon safely peeled.

The fizzy punch would lack sensation
 Without ice cream centered and melting.
 Frozen bananas in the blender with half milk half cream,
 Sweet and healthy, ready to freeze
 Makes for a summer's fiesta dream,
 Cooling us beneath warm sunny beam.

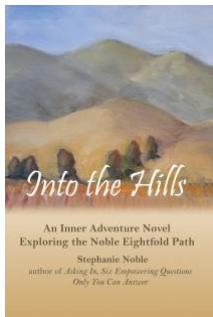
The patting towel, massaging my head
 As it dries off all the wet
 From water of hot tub
 From pool where ball is tossed above
 Blue water aerobics,
 Midsummer's brown grass.

The money tree
 With no blossom to see
 Dull flourishing
 Not heavenly
 Removed by me
 Replaced with morning glory.

The watermelon punch easily digests
 Activities describing that cooling is best.
 The water lavishes body and soul
 While conversation bubbles and rolls.
 Nicely, nicely words well chosen
 Equal punch of healthy, sweet watermelon.

Karen Arnold

ESCOM Authors Publish



**Stephanie Noble's
 Into the Hills
 An Inner Adventure Novel Exploring the Noble
 Eightfold Path**

Insight meditation teacher, Stephanie Noble, hopes her new novel will help readers understand and apply core Buddhist teachings to their daily lives. In it, a mid-life schoolteacher who has made poor choices to cope with grief, flees into the hills trips and falls unconscious. When she awakes, she discovers a new path to clarity, compassion, and joy.

“As Buddhist books go,” the author says, “my new novel is a great beach read!” It’s available at Spirit Rock Meditation Center Bookstore, IngramSpark, Amazon, and local independent bookstores.



Laura Milholland

A Soviet 4th

The hotel breakfast tables were decked out with USA and USSR flags in honor of the United States' 200th birthday in 1976. Our Soviet hosts served us red and black caviar with fresh sour cream, then insisted that the U.S. college students stand and sing their national anthem. About 200 of us from New York, Texas and Montana stood up and did the best we could with *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

"Such a young chick of a country," I heard one older waitress say to another, "why all the fuss?"

Leningrad (St. Petersburg), a beautiful city of canals and fountains where the 24-hour "midnight sun" lasted throughout our visit, was hot and humid. We sweated through our classes that morning in an old school building pockmarked by the German mortar that rained down during the 872-day siege of the city in WWII.

That night we went to the American Embassy where its U.S. Marines guard threw a party in their officer's quarters. I'm sure they would have preferred that only the women attended.

"Marines are forbidden to fraternize with any Russian women," Steve, an Army veteran who served in combat in Vietnam, whispered to us. He insisted that someone needed to protect us from these Marines. And he wasn't going to miss more caviar, free vodka and champagne.

Jack, another Army vet, was finishing a Russian language degree, and thanks to the Cold War, had been spared service in Vietnam. But he kept his oath not to say much about his stint with "Army Intelligence," a term that made him giggle each time he said it. (A Soviet counterpart at that time would have been a young KGB recruit from Leningrad named Vladimir Putin.)

We each had radios in our rooms that broadcast a sour mix of Soviet propaganda, Russian classical music and some pop that sounded at least three decades old to our Rock-saturated American ears. But Jack didn't mind. He relished it all. But he and his roommate soon shared that they couldn't turn their room radio off. And, whenever they discussed anything remotely political the radio's volume would inexplicably go down. When they stopped talking politics the volume would just as mysteriously go back up. No one else's room radio behaved this way. Some of us piled into Jack's room to



Laura Milholland

investigate the apparent Soviet surveillance as fervently as we would the contents of The Hermitage. I'm glad our inspection of Jack's room did not produce any sign of surveillance cameras because I was later seduced in that room--to the pop tunes of Muslim Magamayev, a baritone who crooned about tortured and lost love (thankfully at maximum volume).

Meanwhile, Steve became a source on the black market—the fence between our American jeans and the Russian youth who would starve for them. Yet it was the polyester tops and dresses (my mother insisted I bring) that commanded the most rubles. The Russians had never even conceived of a fabric that didn't fade or wrinkle.

So, it wasn't surprising that when it was time to leave the USSR, some of us had more money than we had declared when we entered the country. We had to spend it all before we left or face the scrutiny of Soviet customs agents (we had been warned they loved to bust "spoiled American brats") upon our exit. This wasn't easy because there were so few products of value to buy in the Soviet Union at that time. So, we spent our black-market rubles on vodka-fueled parties, chocolate and some very nice, lacquered boxes decorated with scenes from Russian folktales. Fortunately, we all departed the USSR together and on schedule.

Jack (yes, *that*, Jack) and I plan to celebrate our 48th wedding anniversary around the same time the U.S. celebrates its 250th birthday this year. But our celebration of the 4th will be low key. I'll dig out the nice flag the Navy sent my mother after my father, a WWII veteran, passed; and hang it from our deck. Maybe its insistent beauty will inspire us to reread some reliable books about the ideals on which our country was founded—especially the option to turn off our radios (TVs and phones) to avoid our own country's propaganda.

Denize Springer



Marilyn Bagshaw



Fred Kral



Harvey Abernathy



Tom Gannon

The Bridge

In the faded photograph mother balances two skinny twig-like legs on a ply-wood foot bridge over a river near the old cabin

She's wearing a swimsuit adorned with two white anchors big black unlaced boots (maybe her father's?) carrying a stick sideways like a paddle— a mischievous grin lights up her face with the unencumbered gaze of a young girl with her life cast like summer sun in front of her

But the trees are blurry— as if time preferred to be obscured she's standing on that bridge as if her whole life could be contained in a moment— snow-like cottonwood blowing in the afternoon breeze forever frozen, as the illusion a photograph portends— what little she knew then as her ashes, decades later— float down that same river intermingling with yellow aspen, cottonwood and late summer light playing on river stones

Marcia Smith

Rustlers or Rescuers?

I'll let you be the judge. I've changed the names of everyone, including the horses, involved in this tale to protect the innocent and guilty.

We chose the 4th of July to carry off our caper, figuring most of our neighbors would either be at the rodeo in Yreka or having barbecues with family and friends. We knew that Candy was out of town. She'd asked Walter to shoot Diego, her old, declining Peruvian Paso stallion, while she was away on vacation, which he sadly had to do.

My friend Nancy and her friend Carol drove down from Nancy's ranch in Ashland, OR. They met us with their horse trailers at Walter's corrals a half a mile down the road from Candy's place. They'd already turned their pickups around and lowered the trailer ramps so they could be ready to load the horses and *get out of Dodge*.

Opal was the first horse Candy brought to her property. Half draft horse she was a well-made beauty. The only horse at Candy's at that time she was lonely and would trot up the road to visit our two horses (Candy's fences were not in good repair). The three of them would commiserate over the fence and whenever I went on a ride Opal would follow along. I told Candy she could leave her in our field, but she declined; she was planning to breed her.

Next an older, gaunt Peruvian Paso mare arrived. A popular breed, she was elegant in appearance, calm in temperament and had a floating gait. She had no name, so I called her Lucia. I walked our dog most mornings down past Candy's place and took carrots or apples for the two mares. They always came to the fence to greet us.

Then Diego showed up. He was old, decrepit and, like Lucia, way too thin. The horses were kept in an old apple orchard next to the Klamath River, but their only food was the over-grazed grass under the trees. Nearby, Walter, a Native American, had alfalfa fields and raised cattle. He periodically dropped off hay as he too was distressed by the horses' condition.

I also took hay to Candy's horses, but she thanked me by driving her car like a maniac down our driveway stopping only inches from my husband Dan's legs. Blonde, Candy was a Marilyn Monroe look alike, but her countenance was hard as nails. "Don't you come on my property without permission," she spat, "or I'll call the sheriff."

I called the Yreka Humane society to report the starving horses and asked two friends to walk past Candy's place and check out the horses' condition so they too could call the



Leigh Noccolaisen

Humane Society. The Society responded and told me they would send someone down with hay and check the horses.

I called again when the hay was gone. They relayed they needed to monitor the case for three weeks before they could take any action.

Meanwhile, Diego had miraculously managed his duty, and both mares came into foal. Opal foaled first, a filly, a rose gold carbon copy of her beautiful mother. Lucia went into labor a few weeks later, but a friend called me to report that Lucia couldn't seem to get up. Ignoring Candy's threat, I mixed hot water with horse feed that had molasses in it. When I arrived, Lucia was still on her side. Smelling the grain, she managed to tuck her legs under her so I could hand feed it to her. Then I brought her a bucket of water, and with a wobbly, heartbreaking effort she managed to rise. She nuzzled her colt and he started to nurse.

I had called Nancy earlier and related the horror story, so she was immediately on board. We decided the best approach was to halter the mares and walk them the half mile to the trailers. The foals would follow and all would get to stretch their legs before they were confined to the trailers.

Luckily everything went to plan. Walter, Nancy, Carol, Dan and I escorted the remaining horses to the waiting trailers where they walked up the ramps without fuss and off to a new life at Nancy's where she would give them three squares a day. Once they began to thrive, she found the perfect human matches for each.

When Candy returned, she never mentioned her missing horses, seemingly relieved they were gone.

Susan Connelly



Laura Milholland



Nancy Pappas

Up Ward Creek

Tahoe, 1952

He’s been teasing us all week; that crafty speckled Brown fishtailing through cellophane water, circling Daddy’s handtied caddis fly, until some primeval ESP sends him dodging under the shadows of a Jeffrey pine, its reedy needles raining pineapple pollen on the creek and camouflaging its denizens. We wait in silence, savoring the west shore morning; scent of pine sap and boot-crushed needle dust and the wild Iris, edging the creek bank. A Chickadee, tiny alpine acrobat, flips up and over the slender branch of a quaking Aspen, tweeting *hey sweetie hey sweetie* among the pines. A red-headed Tanager flashes its rain forest colors, scarlet and yellow and onyx, electrifying the cobalt sky.

Daddy nudges me, tilting his head toward the water. There he is! The old Brown, on the bottom, foraging a meal. I remembered, two summers ago, on this same spot, Daddy, in his red plain shirt and the well-worn navy beret, whispering in my ear: “To catch a fish you must become the fish.”

Silently, rod in hand, barefoot toes curled, I cross the creek, balancing from slimy rock to slimy rock, finding footing on a flat sun-warmed slab of ancient granite. I set the reel and cast the line, aiming my amber nymph in the Brown’s line of sight. Quietly, the tiny temptress lands. Could the hungry fish resist such a tasty morsel? I feel the jerk, the drag, he’s hooked! Slowly, I pull him up and out of the water. Iridescent speckles, like spots of nacre, glisten along the sides of his writhing body. A gold-ringed eye, facing me, telegraphs disbelief.

Now, in that moment, the fish and I understand there’d be no creel for him, no sizzling pan nor parsley-garnished platter. Cradling his head in my left hand, I ease thumb and index finger into his gaping mouth, freeing the barb lodged beneath his lip. On the opposite bank, Daddy shakes his head and smiles. Together we watch the wily old Brown, fish-tail through the water—free to live another summer up Ward Creek.

lynn arias bornstein

No Prayer Through Rubble

You wash your hands, but ash remains the same,
 It settles in the lines you call your own;
 You bow your head and whisper out His name,
 While walls remember every shattered bone.

The sky you trust has learned to carry cries,
 It will not sift your prayer from what you've done;
 Each word you send returns through broken skies,
 A burning echo you cannot outrun.

I saw a child still holding half a door,
 As if it were the last place left to hide;
 You speak of peace—but peace is something more
 Than prayers that walk with violence at their side.

God waits where breath is spared, not torn apart:
 No prayer survives a bombed and broken heart.

Ray Fay, M.D



Harvey Abernathey



Marilyn Bagshaw



Elaine Thornton

The 4th We Set the Desert on Fire

One summer, my son and I drove from Los Angeles to Kingman, Arizona, to visit my friend Peter and his family for the Fourth of July. He promised us a real old-time celebration complete with fireworks. He was not exaggerating.

The event started in the afternoon by a lake beyond town, surrounded by open desert, pickup trucks, folding chairs, coolers, and enough watermelon to feed a small army. Kids ran around with sparklers while radios played country music and adults in lawn chairs argued about who had brought the best fireworks.

Even the town’s volunteer Fire Department was there; parked nearby more as part of the celebration than out of concern. At the time, that seemed reassuring. It was the kind of small-town Fourth of July celebration that felt completely American.

The Arizona heat slowly softened as evening approached. Families spread blankets near the lake while children chased one another through the dust. Every few minutes somebody would light a firecracker early, followed by laughter and mock complaints from nearby parents.

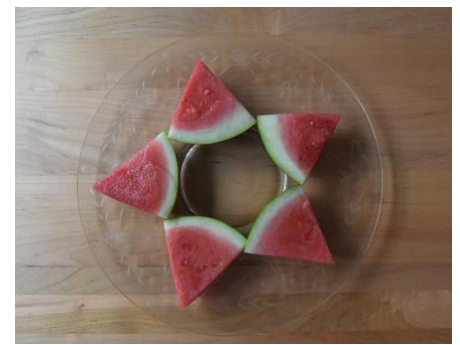
As the sun began to set, a group of us decided we were going to put on our own little fireworks show. Nothing professional, just enthusiastic. And somewhat under-supervised. Roman candles, bottle rockets; things that whistled. Things that exploded. And a few things that probably violated federal regulations.

Peter proudly opened a large cardboard box that appeared to contain enough explosives to qualify as a regional military exercise. Everyone was suddenly an expert on fireworks safety, (despite having no qualifications whatsoever).

At one point, several of us walked away from the crowd to launch fireworks in what looked like completely empty desert (Important phrase: “What looked like”). The ground appeared barren — just dry dirt, scattered brush, and rocks.

One spinning firework suddenly shot sideways instead of upward, skipped across the ground like a crazed hockey puck, and disappeared into some brush. A few seconds later someone quietly asked, “Is the desert supposed to be on fire?” To our astonishment, flames were spreading through the dry brush. I stared at it in disbelief. *You can set the desert on fire?*

Laura Mitholland



Apparently, you can. By now everybody was running in different directions carrying buckets, coolers, soda containers — anything holding liquid. A completely disorganized bucket brigade formed while several people attempted to stomp out flaming bushes with sneakers.

Peter was shouting instructions. The kids were yelling useless advice. One man tried smothering flames with a beach towel. And another continued holding a watermelon the entire time, apparently committed to protecting it at all costs.

For several chaotic minutes, the entire Fourth of July celebration looked like a low-budget disaster movie. Fortunately, between our frantic bucket brigade and the now very alert volunteer Fire Department, we managed to put the fire out before Arizona disappeared from the map.

Nobody got hurt. Nothing serious burned. Although I’m fairly sure local wildlife discussed us for weeks afterward.

Then, almost magically, everyone returned to their lawn chairs like this sort of thing happened every holiday. Later, over watermelon and cold beverages, we laughed about the “idiots from California” who nearly burned down the Arizona desert while trying to stage a Fourth of July fireworks spectacular.

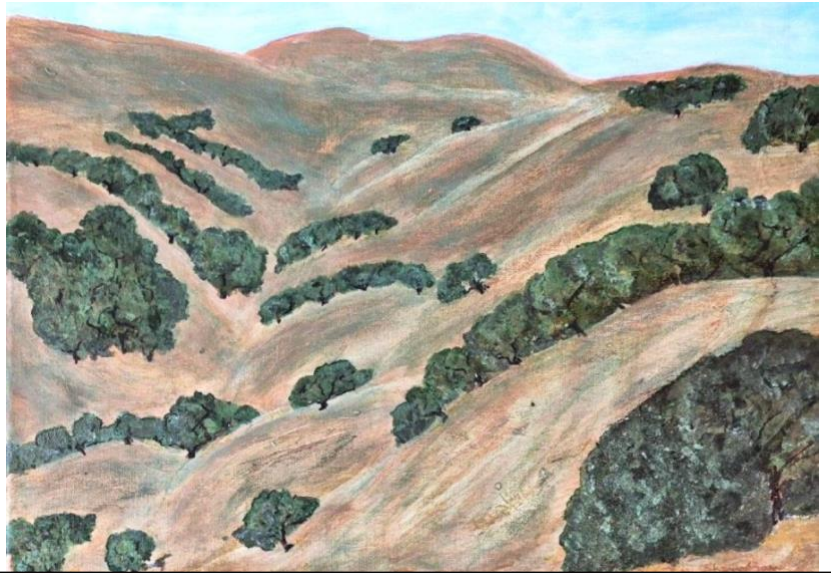
Peter insisted the fire had improved the landscape. Someone else suggested we leave before the local sheriff arrived. And within minutes the entire disaster had officially become a family story. That’s what I remember most now; not the fire itself, but the laughter afterward. The relief. The absurdity of discovering that a place which looked completely barren could burst into flames from one badly aimed firework.

Every Fourth of July since, whenever I smell fireworks or eat watermelon outside on a warm evening, I think about that night near Kingman. And I remember an important lesson; never underestimate the flammability of a desert.

Joseph Cillo



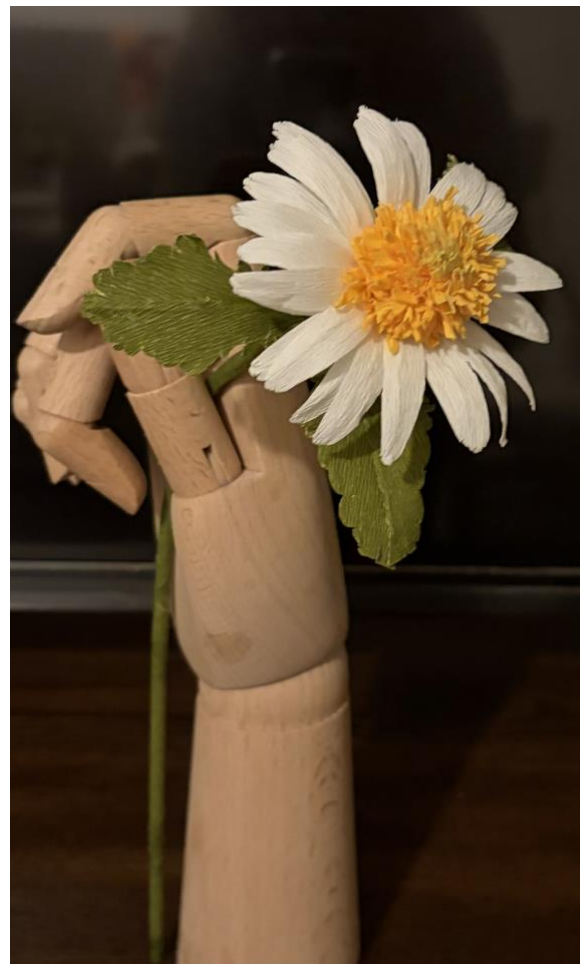
Tammi Tsark, Long Journey Home



Ray Shanahan, Mt Burdell



Diana Wypich, Summer Poppies



Gace Marie Alexander, Crepe Paper Flower

The Commencement Speech I Didn't Deliver

Dear Graduates: As I look out across this sea of shining beautiful faces, a few thoughts cross my mind: The first is--I have sweatpants older than most of you.

I remember being your age. Having my whole life before me and taking those first steps into my adult life. Now I realize that my life has taken twists and turns I never could have imagined at that age. So much good and love, and so much loss and strife. And yet, having been through that, and as I stand here graduating with all of you. I guess that, having lived this long, I should have some wise words to extend to you. So here goes.

You have bright futures ahead. But I know this can sound like platitudes, so let's be real for a minute.

I hope your lives and paths are easier than mine, but for many of you they won't be. Keep going forward anyway. There will be wins and they are worth living through the losses to get to. And in the times when you can't seem to move forward, sit where you are and bring close what you love. Let yourself cry. And rest. Then pick yourself back up and keep going.

You are amazing. Don't ever let anyone or anything dim your light. It's not anyone else's to play with. All there is for them is to let it shine on them. Just walk away.

For some of you, you have just overcome and exceeded all the low expectations anyone ever had for you. Bask in that for a moment. And for others, you have just achieved what everyone has believed and hoped for you. Either way, think of the people who believed in you and keep them close.

On that note, always look for people who support your dreams, and those who, even if they don't believe your dreams, will still support you as you figure out what they really are and how you plan to achieve them. You may have to allow other people to fall out of your life. However painful at times, it would never be as painful as allowing them to pull you down.

Allow miracles to occur. They will. Be open to ideas and people you might not think matter. They do.

Looking out into this crowd, I see a bright future. You are the leaders. The teachers. The scientists. The artists. The People that the world needs. So even if the world does not know it yet, shine your light and love until others can't help but be made better for it.



Marilyn Bagshaw



Jeff True

And when you've achieved, be it in small or big ways, pay it forward. I know some of you already do this daily. There is always another person, young or old, who could use some light and a hand up.

Lastly, don't ever forget that learning is a lifelong pursuit. No, you don't have to go back to school when you are as old as I am. But you can, especially if it fulfills a lifelong dream. Never stop learning because it is learning that keeps us engaged, and young, and useful, and helpful.

Someday, you will be older and, perhaps, wearing an old pair of sweatpants. You might think of this moment and smile. I congratulate you, my fellow graduates. Shine on!

Michele Samuels

The author earned an AA degree in Theatre Arts from College of Marin this year

Kitty Cat

Good morning is what I need to say to you familiar kitty

Curled up you can sit very pretty

Declawing you is unnecessary to know

Either way you want to be on the go

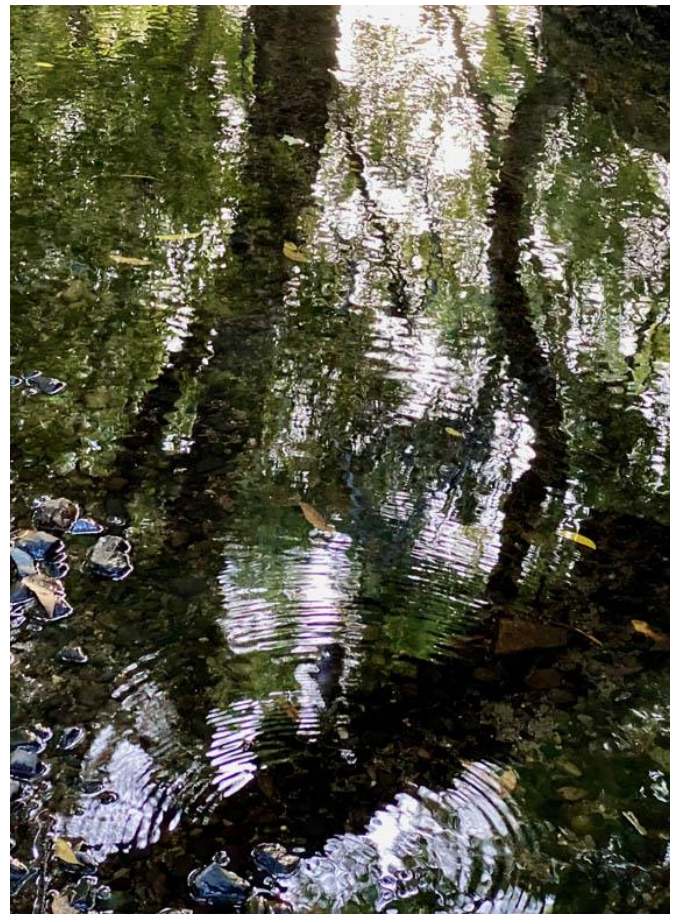
Your fur is sleek not strong

You think of fun songs

Meowing to the moon losing sight in dreams

Your wife abides by you in hidden trees

Cynthia Rovero



Nancy Pappas



Kathi Stewart



Susan Connolly



ESCOM

Emeritus Students
College of Marin

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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NEXT DEADLINE IS AUGUST 15

Please send your **FINALIZED** work to

denizespringer@gmail.com

PLEASE ADHERE TO THESE SPECIFICATIONS

Submit **ONE** piece of written work or no more than **THREE** images. Please do not submit any earlier than the last day of the month before the deadline date. Changes, unless 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). Snapshots may not work in our digital format. **Images larger than 300 kb or saved as a tif file cannot be considered.**

POEMS or PLAYLETS (dialog only): (50 lines MAX including the spaces between stanzas and/or lines) 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. **Please proof your work before sending it in.**