

ESCOM Journal

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

September/October 2026



Harvey Abernathey

INSIDE: *From a Feline's Eye, Feelin' Fallish, Flames and a Family Fire Survivor*



Marilyn Bagshaw

Within and Beyond

We are all embraced within
this mosaic of life:
a broad spectrum of spirited creation,
thriving on planet, Earth.
Living in concert
with seasons, tides and clouds of rain,
each coordinating while, covering
nature's code of care.
The seeds of life are brought forth
to blend and bond, as together
we reach, grow and extend
our essence throughout time,
on this magnificent planet, Earth.

Deidre Silverman

DEAR CONTRIBUTORS:

I am so grateful that so many of you have contributed your time and talents to the ESCOM Journal. Here in Marin, it is so easy to take our county's abundance of natural beauty for granted and often your art, your photography, your creative prose and your poetry are as sublime as the redwoods, wildflowers, waterways, and wildlife that holds us here in its midst. Your contributions are welcomed with a deep appreciation for your efforts.

Space in our very limited template dictates that I am not always able to include all your contributions in each issue. I've made some adjustments to our submission guidelines, so I can include as much of your work as possible.

*The Journal is always evolving. **Each time you submit please take a moment to review the guidelines**, which appear on the last/back page of each issue, to ensure that your submission adheres to our most current specifications--in particular, our word/line count and art/photo file size limits.*

I always look forward to seeing how each issue of the ESCOM Journal evolves. I hope you do too.

Cheers, Denize Springer, Editor



Laura Milholland

The Last Leaf

Every morning, Arthur checked the tree. It stood outside his kitchen window, an old maple that had probably been there before the house itself. By late October, nearly all its leaves had fallen. Red, yellow, and brown covered the lawn, gathering against the fence whenever the wind came up. But one leaf remained on a branch.

Arthur noticed it because there wasn't much else to notice at seven in the morning. For forty-three years, breakfast had meant coffee for two. After Helen died, Arthur still made it that way.

The first morning, he did it automatically. He poured his coffee, poured hers, and carried both cups to the little kitchen table. Only then did he realize what he had done. He stood there for a long time. Eventually, he poured Helen's coffee down the sink.

The next morning, he made two cups again. And the morning after that. After a week, Arthur stopped trying to correct himself. He simply placed the second cup across from him. That was when he noticed the leaf still on the tree.

"You're stubborn," he told it. The leaf trembled. "So was she." Arthur smiled.

And somehow, without deciding that it would, the leaf became part of Arthur's morning routine. He drank his coffee. The leaf held on. Rain came. Wind came. Some mornings the branches bent hard enough that Arthur was certain the leaf would finally be gone. But each morning, there it was.

"You can't stay forever," Arthur told it. The leaf apparently disagreed.

Then, one November morning, Arthur walked into the kitchen carrying only one cup. He didn't notice. He sat down, took a sip of coffee, and looked out the window. The branch was empty.

Arthur stared at it. He had known this would happen. Leaves fall. Seasons change. That was how things worked. But knowing did not make it easier. "Well," he said, "you finally gave up." He finished his coffee and carried the cup to the sink.

That was when he saw it. The leaf had not blown away. It was lying directly outside the kitchen door. Arthur put on his jacket and went outside. He bent down slowly and picked it up. The leaf was dry and brown now, nothing like the brilliant red leaf he had first noticed weeks before.



Nancy Outenreath

For a moment, Arthur hesitated and almost carried it inside. Instead, he opened his hand. The wind took it immediately. Arthur watched the leaf rise above the fence, circle once over the neighbor's yard, and disappear.

Then Arthur did something he had not done since Helen died. He went for a walk. There was no destination.

At the corner, Mrs. Donnelly was sweeping leaves from her sidewalk. "Morning, Arthur."

"Morning."

"Beautiful day."

Arthur looked up. She was right. The sky was deep blue. Leaves covered the street. Children kicked through them on their way to school. Arthur kept walking.

At the next corner, a thought came to him. *The leaf hadn't given up. It had simply let go.* Arthur walked another block. Then another.

Forty-three years could not be released as easily as a leaf from a branch. Helen was still part of every familiar morning, every remembered breakfast, every instinct that once made two cups of coffee instead of one. But that morning, without planning to, Arthur had carried one cup to the table. And then he had opened the door.

He kept walking. For the first time in a long while, Arthur wondered what might be around the next corner.

Joseph Cillo

Lost

lost skill and will to navigate
 by sky tides stars
 north east west south
 drowning in black & white
 and *likes* data blocks
 drink our water
 spin and spit info
welcome to your new prison
 was civilization
 even a good thing
 as our teeth rot rows
 of corn not corn
 little black dress the plantation
 laundromat banks tanks
 shattered compass clocks
 broken shells continental
 drift time space dirty clothes
 race predicted planned penned
 maps barbaric barbed borders
 above ringed cigar men drinking
manifested destiny an empty mine
 lost language white skulls
 debate the name of a dead horse
 can't be beat and in retreat
 politicians finally just stale potato chips
 as we slip into pond scum who cried out
hey what took you so long?
 have we progressed
 by soiling our nest
no use watering a dead rose
 when found becomes sound
 when light becomes sight
 when day has had enough of night
 we no longer take flight
 but awake to our ridiculous plight

Marcia Smith



Laura Milholland



Ray Fay

At Dawn I Rise

Each dawn I greet the hills where sunlight sings,
 As East Bay wakes beneath a crimson sky;
 Coit Tower dims while lifting fog takes wing,
 And morning breathes where silent waters lie.

From Carquinez through Angel Island's shore,
 Where waiting hearts once carved their hopes in wood,
 The tide now bears those sorrows evermore,
 Transforming grief to tides of common good.

The Golden Gate unfolds its arms to light;
 Bright seals and gulls compose the morning's song.
 I warm my hands with coffee, breathing light,
 Releasing fears I've carried far too long.

Safe in this breath, grateful, I arise;
 And join the living Bay where daylight lies.

Ray Fay, M.D.



Jeff True

Postal Annex

I've known an Iranian (Persian) couple since 2014 when my daughter signed me up for a college writing class which met for three hours every Monday night. I kept at it for three years, producing an 1100-word memoir piece every week.

The couple operated a Xeroxing shop in my neighborhood. I brought the installments of my memoir piece to get 26 copy sets made for my classmates. We students would throw one copy on the instructor's desk as we walked into class, and I kept a discipline of one story each week. Tried to never miss.

The couple never seemed interested in reading what I wrote even when I had poured my whole effort into a piece. That was ok with me. I'd walk in and Joe or his wife would get right to it, reproducing the work. They didn't advertise *copying while-you-wait*, but that's what they did. I found them so considerate that I paid in cash, always giving them a bit more than the register's amount. I just wanted to save them from having to make change. So, if the bill was \$16.50, I'd give him a \$20 and say, "please put the extra in your coffee fund." This was a way to convey my respect and return their courtesy.

Later I had a stroke and stopped writing for a while, but gradually resumed, though not in the large class where I had to provide 26 copies, for instructor and classmate comments. But I still went to the shop for any possible transaction including sending birthday and holiday gifts and cards to Vermont where another daughter lives.

Soon our current regime in the United States started a controversial bombing war with Iran. The President declared his war on his Truth Social platform and did not discuss it with U.S. Congress. He seemed to follow a plan concocted by Israel's prime minister, who seems to me a war monger.

I follow politics and know Joe does too. I've made comments in his shop but have always been careful to be discreet when he has other clients in.



Harvey Abernathey, New Moon Over Wolfback Ridge

Lately, I've put myself in their place, imagining what I'd feel as someone of Iranian heritage, in this place, in this time. I

had the desire to just drive over, park my car, walk in and say I abhor Trump's *Epstein War*, and that I realized Joe and his family are part of my community. I wanted him to know that I feel for him and was ashamed of our president's behavior.

I waffled about it for two days. Thought maybe I was being emotional, eccentric, maybe people just don't do what I had imagined. Finally, I decided to be myself; hang any consequences.

I went to Joe's shop. Didn't rehearse my words, just made sure I'd had a good morning and was ready. When I walked in and Joe greeted me as he always has: "Hello, my friend," he said.

I launched right into what I wanted to tell him. I noticed that he gave his wife a side eyed glance and a come-see-this head motion. She joined us as I made my points. The three of us had a moment of community. We were all moved. They made a hand over heart gesture, but not so much as to be theatrical. Sincere, all of us. They both looked like they would cry, which made me tear up, and stop talking so I wouldn't cry.

I shook hands with Javad (Joe) turned around and left before they could see my tears.

Mike Holland

Millie, Our Very Own Phoenix

We visited Millie July 15th, 2025, nearly the third anniversary of the McKinny fire. Her bay coat was once again gleaming, its hair follicles finally recovered from the damage sustained in the extreme heat of the fire. She had successfully regrown her most damaged hoof and now walks, trots and canters as gracefully as ever. She's become a companion horse at the Eagle Point Equine Hospital in Oregon.

Friday, July 29, 2022, a little after 3:00 P.M. "There's a fire somewhere, I said to Matt. I heard a helicopter on my way down from the garden." The whup, whup, whup sound of its rotating blades had sent a frisson of anxiety through me. That sound often indicated a fire in the area during the hot dry months of July, August and September.

"No, I think it was just an airplane flying over." Matt said. He and Luna, our wolf Hybrid, were inside the cabin insulated by doors and windows closed earlier in the morning to conserve the cool night air.

"No, there it is again!" I went back outside to our cabin's front porch overlooking the lawn and the Klamath River flowing thirty feet below. There, just above the trees, was the helicopter, its water bucket trailing behind, its sound deafening as it passed over the cabin. It hovered just down river, dropped its huge canvas bucket into a deep channel, then slowly rose, bucket dripping, and flew off to the west.

The sky was a clear blue and there wasn't a whiff of smoke in the air.

Soon after the helicopter departed, I listened to Matt's call to the Collins Baldy lookout. "So, it's moving slowly west and uphill. No, we don't have wind down here on the river either, just a light breeze." The conversation reassured both of us as well as Dan, the lookout. But a half hour later a flurry of firefighter vehicles raced down Walker Road headed for McKinny Creek and our anxiety returned.

Forest fires had become the new normal for everyone living in or around the Klamath National Forest and the surrounding mountains. On morning walks with Luna or rides up through the forest on our horses, Isabella and Millie, Mother Nature's perfectly laid fires filled me with unease. Dry leaves and needles topped with dead branches ranging from twigs to limbs the size of baseball bats or larger were arranged in a tangle beneath trees whose dead lower limbs dangled just inches above. Years of severe draught had allowed bark beetles to kill the trees, leaving their silvery ghosts woven through the forest's fabric.



Susan Connelly, Millie

A few years ago, I watched with trepidation as the glow of a fire across and just up the river from us crested the ridge and sent flames down the side closest to us. I'd been spraying down the cabin and out building's roofs in fear of flying embers. The next morning, I found oak and madrone leaves on the lawn, perfectly intact but coal black and frangible.

Throughout the afternoon while Matt got periodic updates from the lookout, I repeatedly went up to spray the shade cloth protecting my garden and look for Zane Grey, our cat, who'd charged out his cat door when the helicopter flew over the cabin. He wasn't in any of his usual hiding spots. Back in the cabin I lifted the pastel of Lupine, our first wolf hybrid, off the wall and whispered, "You'll be back up here tomorrow."

Two more helicopters hovered filling their buckets. Shortly after they headed for the fire two retardant air tankers flew over, first a 737 then a DC-10. We were in a war zone.

The fire, devouring the extreme fuel load in the forest, spewed up a huge pyro cumulus cloud. It developed into a cumulonimbus cloud. These clouds produce their own weather— lighting, down bursts of rain and windstorms that can explode in all directions.

The winds from the fire cloud were blowing the fire in several directions and we were now under mandatory evacuation orders. Ben, our young neighbor half mile down river called. "I can see the flames in the woods above me. I think it's time for us to leave."

He'd kept in touch throughout the afternoon and evening. He arrived a few minutes later with his dog, Hazel, so we could drive out together. Before leaving I took the flashlight and looked one more time under the cabin and workshop hoping to find Zane but didn't.

To be continued

Susan Connelly

First Real Look

"A strange old man/Stops me,/Looking out of my deep mirror." Hitomaro

Tonight the lamp shines bright on my
right hand lying flat, palm down on my desk.

I take the time to take a look, a real look,
at the back of my hand and I'm shocked.

Not by what I see but by the realization
it's the first time I've taken a look, a real
look, at something I use every day,
grasper of objects, petter of dogs,
raucous applauder in repeated collision
with companion hand on the left.

And, yes, I'll admit I'm also shocked by the
sight of what I see, paper-thin skin prone to
bruises, thick veins showing through
pumping spent blood back to the heart,
age spots showing up unannounced, rings
slipping around, up and down fingers,
over the years grown every more spindly thin.
Why a first real look now, not back then?

What did my hands even look like in earlier
times when I shot hoops, batted balls back and



Jeff True

forth across nets, changed diapers too
focused on the poop to take notice?

It's the very definition of taking
something for granted, something literally
a part of me that I was too blind to see.

I'm so sorry, hands, what must you think of me?

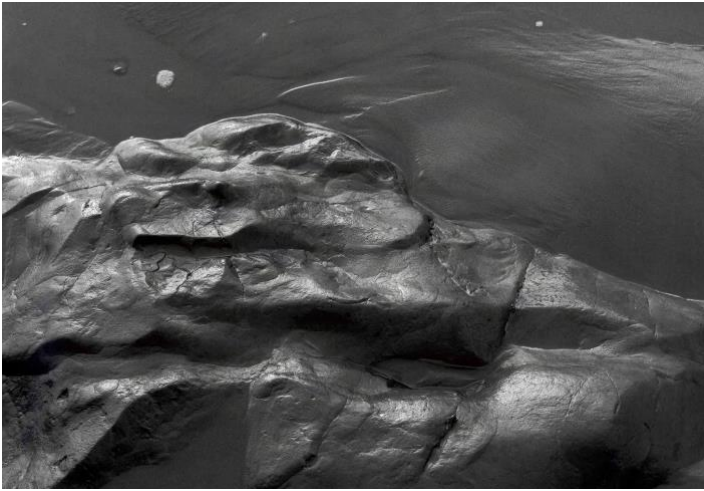
Not to mention the people, places and things,
by now legion, that I've taken for granted in
the past. I'm aghast!

All the people back then I boldly told
I knew this or knew that—like I knew
the back of my hand!!

Tonight this sight in the light of this
lamp has shown me how little I knew.

How little I did and still do.

Larry C. Tolbert



Larry Hoki

Limerick

Fall Prevention Week is September 21-25*

The trouble for Bob was a fall
For which the fire dept got a call
His daughter would frown
When she heard he'd gone down
But the cause was his kitty "furball"

Lauren Vreeland Long

Fall Prevention Week, September 21-25, 2026, aims to help keep vulnerable communities safe, steady and on their feet.

*For more information about fall prevention go to:
<https://www.agedisabilityfriendlynovato.org/>*

Grandmas' Gold

What a day; streets below are grey
If I had my way they would stay
Perpetrating is the only way to go

If I had to leave here, where would I go?
Down the lane into the woods
Josephine told me I could

Take it or leave it is I all I can say
When I say I love you let it be that way ok?

Cynthia Rovero



Tami Tsark, Ashes



Laura Harrison

The Young Reader

Tomorrow is the first day of school. I am one step ahead of my mother as we push our way through the glass doors of the White Plains Public Library. Behind me, my mother's heels tap against the floorboards—click, click—now she is at my side, her red hair in a French twist, her body in a tailored suit. She is five-foot-eight. I am nine and barely reach her elbow. I tip my head back. A vaulted ceiling rises like the sky and overlooks rows of books that stare down at me from shelves that line the walls.

The air is as silent as an unopened book. Two women talk loudly to each other at one of the mahogany tables. A librarian looks up and places her finger in front of her lips.

Now, from the librarian's desk, there are whispers and a soft laugh. More murmurs drift like secrets from a far corner and somewhere behind a shelf, footsteps scuffle and someone coughs. I look up at my mother in anticipation. She glances at me, and then with her lips pressed together and eyes fixed straight ahead, her heels tap left toward a wonderland of imagination; the children's section.

When we finally walk out of the library, my arms are stretched holding two bags of books, mostly suggested by my mother. I smile as I think of P.G. Wodehouse, of Sherlock Holmes, and my eyes widen with anticipation when I remember that my mother pulled a Robert Louis Stevenson anthology from the shelf.

I whisper, "Treasure Island"! I am so excited, that I trip on the curb. But I am young and with quick reflexes. To my mother's relief, I save myself from falling in the street. My friends Nancy Drew, and the Hardy boys, call out to me from the bottom of my bag, "good Job." I laugh.

At night, when lights are supposed to be out, Nancy Drew and her friends solve mysteries under the beam of my flashlight, glow under the sheets. Stars twinkle outside my bedroom window. My neighbor's mother calls, Carol, time to come inside. Where, aaaare you? A dog barks somewhere down Albemarle Road... and a voice from far away calls out, "here kitty kitty!" Nancy Drew explores a haunted house with her friends. I will not put the book down until I have finished it.

On some nights, my father opens the door, and with an "I am captain of this ship, salute," he commands, "lights out!" My sheets go dark. I poke my head out from under them, place my book on the nightstand and whisper, "Good night, Daddy. I am in heaven. Tomorrow I will be in school.

Laurel Marinelli



Grace Marie Alexander, Crepe Paper Flowers



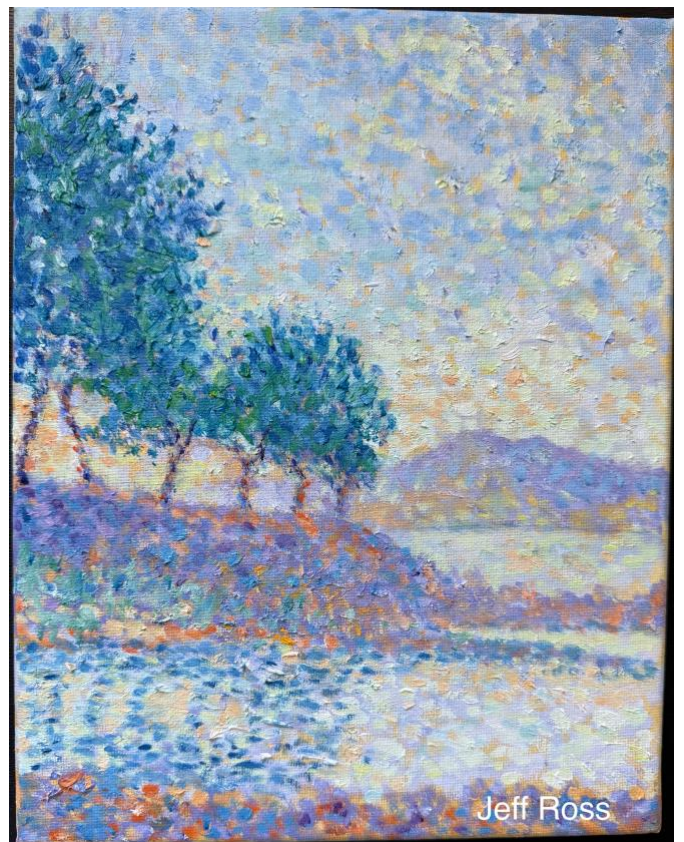
Harvey Abernathey



Marilyn Bagshaw



Donna Baretta



Jeff Ross, After Signac with Mt. Tam

Stings Become Stripes as a Midsummers Night's Dream Becomes Fall

Chinese maiden slumbered in content
Outside the palace where her lover came and went
Sounds drifting about her putting her to rest
Of strings first developed for zing and zest.
(Social parents don't want their young ladies watching
juvenile mothers perform well)

She wakes as her smile fades
As a prince traverses in his wedding parade.
Rage somehow his sent him to travel
Through India, westward where strings and souls unravel.

Now king from Ruth plucks the strings
Of conquest to most, such horrible things.
Somehow traveling afloat
Carthage is reached by boat.
(The psychiatric hospital is a modern red tent.)

Back in India by hand the strings are knitting
To the land of David's lore sticks are insisting
That the women can wake to daylight
As men are in Carthage to play and fight.

Hannibal of Carthage had Europe for a day
Always tempered as Spanish guitars play.
Britain you arrive dressed to kill on our roads
String up sounds for sleeping ladies, sheep and toads.
(keep your hair hanging in the face table eggs away from my
table.)

With all feeling, please don't pluck at me
Even if you're from my family tree.
If all comes down to another day on the green
Please God, don't send me back to that day's midsummer
night's dream.
(Keep your rude ponytails in the faces if they are or aren't as
they reproduce like goat herds eggs away from me.)

Karen Arnold



Tom Gannon



Fred Krul



Tom Gannon



ESCOM

Emeritus Students
College of Marin

ESCOM Journal

Editor/Designer, Denize Springer

Web Content Manager, Richard Jensen

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.

ESCOM Council

President, Richard Jensen; Vice President, Vacant; Treasurer Richard Jensen; Gloria Dunn-Violin, Gary Gonser, Jane Goulde, Diana Lopez, Nancy P. Major, Luanne Mullin, Beth Rowett, Lois St. Sure, Larry Tolbert, Leonard Weingarten

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

ESCOM JOURNAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please send your **FINAL** draft to

denizespringer@gmail.com

PLEASE ADHERE TO THESE SPECIFICATIONS

Submit **ONE** piece of final, proofed written work or no more than **THREE** image files. Changes, unless necessary, will not be accepted after submission.

Please do not submit work until after you receive the email announcement announcing themes for the next issue (usually last week of month before deadline). Themed entries take priority.

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 (no more than three per issue): **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 or PLAYLETS: (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.

Proof your copy before sending it in.