



# p o e t r y n o w

March 2008

*"Relax / I tell them / you're inside / poetry now"* - Julia Connor

## Cinnamon Roll

*G. Thomas Edwards*

Yet another rolled gently down the snow covered slope,  
through the pure white covered with a layer of filth  
forming a giant anomaly, a cinnamon roll, a peculiarity of nature.  
It came to rest at the top of the plowed snow bank  
just shy of the road... as I pass by.

They can only be created in the most unique spots  
under perfect Spring conditions.  
This is one of those magical spots  
at the very top of Brockway Summit on Hwy 267  
overlooking the blue sky reflected by the lake below, Tahoe.

My mind drifts,  
and a shrill harmonic whistle widens my eyes in anticipation  
of the Town & Country, the "Woodie" rounding the corner.  
We wait like Pavlov's children for the Popsicle man  
salivating at what is to come.

Twin oak and glass doors swing open.  
Wax paper lined oak drawers, laden with droppings of  
crusty white sugar frosting, slide into the open air  
and we are wrapped warm in the aroma of  
freshly baked yeast and dark reddish brown cinnamon.

Confucius would have understood, that life,  
the pure and the filth of so many years  
can under the right conditions  
combine and create something deliciously new  
that others might enjoy where we have been.

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Please submit to SPC, 1719 25<sup>th</sup> Street, Sacramento, CA 95816, or email to [PoetDawn2008@aol.com](mailto:PoetDawn2008@aol.com)

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**Poetry Editor:** Frank Graham

**Contributing Editor:** Tim Kahl

**Design Editor:** Elizabeth Krause

The Poet Tree, also known as the Sacramento Poetry Center, is a non-profit corporation dedicated to providing forums for local poets – including publications, (Poetry Now and Tule Review), workshops, special events, and an ongoing reading series. Funded primarily by members, SPC is entirely run by a volunteer board of directors. We welcome your input and your interest.

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Or visit our website at  
[www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org).



## president's message

A full plate for poets as winter moves into spring. Our February bookstore ramble brought great readings to a few local bookshops on three Monday nights. Our thanks to the proprietors of **The Book Collector** and **Time Tested Books** – for hosting these events. Their book-lined walls made the poetry even better than it already was. Remember to shop at these fine establishments, and perhaps they'll be willing to host SPC readings in future winters.

The one reading at HQ for the Arts turned out to be a pleasant evening, temperature-wise, and a hot one verse-wise. **Indigo Moor** and **Khiry Malik Moore** put together an all-star line-up for a full evening of African-American poets on February 18. I'm still charged up from the energy the crowd generated when Khiry led the call for each poet to "Speak, Poet, Speak!"

We're happy to welcome back to Sacramento the esteemed **Alice Anderson**, teacher and poet. She's returned after living for a number of years in Ocean Springs, Mississippi – one of the gulf coast towns destroyed when Katrina made a direct hit. If the turnout for Alice's superb reading with Pat Grizzell (Feb. 11) is any indication, she brings a lot to the Sacramento poetry scene. Her book, Human Nature, has won a number of awards. You can contact Alice, and see some of her poems at [www.myspace.com/herkind](http://www.myspace.com/herkind).

April approaches – and the first week will be busy for poets. An array of Poet Laureates arrive in the Capital on April 2 – if you want to "meet and greet" the laureates from various cities and counties – come with \$15 to cover the cost of dinner, and see what is perhaps the first ever "open laureates mic." On Thursday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> the conference will also include a round-table discussion - 20 poets talking about their successes, challenges and dreams for what poetry can do. There will also be a reading on Thursday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Details will follow – check the SPC website and email messages. Any questions, feel free to contact me at 916-240-1897, or email [bobstanley@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bobstanley@sbcglobal.net).

Friday and Saturday, April 4 and 5 brings our SPC conference to the fore – Indigo Moor has put together what is arguably the most exciting workshop we've put on in years! The Friday night reading at The Space (R Street near 25<sup>th</sup> – around the corner from HQ) features **Jane Hirshfield**, **Joshua McKinney** and **Camille Norton**. Saturday will be a full day of writing workshops – the morning workshops will be run by Norton and McKinney, and then **Quinton Duval** and **Ellen Bass** will lead afternoon workshops. Saturday there will be ongoing readings at The Space as well. Then at 4:30 we'll have a closing reading by Bass, Duval, and **Al Young**. So spend Friday night and Saturday with SPC at 25<sup>th</sup> and R. The cost for the complete event is \$45 – or \$35 for SPC members, and for Friday night only we request a \$10 donation. Bring a friend or two – this will be an excellent chance to hone your poetic skills, hear some great writers, and share your work with other local poets. To register, call Sandra at 979-9706, or contact me if you have any questions.

If you want to be considered for publication in **Jordan Reynolds'** new journal, here are the guidelines – "A *Salt Mag* accepts on-line submissions only. To contribute salt of your own, please send submissions to "[a.salt.press@gmail.com](mailto:a.salt.press@gmail.com)" with your name and genre in the subject line." Do it now.

After about two years as editor of PoetryNow, I'm pleased to announce that **Frank Graham** will be taking over as Editor for the May issue. Frank's been editing the poetry, doing interviews, as well as hosting and helping to plan events since he joined the board a year ago. I'm sure he'll bring new energy and ideas to this venerable newsletter. You can send news, calendar items, and poems to his address at [grahampoet@aol.com](mailto:grahampoet@aol.com). I'll still be writing this monthly Presidential letter, for what it's worth. I always wanted to be Herb Caen, and this is as close as I've gotten, so I won't "go gentle." Thanks for all your support of SPC and the poetry community, and we hope to see you at events in March and April.

Bob Stanley  
President

## The Troubles

Ellen Johnson

what can I say of this time,  
the ticking of the troubles  
like a pegged spoked wheel?

I dug in sorrow's pockets  
and came up with scraps.  
it is time to move on  
but I've become stuck.

one morning while I drove and cried,  
I saw a truck  
and I was that dog  
running back and forth in its bed,  
not knowing where I was headed,  
a little frantic on the freeway,  
but carried by something large  
and unknown.

*Ellen Johnson will be reading with the Zen Marxist  
Laundrettes on March 31 at SPC.*

## PoetryFest 2008

**Wednesday, April 23  
6:30-8:30pm**

**Central Library's Meeting  
Room**

*Lectures, Readings and  
Poetry!*

**Featured poets include Bob  
Stanley and Stan Zumbiel  
and an Open Mic hosted by  
the lovely and talented  
Elizabeth Krause**

## Year 46 Running

Matt Haisch

Could I  
start afresh  
begin again, anew.  
Would I now  
run true. Head up, eyes forward, on  
track.  
Not to stumble  
not to fall. No.

I've lived enough to know  
the metal I'm made of  
is weak, incapable. Against good,  
second place.  
What hope I have.

## Nothing Changes/No One Cares

Tom Babb

He never speaks aboard the bus cruising asphalt paths  
beside burnt-out medians of oleander, oat and fleabane,  
in cramped community with nameless faces equally bored with tract landscapes,  
corporate strip malls that could be Anywhere, America, and  
cookie cutter home plots with lollipop trees, rock roses, and plastic siding,  
watching hordes of belching cars that scamper past, drivers displaying  
ordinary Wednesday fisheye stares, gloved hands caressing steering wheels,  
seeking solace through inane songs and tinny radio voices  
spewing advice, insight and political jokes as backdrop to open windows,  
insidious car exhaust and a Pavlovian ache for cheap imported pinot;  
the bus braking, 'accident up ahead' echoes in the aisle while heads crane to look  
like ancient Romans expecting a blood sport front row seat as  
red taillights pulse and palpable excitement courses through stadium seats,  
sunglasses drop from sleep-starved eyes, exposing souls revived in  
a brief shimmer of bloodlust as cars like chased rats scurry past;  
hearing the bus man bark, 'idiot car' to an arrogant slashing Hummer,  
then pointing a fat finger to a mossy pond, attaching 'should be fishin' over there'  
to a guttural 'ha, ha, hee, hee' and 'gotta be catfish in that lake . . .  
gonna be late; eatin' cold fish sticks tonight!', as smug commuters stare down  
through smeared windows at single occupant cars lurching waddle-walkspeed  
by fresh twisted metal of inconvenient destruction and inevitable delay,  
jockeying among each other like a bumper car game, sucking cigarettes greedily,  
hurriedly, as if the road was about to end, when to him,  
silent staring, the road just goes on and on . . .

*Four poems by Taylor Graham*

**CASTLEHAVEN, IRELAND 1847**

Did lilacs still bend  
in a spring breeze, and geraniums  
bloom in window-boxes?  
From any open doorway listen  
for the squall of infants.  
In this village, starvation  
has no voice.

Two young children stand  
with jaws distended beyond  
words. Is this what hunger does?  
And their mother – that stick-  
figure leaning on shadows  
looking out of the mask  
of her skull.

And here's a dark hovel  
where a child of three lies alone,  
motionless on a plank; staring  
out of eyes so clear, she might be  
waiting for death to levitate  
her into the light of pure  
blue sky.

**A JUNGLE**

With machetes we slashed  
our way in, searching for the idol  
swathed in vines. We arrived  
to the whistling of monkeys  
and twitching of yellow birds.  
We brought no guidebook  
to the customs of the natives,  
no lexicon of a language  
we don't even try to understand.  
It sounds no more sense  
than birdsong, "the short  
and simple annals of the poor"  
who live among such  
splendor, and think nothing  
of it, except to call it home.  
They wouldn't sell it,  
but smile on us, strangers  
with our changing  
ways; and every one of us  
with a machete to slash  
and a torch to and burn  
our way back out.

**FACING THE WALL**

Eggshell white, long-since  
dinged with fumbling for the light  
switch. Cobweb on a mirror  
showing beams and slanted ceiling,  
a banister, uprights and angles,  
all those things that own me.  
Fluorescent lights. I'm facing  
what should be dawn, a wall solid  
as the housing market.  
There ought to be a window  
looking out where it's still dark  
and cold enough for snow.  
The sound of rain has stopped.  
No pitter-patter, just the tick  
of clock and hum of fixtures,  
tinnitus in my ears.  
The light's switched on, the wall  
is eggshell. No rain inside.  
Outside could be coyotes,  
advancing armies, or only snow.

**A PUBLIC DEATH**

*Let us leave to the guiltiest of our kind,  
place and breath to pray, as long as God will hear.  
- Elihu Burritt, "Cold-blooded Homicide"*

By that time, executions were humane.  
In all New England, no one burned at the stake.  
No one drawn and quartered.  
A "decent and solemn" crowd gathered to see  
a sinner off to the next world. Afterwards, each  
returned from the gallows, sorrowfully, home.

You didn't like it. "Cold-blooded homicide,"  
you said. Compassion with a Bible in one hand  
and a noose in the other. Now matter if a priest  
came to pray with the condemned –  
a simple kindness made the killing seem  
that much colder.

Elihu, even now your birth-state  
argues over the death penalty  
while mine studies the most humane  
array of drugs to anaesthetize, then  
paralyze, then stop the heart.  
That cold-blooded heart.

# Sacramento Area Literary Calendar

## March 2008

### 1 Saturday

All are invited to *Escritores del Nuevo Sol's* writing workshop and potluck. 11am. at La Raza Galeria Posada, 1024 22nd Street, Sacramento. For info call Graciela Ramirez, 456-5323 or [joannpen@comcast.net](mailto:joannpen@comcast.net). Website: [www.escritoresdelnuevosol.com](http://www.escritoresdelnuevosol.com)

### 2 Sunday

A reading by Joe Finkleman and Susan Finkleman plus musicians Francesca Reitano and Mark Halverson at Congregation Bet Haverim, 1715 Anderson Road, Davis. 3pm. \$5 cover charge goes to the synagogue.

### 3 Monday

*Sacramento Poetry Center.*

Sacramento Poetry Center features Julia Levine and Rick Campbell. Hosted by Tim Kahl. HQ for the Arts – 1719 25<sup>th</sup> Street. 7:30pm

### 4 Tuesday

- (1) Washington DC author and teacher Rosemary Winslow reads her poetry at Sacramento State – 12noon at the University Bookstore Conference Room. Free.
- (2) Cosumnes River College presents Frank Portman, author of the critically acclaimed novel for young adults, *King Dork*. 1:30 to 3:00 pm in the CRC Main Building (Forum Room L111) Free.
- (3) SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm, Hart Senior Center, 27<sup>th</sup> & J. Bring 15 - 20 copies of your one-page poem. Info: Danyen, (530) 756-6228

### 5 Wednesday

Another chance to hear Frank Portman, author of *King Dork*, this time at Sacramento State. 6pm in the CSUS Library – 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Room 3023. Free.

### 6 Thursday

*Poetry Unplugged* features TBA at Luna's Café. Fuh Shang & The Jalapeno Chocolates. Hosted by Mario Ellis Hill. Festivities begin at 8pm and there will be an open mic as well.

### 7 Friday

*The Other Voice*, sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis presents Suzanne Roberts and Nancy Bodily. 7:30 to 9:00 in the library of the Church at 27074 Patwin Road, Davis. Refreshments and Open Mike follow - bring along a poem or two to share.

### 8 Saturday

*Culture Collection* features Larry Ukali Johnson-Redd, vocalist Carla Fleming and 'Fuh Shang & The Jalapeno Chocolates.' Plus open mic. 6391 Riverside Blvd in Greenhaven. 2 – 4 pm. FREE! Call (916) 427-7715 for more info.

### 9 Sunday

The El Camino Chapter of Chaparral Poets will be meeting at the Senior Center on 27<sup>th</sup> and J Streets between 11AM and 1PM for poetry and tea. All are welcome to attend. Please bring 10 copies of a poem to share and critique. RSVP: Carol Louise Moon [poetrycarol@yahoo.com](mailto:poetrycarol@yahoo.com)

### 10 Monday

*Sacramento Poetry Center* presents a reading by Edythe Haendel Schwartz, in honor of her new collection, *Exposure*. HQ for the Arts – 1719 25<sup>th</sup> Street. 7:30 pm, FREE. Hosted by Bob Stanley

### 11 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm, Hart Senior Center, 27<sup>th</sup> & J. Bring 15 – 20 copies of your one-page poem. Info: Danyen, (530) 756-6228

### 12 Wednesday

Rattlesnake Press presents a new chapbook by ANN PRIVATEER (*Attracted to Light*) and a littlesnake broadside from JEANINE STEVENS (*Eclipse*), a new issue of Rattlesnake Review (#17) and Conversations Vol. 2 of B.L. Kennedy's Rattlesnake Interview Series—all at The Book Collector, 1008 24th St., Sacramento, 7:30 PM. Info: [kathykieth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathykieth@hotmail.com) or 916-442-9295.

### 13 Thursday

*Luna's Poetry Unplugged* features TBA. Open mic before/after. Hosted by Geoffrey Neill. 8pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Info: 441-3931 or [www.lunascafe.com](http://www.lunascafe.com). Free.

### 15 Saturday

Underground Books features what may well be the final performance of Black Men Expressing Tour. Plus Random Abilideaze and R and B singer Carla Fleming. 2814 35<sup>th</sup> Street off 35<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. 7 – 9 p.m. \$3.00

### 17 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents TBA. HQ for the Arts – 1719 25<sup>th</sup> Street. 7:30 pm, FREE.

### 18 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm, Hart Senior Center, 27<sup>th</sup> & J. Bring 15 – 20 copies of your one-page poem. Info: Danyen, (530) 756-6228

### 20 Thursday

*Poetry Unplugged* at Luna's Café. 8pm. Hosted by Frank Andrick. Free.

### 24 Monday

*Sacramento Poetry Center* presents Zaid Shlah and Brad Buchanan hosted by Tim Kahl. HQ for the Arts – 1719 25<sup>th</sup> Street. 7:30 pm, FREE.

### 25 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm, Hart Senior Center, 27<sup>th</sup> & J. Bring 15 – 20 copies of your one-page poem. Info: Danyen, (530) 756-6228

### 26 Wednesday

*River City Writers Series* presents Robert Wrigley 7 pm in the Little Theater, Sacramento City College

### 27 Thursday

*River City Writers Series* presents Kim Barnes. 12 noon. Little Theater, Sacramento City College.

*Poetry Unplugged* features Jackie Schaffer, Marty, the Pirate, plus Robert Grossklaus & Litany at Luna's Café. 8pm. Hosted by B.L. Kennedy. Free.

### 29 Saturday

*The Show* features Lady Kitty Griffin, Kevin Sandbloom and DeDe Hunt. Wo'se Community Center 2863 35<sup>th</sup> Street off 35<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. 7 – 9 pm. \$5.00

### 31 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center features a reading by the Zen Marxist Lauderettes: Laura Ann Walton, Emily Wright, Mira Kores, Sandra Senne, Margaret Burns, Erin Doyle, Ellen Johnson, Carolyn Schneider. Hosted by Frank Graham. HQ for the Arts – 1719 25<sup>th</sup> Street. 7:30 pm, FREE.

## Two poems by Geoff Oelsner

### In Dingle, Ireland

Digging right into that music mine –  
sturdy lady fiddler  
in Dingle tonight...

...her back to the window,  
her bow towing invisible winds;  
untying Celtic knots of song.

They tease the tunes  
from out a silence deep and steep  
as earth to moon.

They weave from pub to pub,  
up the drunken street  
that dead-ends at the Catholic church.

Tomorrow's Easter day –  
church will be full. But this is mass  
hilarity right now.

The solemn adult in the moon –  
faced baby boy;  
the frisky child in the white-haired gent...

His face is creased as if just  
unfolded, like a worn roadmap  
of many days and miles.

The old gray-haired, sad-eyed  
accordion player smiles.  
His whole facial terrain lights up.

Some of that sun comes from within him.  
Some is reflected from  
the smiling concertina-playing lady facing him.

Matron of the music,  
she sits erect and proud,  
well-lived-in yet unborn.

Midwife of the tune,  
unobtrusive, solid –  
probably been around the world and happy to be home.

Madonna in the church above –  
your blue gown flows down through the boozy streets  
into these prayerful pubs.

### Ardmore, Ireland (At St. Declan's Well & Cell)

Ornate waves  
split on rocks,  
spill ivory foam.

Small bird on a fencepost  
feathering the fields  
with song...

Half full plastic pop bottle  
left on an ancient lichen-spattered  
Wall.

Burying my nose in gorse  
flowers – delicious macaroon  
perfume.

St. Declan's gone.  
His well flows  
on.

The ceiling of his hermit cell's  
high rumped clouds  
that veil blue sky.

St. Declan's gone,  
to his own deep  
satisfaction.

## Three Poems by Julia Levine

### Proof, As Near As I Can Tell

Last of the fog burning back,  
she looks out my office window, and tells me

there was an experiment in her dream last night:

an infant that needed to be studied  
and so she unswaddled it, rubbed the clitoris.

Watched the tiny face

register pleasure and distress  
at once. *At the same time*, she says, and cries.

Now is the time to say something small  
to save her life.

And not the things I've already said.  
Like, *What changes slowly, perfectly, is invisible.*

Or, *Imagine yourself before the small desks of school.*

No, today I want to tell her, *Memory drags the river  
of all that is desperate to escape.*

*Find the openings where the gone world  
empties the present. Go deeper in.*

But I don't.  
Instead, a train whistles. My rocker groans

Instead, I lay a kleenex across her knees.

Down below, someone is taking tickets  
and someone is boarding the train. *I'm bloated with loneliness*

she says. *I'm going to die without ever having been loved  
in someone else's hands.*

Over the stationary store, the train station, the barbershop,  
swallows circle the city

before sifting down. *Please, look at me,*  
I say. *I want you to know I'm here.*

And then she does, speaking so softly  
I have to kneel before the couch

to hear her say, *Strange, how scared I am--*

and it's true, her hands are trembling, the mortal house  
convulsed and shaken

just to tell me  
that she knows the experiment is about turning away.

How it can kill you. How she woke

this morning, from the dream  
knowing she didn't want to die. Not from that. Not yet.

### Happiness

When light shaves obsidian into shine  
and shore gapes mouthfuls of dark winter sand

and water talks the way a dog talks  
with his whole body leaping into air

and the spray, still warm, gathers into swallows  
zipping close enough to electrify the wind

around your lips and it tastes of salt  
and white tulips opening into furrows

of wave and wingblades-- numberless seabirds  
scared up, so that the plow of their rising

uncovers a bull seal peering out at your kayak,  
eager as the child you carry across the bay,

and quietly over the cold linger, she is  
singing, then you are, yes, this is

### Grunion Run

I wheel my father under a July moon,  
past a night heron, the feral scent of public bathrooms.

When a terrier trots past,  
he reaches out a hand to graze the prancing dog.

Soon the fish will leap onshore, lay their eggs,  
return to sea, or die,

and there is a kind of courage in the undoing:  
the subconscious cocked and ready,

my father's diminishment in my hands.  
Below us, locals toss bottles into sand,

nurse fires in steel pits. Wait to dive  
into the brief arena, hoping to catch a grunion

between their fingers-- the small uncaught beings  
jostled, touching,--

whether it hurts or not,

whether you believe the dying

hang their gleaming attention just inside of,  
or outside, time.

## Lighthouse

Joyce Odam

If I were the sea  
I would use you for a focal point:  
your light for my darkness;

I would use you for a boundary  
to gauge my edge against;  
I would know where I

could test my calm and fury —  
let my ships beware —  
warn my whales —

and give your shore-gulls praise  
for making stormy skies  
with their whiteness.

I would always know where you are  
so I could ever surge toward you  
with my lonely power.

## UPCOMING EVENTS IN APRIL

( for updates and details go to [www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org) )

### April 2, 3

Gathering of California Community Poets Laureate

### April 3<sup>rd</sup>

*Poetry Unplugged* features TBA at Luna's Café.  
Susan & Joe Finkleman hosted by Mario Ellis Hill.  
Festivities begin at 8pm and there will be an open  
mic as well.

### April 4, 5

SPC Poetry Conference at HQ for the Arts  
CRC Writers' Conference at Hart Senior Center

### April 9

Rattlesnake Press's annual birthday bash at The  
Book Collector, 1008 24th St., Sacramento, 7:30  
PM. Featuring new chapbooks from Annie  
Menebroker and Ted Finn, as well as #2 in our  
HandyStuff series, this time a blank (well, not  
really) journal from Katy Brown.

### *And Monday nights at SPC in April:*

### April 14

Winners of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual SPC High School Poetry  
Contest

### April 21

!X – Sac City Ethnic Theater Workshop – returns  
to HQ for the Arts

### April 28

William O' Daly reads – hosted by Tim Kahl



## Exposure

New York, July, 1949

### Prologue

The city's flow sunders.  
Animosities flare  
in small rooms, rumors seep below  
door lintels, slow air—  
the illness closes breath. No one knows  
what to look for. No one can block  
the fear. Some conceal children,  
legs lank as marionettes. Mothers lie  
when health authorities knock.  
Some say, with illness comes poison  
to justify—

### I

The city says *Stay put. Stay in.* We seal  
windows, the little ones so hot and wet  
they look as though they had been dipped  
in oil. And now my neighbor's girl,  
lungs stuck together like a wad of gum  
on the sole, body's bellows with no hum—  
whisked out of her mother's arms  
and left alone, a sterile hospital bed, her doll,  
Miss Nancy, burned, her red shoes,  
burned, child's world gone in a flash,  
parents trapped behind a wall of glass,  
like touching ice—

the girl encased, iron lung whooshing in  
and out each breath against death, riven.

### II

All day my Solomon presses on the window  
watching the forbidden street. Sun  
shrouds the dust. He aches to swim and run.  
I keep him in. He's hot, not sick. *Polio*  
I tell him. *Swimming pools are closed,*  
*better you should breathe hot air than fever.*  
He sinks against my flesh, my prayer,  
smells stewing chicken steaming my clothes.

His father stitches suits downtown, rides the subway  
hanging by a handstrap, fifty dollars  
a week when there is work— worn out by  
little pay, puts some aside for drink, his collars  
shredding at the seams. I can't stop  
the corrosion in his gut.

### III

So disregard the news, the will  
of God? No exodus for us. Abe yells  
I shouldn't scare, but we are prey.  
Isolation rules. The smell of boiled wool  
raises the terror of burned limbs.  
My *Tateh* should only know—  
We dreamed American; tomorrow  
we may be victims.

Some say it is a pestilence loosed  
to fell those with accents, those  
with prayers not the right kind.

Who will rescue us, virus licked  
from a friend's ice cream cone,  
trouble on the back of a damp wind?

**Edythe Haendel Schwartz**

(*Exposure* appears on the web site  
[www.JCCSF.org](http://www.JCCSF.org), as an award winner in  
the Anna Davidson Rosenberg contest,  
2007, and is published in **Exposure**,  
Finishing Line Press, December, 2007)

## Frank Graham *interviews* Edythe Haendel Schwartz

*I spoke with with Edythe Haendel Schwartz, poet and retired professor of Child Development, CSUS. Edythe has a new chapbook of poems titled Exposure, and will be reading at SPC on March 10, 2008. She is on the book review panel for the journal Calyx.*

FG: Does poetry begin in the brain rather than the mind?

**EHS: For me, poems begin with words or phrases. I've been reading poems since I was very, very little. I don't know how little. My ambition was to read all the books in the library. I went to the branch library by myself on the day I got a bicycle.**

FG: What part of New York?

**EHS: I grew up in Brooklyn. I was a city child. I was self-motivated and very stubborn and began reading my way through the library. I became very good friends with the librarian. She would see me coming on my bicycle, with my basket. She was always happy to see me. And so I had this attitude - I have to read everything. I wanted to be a swimmer and I wanted to swim the English Channel, so I had to figure out how I was going to do it. I didn't know then the English Channel had very cold water. I didn't figure that out until I was twenty-one years old. But I had to read everything about it if I was to do it.**

FG: Does athleticism have a connection to poetry?

**EHS: There's a physical embodiment to poems - the visceral - Sometimes I will see something and that will be a trigger... I have a poem in my collection that started out a poem about polio. I grew up with polio all around me. There wasn't a vaccine until the early fifties, so I had a good sense of how it affected people. You weren't allowed to go to movies, nowhere with crowds. My process is like that of a lot of other writers, I will come back and back to poems. I usually work on eight or nine poems at a time. I read about twelve books at a time. I read a lot of non-fiction, a lot of information. I'm in love with research. I'm working on a poem now about changes in genetics. Sometimes I'll work on a poem for several years - until I feel it is at a point I want it to be.**

FG: Does anybody influence you?

**EHS: I probably have built in the voices of Frost, Yeats, Shakespeare's sonnets....My father used to take me to the used bookstores under 4th Avenue El. He was a structural engineer and he read everything. I got my first volume of Frost when I was nine or ten and I read all of that, and then I knew all of Robert Louis Stevenson. I was also in a drama group; we did Shakespeare.**

FG: Poetry is so individual -- is it good to have friends to bounce ideas off of?

**EHS: It helps.**

FG: Family is your sounding board?

**EHS: Not necessarily. My children are middle aged. I don't usually share my work with them while it's in process. I consider myself fortunate every day. I'm in good health and like my life. I've always worked hard. If I'm going to do something, I'm going to try and do it right. When I think a poem has potential, it could be months of work, could be longer. I've done lots of different kinds of writing - professional writing.**

FG: Is it the same way with painting? Do you return to the canvas?

**EHS:** Like that. I know if paintings aren't finished. As with poems, I can feel they're not finished. I'm very interested in texture and color as a poet and painter - all art. Many years ago I did summer session classes for teachers in the College of Education. I taught art methods to teachers. It was fun. I grew up in museums, I was a toddler in a stroller, and I was surrounded by visual art. I had done some painting when I was younger. But I didn't paint much while I was at the university. The year before I was to retire I went back to drawing, life drawing, and I made a friend in this studio class, and we've been painting together since. Friends and family are an important part of having a life. All of us are faced with challenges everyday. And we have to choose the kinds of things that help us maintain balance. I'm very self-disciplined, and very clear about who I am and what kinds of choices are good for me.

FG: Are you part of a workshop?

**EHS:** I am not. I have been a part of a small group - two friends and I read each other's work often. It's easier to see problems in other's work, than in my own. I do book reviews and I'm on the reviewer's panel for Calyx. Retirement is wonderful. It's such a gift to be a beginner again. It's nice, because you learn a lot more. Once you think you're an expert at something, you don't learn that much. I'd rather be a learner than an expert.

FG: Why is rhyme so important to children?

**EHS:** Children figure things out by playing. Rhyme is playing with language. Play adds richness to life. You have to be willing to paint your picture of a cat, purple. You have to be willing to say, "dizzy-wizzy-wizzy". And children are always trying to figure things out. There is satisfaction for them in creating order. Order makes children feel comfortable - if they impose it themselves, draw on their own ideas. Rhyme has a delightful kind of order. It tickles the ear and the brain, thus advances development. Children love inventing words. And they play with sounds long before they can produce words.

FG: Or they have a sound name for an animal, a cow, or whatever, with sounds like, "moo".



**EHS:** Well, that's --


FG: We do that as poets, don't we? We play with language?

**EHS:** Well, of course. Many words can serve many functions. And I've always been interested in how people acquire multiple languages. I've watched my grandchildren grow up bilingual.

FG: I have a sort of envy of children who have the opportunity to, grow up in a different culture, to learn more than their own culture, more than their own language -

**EHS:** And being bilingual makes it easier to add on still more languages.

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