

WORDS FEST

FOOD

FOOD

FOOD



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to WordsFestZine, an ‘instant’ publication born out of a partnership among Words, Poetry London, Western University, Fanshawe College, and Insomniac Press. Our goal this year was to celebrate Southwestern Ontario and its rich agricultural and culinary traditions. Our call was simple: we asked for works of prose, poetry, creative non-fiction, art, and hybrid work inspired by the relationship between Southwestern Ontario and food in all of its complexity.

So, how did we pull this off? With a team of tireless editors and producers working around the clock to edit, compile, design and, finally, print the zine within 24 hours of receiving the final submissions. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the participation of the public: this is London’s WordsFest; this is London’s WordsFestZine.

We have divided the WordsFestZine into five sections: “Light Eats,” “Organic Delicacies,” “Wild Game and Foraged Foods,” “Home Cooking,” and “Á La Carte.” The first four sections contain poems responding to our theme, and “Á La Carte” contains both the heterogeneous oddments and delicious tidbits that collect around a major literary event and the poems read at the open mic night.

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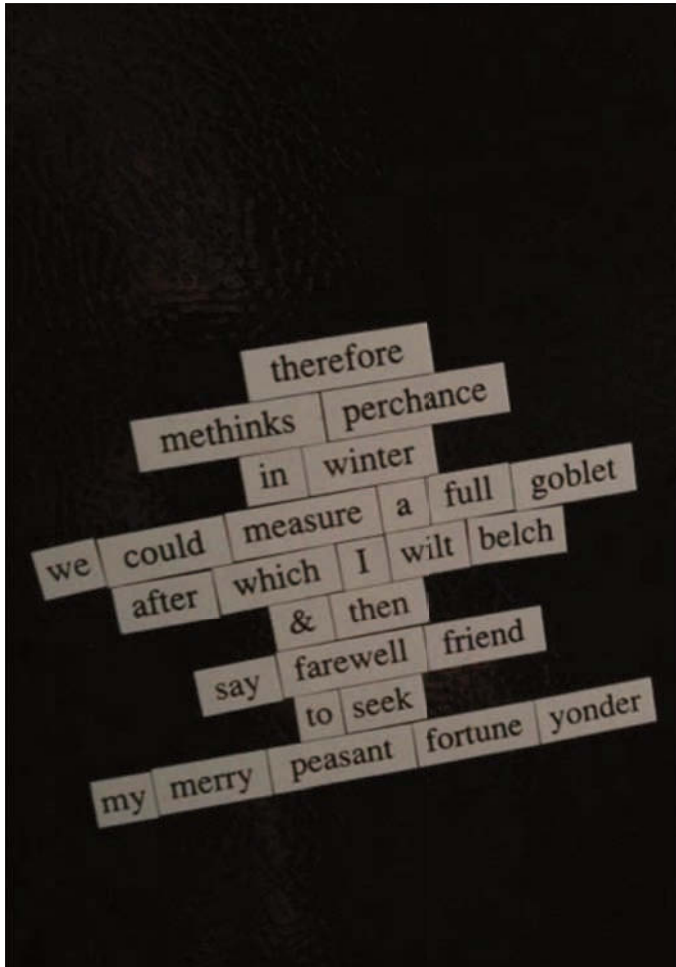
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LIGHT EATS:

VINTAGE

By Heather Uksik



FOR MY DARLING PRINCE AL

By Lincoln McCardle

French fries are golden,
Some cheeses are blue,
My taste is salty and savory,
As my dearest are you.

Vanilla milkshakes are white,
While coffee ones are rare,
Your staying power is long,
May you always be there.

Nightowls come hooting,
Nocturnal and preying,
Time to get blanching,

If you hear what I'm saying.

Sunflowers reach
Up to the azure skies,
My dream sauce is gravy,
A love I can no longer disguise.

The burritos are unequalled,
Your servers have style,
Every meal satisfying,
Every trip worthwhile.

Your poutine is magnificent,
Worth missing curfew,
I just wanted to ask ...
That you keep being you.

TELLING FRIES

By Gareth Boyle

I am a liar.
I lie to my family, to my friends,
I lie about my grades,
about my exams,
about everything.
It is who I am.

I don't know why I lie.
Unsure of when it started.
But people eat them up
like french fries:
salty, delicious,
bad for you.
People cannot stop.

They sit there and fatten
on lie after lie.
Will they eventually notice
that this is not the best diet?
Exercise, unwind, get better.
Burn off the weight of my dishonesty.
The hunger will return
and so will I.

PLUM

By Frank Beltrano

A plum floats upon my fingertips
 having been washed
 having been dried
 having been lightly polished.
 This, the last bite I will eat
 before the end of the meal.
 This plum is the austere
 conclusion to a plate of ratatouille
 on a bed of yellow fettuccine
 and, of course, a glass of acidic
 red wine to wash it all down.

It is late into the evening
 and I will sleep on this
 dreaming of eggplant
 and squash, but

the plum will float
 above the stars
 while ratatouille
 fettuccine and
 red wine swirl
 round my intestinal tract
 like Disney mice
 in racing cars.

PEPPER POT SOUP

By Annette Pateman

Mouth lowers to the
 spoon and sips at the soup.
 Tongue tastes the yam and
 starchy white dasheen.
 The scent of fresh thyme
 hovers above the pot.
 An aroma that evokes
 memories of Jamaican mother.
 The green finger-like
 shape of okra.
 A lady's finger.
 Makes a gentle curve
 in the liquid.
 Spoon dips to catch
 okra, and a red piece of

scotch bonnet floats by.
 Spicy warmth follows
 where pepper soup
 is fed.

AS THE CROW FLIES

AN EKPHRASTIC POEM ON RON BENNER'S INSTALLATION OUTSIDE MUSEUM LONDON

By Courtney Ward-Zbeetnoff

as the crow flies
 down the 81.14° meridian
 on this day of November,

spatterdock floats on fresh water,
 ravelled veins of roots
 drifting under the surface.

milkweed seed pods splinter,
 erupting white tufts
 like truffula trees.

echinacea discs are stripped
 to the spine, bodies crested
 with thick quills.

hollow sunflower heads slump
 with pock-marked faces,
 petals already fallen.

tobacco plants finish their flower,
 pink tips curling
 from colder weather.

amaranth leans, heavy with seed.
 grain drops from crimson stalks
 along this meridian
 as the crow flies.



LATE AUGUST. MY FATHER.

By Teresa Cole

Late August. My father. Sun-browned arms and white T-shirt. Pants the colour of soil. Alone in a 5-acre field of tomatoes with red-topped hampers streaming out behind him, all in a row. I've brought you a drink, I say, holding up a Thermos. He grabs an empty hamper, flips it upside-down and sits with a satisfied groan. Asks me to pour. I hold the cup and watch as he reaches down for a perfectly ripe tomato. Holds it in his hands. His hands, broad and covered with a

layer of tomato tar so thick it looks as though it could be peeled off like gloves. Hands so rough they make a sound as he wipes the dust off the fruit. He sits holding the tomato. The expression on his face is one of wonder. Admiration. Pride. He places the tomato gently into a half-full hamper and takes the cup I offer. The silent space between us is filled with the sound of cicadas. Desperate. Urgent. Warning of a season ending. I search for words and find none. Finally, tea finished and rest taken, he hands back the cup, thanks me, flips the hamper upright again and returns to his work.

SEEDLINGS

By Rebecca St. Pierre

I squinted in the harsh midday sun at the acres of parched, baked soil. Bins of hopeful tomato seedlings patiently waited on the crimson tractor attached to a planting machine. Dan, our neighbour, a Southwestern Ontario farmer, eyed me apprehensively as I shifted from one foot to the other. A drop of perspiration slid down my forehead, behind my glasses and into my left eye as I met his gaze.

It was the '60s and planting time in Souwesto. Soybeans, sweet corn, strawberries and tomatoes waited their turn at meeting the deep dark, rich earth. For teenagers looking for money, planting and selling vegetables meant the pleasant clatter of change in patched pockets and worn purses.

Early in the season, workers would sit hunched on rigid steel stools of planting machines, deftly dispensing tomato seedlings into a rotating wheel of metal clamps. Almost as quickly as the tender green shoots disappeared beneath the bent workers, they would magically reappear, unsteady, but triumphant, in the fertile, furrowed soil. With military precision, the tiny chlorophyll soldiers stood mostly at attention in rows upon rows of dotted green, prepared to battle drought and downpours.

I had worked at a roadside stand the summer before. Hours of my life wasted away as droves of cars passed by. Clouds of dust discovered a new home on my horn-rimmed glasses, chestnut hair and

cracked lips. Often I was reprimanded for retreating deep inside the protective confines of the stand with a Nancy Drew novel, instead of sitting in the glaring sun where I could entice tired drivers to stop for a pint of warm beefsteak tomatoes, or a dozen slender, tender cobs of Seneca Chief corn.

This year, Dan said I was ready to plant tomatoes. What he didn't know was that I had overheard him talking with my parents. They pleaded, he yielded, and here I am, staring down a strange, uninviting, torturous beast with sharp unyielding parts. I begged to be transported to the end of the season when I would kneel to these same seedlings now transformed into mature plants, and twist, no, tear, voluptuous blood-red fruit from the vibrant vines.

Four of us waited for the signal. Dan nodded. The others stepped into the machine. I rushed to join them, stumbled, and almost fell into the seedlings. A trickle of laughter settled on my warm face. I looked for guidance on how to untangle the tapestry of roots, stems and leaves. A fellow worker whispered, "Roots point down; one plant per clamp."

Suddenly, the tractor roared to life, we jerked forward, and a steel clamp rose into view and demanded its due: a healthy seedling. As I ripped a plant from the mangled mass, the clamp slowly closed empty-handed, and was quickly replaced with yet another and another and another begging steel trap. Sporadic seedlings appeared in my row, tiny specks of green intermingled with root threads grasping for solid earth, but clawing at only empty air.

“

A trickle of laughter settled on my warm face. I looked for guidance on how to untangle the tapestry of roots, stems and leaves.

”

— Rebecca St. Pierre

WET POTATO SKINS

By Debbie Okun Hill

His toughest moment
drips —
clings
then slides down
skin —
like sweat.

The perspiration of a farmer, stoic-sturdy,
turning soil in a field earthed with Yukon Gold.

The time it takes to run his tongue over parched lips,
red moustache glistening, the earth black welded
against water beads until north winds whip, wail,
and wagon in grey clouds.

He picks up his tools: his unsharpened hoe,
his shovel, rake, and calloused hands,

as another moment
slides from his chin
his outer skin textured
like bags of potatoes
now drenched by
this isolated storm.

A second too late
to run, recover
his Monday harvest.

UNUSUAL FRUIT

By Jade Wallace

baby kiwi
leathery and hairless
old as the Pleiocene

hardy kiwi
suffers no surfeit of
water or sun

arctic kiwi
frost-burned flower
bears no fruit

kishmish, kiwi grape
catnip scent tempts
tiny teeth

TANGERINE

By Faith Patrick

i love to massage your peel open
i love the meeting
between the tip of the tongue and the tip of the
wedge
breaking the membrane skin
tissue paper seal
tangerine
you are the perfect size for my fingertips
tangerine
oh Florida Classic Growers
tangerine

ORGANIC DELICACIES:

FOOD WOULD DO!

By Chinelo Ezenwa

Dear Organizers,
it behooves me to write this letter, following such an
august occasion,
to suggest, no insist, that a pledge of food should be
food.
As people go, I'm easy, but I am literal.

On this august day, with the promise of food re-
sounding in my heart,
I set out with my glad rags—my best, really.
Waiting, waiting for the food to come.
As if in premonition, I detect no scents wafting
around,
I only smell the fumes of per'.

Hmm ...
Then, "da food!"
"Crisps?" he asks.
"Lettuce!" I say.
A closer look,
nice-looking flowery lettuce, but lettuce nonethe-
less.

Having the glad rags out, with sumptuous rice in
heart,
'twasn't at all lettuce on my list.
What to do?
What any self-respecting foodie would do ...
I dug in.
Not so bad—for a bit of vegetation.
Still, I long for sumptuous rice, rice with oozing
juicy tomatoes.

Dear Organizers, food would do! Just food.

APPLE LAND

by David Barrick

Grass parking lot cordoned off
with yellow nylon rope.
SUVs and trucks sinking
troughs in torn turf and mud.

The air laced with manure.
Fried pastry twists, Crisco pie crusts.
Jug band of electronic sheep
glitching out a hoedown
every thirty minutes.

Train whistle sounds: men in jeans
guide boot-wearing families
onto carts hooked up to tractors
fitted with plywood cow-catchers.

Farm kids deke among trees,
bite and aim, sticky cores
pelting passing apple pickers.
Laughter thrashing through
stalks of the corn maze.

OF GOOD AND EVIL

By David White

with a crunch more satisfying than a pomegranate
that other candidate for forbidden fruit

an apple twisted from the branch
along Erie's northern shore

orchard of the Great Lakes Farms
October morning, dew on grass

pebbled on the mottled green, red
Thanksgiving weekend, chill in the air

bright sun warm on my cheek
I taste the desperate thrill

of knowledge
sweet juice running down my chin

KING RICHIE'S

By Gabrielle Drolet

Winter. Time to forget about cooking
and order a pizza. The basil plant in the window
finally going, leaves yellowed from weeks
without trimming. The chives gone already.

After a while, you forget about the sound
of hot oil, the smell of fried garlic, the slow
browning of mushrooms. Back before
deadlines rose like smoke, you spent mornings at
the market, deliberating over grapefruits
and testing the ripeness of avocados. Now, you
walk down the street to King Richie's, where
business cards and polaroids are stapled
to the walls; where students lean
against counters, waiting; where steam is pressed
against the windows.

This will do for now. You eat without
plates, sparing yourself from dishes. You eat
too eagerly, burning the roof
of your mouth. You eat with garlic
dipping sauce, dousing your crust.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

By Marlene Laplante

I remember as a child
I'd pick flowers
where they grew wild
I remember cricket songs
and fireflies in a jar
snails in dark places
ants marching in a row
trilliums on the way to school
sun fish in the creek
the smell of hay in the loft
following butterflies as far as I could
our dog with new puppies in the shed
eating pea pods from the garden
kicking stones on the gravel road
bumblebees of black and gold
spider webs on a drain pipe
at the corner of the house
coaxing ladybugs to fly away home
shooting stars that crossed the sky
coloured leaves in the fall
blowing dandelion seeds through the air
watching my dad milk the cow
pulling each petal from a flower
picking berries down the lane
a swing that reached the sky

I remember swallows in the barn
bunny prints across the snow
opening milkweed pods to let them go
a favorite tree to climb
riding the workhorse in from the field
I think of how it was back then
as I sit in my chair and remember when

SHE WANTS POUTINE!

By Mahdiyeh Ezzatikarami

“‘Jooje Kabab’... You have no idea how delicious
it is. It is chicken cooked with saffron. It could be
served with rice or bread. Sometimes you can even
have it with fries. Oh my God! I really want one.”

“Oh ‘Kibab!’ ... It is ‘Kabab,’ not ‘Kibab.’ It is
made of ground beef. You add some grated onion,
salt and some spice, and then play with it like a stress
ball, and just cook it with a little oil. Do not forget to
have some onion with it. All tourists look for ‘Kabab.’
It is the best. Actually, we serve ‘Kabab’ at our
wedding party dinners. Everybody loves it.”

“Of course, we do not serve it with onions in
dinner parties. We serve it with some salad.”

“Something yellow you had eaten?! Oh my goodness!
It was ‘Gheimh.’ It is made of chickpeas, saffron, meat,
and ‘limou amani.’ Do you know what ‘limou amani’ is?
Let me explain it. It is dried lime. It has a special taste,
something between sour and bitter. You should give it a
try. If you like it, I can buy some for you.”

“‘Fesenjoon’ ... yummy! You should certainly give it
a try. It is made of fried eggplant, lots of garlic and eggs.
Garlic makes anything delicious. It does wonders.”

“I do not know how to explain it. ‘Kashk e
bademjoon’ is made of fried eggplants and ‘kashk.’ I
do not know how to describe what ‘kashk’ is. We also
add ‘kashk’ to ‘Ash.’ It makes it very delicious.”

“Oh, ‘Ash.’ It is not soup, but looks like soup. It is
mainly made of vegetables.”

“Sorry, ma’am. Who are you talking to?”

"I was explaining the foods on the menu to my friends."

"Wow, I think it is the other way around, ma'am. May I suggest 'Poutine' if you want to try something Canadian. You can also add more 'gravy.'"

He said "gravy" as if she had known gravy her whole life. Then, he moved the chairs and made them squeak as if he wanted to make sure he knew she was alone and would be alone for a lifetime.

"By the way, where are you from?"

The girl could just mumble "Iran," keeping her head down to avert the waiter's suspicious looks.

"Great! You have come a long way! Ok! It will be ready in five minutes. How do you find London?"

The girl could not even move her tongue. She just saw the menu slipping from the bottom of her hands and heard him saying, "Western is a happy university. You will forget all, I promise."

THE MANY LIVES OF FOOD

By Amanda Yeo

I've always had a complicated relationship with food. Food has played a big part in my life and in my identity.

Whether I've loved it or hated it,
and whether it loved me or hated me,
we were always entwined.

Food can love real good.

It can make you feel less alone,
it can connect you to other people,
it is something people have discussions about,
and friends and families gather together to spend
time and enjoy.

It is the first time during the day,
where most people can get a break from their daily routine,
and just do something for themselves,
a place where people have options and choices,
not only when it comes to what you eat,

but also who you eat with and how you spend your time.

It is something that characterizes culture after culture after culture.

The first thing that people bring up when talking about how multicultural Canada is,
without taking a second to talk about its oppressive history,
or racist policies that still plagues Canada today.
And that's the problem with food,
it is good at hiding the bad.

Cause food can hate instead.

When you enjoy Japanese food,
do you think about the thousands of Japanese Canadians
killed at internment camps?
Or just say yum?

People can spend all of their days and meals alone,
feeling lonely and knowing that others are not,
reminiscing on when they had someone to share their days and their meals with.

It can also be a time of no options
but instead of people having to settle for the disgusting slob in front of them.

Even worse food can hurt,
it can choke the very last breath out of you
as you try to force it,
rather it is forcing it down or forcing it up,
you don't know which to do,
you just need it out.

It can also taste so good and it can be so enticing
that people eat it in bundles,
just for society to tell them that their bodies are not right
and for peers and strangers to comment on it as if human bodies are like a pig's body,
something that can be graded on,
and can be left to slaughter if it was not right,
making millions of girls and boys around the world,
hate their bodies and hate themselves.

But food shouldn't have the power to control and change lives,
it has no emotions—no power to hate or love,
it is something our bodies need to survive,
and let us turn it into something good, something bad.

I've experienced it all,
and that's pretty sad.

WILD GAME AND FORAGED FOODS:

THE NATURE OF FOOD

By Penn Kemp

For weeks we fed five bereft baby skunks by Kil-
laly,
a mixture of kibble soaked in mussel or tuna juice.

They hissed, tails up, but no spray, whew. No sign
of mother but the fading stench by the highway
where
she must have been hit. No tomato juice for a while.

The babies were used to us, though I tried not to as-
sociate
myself with nourishment by leaving the tray unat-
tended.

Let them learn to find their own grub. And at least
one
did. Next season, a friend a mile off posted a photo
of

a bold skunk in her yard by Stoney Creek. His V-
shaped
markings belonged to the alpha of the litter, the one
who

was first to approach and snatch the children's offer-
ing
while his siblings hung back in their crèche of river
rock.

NO DEGREES OF SEPARATION: A POEM STOLEN FROM POACHED CONVERSATIONS AND SONG LYRICS

By Linda Lucas

I sit beside James Reaney Jr,
talking about Tommy Hunter
and how my mother babysat his children:
every time I turn around, I hear
echoes of my own thoughts; I see
mirrors of my own experiences;
I am bathed in connections.

Riding the fourth wave,
contemplating the kindling
ignited to conflagration
by populism under the Apricot Resident,
I think of all those people that play on the backs of
my eyelids,
knowing that until we hear, we cannot do.

Can I re-imagine our identities as woke global citi-
zens?

Because if I can't, we can't metamorphose.
We're all a product of where we came from.
We all repudiate the mother,
but if we want a safe community,
we have to build one,
and to build one
we have to come back.

The earth under the status of
women is shifting. The earth under
the status of men is shifting, too.
Count the future with thunder;
count the past with lightning.

What does it take to get
factored in? When PMS meds
morph to Viagra? When there's
only one female spacesuit, period?
When 17% of women in a crowd
is the limit of Hollywood toleration?
When crash test dummies kill us,
instead of keeping us safe?
Ever tried to open a fire hydrant
with gloves three sizes too big?
All the rules were made by men,
men filled with verbs.

And here I am,
emptied of my children,
now allowed to remain
female, unoppressed.
If we had known 10,000 years ago
that bird droppings were going to kill us
because seed becomes surplus
becomes farming
becomes farmers
becomes the need for children
becomes free labour

becomes enslaved breeders,
would we have thought twice
about harvesting the seed?
Or would we have persevered,
trusting that someone else
is always holding our light,
no matter how many light years
it takes to get to us?

How shall we negotiate
the darkness of antithetical binaries?
Where is our gyroscopic flux
between the polarities of gender?
When will we dance in and out
of the litany of grids to find
the order inherent in perceived chaos?
The music in ambient noise?

Must we walk away? Long enough
to ignite that first instinct?

This is my re-imagining:

I had always liked my own company;
the loneliness felt good to me.
Though money's never made amends,
I guarantee this story can.
I'm trying to do my best
to keep this 'S' here on my chest.
When you are younger, you do a lot of thinking,
pulling things apart just to see what keeps them
 spinning.
But when your heart beats like a drum,
that's where the music comes from.
Thank God I crawled into my heart
and gripped me from the inside.

There is nothing here in the whole and all,
that's quite my own.
 Yet this is me.

Sometimes
I let the sketch
stand as the final copy.

THE YEAR WITH FOUR KINGS

By Udochukwu Ezenwa

The scarlet leaves fall,
Fast to the muddy earth,
Crunching as I walk by.
Trees are stripped of colourful dresses.
But the harvests roll in for
Abundant Autumn.

Arriving in a frozen fairytale,
I see the colorless world.
Thick, fluffy snow falls,
But firs are in full bloom.
As life sleeps away the chill,
We are in Wonderful Winter!

The April flowers bloom,
Their vibrant petals light up the gloom,
The insects and birds chirp as I skip by,
The showers cleanse the land,
As Jesus is once again restored.
This is Sublime Spring.

What we've been waiting for is at the end:
Meet Summer the Illustrious!
With his mighty cloak of warmth,
He heats the land;
With his blazing torch,
He gives light to us.
His humour is our joy,
Children and adults alike
Are forever indebted to him.

Alas, he doesn't live forever!
Summer retires to his home beyond the seas.
His lantern dims,
His cloak unravels,
As it's Autumn's turn once again
To rule the realm.
That's our typical year.

LOPSIDED POUND CAKE

By Julia McCarthy

Dear sister,

To-day one of my patients made me a meal. He is being discharged from the asylum tomorrow evening. He called me to the parlour around 6:30, and, upon entering, I found he had baked a rather lopsided pound cake for myself and Dr. McConnell. "To thank us for our counsel during his incarceration." We sat in silence until Dr. McConnell arrived; he had been making the rounds in the women's wards.

The cake was a little too dense for my liking, but the flavour was rich and sweet. I joked that he could start a bakery when he was discharged. That made him smile. Dr. McConnell asked an attendant to bring us coffee to complete the meal. I did not drink, as I had to rise early to make the rounds.

The patient gave what was left of his efforts to the kitchen staff, and I took him back to his room. As I opened his suite, he told me how much he had hated baking that cake. "Had to restart four times," he told me, "kept dropping the eggs. I'm glad you liked it, though."

To-night around 9:00 I found myself reading a rather distressing note. I won't relay the details to you, sister, but it was written by the man who baked the cake. Mad ramblings about "running out of time, needing more time, not ready to go back," etc. The attendant who found it also found his body.

To-morrow I will add his name to the list. It always lengthens around the holidays. People get lonely. Desperate. That man had found security here that he did not have outside the asylum. He did not wish to go home for Christmas, I suppose.

When I think of him now, I will remember dense but sweet lopsided pound cake, served with a cynical smile.

Send my love to mother.

Kind regards,
Greg

From the Writing Desk of Dr. Gregory Foust, Physician
& Alienist London Ontario Asylum for the Insane

GOOSEBERRY PIES

By Bruce Meyer

Her gooseberry pies were a delicacy, but because the jack-o-lanterns were a late season fruit, waiting for them made her works all the more alluring to the hungry men of the village.

She wasn't sure who had planted the lanterns, yet they spread through the backyard and overtook the flower beds after her brothers and father were drowned when their dory capsized in sight of the rise on the Talbot shore that served as a landmark to Rodney Road. They died in the year of bad weather, a year when the summer storms made the waves tear at the Erie sands. She picked a bouquet of gooseberry lanterns and set them in the front window in the hope their fragrance would guide their ghosts home.

Disasters bring blessings in disguise. Because her father and brothers no longer worked their boat, it meant she could sell the field they owned at the edge of Rodney and her work on the land could cease. She had grown tired of long hot days in the sandy soil tending the garlic she grew. It meant her hands could smell of something other than the faint aroma of death. She would be free, as long as the money lasted, to bake her pies and wait patiently for the long days in the summer heat to tire as cicadas buzzed in the walnut trees. Gooseberries, sugared and spiced with cinnamon, would adorn her with the perfume of a Biblical temple and she would no longer be a stinking pariah to the women she passed in the main street.

The first year she sold her pies, she set up at the edge of her front walk a sewing table that had been her mother's. They proved to be a novelty. The second year, some of the townswomen complained that the pies were too enticing, that she did not merely sell the pies but attempted to seduce the townsmen with her mysterious arts.

A woman several doors down from her house grew pumpkins in her garden. Pumpkins were safe. They were fat and ugly as they waited and grew round, symbols of good womanhood. They harboured no illusions of a seductive pearl beneath a hood of skin. By the time the third year came, the money from the field had run out, the bank waited to foreclose on the house, and the gooseberries froze and blackened in an early frost.

She heard there was work up north, that men on

the TNOR needed cooks and companionship at the workstations in the bush, and a young girl on her own could do well. There would be Temiskaming fishermen but no gooseberries. She set off on a late October morning and left her world behind.

When the pumpkin woman and her friends were certain she had departed, they tore the gooseberries from the garden, heaped the tiny lanterns and their stalks in a pile, and burned them for their witchcraft, certain they were burning her.

STRAWBERRY PICKING

By Jennifer Wenn

Rumbling by the strip mall
and apartment buildings,
cursing traffic lights
and idiot drivers, a
peripheral phantom beckons,
the strawberry patch,
a young parent passing on
traditions, slowing childhood
impatience to simple pleasures in
soil, leaf and fruit.
The farmer resignedly talks
about the pressure to sell,
“development” steamrolling in.
Half-listening, I glance down
the row and sense the
sun-dappled inchoate me,
plunked in my chosen spot.
While most gad about
and fill baskets,
I search and shift slowly,
carefully studying each candidate.
Imperfections—they remain here;
too much colour—their time has passed;
too little—their moment is yet to come.
Bit by bit, building a little mound of
succulent scarlet perfection,
eschewing others’ lack of standards,
struggling on with a vision
of epicurean ecstasy and
a quest for rare beauty,
just a sigh of distant thunder,
floating on the breeze.

CEREAL KILLER RELEASED

By Debbie Okun Hill

You shake the refined wheat, sugar-coated
glue-starched O-rings of cereal like biscuits,
animal crack-her heads with added food coloring
pour the chemicals from a waxed bag
the kind found inside a cardboard box
coffin-shaped package plastered with glitzy ads
labels of ingredients with names inedible to hu-
mankind

You ingest your breakfast, standing up
upwardly mobile, grab your briefcase
before washing your mouth with punch,
twenty-five percent juice, watered down
pop a pill for your headache, any ache
jostle your kids, teach them nothing
like a closed umbrella never opened
your muscles forgotten in your closet

And if you ever stop running, racing
release grips on steering wheel
turn off ignition, get out of car
walk absent without leave
into wheat field, heavy-headed with kernel
you may still not notice bruised apple falling
many others rotting in orchards, forgotten
the dietary fiber crushed beneath your shoes

CORN

By Ola Nowosad

O, Mandaamin, Anishinaabe Spirit of Corn, today,
 you would not recognize
 the seed of your seed, in this land where, for millen-
 nia,
 your First Nations people treasured corn, cherished
 its ancient goodness and cultivated such intricate
 diversity

O, Mandaamin, Anishinaabe Spirit of Corn, how
 colourful was the ripened corn, so many shades
 of brown, yellow, the varieties numbering to
 more than two hundred, manifesting your imagi-
 nation as Spirit

O, Mandaamin, Anishinaabe Spirit of Corn, what
 would you say to the Mega-Agri corporations
 that now grow huge cornfields, engineering corn
 to unnatural perfection, its peculiar uniformity to
 suit metal machines that process it

O, Mandaamin, Anishinaabe Spirit of Corn, walk
 me through this maize to a past without GMO's
 and pesticides, to luxuriant fields alive with di-
 versity, with the clatter of insects, the singing of
 birds, the laughter of children

O, Mandaamin, Anishinaabe Spirit of Corn, take me
 back to my grandmother's garden where I ran as
 a child among tall stalks, tassels sunlit and bend-
 ing to the winds, where I longed for the taste of
 the freshly-picked corn

O, Mandaamin, Anishinaabe Spirit of Corn, let the
 corn once again capture the sunlight of summer,
 its golden promises, and its sustenance to carry
 us through the long winters

“let the corn once again capture the sun-
 light of summer, its golden promises,
 and its sustenance to carry us through
 the long winters

— *Ola Nowosad*

HOME COOKING:

LITTLE BROWN COW

By Catherine Agar

Twelve years ago, Jenny Butcher and Wes Kuntz made the financially crushing decision to walk away from his family's dairy farm business. They met at university and dreamed of becoming dairy farmers processing their own milk but were disenfranchised with the modern farm model, where the farm gets larger and the only way to make more money is to keep getting larger. Their vision to de-commodify food and farming and create a more compassionate food experience started with renting a barn to milk twenty Jersey cows. They lived in a trailer and had full-time jobs to make ends meet, all the while on the lookout to buy a farm where they could create something unique and innovative.

The small farm they purchased on a main highway south of Brantford, Ontario needed a lot of work; an old abattoir was converted into the cheese plant and a simple barn fixed up for the cows. One Sunday afternoon, Butcher started carving letters out of plywood and created the whimsical font in bold red and green that became Little Brown Cow.

They started with curds and soft cheeses and interacted with their customers to get feedback and direction on where to take the business next. The sales and store grew from putting an Open sign out at the road and starting a Facebook page, and their dream has turned into a full-time job for both of them, with five employees and seventy cows. Kuntz is now in charge of the dairy processing, Butcher runs the store, and both manage the farm work together. Curds and their non-homogenized, full fat white and chocolate milks are top sellers. Campfire Cheese, a marshmallow-shaped cheese with a high melting point perfect for roasting, is especially popular.

"You don't have to shop at a multinational company to sustain yourself. We aim to be a one-stop-shop where there is one degree of separation between us and the local farm."

In addition to their own dairy, beef, and honey, the store is stocked with a variety of meats, spice mixes, sauces, soup beans and in-season fruits and vegetables. A kitchen in the back of the store creates ready-made

meals like Beef Lasagna with Cheese Curds and desserts like Dulce de Leche Cheesecake, all using the farm's own ingredients.

Butcher notices food trends evolving and observes that veganism has peaked and that consumers are coming back to a middle ground that includes locally grown meats and dairy. She says monoculture, like huge fields of grains or vegetables requiring irrigation and commercial fertilizers, is much more harmful to animals and the environment than a properly constructed dairy or beef farm.

She sees a lot of value in people stepping on the ground that grew their food, where they can ask questions. This transparency around farming practices and food production has helped Little Brown Cow blossom.

"Farms are complex, and reducing them to a single word, like grass-fed, is not the whole story. I encourage people to come see us."

SOUWESTO

By Lynn Coveney

I saw my first hologram at the 2020 Art Gallery on York St. in London, Ontario, the heart of Souwesto.

I grew up in London in a blue-collar family that lived EOA (East of Adelaide) at a time when I was blissfully unaware of the stigma. My parents were just one step off the farm, so my childhood was punctuated with pick-your-own strawberries and apples. We foraged for field mushrooms, watercress, and wild grapes. Our cold cellar glowed with row upon row of jams and jellies and preserves.

This all changed in the late sixties when I became an aspiring hippie: long straight hair, bell-bottoms dragging in the dirt, and an army surplus jacket from Novack's embroidered with peace signs and flowers. We hung out with all the cool people at Wellington Square.

I was friends with Brian Jones—not the Rolling Stone who drowned in his pool but the Beal Tech student who became a well-known London artist. Although Brian was painting in the photo realism style in egg tempera, we still enjoyed the Souwesto art scene, especially the 2020 gallery.

That evening we went out to the Hoo Hoo restaurant for that most exotic of Chinese menu items—egg

rolls with small packages of plum sauce. I was smugly certain that this was far beyond the plebian palates of my parents. I was feeling very sophisticated.

We danced up the stairs to the gallery and gravitated to the jukebox on the wall next to York St. We inserted a small coin and played “Going Up the Country” by Canned Heat and “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35” by Bob Dylan. The place was hazy with cigarette smoke, and the circulating waiters handed out small glasses of cheap wine of indeterminate origin. We didn’t care; they didn’t ask for ID and we were underage. Another badge of sophistication, as we sipped the plonk that managed to be too sweet and bitter at the same time.

This was the opening night of Tony Urquhart’s series of small painted boxes with tiny hinged doors that you could open for a glimpse of another world. The next summer I left to hitch-hike around Europe thirsty for my own glimpse of another world. The 2020 gallery had closed its doors forever by the time I returned, but the magic of the Souwesto group remains to this day.

WHAT I THOUGHT FOOD HAD TO BE

By Liam MacDonald

Dad wasn’t from London,
born closer to the namesake of the Ontario town.
Half the world conquered for the sake of spices,
but to Grandmother, none save the monochromatic
was worthy of assaulting the taste buds.
Blackened meat, too tough to chew,
slathered with green slime,
made my jaw ache for something more.
Bland. Deliberate.

My mother chose a different path.
Born near endless fields brimming with wildflowers.
Nannie’s lessons flooding her veins with
hearty pot pie that leaves the stomach full and satisfied
homemade jam sweet with the wealth of years past.
Beef flooding the mouth with juices that
hum a hymn to the taste buds.
Food made with love tastes like it, too.

KITCHEN LESSONS

By Stephanie Evelyn Mason

I can’t tell you the first time I learned how to cook and bake. What I can tell you is that it was in my grandparents’ kitchen that, to this day, has the same stove, the same sink, and the same people living in that house with green siding and a modest Canadian flag sticking out of its front like a unicorn horn.

Together, when all the bad things were happening, my Nanny and I made Jell-O (always red or orange) so she could teach me patience even though there were always small finger-holes in the center of the sticky-sweet jiggle.

Together, my Hog (Husband of grandmother) and I made his traditional English bread pudding so I could get one more patch on my navy-blue Brownies sash and maybe have a better chance of being the leader of my group (the elves).

Together, Nanny and Hog taught me to bake Yorkshire puddings (sometimes the good homemade ones if Hog was feeling particularly British that night) at the same time as the acorn squash with brown sugar and butter. All the while, the Brussels sprouts and carrots cook on the front element of the stovetop as the potatoes boil on the back burner; the turkey (or ham) sits in foil on a separate counter.

Together, my mom and I found out that I was to be the dessert person of the family (I always had room in my right leg), and with Evelyn’s recipes, she sent me on my way. While I would whip meringue, she would make the marinade, interjecting with helpful notes once in awhile. We’ve always worked well together.

I can’t tell you when they made me into the person I am today. What I can tell you, though, is that it has all culminated in this place. This university apartment in London, Ontario. We sit, we eat, we reminisce, we start this new part of life, together.

BLUEBERRY KING

By Bruce Meyer

A pancake breakfast would have been a show worth the indulgence of an early Saturday;
would have been worth watching sunrise
pierce old maples around the canvas tent

and lend an air of beauty to the scent of batter mixed with sweet blueberries picked fresh in the moments before dawn; butter, syrup enough to finish the whole thing off.

The band, their voices raspy from singing hard into the bar only hours earlier ranked beer with hard-luck country lyrics wafting through the charcoal of the grill. But luck has little to do with success. Five girls stood on the stage, one shaking sleep off, yawning, as the banjo and bass fell quiet and a voice, too loud for that hour, announced royalty.

The queen was to be expected; a senior with doe-eyes and blonde ringlets draping her white shoulders. She must have been up for hours to make her hair just right; to be judged at any time is taxing but to be judged at dawn is almost military; it is the hour when final pronouncements cast a shadow of life and death, and make crowns

awkward hats, tipping against the skull like an embarrassing question. Then the king was called. He unknotted his white apron, wiped his hands and said he had to return to sausage duty. I simply wanted breakfast and instead inherited the history of strangers, everyone knowing each other's names, everyone familiar with the ritual of repast.

The first time I broke faith with my past, I knelt in the silence as a priest raised a host, believing for an instant I saw a fluttering above the sacred bread. And when I looked

at the grill and the pancakes being served, the heat, shimmering like a summer road, rose up and twisted in a misrule of joy, a king with blue blood on his serving hand.

IF YOU SEE MY DARLING

by Connie McLachlan

If you see
my darling
with somebody new

She sings the first few lines of a song, that one, and
always stops.

This time she is rolling out a pie crust
in the farm kitchen.

Making pies for the men who are coming in from
the fields, for lunch.

I am lying upside-down in the green upholstered
rocking chair in the corner of the kitchen and
pushing just a little so it rocks gently and just
watching her and the patterns on the ceiling and
once again wondering what happened to the rest
of the song?

You can smell raw pie dough, you know,
the smell of the flour, the lard, the salt.

Pop a bit in your mouth and taste the heaviness of
the fat.

Heavy now, but the crust will rise and change to be-
come delicate and smell toasted,
holding in whatever it needs to—the lemon, the
cherries, the sour cream raisins, the apples.

As goes the chemistry of baking, the weight inside
does not matter; it will always come out well, this
pie.

But always just the first few lines, there was never
more to her song.

And all the pies, so many for the men for lunch who
would burst into the house smelling like diesel
and metal and with their heavy green cotton work
shirts and pants. Knowing there is roast beef and
mashed potatoes and beans and pie and shhh,
when the farm report is on the TV, at 12:15.

Later, later she is gone.

Fifty years go by and I have not heard the words or
the melody again, so I decide to look this up, be-
cause people do this now, look things up a lot and
not make pie. Looking for a song, maybe it is

called “Have You Seen My Darling,” but it is found as “Keep It a Secret,” by Bing Crosby. He sings it languidly, and it sounds like the saddest song I ever heard. Look it up and you will see. You will hear.

I learned to make pie for someone to burst in and eat, and oh yes I did.

But then they just stopped bursting in.

I guess sometimes people burst out, and just forget to burst back in?

And so I sing,
If you see
my darling
with somebody new ...

MY MOTHER'S BEST DISH

By Sarah Menzies

My mother will often light scented candles when she cooks to mask the smells of food she feels will seep into the fabric of her sofas. Her favorite scents are winter evergreen and cinnamon, three-wick, Bath and Body Works, stockpiled during Christmastime and carefully stored in the basement pantry.

I used to laugh because the candles did little to mask the smell of her cooking, and I wished that they would. When I remember their scent, it is always mixed with the smell of pork sorpotel—cubed chunks of meat meticulously cut, simmering in a bath of fiery red liquid, releasing the aroma of spices I do not know because I never asked; this is a meal I stopped eating years ago, although I am repeatedly told that it is her best dish.

The cafeteria is serving a selection of Indian food today—aloo gobi and chana masala, served alongside overcooked basmati rice that has settled into the corners of its metal pan and is being carefully scooped by a woman who asks if this food reminds me of home.

“Yes,” I will reply. Yes, as I shovel in yesterday’s leftovers—undercooked cauliflower, stale chickpeas, yellow food colouring used where turmeric would normally give colour, all thrown onto a plate and claiming to know the taste of my home. Yes, as I sink into memories of a tiffin full of leftover dhal and a

chapati wrapped in aluminum foil left uneaten in my lunchbox; scented candles are not allowed in the classroom. Yes, as my dad unwillingly hands me two unbuttered slices of bread with turkey in between. Yes, as my friends will argue that Indian food is too hot, too spicy, too different for them in its hundreds of variations. Yes, I always reply, because I never think to say no.

If I press my face into the sofa, pushing my nose deep into its upholstery, I hope to catch the final traces of evergreen blended with memories of roasted coriander, garam masala, and Kashmiri chili powder that permeate the fabric and the deepest part of my self that wishes I could have a taste.

À LA CARTE:

The Gift

by Marsha Lemon

Corn.

Why were we taking corn to my grandfather who was in the hospital? A magazine, maybe. Or even flowers. They were proper gifts. I was embarrassed for my father.

I watched as he carefully lifted the cob from the boiling water and placed it on a piece of foil. ~~then~~ He added butter and then sprinkled on salt and pepper before closing the ~~foil~~ packet.

Ready, he asked, and we were on our way to St. Joseph's.

~~The~~ Grandpa was alone in his room when we arrived, lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. My ~~Father~~ We said our hello's and then I headed to ~~the~~ a chair while my father went to ~~the~~ bedside. ~~The~~ Vinyl ~~chair~~ creaked ~~down~~ beneath me while I shifted to get comfortable. I watched my father while ~~he~~ helped my grandfather sit up. He unwrapped the corn ~~and gave it~~ and ~~Grandpa~~ gave it to him. ~~Grandpa~~ began to eat.

It was strange seeing him here ~~in a hospital~~, ~~in a~~ dressed in a blue gown. ^{Till, now} I'd only seen him in overalls and boots with a cap on his head ~~ready to~~ ~~hear~~ either coming or going to the barn. ~~The~~

The ~~disinfectant~~ ~~smell~~ ~~of~~ hospital disinfectant ~~smell~~ ~~all~~ overpowered the smell of the hot buttered corn,

but grandpa didn't seem to ^{mind} ~~notice~~. He was
 really enjoying ~~him~~ ~~seeing~~ his gift ^{it}.
 Still, I thought it was a strange gift.

Corn.

She proposed a friendly cooking
contest

on our second intimate rendezvous

I have selected the Barberesco and
her little black dress

Champagne method wine in flutes
with raspberry liqueur for the
Royales - to go with the cheese &
fruit for desert.

Butterfly pork chops covered with
Harvanti for the entree.

Prunelle from her navel for after
dinner night cap

- Now for the evening to commence!
Have Monture

Food is sexy,
Food is queer,
Food is jazz,
Rain, love, and hope.

Food is,
Braves, life, wisdom.

Fear, comfort, heart

Food is

Survival, indulgence,

Discovers,

Freedom Eva Cupchik

My name is Julie Weeks and I have a very strong memory of a particular food from my childhood.

My father worked out of town all week and arrived home every Friday in the late afternoon. My mom spent the morning cleaning the house and cooking in anticipation of his arrival. This included baking my father's favourite... APPLE PIE! The pastry was light and flakey and a beautiful golden ~~brown~~. But what I remember being fascinated by was the apple peeling. My mom amazed me, creating a "daddy long legs," one long, continuous, unbroken peel from each apple. And of course the aroma that filled the house, the mackintosh apples (the only choice,) cinammon, cloves and allspice. ~~There is nothing so delicious as~~

They say that scent provokes memory stronger than the other senses, and it certainly is true for me that that combination takes me right back to that ^{childhood} moment in time.

THE BEST
WHEN YOU DIG THROUGH THE
VEGETABLES, THE ONIONS & CARROTS
& ON THE BOTTOM YOU UNCOVER
A PILE OF WARM CUSHY
MASHED POTATOES SWATHED
IN GRAVY & VEGETABLE
JUICE AND YOU REALIZE
YOU'VE FOUND THE PRIZE!

SUGAR

Tatyana Alexandra



WAVES

By Ana Paula

I'm really sorry I drowned you.
 Sometimes raining all over the place is the only love
 I know.
 Understanding water as life,
 and people as glass bottles with mysterious words
 inside,
 wanting to sail away.

NEVER COME BACK

By Ana Paula

Sometimes I feel like my flooding clears the path to
 growth.
 But it isn't always as planned.
 It gets dark.
 Overwhelming.
 That's when I watch their silent screams,
 washed out by violence.

The sea,
 the waves.

All as I extend my hand,
 desperately trying to save,
 and coming back empty.
 Hoping next time,
 I can recognize,
 when it's too much,
 before it's too late.

EMPTY

By Ana Paula

Empty.
 That's my word.
 You were so empty.
 That's why it always felt fragile.
 Loving you was like holding a porcelain cup,
 admiring its soft beauty,
 caressing its silhouette,
 with a dry throat.
 Hoping that eventually,
 like a magic lamp,

you'd fill your void up.

SAME GIRL

By Ana Paula

I still think it is so interesting,
 as a girl exploring the world of adolescence and
 finding your place & voice,
 how we feel some sort of power,
 fed by dreams and ideas,
 yet we still allow others to make us less.

Like we've been hearing magical stories and exam-
 ples of strong & empowered women and we want
 to be them,
 but we feel so small,
 so unprepared,
 we just settle for a place in between.

AUTOPSY

By Chris Cull

Nose: "normal."
 Teeth: "native."
 Hair: "male pattern balding."

Build: "moderately obese."
 [This doc, no doubt,
 some spindly kid just starting out.
 I've half a mind
 to fire him off a photograph.
 For death is not so flattering
 when rigour mortis is "advanced,"
 the body "cold."
 That "hospital blue gown," no prom attire.]

Cause of death: "extensive aortic rupture from root
 to left Iliac."

Brain: "unremarkable,"
 Oh God, if only anybody knew!
 Heart: "massively enlarged."
 That much, at least, is true.

CONFETTI

By Ian Rutherford

There was a parade to welcome us home today
Everyone showed up in their best, despite the mist-
ing rain

confetti cannons exploded all around us,
aimed at the sky. The wind carried their

ammunition well. Red and white fragments
flittered through the air. I was

afraid to open my mouth, because one of the
damp slices might get in. Fred was beside me,

it happened to him. He said,
They didn't taste good, kind of metallic.

It was chaos, god-forsaken bedlam.
I couldn't see you there, though I knew you were
there.

You were hidden by the pomp and circumstance.
The noise was worse, everyone screamed.

They screamed at me, they were so happy

ANGLICIZE AND FEATURIZE

by Siddharth Meheshwari

Give me a taste of home
In this gloomy monotony.
It is the respite I seek,
A bomb that eases me.

Its presence is incorruptible.
My senses are tuned,
Manipulated they will not be.
No wondrous scent or exquisite taste can fool my in-
tuition.

They wish to integrate me;
I do not resist.
But how can I unlearn all that I have,
Conform when I am destined to stand out?

Guilt jumps at me from my pretentious pride
And the misgivings of my past,
At the unresolved conundrums
That hang over me like an angry swarm.

Adjustment and adaptation
The forefront of my ignominious existence—
Also the drive to restore normalcy
And earn the faith of my forebears.

The tentativeness of forlorn moods
Is the burden I drag like a sack of wine.
Enough with this veiled epistemy
I just want to go home.

SOME HOPE

By Jeff Blomqvist

Give me some hope and a way to cope,
A good message to share
Instead of this noose that we try to break loose
Another struggle we must bear.

Find me pure love, from way up above
A good warmth to know
Instead of oppression that has no lesson
Another horror to show.

Show a safe fate, and in peace we can wait
A good shelter to protect
Instead of a trick to abuse the sick
Another lie to detect.

Know the true God, not concepts so flawed
A good master to serve
Instead of a rule so intolerably cruel
To expose another nerve.

Escape to our home, not this earth to roam
A good place for all eternity
No more a generation courting alienation
But with God in unity.

HAIKU

By Sophia McKie

Leaves are falling down
Like keys on a piano
Autumn race is here

THE UNIVERSE IS SPEAKING TO YOU

by Merna Seliman

You know those times when you meet a new person ... then your mind jumps in and makes an immediate judgement about them ... their ethnicity, their style, how they speak ... you quickly and unconsciously perceive that person in a certain way and your mind deceives you because you get a rush out of it ... you feel powerful, you feel in control. Obviously this is a fake sense of control. You don't know anything about that person.

Remember, you are not your thoughts, you're not even your mind. When you meet a new person, try to see them with the eyes of your soul, not with the eyes of your body. That new person is a whole other universe that is yet to be discovered, like Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas. Trust me, you will be pleasantly surprised what happens when you look at people with the eyes of your soul: you will see the universe, the soul of the world, and most importantly, you will see yourself. You will learn something new, just listen, pay attention ... the universe is speaking to you.

YESTERDAY

By Andrea Nolan

I know this place on the opposite side of town; it's where the old people live, where my first memories were made.

It's a place where trees are overgrown—one hundred, two hundred years old, whose leaves fall down like snow.

I took a bike ride there yesterday because I needed to get away from the part of town where I live, with new roads, young people, and small trees.

I twisted and turned my way through the city, polluted with honking and people being busy.

Drivers almost ran me off the road and I had to stop my anger from wanting to explode ...

I knew I was almost there when I saw that stone church on the corner standing resolute against the noise that tried penetrating its exterior.

I stopped.

Because a squirrel cut off my path—I was glad! I'd forgotten how many squirrels were here, climbing the chestnut trees, knocking chestnuts to the ground with their tiny little feet.

I rode into the park behind my mom's old school where my dad used to take us to play, and I couldn't believe how the sun poked through the leaves; I'm still stunned by the glory of yesterday.

I dreaded returning to the place where I live, but I'm forever grateful that this place where I lived provides the backdrop of a beautiful childhood full of colours that lives on

somewhere in my memory.

OLD ADDICTIONS & COMFORTS

By Frankie B.

chain smoking cigarettes
on my way to yoga class
is not a routine i am proud of.
i am painfully aware
of the irony,
how obvious it is
that i am falling back
into the arms of old addictions
and comforts.
i will be damned
if i don't at least try
to maintain some kind
of a self-care routine
until these lungs
are one day
free of nicotine.

you see,
i am struggling.
i am constantly spilling
& overflowing.

i am a mess.
i cannot turn off this faucet,
i cannot stop all that pours
out of me.
for if i am not creating,
i am destroying.
if i am not loving,
i am still destroying.
nothing that i say
or feel
makes any goddamn sense.
but in the meantime,
i will carry on.
i will do my best
to take steps closer
to be the person
i want to be,
instead of running away
from them.
i will still smell of
cigarettes until i find
the courage to release
to surrender
to exhale
without the help of nicotine.

CONTRIBUTORS

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**“walk absent without leave
into wheat field, heavy headed with kernel”**

— Debbie Okun Hill, *Cereal Killer Released*



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