

Swallow's Nest

A Poetry Journal

of



Second Annual Issue — December 2020

Linda L. Kruschke
Sue Miholer
Editors

Linda L. Kruschke
Design & Layout

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Foreword

In 2019, Mary McIntosh and Rachel Lulich had the splendid idea to start an OCW poetry journal. Mary gave it the name *Swallow's Nest* based on a favorite verse of Psalm 84. I was honored to have my work included in the pages of the inaugural edition and to be asked to provide layout and design for that issue.

As 2020 progressed, I realized that for all of the things we've experienced in 2020, the discontinuation of this fledgling journal could not be one of them. I offered to once again do layout and design. The call went out for submissions and the words contained herein were offered by their authors. Because of time constraints, authors were limited to submitting a single poem. Perhaps for the third issue in 2021 we can return to including more poems by each author.

We also asked poets to submit their own photo for inclusion with their poem. I was delighted that many poets did.

Linda L. Kruschke, co-editor, *Swallow's Nest*

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A Call to Rest
By Laura L. Bradford
Walla Walla, Washington

“Come sit awhile,” my Jesus called.

“Come spend some time with Me.

This world, Dear Child, is not your home,

Nor will it ever be.

“I am your home, your resting place.

Come sit here by My side.

I’ll give you everything you’ll need,

So you’ll be satisfied.

“Peace only comes from knowing

The One who gave you life.

I long to show you who you are,

And guard you from all strife.

“So step aside and join Me

In this secret, quiet place.

I’ll bless you, Child, and heal your wounds

As you gaze upon My Face.”



Hope Amidst Duress

By Barbara Greer
Forest Grove, Oregon

A space opens up between You and me, Lord.
We meet there in that bliss before dawn—the sacred time
When anxiety is stilled, when You brush my soul with Your sleeve
As You comfort me, as You say, “It’s okay; I am with you.”

You fill the space with Your love; I draw from it—am sated.
Ego is chastened by radiant grace that compels surrender
To say “I obey” at that threshold of belief.

I wait to know You more while there is still time.
O, weave Your Word into my soul that it may cling.
Show me my passion, Lord; give me a sign.

It is not words we express in that dawn light
Rather, it’s Your breathing into me hope amidst duress
Like that *first* breath from You that gave me life,
along with a heartbeat and a purpose You blessed.



How Does Christ Hold My Heart?

**By Robin Illers
Eugene, Oregon**



When I am afraid
 He gently holds my heart
 Softly, rhythmically stroking
 Until it calms

When I am broken
 He gently presses edges together
 Holding them in place
 Until they mend

When I am in despair
 He gently cradles and rocks
 Until I relax
 In comfort

Morning Glory

**By Michael Mailloux
Seal Rock, Oregon**

Early light brings sparkle
To the morning dew,
Scent of blooming roses
How beautifully they grew.

Blanket me, O loving God
With your holy zeal,
Like fresh-born morning glories,
Wrapped 'round the wagon wheel.



The Failing of a Grand Plan

**By Linda L. Kruschke
Lake Oswego, Oregon**

On a blank canvas, a void
God created earth spheroid

Then added some amazing details
Under the sea fish and whales

He spoke and was never tongue-tied
Breathed life into Adam and his bride

All was good in the garden
Yet Lucifer's heart did harden

He was jealous of the connection
Between God and His new creation

So the devil devised a grand plan
For the permanent downfall of man

He tempted with fruit fresh-squeezed
With God's one command he teased

Eve and Adam fell for his ploy
Their bond with God to destroy

Because of their rebellion then
Rainstorms flood the homes of men

Arid deserts will scarcely grow seeds
And are covered in dry tumbleweeds

Violence and hatred all around
Green flashes of greed abound

It might seem that Satan's grand plan
Has succeeded to destroy man

Until you look to the cross
Where the mercy of Jesus is boss

In view of eternity ahead
Satan loses because Jesus bled

Then rose again from the grave
God's perfect Grand Plan to save

One day all things will be new
The devil has lost his coup





Many Partings

**By Dawn Shipman
Longview, Washington**

When I look at you, my infant son,
I'm captured by the smoke-grey liquid depths
Of newborn eyes—

 The fresh-from-heaven wisdom
 That still lingers in your gaze.

And I marvel at the miracle
Of brand-new life—

 So much a part of me,
 But so uniquely you.

We are joined together tightly
As I struggle with your feeding,
With this ancient symbiosis
I thought I'd never need—

 Life flooding into you with my milk,
 My own need met in meeting yours.

And I want this time to never end.

Your hunger sated, stomach filled,
You slide gently into dream-filled slumber.
A tiny translucent stream oozes from
Your baby lips as you slip away
and a vague uneasiness steals into my heart—
At this, the first
Of many partings.

Mirror Conversations

By Sue Miholer
Keizer, Oregon

Conversation in the Rear-View Mirror of a School Bus

“Jason, I want you to sit down.”
“But, bus driver, I don’t want to sit down.”
“Jason, you need to sit down.”
“But I need to get my pencil, bus driver; it fell on the floor.”
“Jason, please sit down.”
“But, bus driver, Jenny’s not sitting down.”
“Jason, what did I tell you to do?”
“Sit down.”
“Are you doing that?”
“I am now.”
“Thank you.”

Conversation in the Mirror of God’s Word

“Sue, I want you to give thanks in everything.”
“But, God, I don’t feel thankful.”
“Sue, you need to give thanks.”
“But how can I, God, when I don’t like what’s happening?”
“Sue, please give thanks—I am in control.”
“But, God, it doesn’t feel like You’re in control.”
“Sue, what did I tell you to do?”
“Give thanks in everything.”
“Are you doing that?”
“I am now.”
“Thank you.”

As a school bus driver, I often had the first conversation with a student. I was always glad when the child complied.

God and I often have the second conversation. I know He’s glad when I comply—and I’m happier in the long run.

Morning Anthem

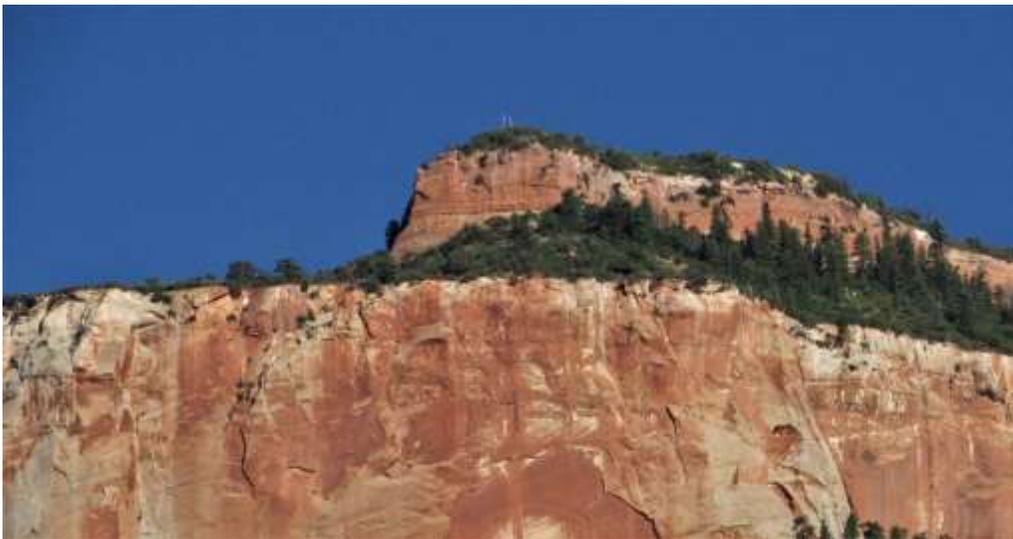
**By Richard Hake
Rogue River, Oregon**

Lord, lead me outside the box that constrains me
Lead me, Lord, beyond the fears that hold me
Free my mind from the lower things that be
Dear Lord, raise my mind to bring others to Thee.

Dear Lord, free me from my culture's casting
Draw me deeper in the ways everlasting
Help me to clearly see the logs in my eyes
That I may reject my own self-worth lies.

Most everyone is dancing on the ledge
Lukewarm at best—treading too close to the edge
What they call normal is disturbing and fearful
Their way offers no hope, no joy, and is tearful.

Lord have mercy on my failures to walk true
Upright, with honor, and pleasing to You
Only You know the rage of my heart's fire
Only You can breathe life into my desire.



Perspective

**By Suzanne Felton
Gainesville, Virginia**

One grain of sand on the shore by the ocean,
one drop of rain falling into the sea,
one blade of grass in a green, rolling meadow,
one small leaf on a towering tree.

I'm just one of Your countless created,
one brief life in mankind's history,
just one child among all generations.
Who am I that You are mindful of me?

Just one voice, lost amid a cacophony,
just one prayer, one petition, one plea;
yet, You hear me, You know, and You answer.
Who am I that You are mindful of me?

Just one sinner in need of redemption,
one who stumbles continually;
yet, You suffered to buy my salvation.
Who am I that You are mindful of me?



Nearsighted

**By Rachel Lulich
Bloomington, Indiana**

I take off my glasses,
and instantly the world changes:
The lights in the night bloom
to fuzz balls twice their natural size;
the world transcends
into an ever-increasing impressionism.

Even the face across the table
and the cup of chai half a foot away
have begun the transformation
to blurry indistinction.

There's allurement in the half-truths
of how things really are;
a magic in the bleary stars.
It calls and we answer—
beckons, and we come.
And yet—
and yet—

2020 Warp

**By Judy Litchfield
Portland, Oregon**



I spoke I heard

My voice My voice

My heart poured out
my longing

My mind blabbered at mega speed

The world was alive within,

Yet,
I felt alone
a mass of loneliness

alone, as if
standing at the brow of a mountain range

Listening to one word echo

Apology to Linus

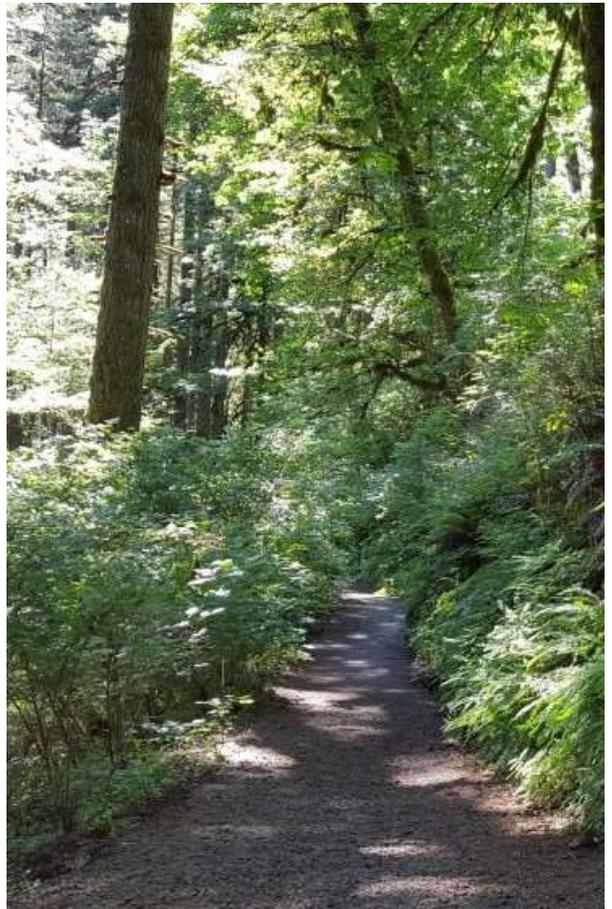
**By Billie Reynolds
King City, Oregon**

I always liked the variety of Peanuts' cartoon friends
But to my least favorite, I now must make amends.
Peanuts oft confused, meant well and Lucy was so sure.
Beethoven knew his piano and music always would endure.
Snoopy bravely tested all ideas and even dreams,
Accepting nature, life, unreal or for what it seems.
But Linus without his blanket always, always whined
Without it in his grasp, he frowned, and sadly opined.
Linus, now I understand, why continually you would whine
Unless your cuddly cover made you feel warm and fine.
Now that I have aged, I like naps when meals are over
But rest won't come to me, without my cuddly little cover.

How Can I?

**By Tom Luther
Portland, Oregon**

How can I tell others about Jesus' love
And assure them a home up in Heaven above?
How can I persuade them with Christ to relate
And turn from destruction before it's too late?
I know many people I'm aching to see
Surrender to Jesus. Lord, help me to be
A pivotal force about which they will turn
From the broad way to hell, from a selfish concern,
To the pathway to Heaven that's narrow and true.
Dear Jesus, I'm eager to turn them to You.
I know I can't do it in my strength alone.
But I can harvest what others have sown.
Or perhaps I will find it my place
To run but a lap in this spiritual race.
Jesus, Your life is my beacon, my goal;
To be in Your will is the wish of my soul.
And as life progresses, I'll pray that I've done
All that You've asked of me.
God, Your dear Son
Is all that I need for my strength. I depend
On Him to sustain me 'til I reach its end.



Robes and Rags

**By Barbara Rice
Lihue, Hawaii**



A collage of torn rags, each a past love—
A moment of friendship or care.
Each one woven around and above
With carefully sewn stitches so fair.

They keep out the cold, the glacier, “alone.”
They keep me from feeling exposed.
Without it they’d see me, not what I’ve sewn.
They’d see fat I haven’t deposited.

Besides the excesses, the wounds and the scars,
The fear and the anger they’d see.
They’d know that the past keeps me in bars.
I’m not all that I seem to be.

The Father has come and woven a cloak.
A rainbow He twisted in silk.
It shimmers and glistens. It glitters with hope.
He beckons me, “Come wear my coat.”

He bids me, “Please come away,
Give me your rags, put on my cloak,
Be filled with my love today;
Let me give you my hand and take on my hope.

“Know that my love is to stay.”
“What? Give you my rags? But it is my purse!
How can I give this treasure away?
The memories of wounds I want to nurse.

“I won’t take your rainbow today.
I won’t take your love if it means leaving my play.
I’ll cling to my hurt,” I say.
I don’t want to change. Not today.

The Father sighs deeply, and I see Him cry
For what has brought me so low.
What I would nurse, is just why He died.
To wash open infection away.

She Remembered When

**By Debby Lee
Centralia, Washington**

She remembered when . . .

She painted on makeup and spiked up her hair,
then stepped to the closet for a miniskirt to wear.
She was selfish and vain and she didn't really care.
It's hard to fly right when one's alone and so cold.
All that she needed was a Savior to behold.

She remembered when . . .

She smoked up her drugs and lived to get high.
She worked as a stripper but struggled to get by,
Haunted with disparity, she wanted to die.
It's hard to fly right when one's wounded and afraid.
All that she needed was her anguish to fade.

She remembered when . . .

The streets were freezing, the nights were so grave.
The sirens were screeching, to death she was slave.
She was drowning in pain and too weak to be brave.
It's hard to fly right when one's alone and so numb.
All that she needed was redeemed from the slums.

She remembered when . . .

She collapsed at the cross and called on His name.
He took her transgressions and shouldered the blame.
She reached for His grace as He absolved her shame.
It's hard to fly right when one's learning to surrender.
All that she needed was forgiven forever.

She remembered when . . .

She prayed on her armor and combed through her hair
then skipped to the closet for a church dress to wear.
She was humbled and grateful as she whispered her prayer,
"There's hope to fly right, to soar on eagles wing,
now all that I need is you my King!"

Awakening

**By Ginger Kauffman
Stanwood, Washington**

When he awoke
he raised his head
to study his surroundings.
Pigs rooted in the corner.
A single fat sow
lay on her side in the slime.
The scorching sun
had parched the ground
and bleached all color from the fence.
Slowly he stood.
He brushed the straw and corn husks
from his rumpled robe
then, quietly,
turned toward his father's house.
He was going home.



Fear or Love

**By Helen Heavirland
College Place, Washington**

Horrendous choice—
Zap evil and live with
Universal loveless fear
Or meet mutiny head on.
God became two cells,
Grew to manhood,
Met the fallen Lucifer
In wilderness,
In people,
And on a cruel cross.
Christ demonstrated love,
Superior to force,
And guaranteed a future
Of eternal fearless love.



Soaring with the Eagles

**By Judi Mayfield
Vancouver, Washington**

We love You, Lord, so majestic and regal,
You bid us to soar like the eagle.

The eagle is powerful and swift,
delivering the news of Jesus' great gift.

“Call upon Me,” said our loving Lord;
“Your strength will surely be restored.”

We mount up in faith and are heaven-bound,
Living with Jesus is where we will be found.
Praise to God, the refreshed heart sings,
When we are soaring on eagles' wings.

Born to Save

**By Mary Hake
Terrebonne, Oregon**

Jesus left His glory to be born a helpless babe,
Fulfilling all the prophets had foretold.
Virgin-born Messiah in a manger laid
Didn't fit the Jewish plan or mold.

Shepherds in the fields saw a brilliant light.
Angels sang, proclaiming the great news.
Hurrying to Bethlehem, they found Him
Who was born to be King of the Jews.

Jesus taught and healed as He walked the earth,
Then was crucified and rose again—
Offering salvation to all humankind,
Freedom and forgiveness from our sin.



Marrow

**By Julie Kepler
Banks, Oregon**

The sweetness we share
is not the heady elation
of infatuation
racing past normal heart pacing;
nor the spike of
adrenaline through vein—

here today, gone tomorrow.

It is not the
blush,
the rush of love's first pulse.

The sweetness we share
is the steady hush
of lifelong love
coursing
through abiding years—

beyond bone, into marrow.



Technicolor Zooming Threads

**By Patricia Tiffany Morris
Bondurant, Iowa**

Threads unravel.

Surging waves of fear
and isolation
dash our hopes
like mamma used to beat the dirt from our clothes.

Sweaty hands wait.

Wireless chatter
and Grandpa's Old Spice
drift into view
in technicolor zooming rooms of hope.

Electric waves
must hold until the day
we can weave courageous threads.
Together.

Christmas Rhapsody

**By Kathleen R. Ruckman
Eugene, Oregon**

A Baby cries. A song is born,
With notes of triumph until morn.
And mingled in with bleating sheep,
The Baby Jesus falls asleep.

The greatest story ever told
Unfolds through brittle straw and cold.
A mother hums a lullaby,
As glory fills the evening sky.

Amidst the scent of scattered hay,
The star above Him points the way.
Eternal life, a gift of grace,
That God would come to take my place.

A humble stall for majesty,
An opus for Divinity.
A symphony in one accord,
A chorus to my sovereign Lord.

This song of praise is mine to sing,
A composition for my King.
Cradle, cross, and coronation—
Rhapsody in celebration.



Eternal Word

**By Laura Davis
Clackamas, Oregon**

Far within immortal dawn a blinding flash, exploding, shatters darkness of the deep.
Brilliance condenses thought to being, as
Voice declares a world of nature—wild, unspoiled, fresh.

Once again Voice explains Thought, creates immaculate balance of dust, glorified. Perfection faces
challenge, falls, as Immortality weeps, awaiting return of Love.

Angelic words surprise her now, Pure maiden ready to obey and wait and bless.
Within her they create anew, Eternal Word by Grace bestowed and wonder filled.

Thunder rips dark day's night, reflecting agony, rolling over dreams demolished.
Voice cries out—"It is finished!"

Hearts shudder in confusion, join in prayer, awaiting Heaven's answer.
Jerusalem dawn, open tomb, angel voice of triumph, comfort, challenge anew, Confirming His
promise, creating fresh purpose.
He is not here. He is risen. Go quickly and tell His disciples."

By Galilee again they meet in wonderment, joy, fear, relief, confusion, awe.
And again His Voice—

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
Sacred, imperishable, eternal salvation. Sacred, imperishable, eternal salvation.



A Psalm of Plea in a Pandemic of Despair

By Lilia Salazar, Ph.D.
Vacaville, California

Why so afraid, oh my soul?

Might be infected and others contaminated,
Might lose my livelihood and join the unemployed brood,
Might wipe out years of savings and the future's secure living,
Might weaken health and end up in death.

Why so sad, oh my heart?

Anxious and alone,
Depressed and distressed.
Hopeless and helpless,
Lonely and lost.

Why so tired, oh my body?

Not doing much yet fatigued,
Not leaving the house yet drained,
Not working yet exhausted,
Not moving a lot yet strained,

Why so perplexed, oh my mind?

Questions of why it's happening,
Doubts if God's really in control,
Struggles with when it's ending,
Worries on how to cope longer.

But to You, oh God, I surrender my shaken soul.

I entrust my hurting heart. I offer my broken body.
I give my muddled mind.

This is my plea, oh God, that I will put my trust in You.

For You are our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble.
You are my Shepherd.

You are with me even if I walk through the COVID valley.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship You.
With all my soul, heart, body, and mind.

Letting Go

By Sandy McCulloch
Ocean Shores, Washington

You lie there—so small—so fragile
In a fetal curl
Cradled between bed rails.
And I
 Can do nothing to save you.
Seventy years of Philip Morris have hardened
 your lungs,
Disappointments your heart.
And I
 Cannot ease your pain.
Poor life so wasted in bitterness,
Because you were sent away to school,
Because Dad died at fifty-two,
Because I
 Can never please you.
Laughter cuts through thin walls of privacy
In a six-bed ward. A celebration—
She will recover. You will not.
Your eyes flutter open, but there is no smile.
You are angry because I brought you to this
place.
But I
 Had no choice.

Standing by your bed, I ask how you feel and
chatter on, fussing with your pillows,
“Can I get you anything?” “Here, take a sip
of this.” “Are you warm enough?”
But you
Push me away with a loudly whispered,
“Sandra, be quiet!” “Sandra, be still!”
And your eyes close once again.
I turn, walk away, but just for a moment.
Suddenly you’re gasping,
Stomach—chest heaving, trying for breath.
“Someone ring for the nurse!” I yell.
But it’s no use.
The nurse wants to know
If she
 Should try to revive you.
“No,” I say quietly,
“Let her go.”
 Let her go.
She
 Has suffered enough.

Abba's Love

By Susan Kuenzi
Jefferson, Oregon

Once a sturdy Swiss farm girl, I hauled hay and chased cows for hours.

I now possess hands that fumble, a body easily tired.

Messages from my brain seldom reach my feet,
and all too often my body and the ground abruptly meet.
My legs and my bladder get confusing signals from above.

Oh, Jesus, reduce me to love.

“God, I *need* You,” I cry out
as I soak in the bathtub after another bad fall,
my sanctuary from the day’s pain.

Soft as the bubbles, my words rise to heaven
and He reminds me—

I *have* Him.

I am not alone. His grace, sufficient. His love, transforming.
His power, unlimited.

He holds me close to His chest where I can hear His heartbeat, deeply comforted,
drawing strength from Abba’s love.

I now possess a quieter heart, a deeper passion than ever,
ears attuned to His voice, a spirit and life fully yielded
and prepared to do His bidding.

Rich in spirit, slowed down to a useful speed—reliant on Him alone.



Forgotten Rule Day

by Tabitha B. C. Abel
Centralia, Washington

God sanctified His Sabbath at the end of creation week—an appointment
with God for man to keep.

His Ten Rules weren't suggestions but for man's good—to show love to God
and others, as they should.

“Remember,” He wrote, for there must be no conflation of the day God delighted
in at earth's foundation.

But man didn't care and God's day they forgot—though written in stone
by the finger of God.

I, too, forgot to remember His day, and with the Deceiver began to play.

Oh, the horror of my big mistake. What had I done? God's Rules I ne'er had meant to break.

Rubbing my eyes, I sat and cried. Too late! I was alone, forever lost, outside the pearly gate.

I'd been a fool and listened to the crowd, obeyed Popes and pontiffs—to them I had bowed!

“Forgive me, God; I forgot,” I confessed, “to remember the Sabbath day that You blessed.

“You set aside that time for me, but I turned my back, and avoided Thee.”

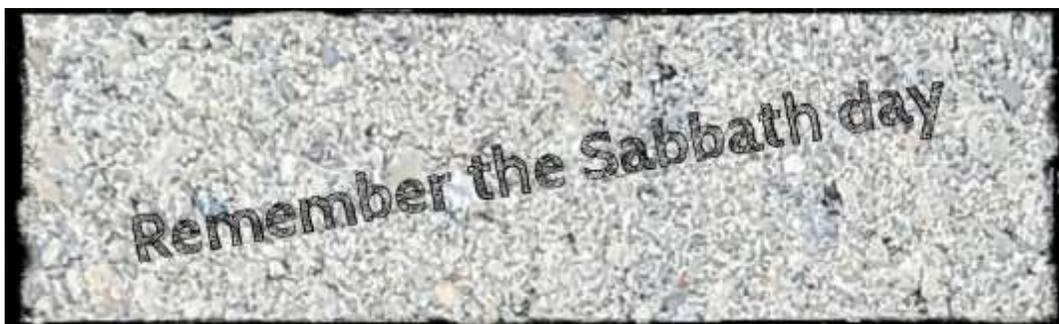
Signs? Manna fell on all but the Sabbath day, showing man when to worship God and Him obey.

You, they nailed to the cross—not The Ten; sacrifices and Moses' laws had come to an end.

On Passover Sabbath You rested in the grave, and rose the first day; mankind You had saved!

And my *good* deeds look like a very filthy rag; my saintliness is naught of which I can brag.

Then I awoke—and to God prayed, “I'll not forget to worship You, on Your Sabbath day!”



Autumn Truth

**By Dorcas Smucker
Harrisburg, Oregon**

The time of shifting, showy leaves is through.
The structure of my soul shows clear and true.
This season shows the work the Spirit's wrought.
I can't pretend to be what I am not.
As summer fades and autumn comes may I
Be like a leafless oak against the sky.



Stained Glass

**By Gail Denham
Sunriver, Oregon**

Never in her 83 years had the old woman worn such a headpiece. She sat in her usual pew, demurely fingering her white handkerchief with spotless gloved hands.

Meanwhile, light filtered through Jesus with the little children window, multi-colored pieces of crinkled glass, held together with thin molding, swathing her in sunlit wonderment.

Reds, blue, shades of purple mixed on Mabel's well-earned white hair. Her eyes were trained on her dear pastor's face. She never guessed her crown was emerging early.



Previously published *In Touch Magazine*, 2013

Haiku

**By Karan Gleason
Clackamas, Oregon**

Winter snowflakes dance
Descending on small faces
Joyful children play.



Undeniable

**By Maxine Marsolini
Happy Valley, Oregon**

Scripture's sanctified
Undeniable strength
Abides in written words
Bound by grace and wisdom
Through divine intention
To equip God's people
With fearless confidence
In all circumstances
Whether mournful moments
Difficult encounters
Or unconstrained smiles



A Savior's Love

By K. M. Ellis
The Tri-Cities, Tennessee

A warm wind blows her warm-blonde hair
Waving, washing, if you dare
A day that washes over me
A pale black night, a memory
A scent that makes it all come back
A warmth that crushes, tit-for-tat
A surge that brushes 'gainst her mind
That rushes through the sands of time
And in that moment stillness reigns
A Savior's love is all that saves

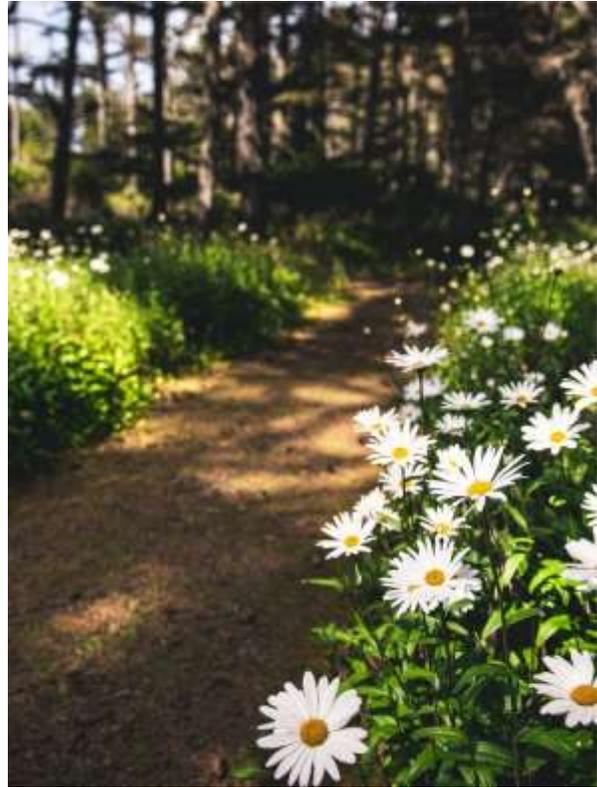


Daisy Chains

**By Kit Tosello
Sisters, Oregon**

I woke the year the daisies bloomed
and 'fore that sacred harvest ruined
had dreamt and erred and tread bereft
while ears and eyes and hands grew deft.

Now I, through tears, braid daisy chains
for pilgrims on this winding lane
and light candles 'neath the falling gloam
where we all walk each other home.



Truth Hides Itself

**By Susan Wade
Portland, Oregon**

The truth is seldom heard you know; it wears a mask and hides.
It's sat upon, thrown about, filled with compromise.
Uncover its disguise in you, and you shall surely see
How easily the heart deceives; yet truth will set you free.

I have called you by your name, your sins are all forgiven.
Stand firm in how you value things, be led by me, not driven.
Listen very carefully, my words accomplish much.
My truth will bring you lasting peace, and others you will touch.

Queries of Love and Matter

By Sherry Chidwick
Salem, Oregon

Half are so relieved, their counterpart aggrieved
Does their voice matter
Rightfully achieved, or banking on perceived
Does their wealth matter
These truly believed, but those have been deceived
Does their faith matter
One is long bereaved, another just conceived
Do their lives matter

If we love them, they matter
If they matter, we love them
If they matter not, do we love
If we love them not, do we matter



Testimony

By Joanne G. Harris
Vancouver, Washington

Lord, I'm afraid. Now I'm not sure this is where I belong.
They are so young, but so am I, so who am I to even try
to teach them your ways, when I know so little myself.

Will I seem old and out of date, the times I try to relate
that I understand their feelings and know their heartaches?

I've been there, Lord, you know that, and in looking back,
without you I never would have made it through.

Will they give me a chance, or turn their backs, and close their ears
and discount the years I've spent getting to know you?

I'll try my best God, to let you speak, and to remain silently meek
as I share what you've done in my life.

Autumn Gifts

**By Susan Bardzik
Vancouver, Washington**

Flit and flutter, sputter, and spurt,
In the gusts of Fall do the leaves flirt.

Whirling and twirling, swirling around,
Weaving a blanket to cover the ground.

Pile them up high to cushion a jump.
Hide with a friend in a colorful lump.

Gather Fall's glitter, gold-veined, big, and thin,
With glue, paper, scissors craft projects begin.

Soon quiet leaves lie beneath hush-white snow,
Composting the earth for New Spring to grow.

Well done, Gift-Servants from the arms of the trees!
Enter sweet rest, your Master is pleased.



Enjoy Your Youth While You're Young

(Ecclesiastes 11: 9-10)

**By Barbara McCourtney, M.S.
Brush Prairie, Washington**

“Enjoy your youth while you’re young,” said Great-Grandma in her squeaky voice.
“Flip funny cartwheels. Hop on hopscotch.
Delight in your rosy, red cheeks. Stroke your silky hair.
Never forget to thank God for your youth . . . while you’re young.”

I observed Great-Grandma’s wrinkled face. I thanked her for her advice.
I was a child. I didn’t understand.

“Enjoy your youth while you’re young,” said Grandma in a creaky voice.
“Tango with anyone. Waltz with everyone.
Appreciate your strength and speed; suppleness too.
Never forget to thank God for your youth . . . while you’re young.”

I examined Grandma’s age-spotted hands. I thanked her for her advice.
I was a teenager. I didn’t understand.

“Enjoy your youth while you’re young,” said Mom in her elderly voice.
“Lift loud songs. Laugh ’til the sun lights the sky.
Live like you’re swinging on rope swing.
Never forget to thank God for your youth . . . while you’re young.”

I beheld Mom’s graying hair. I thanked her for her advice.
I was a young adult. I didn’t understand.

“Enjoy your youth while you’re young,” I told my granddaughter in my own personal voice.
“Skip. Run. Dance. Leap into life.
Stretch your fingers to the heavens. Flex your pain-free knees.
Never forget to thank God for your youth . . . while you’re young.”

She gazed into my wrinkled face,
Held my age-spotted hands; stroked my graying hair.
“Thanks Grandma,” she said.

Her youthful eyes . . . empty.
She didn’t understand. Someday, she will.
Yes, someday she will.

Fond as a Mama, Fond as a Papa

By Kathleen Bufford
West Linn, Oregon

Fond as a mama, I waked one gorgeous day, peered out at first flowering, smiled to see a second, rising up from multi-browns of mulch, a third, and a fourth, budding jonquil-yellow and green, at the edge of spring planting.

Months later, journaling, remembering, I glance skyward, thanking.

What a palette He's made, yearly painting everything from yellow to crocus purple to strawberry red, and deeper red-green-leafed lettuce. Also, early spring, our soft green asparagus shooting up fast, surely teased a smile from our Father. I wonder if, like me, He wishes His iris would last longer. Maybe, in a second Eden.

My fingers type it all, in the den remembering the coloring, then to now—late summering. Plus, ah yes, I can now see our late planting of stern green kale sprouting, darkly admonishing everyone and everything about nourishing, nourishing, even come winter, nourishing, while the late-fruiting Arkansas Black apples are chuckling.

Suddenly chilled, blood as ice, I note my world darkening. Wind brings clouds of ash, choking, from wildfire across a small river. Driving up hill I see flames from five miles, advancing rapidly, licking, licking. News says this is huge, will leave only embers, smoldering.

Sinking heart, packing to flee fire, I wish to flee further. Correspondingly, as soul-deep as my flower delight, is sickening fear. I fear this and would flee, as I fear dishonest politicking, flee gangs smashing my city; flee COVID. This world is evil, is darkening, pressing in, oppressing. I wilt now, conceding—flowers play such a small, small part.

At home, days later, in wind-changed moments of cleaner air, I walk, feeling somewhat safer, because hard-fought firefighting has distanced me more from fire lines. I look up through nighttime darkness to sudden lightness for one fleeting moment, as orange-grey ash clouds part, with winds shifting, revealing what I knew should be there, half hidden—a snow-white moon sliver.

Startling, for one brilliant-white moment again, clouds more fully part, stilling my heart.

Soulishly, I think this is His reflected resplendence. Wordless, by way of creation, HE whispers to all who are searching, waiting, hoping, watching: SEEK ME.

For a third time, ash-clouds part, revealing an even fuller, white sliver, soundlessly shouting I, I, I AM STILL HERE—Stronger, more sustaining than fear!

So then a gorgeous morning will gladly come once again, with healing, with quiet, flowering, growing and greening.

If only in slivers, this woman-child, renewed, sees, believes, that in spite of all darkneses, Fond as a Papa, He is still being, all-encompassing, correcting, rebuking, fathering, tendering, gardening, Holy-Spiriting, Reigning.

Breathing deep, smelling my dried oakleaf hydrangeas, relaxing, I sleep.