



SEPTEMBER 2025

Fresh Ink

**INLAND EMPIRE
CALIFORNIA
WRITERS CLUB**



CONTACT THE board

President:
Judy Kohlen
judy.kohlen@gmail.com

Vice President, Membership Chair,
temporarily standing in for

Secretary:
Ben Alirez
iecwcmembership@outlook.com

Newsletter Editor:
Anaïs Hamel
iecwcfreshink@gmail.com

Treasurer:
Sam Nichols
samuelthomasnichols@gmail.com

Hospitality Chair:
Shirley Petro-Timura
timura@hotmail.com

Social Networking Chair:
Cynthia Demone
talk2msm@verizon.net

Critique Group Coordinator:
Constance Cassinelli
cassinelli100@hotmail.com



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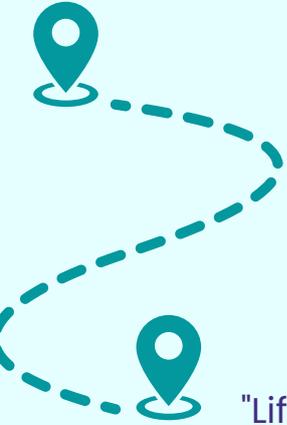
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



"Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall." – F. Scott Fitzgerald

September ushers in a new season of shortened days, new routines and cooler temperatures. I always savor autumn as a period of focused productivity.

Since the Ovitt library is not available on September 27th, we have temporarily relocated to Claremont. To make our time special, we are serving lunch, and checking in on our writing projects. Be prepared to answer these questions: What is your current writing goal? Is it a WIP or new project? What is the genre? Where did you get the idea from? What is challenging? What is easy for you? What do you need to change to make your project more successful?

We will also meet Kristen Chavez Bennett, a trained copyeditor who will share her expertise with us.

Looking ahead, Riverside is hosting a Book Festival on October 11th. We've applied for a booth! If accepted, we'll need volunteers to bring books to sell or help out at our table. I will keep you posted.

Until then, we need extra food items for the September lunch. The board is bringing coffee, tea, water, and sandwiches. We will need desserts, fruits, salads, sodas, juice, and finger foods. Come a bit early at 9:30 am. 727 W Harrison, in Claremont. We start at 10 am promptly. I hope our September meeting will inspire us to move forward with our writing projects.

Fall into writing!

Crisply,
Judy Kohlen

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue was edited using
Canva



Hello, readers.

September has arrived, and with it, the “summer slowdown” is coming to a close. As we step into autumn’s busy season, I find myself adapting from a more relaxed pace to the rush of deadlines and new projects.

I’m excited to share my first official issue as your new Editor. While the previous edition served more as a transition and introduction, this issue gave me the chance to incorporate our writers' wonderful stories. I had a lot of fun designing and decorating this issue to match the theme. If I got a little carried away with the visuals—I hope you’ll see it as part of the journey too!

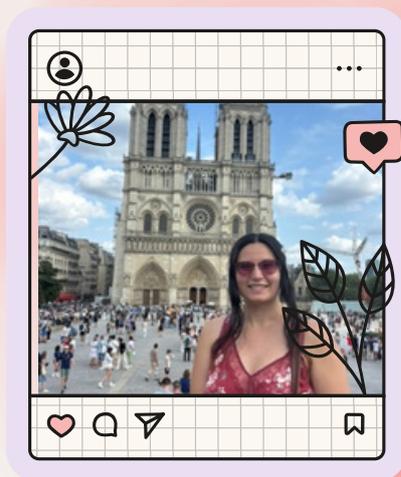
This month’s theme is Wanderlust. As summer adventures wind down and a new season begins, wanderlust captures that longing for discovery and change.

I’ve always had a love for traveling, and I find so many parallels with writing. Both are about exploration—the thrill of uncovering stories, the highs and lows of the journey, and the unexpected moments that stay with us. Sometimes the road is smooth, and other times, we hit obstacles. But it’s in navigating those bumps that we grow. I wanted this issue to reflect that spirit of exploration.

I hope you enjoy the stories in this issue. Thank you for reading, and for being part of this continued journey.

Ink to page, tales unveiled.

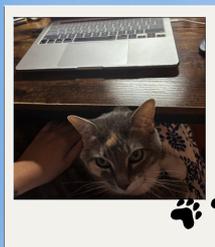
Anaïs Hamel



@globetrotteuse99

Bonus: Meet My Assistant!

Say hello to Litchi, my assistant for this issue! She kept me company through late-night edits and may have even attempted to contribute once or twice.





Saturday, September 27, 2025 at 10:10 am
Claremont Friends Meeting
727 W. Harrison Ave., Claremont, CA 91711



Self-Editing: When 'The End' is only 'The Beginning' by Kristen Chavez Bennett

Program Description

Kristen Chavez Bennett is a freelance fiction editor and owner of ARTiculate Editing Services. She offers line editing and copyediting services to publishers and independent authors alike.

If you have crafted a compelling and well-structured story but suspect your writing can benefit from the professional polish required in the marketplace, an agent, or a publisher, Kristen has words of advice to offer. As a trained copyeditor, she has had the privilege of making countless manuscripts more clear, consistent, and even while maintaining the writer's unique style and voice.

She especially enjoys working with first-time, independent authors in a variety of genres, including young adult, romantic suspense, fantasy/adventure, and women's fiction.

About the Author

Kristen has a bachelor's degree in English Literature (with elective classes in creative writing, poetry writing, and children's literature), an associate's degree in Illustration, and a specialized certificate in Copyediting from the University of California, San Diego Extension.

Most importantly, she has a detail-oriented, artistic eye, great at identifying problems with writing mechanics; an artistic ear, in tune with the rhythms and flow of a multitude of sentence structures; and an emotionally responsive, intuitive personality that enables her to connect with any story and inhabit the characters.

Found on her ARTiculate Editing website is a blog with valuable writing tips and a fiction style guide dedicated entirely to fiction.



SEPTEMBER 2025 MEETING

WHAT'S COMING UP

WRITERS RETREAT

INLAND EMPIRE CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB

SELF-EDITING: WHEN 'THE END' IS ONLY 'THE BEGINNING'



Have you crafted a compelling, well-structured story and wondered what is next?

Our guest speaker, Kristen Chavez Bennett, is a free-lance fiction editor who has had the privilege of making countless manuscripts more clear, concise, and consistent.

Come listen to words of advice from a trained copyeditor and owner of ARTiculate Editing Services.

FREE for IECWC members

\$10 for non-members

Lunch provided

**SATURDAY,
SEPTEMBER 27**

9:30–10: Registration

10–10:20: Speed intros & writing projects

10:30–11:30: Presentation and writing exercise

11:30–11:45: Q&A

11:45–Noon: Members' book selling and signing

Noon–1:00 pm: Lunch onsite

**CLAREMONT
FRIENDS MEETING
HOUSE**

**727 W. HARRISON
AVE.,
CLAREMONT, CA
91711**

✘ CHECK, CASH, OR CREDIT CARD AT REGISTRATION ✘

JULY 2025

MEETING REVIEW

Writer Things I've Learned" by Victoria Waddle

Saturday, June 28, 2025, at 10:10 a.m.

Review by Ben Alirez

With the annual and always popular open mic on the docket, President Judy Kohlen opened the meeting by offering a few key pointers on speaking at the podium, along with a friendly reminder it's club renewal season again. Payment methods are offered in the form of cash, check, or PayPal, with a credit card reader in the works. She then turned the event over to MC Sam Nichols. Each reader was given a ten-minute limit, which Judy helped to monitor. The order followed a first come, first served format as Sam maintained the log of scheduled speakers.

First up was Stephanie Logan, an employee of the Claremont Library. Much of her works are based on mystical subjects and goddesses. With six short poems to recite, she drew inspiration from Emily Dickenson and Amanda Gorman, sharing tanka and haiku form poetry. Some of the titles included "You Were There" and "Summer Storm."

Shirley Timura came next. No stranger to enlightening poetry, she offered instead a powerful essay on twenty dreadful hours she experienced, a life-threatening ordeal that resulted in a trip to the emergency room. Her piece was raw, brave, and emotional.

New member David Metoyer followed, describing himself as a retired businessman, Tai Chi instructor, and husband of over sixty years. And although he didn't consider himself much of a speaker or writer, David delivered a touching and poignant poem on his experiences in Vietnam as a member of the military and the men who never returned. It was titled "Don't Make Friends When You Go to War." His second poem spoke to the significance of placing coins at a gravesite, titled "Home Again."

Another new member, Diosa Xochiquetzalcoatl, took to the podium next, sharing a very thought-provoking poem called "The Weight of the Scales," which shared the impact of the number seven in her life. She also astutely pointed out the fact she just experienced her forty-seventh year on this earth, ultimately leaving us to reflect on the "kiss of death."

Kenneth Jordan then recited an engrossing short story titled "The Quandary." A work of fiction, the premise centered around a doctor's decision whether or not to harvest the liver of a young man believed to be brain-dead. A choice that left the audience reeling in quiet contemplation.

Long-time club member and critique group leader Constance Cassinelli used her opportunity to stand center stage with "A Lesson for Art's Sake." A memoir, she recounted a humorous time from her past when—as a twenty-year-old student from the University of Cincinnati—she attempted to learn more about the finer aspects of dancing. An innocent endeavor which led to a burlesque club as part of a school project.



The writing club's eighteen-year-old phenom, Abigail Handojo, offered three engaging poems next. The first was titled "The Tourist Trap," a composition about leaving her hometown to venture off to college. "Stone Left Unturned" and "For Long if Not Forever" followed. As always, Abigail delivered her words with an eloquence rarely seen, renditions which are not simply spoken word, they are visual performances. Note: Judy took a moment to express her deep gratitude for Abigail's participation with the club over the last few years. Now that she will be leaving for a university in the Southland, she must step down from her role as club editor. I'm certain I speak for everyone when I say we couldn't be more proud of her.

Vicki Peyton, another club fixture, delivered a humorous piece called "Teensy the Bogus Tooth." An entertaining tale that touched on the misadventures of a loose tooth, the short story became a study in dental care products (including peculiar adhesive options) and a thrilling search and rescue effort.

Leticia Garcia Bradford, poet, playwright, and publisher, came next with a flash fiction piece titled "Her Dusty Shoes," which originally appeared in "The Mighty Ant" anthology. Her narration detailed the relationship she shared with her sister and mother, and the insidious effects cancer can have on a family. Still, we were reminded that powerful moments from our past can lift us up, much like the song "God Bless America."

Ann Casas under the pen name Yvonne Suzan, shared an excerpt from her latest novel "Love on the Reservation," a story about a Navajo girl and an Anglo boy. In the composition, Ann touches on Native American traditions and the influence of a highly respected great grandmother in northeastern Arizona. The story itself involves drama, travel, crime, intrigue, suspense, and enchantment.

Past president and poet extraordinaire, Sam Nichols recited three poems. The first, "On the Beach, That June" was inspired by a Writer's Digest prompt. It was followed by "Responsible," a ghazal style ode which exemplifies a complicated, internal rhyme structure that is Arabic in origin. His final poem, "Only One" stirred to life after something Judy said while at a board meeting. Inspiring, indeed.

With a few minutes left, the floor was opened to any willing members and Cindy Demone closed the affair with a poem about a person entangled in the throes of death.

In conclusion, the open mic session was a true depiction of the members that comprise the Inland Empire California Writers Club. Featured were poetic expressions, remembrances of pains past, there were fanciful tales and moments of laughable wails. But most of all there was connectivity and community that can only come from talents shared. In addition to the seven firsttimers and/or guests, twenty-four people attended. Afterward, several members (and non-members) reunited for lunch at local favorite Eden Garden Fusion Grill for more comradery.





Benefits of IECWC

MEMBERSHIP

- ALL AGES are welcome!
- Entrance into monthly meetings
 - (in-person or remotely through Zoom)
- Access to monthly speakers on topics related to the craft
- Exposure & practice by submitting to our monthly literary newsletter, FRESH INK
- Network with other club members
 - (various levels of expertise, mentors)
- Participation in Critique Groups
 - (in-person or remotely through Zoom)
- Your OWN PAGE on our Club website at no additional cost
 - Highlight your bio, photo, website, social media, and published books
- Opportunities to serve on the board or on committees of our branch
- Camaraderie among other writers at all levels, all genres, and all ages!
- Partake, volunteer, and/or help plan our Spring and Fall Conferences which are provided at little (or sometimes no) cost to our members
- Annual opportunity to showcase your work at Open Mic events.
- Annual opportunity, each January, to attend/appear on our Panel of Authors
 - Members who were published the year before
 - Learn/share advice on the publication process, ask/answer questions, and buy/sell your books on site
- Annual opportunity to submit, read, and assist with judging the competitive Statewide CWC Literary Review, with readership of about 2,000 members and their readers and associates
- Simultaneous Co-Membership into California Writers Club
 - Our state-level parent organization at www.calwriters.org, with additional volunteer opportunities

- Read/advertise in the Tri-Annual CWC Bulletin available online, free of charge
 - Access to news from the other CWC Branches throughout California, gaining perspective about other serious, mostly published, writers, editors, Web designers, graphics experts, etc.
- Potential for your writing to be chosen to be displayed in the Southern California Writers Showcase at www.socalwritersshowcase.com
- A wonderful addition to your curriculum vitae or resume!
- Access to the monthly IECWC Blind Review Team
- Utilize our FACEBOOK PAGE to get your works word out to the public interested in writing

JOIN or RENEW at:

<https://iecwc.com/membership-meetings/>

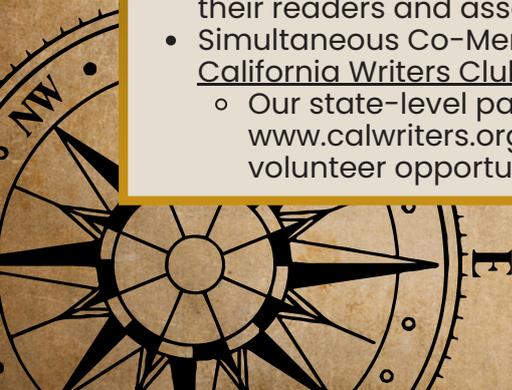
Active
\$65

Supporting
\$65

Student
\$15
ages 8-22

Renewal of Membership
\$45

Renewal deadline September 30.
On October 1, CWC shall drop all delinquent members from the rolls. If dropped, you must pay the new \$65 member enrollment fees.

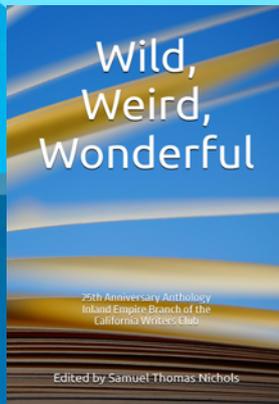
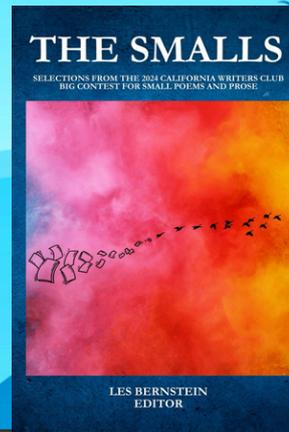




THE SMALLS

The Smalls includes selections from the California Writers Club 2024 "Big Contest for Small Poems and Prose." This is a vibrant collection of unique voices chosen from the contest entries.

<https://a.co/d/45iqsdm>



Wild, Weird, Wonderful: 25th Anniversary Anthology Inland Empire Branch of the California Writers Club

<https://a.co/d/0SVxupt>

This collection includes short stories, poetry, memoir, nonfiction, memoir, original drawings and photographs, and one novelette entitled *Murder in Huckleberry Heights*.

This anthology contains the varietal work of eighteen members of the Inland Empire Branch with several genres being represented.

Vision & Verse: A Fusion of Art, Photography, Prose and Poetry

The multi-talented artists and writers featured within these pages have come together to create a dialogue between their respective mediums. This collection showcases the beauty of visual art married with the magic of the written word.

<https://a.co/d/2zu0Afx>



BOOKS

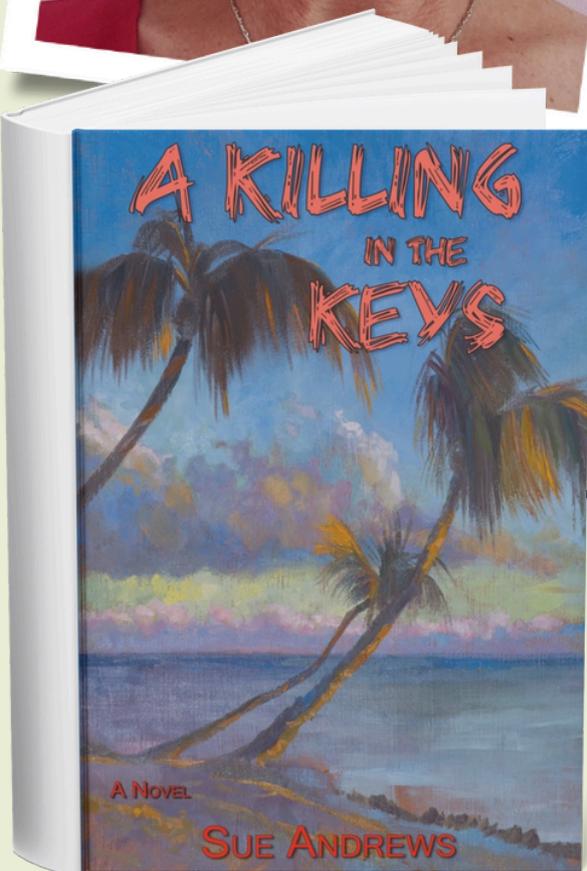


KUDOS K ORNER



Congratulations to Sue Andrews !

She was selected to be in the Diamond Valley Writers Guild Anthology. The anthology had various themes and hers focused on animals. She had done a remake of her story about Chantek, the orangutan who signed to her in ASL. For those who have read it before, it has a new twist to it. Go check it out !





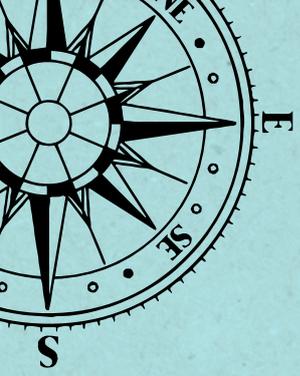
KUDOS KORNER

Congratulations to Abigail Handojo for starting her first few weeks at the University of Southern CA. She's studying Creative Writing at Dornsife college and hopes to make connections within her major!



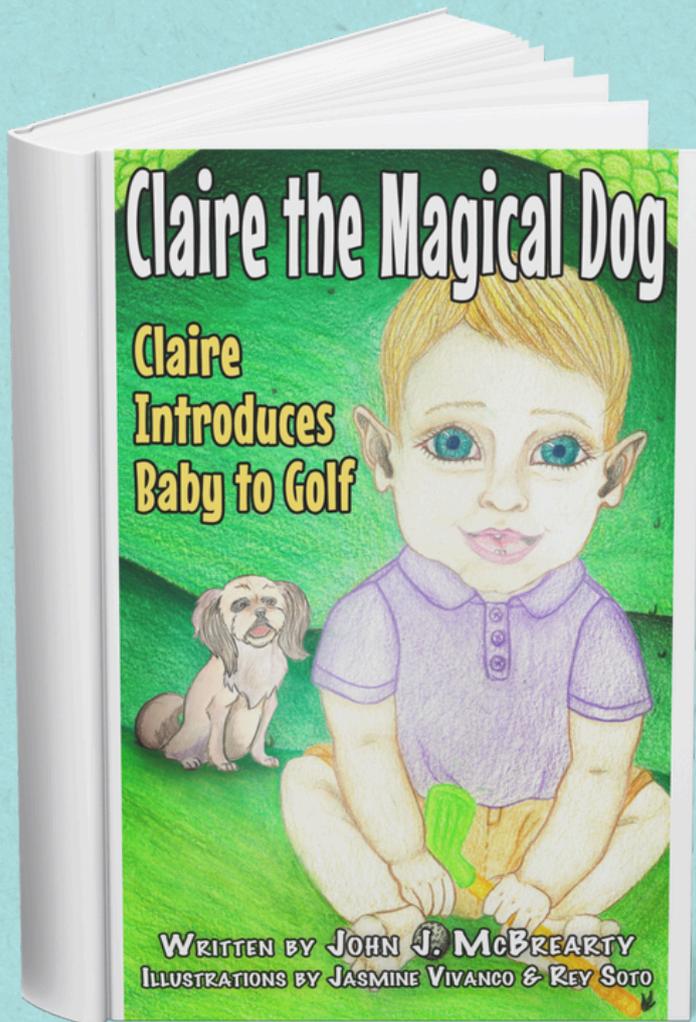
Congratulations to Ken for starting his classes in his Master of Fine Art program in Creative Writing at Mount St. Mary's University!





PRESS RELEASE

Presales available NOW on Amazon
Paperback release 9/11/2025



@JohnWritesHistory

CLAIRE THE MAGICAL DOG

A well-illustrated picture book for babies and young children. Claire the Magical Dog explains the game of golf to an adorable baby—an excellent introduction to golf for the youngest of children.

And remember, it is never too early to start learning the game of golf.

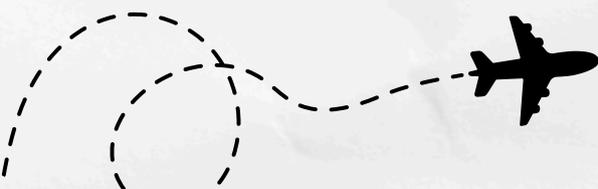
Amazon #1 New Release
Children's Olympic Sports Books

“John is a prolific author writing golf books for children.”

Jim Hill, CBS Sports Central

“John McBrearty does it again with this beautifully illustrated children’s book!”

Andreas Kossak, WGA, Written by
Veterans Founder



Deadlines

Submissions are due the **15th** of every month
*Will need to be updated by the new editor



Content Limits

Submissions with the following will not be considered:

- Excessive or gratuitous violence (violence for violence sake)
- Excessive or gratuitous profanity
- Excessive or gratuitous sexual situations or pornography
- Political or religious agendas that are meant to persuade or denounce



**FRESH
INK**

guidelines



Form

- Prose word count <1,200
- No line count on poetry

Send as an attachment
Google or Word document
Times New Roman
12pt font



Photos

Accompanying images are optional

We can only publish digital images that **do not violate copyright**

You are encouraged to submit photos you have taken



Email

iecwcfreshink@gmail.com

Check your email periodically for suggestions from the editor



Poetry Musings

By Samuel Thomas Nichols
Wanderlust



From the German words *wandern* (to hike) and *lust* (desire), wanderlust is the strong yearning towards wandering, a theme common in poetry and song. What came immediately to mind were songs like Dave Loggins' (1947-2024), *Please Come to Boston*, Johnny Hartford's (1937-2001), *Gentle on My Mind*, and the Marshall Tucker Band's (Toy Caldwell, 1947-1993) *Heard it in a Love Song*. In poetry, there are several well-known poems such as *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost (1874-1963), *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* by William Wordsworth (1770-1850), and *Ulysses* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892). However, there has always been one wanderlust poem that has stood out for me, and that would be Walt Whitman's (1819-1892) *Song of the Open Road*. The poem begins:



Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me.
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

I always liked the idea that the path before him leads where he chooses and not the other way around. I have a facsimile copy of Whitman's 1855 edition of his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass* and this poem was not included in that first slim edition. Now, the *Leaves of Grass* was something that Whitman tinkered with his entire life up until his death in 1892. The very next year after his first printing, in 1856, Whitman published a second edition, and this one included his *Song of the Open Road*. There were as many as nine separate editions of his book of poetry, with the first containing twelve poems and the last containing about 400 poems. There is an online exhibit at the Library of Congress that shows eight editions here:

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/whitman/leavesofgrass.html>.

In my 1950 edition of the *Leaves of Grass and selected Prose of Walt Whitman* the *Song of the Open Road* is written in 15 sections believed to comprise two parts, sections 1-8 and 9-15. In part 2, he starts all but one section with the French *allons* - hear goes, or hear I go - and invites the reader to join him on his wanderlust. From section 9:



Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!
Traveling with me you find what never tires.

From enotes summary of the poem: ...the poem first delves into the invigorating advantages of a life unburdened by societal constraints, followed by an earnest call for companionship on a shared journey.

The entire analysis is available here:

<https://www.enotes.com/topics/song-open-road/in-depth>.

The poem itself may be read in its entirety here:

<https://www.poetryexplorer.net/poem.php?id=10032538>.



I subscribe to *Poetry Magazine*, which is published by the Poetry Foundation. In the January/February 2025 issue was a poem by Miguel A. Vega, a contemporary poet living in Riverside, California, titled *Wanderlust*. I like the fact that Vega uses imagery evoking visions of California, Oregon, and Nevada.

His poem begins:



If, even now, I am excited about it: every cow & horse,
every canoe on the surface of Pyramid Lake—
If, at two hundred miles out, I take a selfie with the Bravoland
cowboy,
record us driving by the Tule Elk Reserve, record
two jet-black crows circling the morning's blue wrist of light



There's also a bit of hyperbole in being *two hundred miles* out on Pyramid Lake. The entire poem is available online here

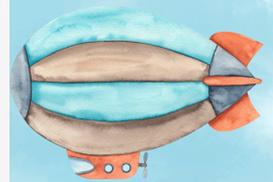
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/1639266/wanderlust>

When my son was in middle school, he studied some poems of John Masefield (1878–1967) and I recall a real sense of the wanderlust as it relates to the sea. Consider his poem *Sea Fever*, which is in the public domain:

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.



Such a real sense of desire for the *vagrant gypsy life*. Here are the first and last stanzas his poem, *A Wanderers Song*:

If, A wind's in the heart of me, a fire's in my heels,
I am tired of brick and stone and rumbling wagon-wheels;
I hunger for the sea's edge, the limits of the land,
Where the wild old Atlantic is shouting on the sand.

Oh I am tired of brick and stone, the heart of me is sick,
For windy green, unquiet sea, the realm of Moby Dick;
And I'll be going, going, from the roaring of the wheels,
For a wind's in the heart of me, a fire's in my heels.



But those who give in to wanderlust know that it will someday have to end. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Requiem* is my favorite look at the end of the fever to wander.

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

As a boy, I was blessed by a sense of the wanderlust and explored the American Southwest on the back of a motorcycle. As fate would have it, the boy became a man, and he took a wife, a job, pursued higher education, and relegated his wanderlust to pen and paper and to the ephemeral castles in the air. May you savor your own embodiment of that yen to wander out beyond yourselves.



Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) is another writer who penned poems of wanderlust and travel. In 1908 he published *Songs of Travel*, containing 44 poetic compositions, the first of which was *The Vagabond*, from which the following is excerpted:

Give to me the life I love,
Let the love go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above
And the byway night me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river --
There's the life for a man like me,
There's the life for ever.

Wealth I ask not, hope, nor love,
Nor a friend to know me.
All I ask, the heaven above
And the road below me.



Tourist Trap

BY ABIGAIL HANJO

There is a nightingale
Weeping from her cage
Sick with self-pity
Yearning to escape

An ingrate
Trilling tunelessly
Such a selfish thing to be
Here reads her soliloquy:

"I want the kind of fondness not born of distance
To rid myself of stubborn ambivalence
About touring trollies I haven't ridden
And balloon baskets I haven't been in

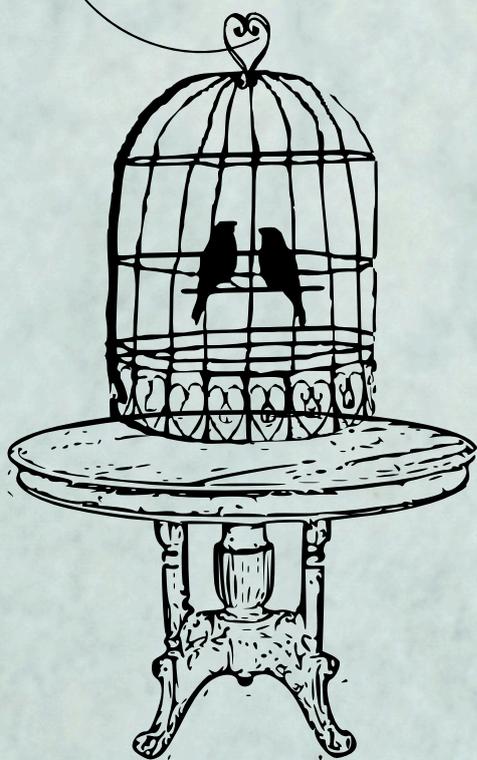
Would I still want it to end if it were a vacation?
If I saw it not as a limbo but as a heaven?
Polaroids, postcards, souvenirs
Magnets, keychains, 'Wish You Were Here's

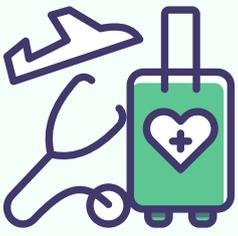
I want to realize the appeal of what I'm used to
Take a stroll down this ghost town as if I'm not a resident
Too young to be confined, dying
Yet too young to be untied, living

I want to move somewhere I'll miss the sun and heat
Perpetual summers and dusty streets
Love this city like a Noah Kahan song
Bittersweet

Maybe my cage looks prettier from the outside
Maybe when it unlocks, I won't want to fly away
Except the steel rods look too much like prison bars
And nothing in this neighborhood could convince me to stay"
The nightingale sings
Safe in her cage

Sick with self-pity
Contemplating escape
In a year it will open
And she will be free
No longer rueful or wistful
But does she want to be?





THE QUANDARY



BY KENNETH JORDAN

Finishing up his rounds in the Intensive Care Unit, Dr. Conrad Burton felt both hopeful and useless. He had left the bedside of a critically ill child and entered the adjacent room where flashing monitors surrounded a pale, comatose young man. The man was motionless except for the rise and fall of his chest from the ventilator. Tight-lipped, Burton walked out of the ICU towards a lonely grey-haired woman seated in the hallway alcove.

One year out his fellowship, Burton was Director of the Neuroscience ICU at Parkland Regional Medical Center. His brilliance had been recognized throughout his years of training, and he had been offered prime academic positions at Harvard, Mayo Clinic and Columbia. But his aging mother and disabled brother, a teenage victim of a drunk driver, needed him, so he decided to stay close to home. He accepted Parkland's offer to spearhead its specialized ICU for patients with life-threatening brain injuries

Burton met the woman's searching gaze.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. McDaniel" he said, "but the tests are 98% conclusive that David is brain dead."

"What does that mean, 98%?" said David's mother.

He sat down and extended his hand to her. She grabbed it with both of hers.

"It means that my exam and all the tests showed no evidence of brain activity."

"But you said there is a two per cent chance that he's alive," she said.

Burton hated these conversations. He had had more of them than he ever thought he would. Dealing on the front lines with people with severely damaged brains and their families had added enough grey to his dark wavy hair to make him look a decade older than his thirty-four years.

"Mrs. McDaniel" he said, "in the room next to David is a six-year-old boy who accidentally swallowed a bunch of Tylenol pills. The overdose damaged his liver so badly that he needs a liver transplant within the next twenty-four hours, or he will die. David is a perfect match."

"But my David may be alive!" she said, squeezing his hand.

"He suppressed a wince. "I had to give you a number short of 100%, because none of our tests are perfect. But the odds are overwhelming."





"If he were your son, Dr. Burton, would you give up when there was even a decimal of a chance that he was alive? Damn the odds! If you want to save that child with my David's liver, I have to know that David is absolutely gone."

Burton knew of novel studies using Artificial Intelligence that had detected slight nerve cell activity in a few patients who were declared brain dead by conventional means. If he could get access to that AI program, his MRI team could upload it and run a Functional Brain MRI on David. He was confident that David was brain dead, but his mother was adamant. If proving David was one hundred per cent dead with an fMRI was the only way to save that little boy, he had to try.

Four hours later, in the cold basement room of the radiology department, Burton looked at the life-like image of David's brain glaring at him from the oversized monitor. He saw a small but unequivocal bright area, the size of a pencil point, in the left parietal lobe.

"Shit!" he said.

He turned off the monitor and leaned back in the dark. What did that miniscule area of surviving nerve cells mean? Was David alive? Would that speck of brain activity ever bring him back to a meaningful existence? Mrs. McDaniel would never agree to the transplant if she knew there was a wisp of function in her son's brain? He regretted ever doing the MRI.

The moment took him back years before when his brother Michael lay comatose and near death. Burton was only a medical student then. He had ignored the specialists' recommendations and insisted they do everything to save his little brother. "Every Goddam heroic thing," he had said. They did and Michael recovered, disabled but well enough for Burton and his mother to be eternally grateful.

He turned the monitor back on, adjusted the color scale and hit the save button. He dictated his report into the electronic medical record.

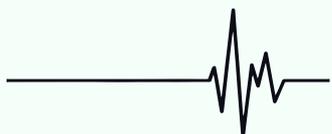
David's mother accosted him as he walked out of the elevator. "So, what did it show? Is David alive? Did it show the two percent?"

"It confirmed that David is dead," Burton told her. "One hundred percent. I'm sorry, Mrs. McDaniel. There was no brain activity."

They rolled David's body into the operating room to harvest his liver. In the adjacent OR, doctors prepared the child to receive life.

One floor below, Dr. Conrad Burton sat on the call room bed, his senses numb and the door locked. The ceiling light cast his bent shadow onto the cement floor. He drew the pillow to his face and cried

THE END



TWO POEMS

By Ann Casas

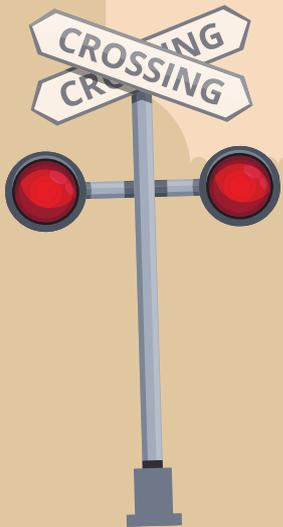
PAULETTE'S SONGS

Your alto voice
Resonant with song
Filled the church with
Resilience
Strength
And
Hope
To see you sitting there
On the platform
Tired yet strong
Singing joyously
To share
Your praise
For what is
Now
Your life

PAULETTE'S LAMENT

I'm not ready
You cried
Darkness overcame the
light
Sickness overtook your soul

As you suffered
We ached too
When you wept
With every visit
Every trial
Every injection
Every infusion
Every torture
We thought
When will it be
Our turn



FIVE STAR ADVENTURE ALONG THE APPIAN WAY

Constance Cassinelli



Traffic erratically whizzed by at a high speed making it impossible to cross the four lanes of *Via dell'Impero* near the Colosseum. We patiently waited for a break, but we couldn't cross the street if our lives depended on it. There was no other solution left to stop traffic other than simply step in front of it.

My college roommate, Dail, our med-student traveling pal, John, and I, caused quite a jam. Perhaps a hundred drivers slammed on brakes at the same time as they skidded to a halt. Then came, shouting of obscenities, gesturing with that arm signal thing, while horns blared intermittently.

A cute Italian guy in a red Fiat Spider roadster, whose car was first in line, yelled, "*Roma, is my homa. Let me show you Roma. Get in before you get killed.*"

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I'm Marco, the photographer for Life Magazine in Italy," he volunteered.

"No, you are not," I playfully responded.

"Yes, I am. Get in," he said as he leaned over to open the passenger door.

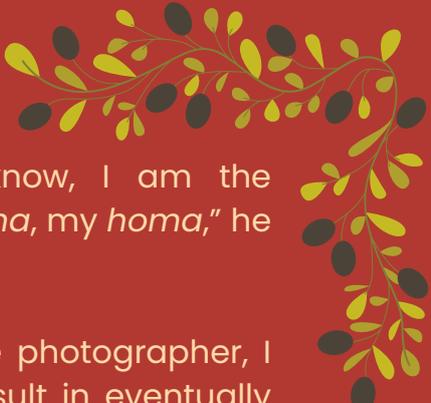
Meanwhile, when menacing shouts became more insistent that we get out of the way, Dail and I climbed into the small space behind the seats and sat on the convertible top's boot. Our friend quickly sat in the passenger seat, slammed the door, and off we went.

"*Roma is my homa. Let me show you Roma,*" he repeated and drove past the *Colosseum* so we could view it once again. "What do you need to see now?" he asked.

"We just wanted to cross the street," I replied. "It would be wonderful to just enjoy the people of Rome today."

We weren't travelers with wanderlust, aimlessly checking off items from a recommended list. Instead we related to being adventurers, wishing to experience the element of surprise on our journey





Our new Roman friend again identified himself. “You know, I am the photographer for Life Magazine in Italy and I will show you *Roma*, my *homa*,” he said with a smirk on his face.

“No, you aren’t,” I giggled. Each time he insisted he was the photographer, I insisted he wasn’t. It became a game that I knew would result in eventually viewing his work at his mother’s house. (This ploy fit into my plan to see how Italian people lived. The men tend to live at home with their mothers until 40 and are then considered ready to marry and move out.) I was busy securing a natural invitation.

Once past the *Colosseum*, he drove onto the *Appian Way*. Marco decided the guys should purchase a watermelon for a picnic. He indicated there wasn’t room for the four of us and a watermelon in the Fiat so he deposited Dail and me alongside the old road lined with Italian Stone Pines.

When we turned around we saw comforters hanging from a clothesline strung between trees. We thought it odd to air bedding this far away from home. That little devil, Marco, dropped us off in front of two middle aged, overweight women with ratted-up black hair, heavy rouge, azure blue eyeshadow, and dark arched eyebrows. They stepped out from behind the comforters in off-the-shoulder skimpy black outfits and thigh high leather boots. Cigarettes dangled from their gooey red lips. They were prepared to defend their territory.

Oh my gosh, suddenly it felt as if we were being involved in a remake of Federico Fellini’s film, *Nights of Cabiria*.

The women were furious at us. We were on their turf, and we were cute and young. They continued to shout Italian obscenities, shake threatening fists, and became quite animated with each other and us in a rapid dialect that I doubt even Romans could understand.

It seemed the guys were gone for an eternity. Large black cars with tinted windows slowed down to get a look at us which gave us great concern that we might be kidnapped and sold into some white slavery enterprise.

We had no other choice but to behave as silly as possible by doing jumping jacks each time a car slowed down. This was really bad for the old gals’ business as drivers sped off at the sight of our Chaplinesque behavior. Everyone knows Italian men take “certain things” very seriously. Our antics mocked whatever was spinning out of control in their brains.

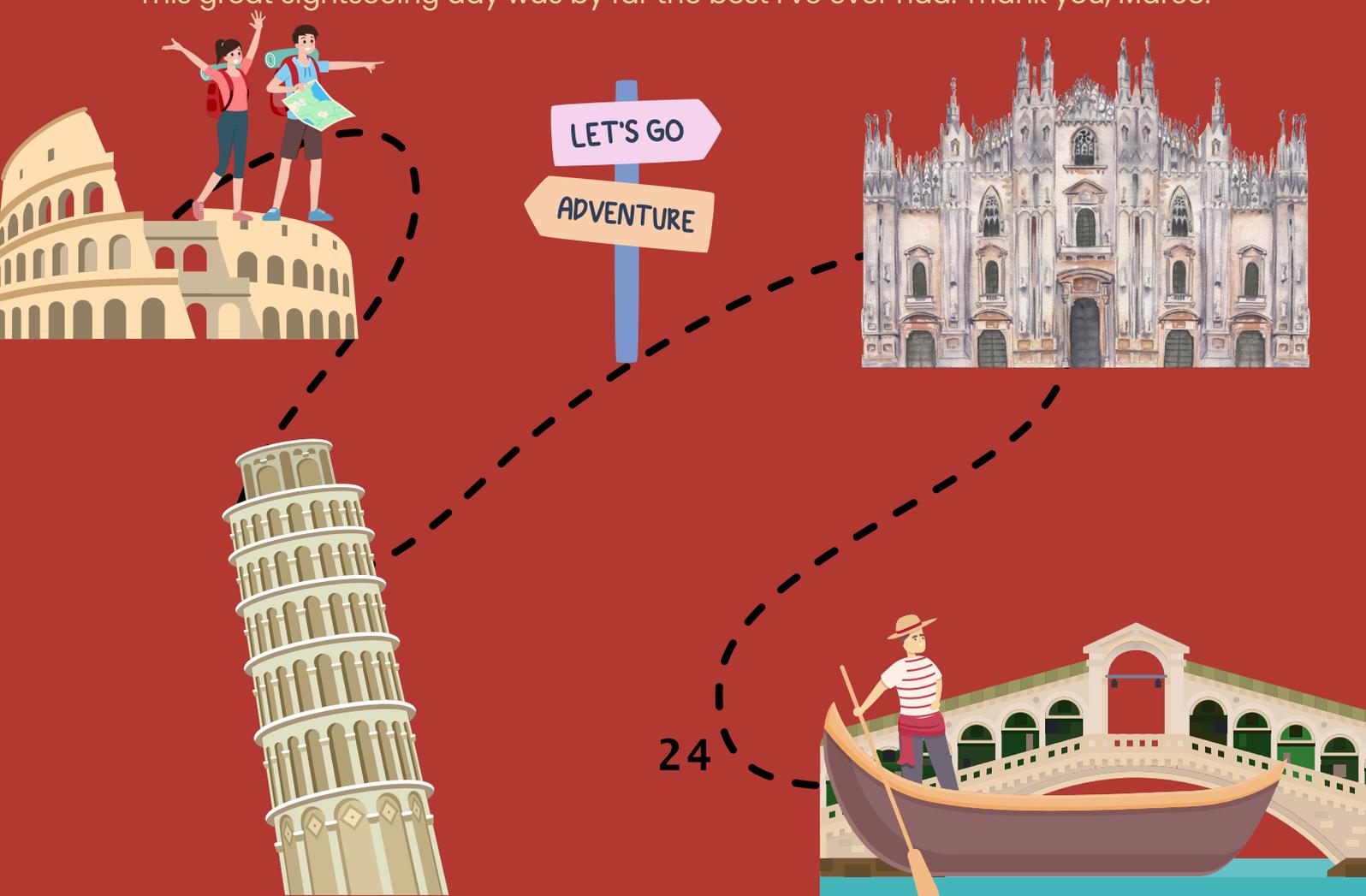
The guys returned with a watermelon and we rode off to find ruins of an ancient amphitheatre. Marco warned us to avoid stepping on soft ground as it could easily give way and drop us into one of the numerous catacombs below. After we picnicked on watermelon, we improvised our own romantic tragedy on the stage. Three parts were in English, and one part was in Italian. Apparently, we were typecast. I knew Marco had a bit of melodrama in his blood each time he passionately grabbed his chest, then simultaneously flirted with the both of us.

After we took our final bows, we enjoyed an hour drinking wine under a pergola with friendly older Italian men who made us feel appreciated. Of course they were drunk.

"I know all these wonderful locations," Marco said with a glint in his eyes, "because, *I am the photographer for Life Magazine!*"

The moment of truth came when our new found Roman friend took us to his mother's home to view his framed photographs that hung on the dining room wall. I didn't get to study them or ask questions because he locked me in the bathroom as my punishment for all the times I playfully challenged him bragging about his true profession. (I probably deserved it.)

This great sightseeing day was by far the best I've ever had. Thank you, Marco.





NOT IN THE TRUE SENSE

Kenneth Jordan

He looked like a professor and smelled like a drunk. His threadbare blazer, rimless glasses, slanted bowtie and faded corduroy slacks seemed poised to fall off his skeletal frame. His bony hands grasped the barstool next to mine and with effort he climbed onto it. He ran his knobby fingers through his disheveled grey hair and turned to me. I wasn't in the mood to talk. I was impatient for my third Jack Daniel's Deadshot to do its job. I was never a drinker until Grace and I called it quits. After twenty-five years, the resentments stuck hard in our craw. We got fed up with each other. I moved out three months ago and haven't spoken to her since.

The "professor" was mumbling something into my ear. I turned and almost brushed his grizzled stubble with my cheek. In a melancholic baritone he asked me what I was drinking and ordered the same. He downed it, ordered another and, raising his glass to me, made quick work of the second. Then, like a confidant he brought his face close to mine. His penetrating blue eyes froze me as his hand grabbed my wrist. He stared me down and cleared his throat.

"What I know now about her murder," he said "is that she did not die. Not in the true sense, anyway. You may quibble about what I mean by 'the true sense.' That's okay. I know what I mean, though it's taken me years to figure it out. I don't mean figuring out who did it or why. That part is factual, done, established. Carjacking, two bullets, life without parole.

"My best friend's wife died three months later. Cancer, the slow and miserable kind. Took two years. Once he shook off the guilt, his relief told him she was dead in the true sense. My brothers Rick and Bob they're also dead in the true sense, and so are Mom and Dad. Rick got into drugs at seventeen, spiraled down and died when he was twenty-seven. Mom went a few years after Rick, no surprise. Bob died after a life of mendacity and anger, denying that anything was wrong with him until it was too late for a cure. Dad held on to his mind and dignity into his mid-nineties, and then it was his time. All of them are dead in the true sense.

"But not her. I am sure you get my drift. There is death that ends a life, the kind that is final. And then there is death that pauses life, the kind that leaves a space to be filled in.

"When we were in college, she discovered Edna St. Vincent Millay. In between classes, she read to me from *Renascence*:





!..All suffering mine, and mine its rod;
Mine, pity like the pity of God.
Ah, awful weight! Infinity
Pressed down upon the finite Me!
My anguished spirit, like a bird,
Beating against my lips I heard;
Yet lay the weight so close about
There was no room for it without.
And so beneath the weight lay I
And suffered death, but could not die."

He stopped to order another drink and raised an eyebrow. I nodded. We raised our glasses and toasted the poet.

" We were thirty-one years married and happy empty nesters," he went on. "One night, a month before she was murdered, we pulled out boxes with our college memories and sat up in bed reading poetry until our eyes blurred. When we came to *Renascence*, she recited from memory,

!..The rain, I said, is kind to come
And speak to me in my new home.
I would I were alive again
To kiss the fingers of the rain,
To drink into my eyes the shine
Of every slanting silver line,
To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze
From drenched and dripping Apple-trees...!

"Midway through, her voice cracked and she started crying. 'I'm frightened,' she said. I comforted her to sleep.

"We so-called professionals swear that 'evidence-based data' will lead us to the truth. It's taken me almost three decades to see that that's pure hubris. We can measure the absence of life: no blood pressure, pulse, or reflexes. But can we really measure the absence of being? And what happens after 'being?' We cannot measure if there is a continuing essence of our loved ones after they die."

His radiant eyes and mellifluous voice held me like a magnet. I felt like a seafarer before the Ancient Mariner. Was this man, like the Mariner, doomed to repeat his story to random strangers for the rest of his life?. He had me under his spell.



“For me,” he continued, “whether or not she is dead in the true sense, has nothing to do with science or evidence. It has nothing to do with religion or faith. It has to do with memory. We use the cliché “living memory” for a reason. To some, memory is a quantifiable network of synapses, but I cannot measure how my memory creates her continuing presence in my mind”

He leaned into me and pulled me closer to his chest.

“Clichés contain core truths,” he said, his voice now whispery and frayed. “Having lived with her death for decades, I know it is factual that “true love never dies.” Her presence in my memory sustains me. Her values, her trust, and her faith in me have no end. They retain their vitality in my memory as guideposts, just as they did when she was alive. I have tried to heal, live on, love again, and find joy, but...I remember. And in my memory, she did not die. Not in the true sense.”

He released me, finished his drink and paid both of our tabs. Then he patted me on my shoulder like a father and left.

I stared after him for a while. Then I picked up my phone and said, “Siri, call Grace.”

THE END



YASGUR'S FARM

BY SAMUEL THOMAS NICHOLS

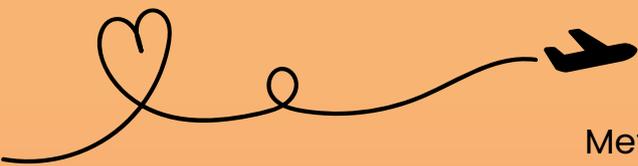


It was
The end of July
Nineteen sixty-nine
My best friend and I
Stuck our thumbs out in the road
Highway 91, pointed east
Towards a New York farm
I would soon be fifteen
He was somewhat older
But we both wanted to be at the crossroads
We both saw coming

Rode in the back of a pickup, Chevrolet
All the way to Blythe
Where we got educated
With some instruction, Phoenix tease
Outside a new-age farm
My friend went on alone
He was somewhat older
What we both wanted diverged at the crossroads
No one saw coming

In the month of August
Nineteen sixty-nine
My new friend and I
Kept our thumbs out on the road
Neither one of us made it east
To Yasgur's New York farm
I was only fifteen
She was somewhat older
What we both wanted diverged at the crossroads
No one saw coming





Met a dark girl that August
Nineteen sixty-nine
A coincidence
Cause I knew that girl before
Loved her completely, loved her real
More than any New York farm
I was only fifteen
She was somewhat younger
But we wanted to be at the crossroads
We both saw coming

We met at the crossroads
Got lost on the high road
Interstate pointing north
Plated cuffs and back seats
You'll never get away
Until that final day
You once again are clay

We only wanted to be at the crossroads
That we saw coming

Rest in peace on that shorter road
I'll find my way there
Soon enough





Theme for October

Superstition

