Virtual Alumni Day
Poetry Competition in Honor of Dan Leslie Bowden
April 24, 2021

1. JOY by Clarence Cryer ’80
2. Ambling Along by James Weinkle ’76
3. Stone Soup by Dave Bricker ’82
4. XX / XXX by Alessandra Calderin ’07
5. THE SHOOTER by Clarence Cryer ’80
6. Some Day I’ll Love Kareena Rudra (After OceanVuong) by Kareena Rudra ’20
7. picnic with you at peacock park by Kareena Rudra ’20
8. Untitled piece by Ted Seward ’61 Ransom
9. Old Friend by Pam Pennell Kelly ’86
10. snowflake by Sarah Nims-Seaman ’70
11. Voice Mail Message from my High School Poetry Teacher, Saved Joanna Rago ’76
12. Saddle Shoes, Joanna Rago ’76
13. Bloodroot by Yvette LeFebvre ’13
14. I Carry by Yvette LeFebvre ’13
15. The English Teacher for Dan Leslie Bowden by Kit Pancoast Nagamura (Everglades ’77)
16. Haiku, for DLB by Kit Pancoast Nagamura (Everglades ’77)
POEM 1

JOY by Clarence Cryer '80

JOY

I am a kite without any strings
'Flying blind' on faith for wings
High above all earthly things.

A wayward wind is lifting me
Far beyond the forestry
Of tangled twine that strangles me.

Set a-flight o'er land and sea,
Gone, not lost
Untethered
Free.
Ambling Along

Driving by myself on an Oregon sand & gravel road Ambling along above the river where
White water smooths river rocks
The essence of life
I am not alone
I am not alone

Breathing in
I breathe in
Scent of pine, freshness....pungent aroma of life creation The essence of life
I am not alone
I am not alone

Opening my eyes
I open my eyes wide
not just with my eyelids
Green trees strong against blue sky
Dead tree
Live tree
The essence of life
I am not alone
I am not alone

The road curves
Wildflowers in bloom
Yellow and purple, orange pink blue
Blackberries not yet ripe
Life essentials
I am not alone
I am not alone

Listening
Hearing
Wind through trees
Water rushing onward
Insect flights
Nature Songs That is life
By myself
I am not alone
POEM 3
Stone Soup by Dave Bricker ’82

Stone Soup

In November, 1954
In Sylacauga, Alabama
Ann Hodges was lying on her couch
Asleep
In her apartment
In the middle of the afternoon
With a blanket wrapped around her
And a cylindrical couch cushion wedged under her neck
When a meteorite
Or a baseball-sized piece of one
(Isn’t a piece of a meteorite still a “meteorite”?)
Crashed through the ceiling
Bounced off the radio
And made a bruise the size and shape of a pineapple on her side

The reporters said the space rock
Was twelve inches in circumference
Reporters like to exaggerate
Twelve inches sounds big
But if we divide 12 by pi (3.14 is good enough)
We can calculate that the diameter of the Hodges meteorite
Was 3.8 inches
More like a softball than a baseball
But a lot less like an iron basketball than you might think If you’re not paying attention

Ann Hodges’ landlord was named Birdie Guy
(I think that’s a great name; don’t you?
Especially for a woman)
“Birdie, this is Ann. How are you?”
“Good to hear from you, Ann
Is everything okay?”
“Yeah, I’m fine
But there’s this big hole in the ceiling
And you’re not going to believe how it got there!”

Everyone came over to Ann Hodges’ apartment
Neighbors
Reporters
Her sister

The Brattles came over
From the white house three doors down
The one with the pillars in front
And the circular driveway
And the mailbox with a big decal of a largemouth bass on it “It’s a good thing it didn’t hit our house,” said Ernie Brattle “It could have hit one of the children or dented the hood of my new Packard” “This is God’s judgment,” proclaimed Millicent Brattle “It didn’t hit our house because nobody was home, nobody was idly sleepin’ in our house. When they coulda been bein’ productive” 

Billy Hodges from around the block (Same last name but no relation) And his friend Dewey Saw the cars in front of the apartment They threw their bikes down on the front lawn And hung around for a few minutes And thought it was kind of cool That a rock from space Could punch a hole in the ceiling “I wonder what the odds of being hit by a meteorite are?” mused Dewey Billy suggested they were “astronomical” And they laughed And got a few dirty looks Because this was a serious matter They left after a few minutes When the thrill wore off 

A geologist analyzed the rock And found high concentrations of iron and nickel He confirmed that the rock was indeed a meteorite A visitor from outer space Wooooooono

People in town had seen smoke trails in the sky And some heard a boom When the meteor broke the sound barrier A few thought a plane had crashed Walter Emmons conjectured That the Soviets were responsible And told everyone to get ready For President Eisenhower to make a move against the commies 

Sergeant Drake of the Sylacauga Police Force Said the rock was “evidence” He confiscated it And called in the experts from the U.S. Air Force Who know all about rocks from space (Because they fly jets at very high altitudes, I guess) And they also confirmed 

That the Hodges meteorite was
In fact
A meteorite

Walter Emmons was disappointed
He’d spent a lot of money on ammunition And
had stocked up his cellar
With emergency food supplies

When Ann got out of the hospital...

Well, she didn’t go there because of the injury She
went there because all the lookie-loos And
rubberneckers
And gawkers and neighbors
And reporters asking questions
Made her anxious
And nervous
And frenzied
And she needed a sedative

But anyway...
When Ann got out of the hospital
And all the commotion had died down She
wanted her meteorite back
Her meteorite
But her landlady
Birdie Guy
(The one with the interesting name)
Wanted to keep it for herself
After all, it had fallen on her property And I’m
sure it wasn’t cheap to fix the roof Birdie hired a
lawyer
And sued Ann Hodges

But folks thought it was unfair
When you’re struck by a rock from space
You’ve been chosen
You—not your landlady
You should get to keep it
After all
If Ann Hodges had been hit by a stray bullet
While napping on her couch
It’s not like Birdie Guy would have come around And
claimed the bullet belonged to her Even if she did have
to pay
To fix the hole in the wall

They settled out of court for 500 bucks
500 bucks
That’s $4,364.53 in today’s money
For a softball-sized chunk of iron from outer space
That might have landed in the Indian Ocean
Or on a glacier in Alaska
Or on some mountainside in Tibet
Or perhaps in Bulgaria

But by that time
The Christmas holidays had come and gone
And Rosa Parks had been arrested in Montgomery
And Salk’s new polio vaccine was in the news
And Disneyland was about to open
And Ernie Brattle had put a big crease
In the right rear quarter panel of his new Packard
And the Bureau of Engraving had added “In God We Trust”
To all of our nation’s paper currency

Nobody made an offer
To buy Ann’s softball-sized chunk of rock from space
So she donated it to a museum
And went back to sleep
All cozy and safe
In her apartment
With a blanket wrapped around her
And a cylindrical couch cushion wedged under her neck
POEM 4
XX / XXX by Alessandra Calderin ’07

Cursed at conception,
X marks the spot.

Shows you all the things that you are and are not. Tepid holy water invades fingers, forehead, chest, shoulders, Overcoming, take me over.
Father, son, and genuflection,
Jesus and his resurrection.
Tip toeing down the long burgundy carpet,
A saintly catwalk.
He watches from the altar, crucified and bleeding. “On your knees, commence thy pleading.”
And little girls bear their crosses well,
Smile for the boys in hell.
Drag the weight to every station, no complaint escapes your lips, A lash for every sway of hips.
At least Veronica wipes your tears,
While Mother Mary instills carnal fears.
For now, you are safe, secluded, untouched, but
X marks the spot.

Losing every fight you fought.
The cross digs into muscle,
Splintering your skin,
Deforming you from the outside in,
Like heavy breasts within tightened training bras. Stand up, ask why, again you’ll fall,
And bleed from the place you dare not call,
X marks the spot.
It’s what you want, it’s all I’ve got. You slide your double digits in. Won’t let me out or let me win. Bodies, heavy, warm and stale Poke and press and hammer nails. And you won’t listen you can’t hear, The smallest voices yearning.
And you won’t see because you’re blind To bleeding girls with battle cries. But I’m done fighting so I’ll stay, Press for more I’ll shrug, “okay.” X marks the spot.

You’ve brought me here to dig my plot. The soil warm, the grass so green, Smells like summer in my dreams. But the ground falls out from under me, And I am falling,
I can’t see,
So I retreat internally.
X marks the spot.

The prison that we call a womb, Has always been the woman’s tomb. Surrogate creator,
Carnal incubator,
Steps out of line and loses favor. X marks the spot.
THE SHOOTER

Harsh words cut.
Wounds run deep
Like third degree burns.
So he tosses, turns
But
Still can’t sleep.
He lies awake
Suffering, sore
Knowing sticks and stones
Do break bones
And words? They break
So much more.

His soul implodes,
‘Can’t take no more.’
Fighting to save face,
He finds peace there (alone in the crawl space).
Where he locks, loads.
And settles the score.
Someday I'll Love Kareena Rudra (After Ocean Vuong) by Kareena Rudra ’20

let time pass through you
like birds through the sky.
i know it is only a construct
but let it construct you.
things were put into place
all for a reason.
you are put into place
all for a reason.
let seconds be the base,
minutes be the bricks,
and hours be the glue.
let the structure be you.
i know how hard it is to forgive
when your body wants to forget.
these moments may make you,
but they do not define you.
you grow as time moves
remember that it is not your fault.
do not blame yourself
for what others take from you.
your body is your home.
do not think, even for a second,
that they deserved to steal your bones.
use these days like glue.
built yourself back up.
just because you are dust
does not mean you cannot
become whole once again.
give yourself all the time in the world.
i’d give you eternity; you deserve forever.
let this time flow through your bones
as water through a stream.
and someday, you will grow to love them.
maybe not today,
but someday.
someday i’ll love Kareena Rudra.
POEM 7

Picnic with you at peacock park by Kareena Rudra ’20

picnic with you at peacock park

the sky peeks through the trees,
an unfinished painting.
you, a centerpiece.
your poinciana arms keep me grounded.
in full bloom,
you are red;
warm, glowing, passionate.
you teach me things i do not know
i was missing from myself.
out of season, you wait for flowers,
but you stay beautiful.
you let me bloom in my own time.
you don’t rush me,
but you do help me.
the picnic blanket keeps us afloat.
somewhere the sky stitches itself to the trees.
a storm is coming.
my unleashed trauma rages east.
it rains, and rains.
droplets make their way to our haven.
they fall in between the seams.
you teach me
how to catch droplets with my tongue.
let rain fall around me,
let the droplets hit me
without becoming soaked.
trauma affects me,
it hits me and it hurts me.
but it does not define me.
it does not consume me and take over.
i can consume it.
take the power back from my oppressor.
the storm passes,
but you stay.
your roots keep grounded next to me.
you lay on the blanket
and we stay afloat,
keeping me safe.
somehow,
the painting becomes a little clear now.
it’s meant to be unfinished.
our story together has only just begun.
POEM 8
By Ted Seward ’61
He has left us now
He cultivated our minds
We exalt Dan Bowden

POEM 9
Mr. Bowden by Pam Kelly ’88

Mr. Bowden
You are my old friend, now gone
But I see you daily

You oversee our lives from a place in our home
with lively discussion and laughs

You are perched on our kitchen bookshelf
watching as meals are prepared and people come and go

Though others may not notice
I know you are there
POEM 10
Snowflake by Sarah Nims-Seaman ’70

snowflake
-startled into being
from a tumultuous union
of cold, ice crystals and water vapor,
   born in the deep recesses
   of whirling, heavy cloud,
it came in the depth of frigid night,
unseen, unseeing, no light to guide it down,
gravity coaxing,
fierce, katabatic wind propelling it
to the dark, frozen ground.
It landed in the blackness,
magically perfect in hexagonal, crystalline beauty,
one amongst millions also pulled to winter-forest earth.
   And it lay,
spent from its perilous journey,
silent, waiting, still,
under a laden bow,
while all around was a swirling, drifting mass of cold dark forms
   until--
a crack of brilliant yellow,
a shimmering ribbon of awakening dawn appeared,
and what was unseen, un-seeable
began to emerge from the inky deep.
Absence of light became ascension of light:
   black then gray gave way
to auroral murmurs of pink, rose, purple and orange,
cast magically upon the unsuspecting forest.
   And then,
a molten mass of star rose up behind the lingering, spent clouds
and settled into a crystalline, cerulean sky,
and what was unseen, un-seeable
became white, startlingly white brilliance,
stunning to behold
in its pristine, perfect, glory.
The forest held its blanketed quiet
but for the sudden, subtle rustling of heavy branches
shifting to hold their wondrous white burden.
   And there,
amongst them all, against all odds,
it laid, ephemeral,
still perfect in shape, mesmerizing in beauty, miraculous in creation,
   until--
the second it was struck by a ray of the yellow-hot sun,
and was vanished
in a diamond-sparkle brilliant moment,
stunning in its ethereal transcendence,
vaporized to another realm,
back up from whence it came,
to await its re-creation.
Voice Mail Message from my High School Poetry Teacher, Saved by Joanna Rago ’76

VoicEMAIL Message from my High School Poetry Teacher, Saved
~March 2018

hearing your voice—
(praising the book of poems
my mother insisted I send)

it's unforgettable melody,
the hue of its Georgia roots
the poetry of your words—

reminds me:

to never end a sentence with a proposition,
ever to split an infinitive, and
the duties of privilege.

Saddle Shoes by Joanna Rago ’76

Saddle Shoes

The pastel pink, yellow and blue uniforms
required at our all-girls school,
we wore belted and hiked up;
our black and white saddle shoes
tried to keep us grounded.

From the banyan tree outside the cafeteria,
across the Bermuda grass field,
we could see a slice of Biscayne Bay,
its glimmer tempting us
to ditch Mr. Lester’s Geometry class.

We tried to stifle our giggling,
when his Mrs.
cautioned us in Biology class,

"The best form of birth control—
is the word, No."


Poem 13

Bloodroot by Yvette LeFebvre ’13

Bloodroot

She’s a child forever changed
The first time she sees
Red juice running down strange fruit,
Swinging in the breeze,
Warmlly dripping on cool earth
Underneath the trees.
The next day a flower's there,
Pretty as you please,
With a quiet, knowing air,
Giving her unease.

Anguish chokes and chills night air,
Next time she sees it.
A pretty girl, still so young,
Master’s new favorite,
Buries her newborn baby,
Stillbirth the bandit.
She can hear her muffled cries
While skies are starlit.
She looks to the Master's house,
Windows warmly lit,
Lounging with his wife and son,
Not caring one whit.
On the unmarked grave it sprouts,
An infant’s obit.
In her heart she carries doubts
She tries to omit.

His burning eyes follow her,
The feeling acute.
He drags her to the old shack,
A wolf in pursuit.
Her husband can’t protect her,
She’s the next tribute.
She looks back at his wet eyes,
Their fear absolute.
She wants to scream, call him out.
But, every time, her head bows,
Pain remaining mute.
His wife glares, darkened brow,
Calls her prostitute.

White petals stare back at her
Lining the steps to the shack,
Standing resolute,
Witness to what has been done,
Offering salute.
Their leaves shiver in the wind
As the owls hoot,
Murmur she can make it stop,
Demand restitute,
Softly whisper sharpened words,
Plans to execute.
She digs until she finds it,
The flower’s strange root.
Milks its thick juice, red as blood,
His drink to transmute.
Slips it in his favorite wine,
A deadly solute.
Takes her husband’s hand and runs
From that institute.
Come morning light they’ll be gone,
But the point’s not moot:
No one lives another day
Under that man’s boot.
As they flee, when she sees trees
Heavy with strange fruit,
She passes on, proclaims, decrees,
The name of Bloodroot.
POEM 14

I Carry by Yvette LeFebvre ‘13

I Carry

I’m just walking, talking to myself, as you do, 
Thinking of all that those before me have been through 
And how it all comes back, connects to me and you, 
Like a string that thrums and sings a rhythmic tattoo, 
Reaching and preaching, their lessons begging to imbue 
The hard-won wisdom, power, and virtue. 
It’s true, under the sun there’s nothing new, 
But that doesn’t detract from its inherent value. 
Over such truths, to gain is to review. 
I’ll carry their teachings with me without further ado, 
And in me, my soul breathes life in them anew.

I carry the genes and gifts my ancestors gave, 
I hold every dream, every hope of the slave. 
What, you thought they went with them to the grave? 
Ha! I follow the path they wondrously paved. 
Despite efforts to muzzle, I aim to misbehave, 
Their hunger for the better is what I still crave.

I carry on the legacy of the worlds women 
Who were bruised, burned, and drowned when they did not give in. 
Who worked to the bone to create their own deliverance, 
Who wrought needed change when met with indifference, 
Who walked for themselves because they were worth it, 
Who fought fierce as Furies when their lives were forfeit, 
Who taught the next generation to live with feeling, 
Who brought the world’s population into being.

I carry a crown of bouncing curls, 
Shining onyx, obsidian, cultured black pearls. 
More exquisite than gold chains, value that never wanes, 
Vibing like the Queen of Sheba with impressive train. 
Rich as Ethiopian blend, Nile lily soft, 
Make King Solomon wish he could pull this off. 
I heard heavy is the head that wears the crown, 
Sweat on creased brow, lips turned to a frown. 
No disrespect to Shakespeare, but not quite. 
It’s proof of my people’s might, my birthright, 
Not feather light, but bright, imparting insight.

I carry the wins of my mothers, sisters, brothers. 
I carry the sins of others who our light would smother, 
Those who watered crops with black blood, sweat, and tears, 
Those who fill our nights with terror and worst fears, 
Those who slaughter brown bodies with hot, lethal lead,
Those who say not to worry my pretty little head.
Those are the dark days and bone-chilling nights
When the only warmth offered is by gaslight.
When things get heavy, sometimes it’s a fight,
Leaves my shoulders aching, my muscles tight.
I don’t ask for much really, just equal respect.
Why is it so hard to take your boot off my neck?

I carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)
You always call me back before I fall apart,
Give me a hand to hold, a place to call my own,
Though I travel far you know I’ll be coming home.
You’re kinda moody, but rock steady when I need it,
When I exceed my limits, you know when to intercede it.
You remind me that this is nothing new,
And the pain that I carry, you are carrying too.
I carry my legacy with pride and honest honor,
I carry your heart with all the cherishing I can garner.
My compliment and counterpart,
I carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

For those who toiled all of our lives,
I am we,
A black ocean, leaping and wide.
I am she
Who stays, bearing in the tide.
I am me,
Who will continue to rise.
I rise.
We rise.
See?
he knows the drama
of stretched syllables, snipped
on consonants, cut into
an exquisite pause
—the moment pursed into
an assessment of you—
then his hands take flight
at the marvel of your fledgling
potential, and of his own
to set what you know
on end

how it is he knows your name
and forebears better
than you do, or the books
that you have read recently
full of labyrinths with Minotaurs
you fear to recognize
in the mirror?
he cares to read even your
dog-eared life from hook to
to denouement

he is not afraid
to be (or not to be)
the answer to your questions
the string that you wind
to safety, the flea in your ear
but he will be the one
who sang siren-like
the body of words you recall
half a century later.

alone, we might imagine
him posing, impossibly sure
yet heartbreakingly uncertain
of his own image
his gravitas, when alone . . .
but in his classroom
his soul was certain
the words he soaked up,
wallowed in, run his tongue over
til grown gold
moved as through mud roots
in the long hot tropical night
morphing by morning
into lotus blossoms
POEM 16

Haiku, for DLB
By Kit Pancoast Nagamura (Everglades ’77)

summer shadow play
banyan roots spreading beyond
the tree’s circumference