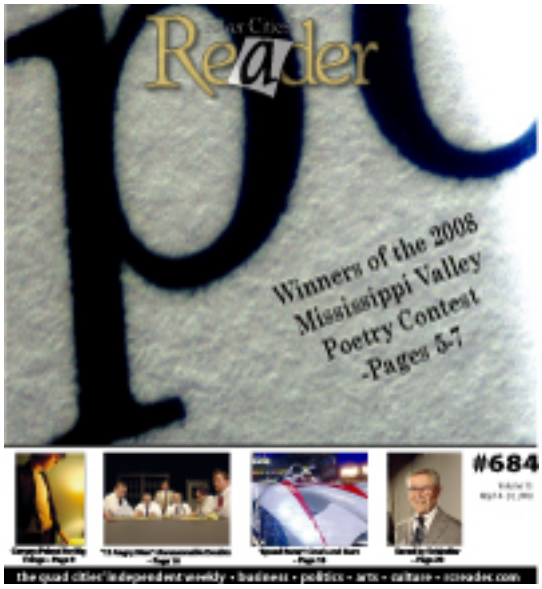


F*or the second year, the* River Cities' Reade*r is publishing winners from the Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest.*

*The awards ceremony for the 35th-annual contest will be held on on Saturday, May 17, at the Butterworth Center in Moline.*

**First Grand Prize:** Jean Slover Chellos of East Moline for "Timber Talk."

**Second Grand Prize:** Gayle Rein of Geneseo for "Survival."

**Adult General.** First Place: Pat King of Albia, Iowa, for "Curried Chicken with Friends"; Second Place: Julie Meylor Simpson of East Providence, Rhode Island, for "Memorial Day Morning in an Iowa Cemetery"; Third Place: Nedra Rogers of Lawrence, Kansas, for "I Buy the Dress."

**Grade School.** Winner: Rob Meyer of Rockbridge, Ohio, for "I Am from."

**Middle School.** Winner: Mary Reeves of Davenport for "Sunshine"; Honorable Mention: Mary Reeves of Davenport for "Night Road."

**High School.** Winner: Jeffrey Wellman of Silver Spring, Maryland, for "Night"; Honorable Mention: Christina Beasley of Vienna, Virginia, for "How to Care for Your Phoenix."

**Ethnic.** Winner: Daniel Gildersleeve of Rock Island for "Akinyi, Nyar Kadem"; Honorable Mention: E.P. Shultz of Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, for "Were You the Winter?"

**Humorous.** Winner: Lisa Michelle Atkinson of Kent, Connecticut, for "In Love Again"; Honorable Mention: Betsy Humphreys of Granite Falls, North Carolina, for "Island in the Sun."

**Rhyming.** Winner: Ginna Wilkerson of Tampa, Florida, for "Raining in Sedona"; Honorable Mention: Lisa Michelle Atkinson of Kent, Connecticut, for "Deadheading."

**Religious.** Winner: Sharon Wilhite of Eldridge for "Refreshment"; Honorable Mention: Mark Davidsaver of Bishop Hill.

**Senior Citizen.** Winner: William Perry of Rock Island for "Dime Store Music"; Honorable Mention: Brooks Carver of Canton, Illinois, for "Our Lives Are Measured in Good-byes."

**Haiku.** Winner: Elizabeth Matt Turner of Bettendorf; Honorable Mention: Cynda Strong of Springfield, Illinois.

**Mississippi Valley.** Winner: Michael E. Strosahl of Elwood, Indiana, for

"Mishigami"; Honorable Mention:  Jill B. Weissbrot of Moline for "In Autumn."

**Timber  Talk**

**by  Jean Slover Chellos**

The  timber is talking.

Crackling,

popping,

the  mighties and the mulls,

the  shags and the pines.

Cloaked  in ice and dusted with snow,

all tremble and shake, pushed by a winter wind.

Shaped of tall, tall bodies with arms twisting toward the sky, or,

fallen, ill-fated, lying distorted and criss-crossed on the ground,

the timber is a safe home.

Safe for the roosting and the hiding,

for climbers and crawlers.

In the cover of dusk grazers come out,

dropping out, plunging down, rising up,

the longbeards and the coons.

Into the open, from the fringe of their friend,

stepping,  pausing, then stepping again,

come the  toms and their hens, the bucks and the does.

Searching  after the same supper,

they  crack acorns and chestnuts to eat.

Pheasant  cocks and their mates crouch close

to  masking grasses or strong, stout stubble.

They  peck and scratch, barely causing a rustle.

Then the  hunters appear, revealed by the moon's light,

standing  in wait on a ridge.

The dogs  of the timber and flatlands drool

lusting  after their soon-to-be feast.

Here are the true hunters. Not men, but beasts.

A howling begins.

The timber is talking, carried howls in the wind.

The hunters are hunting.

Hooked teeth slashing and tearing;

a feasting begins.

Back in the center, in a still, quiet world,

an owl asks, *Who-o-o-o? Who-o-o-o?*

curious about those sipping at the spring

that bubbles out of the ground.

The timber's river runs under its ice,

with a few open spots giving drink

to light-weight moles and thoughtless mice.

The timber babies feel lonely, the adults gone to hunt.

The pups whine and yelp.

Piles of fur pulse and emit squeaks.

Frady cat babies, at first, just cry.

If no one comes soon, they'll snarl and growl.

By dawn,

the responsible have fed the inconsolable.

Some, who live in father timber, will bed down.

But others, like the woodpeckers,

tap for creatures who are stirred

by the warmth of mother sun.

Awake for the day, squirrels chatter in clicks

and play as they run.

Music floats all through the timber.

Cardinals' songs and screeches of jays,

cat birds in mimic

and calling crows, gathering their stray.

Just before sleep, before the sun glares into its eyes,

the owl inquires, *Who-o-o-o?*

*Who-o-o-o do I hear?*

It's the city all around; it, too, comes awake.

Talking motors make noise as do faulty brakes.

The timber calls out to the city where it lives

smack in the middle,

surviving because of its deep gullies,

where man found things unbuildable.

*Please leave me to stand,* the timber begs,

*though in years I may fall.*

*My river, I'll run, for you to enjoy.*

*City,  we can talk and share every day.*

*Please  listen when I speak, if I may.*

**Curried  Chicken with Friends**

**by  Pat King**

Invite  six friends who already know each other

and two  known only to you.

A  variety of faiths will enrich the mixture

even if  no one talks about religion.

Let each bless the food and the evening.

Light candles, one for each guest.

Stew the chicken with onion and celery until it falls off the bone.

The dark meat, the bits closest to the backbone, are best.

But getting at them requires patience, a delicate touch

and willingness to get your hands dirty.

Listening is important, even when Luke

who comes very early and stands in the kitchen choking back tears

while you chop onions, asks you six times

"Why did he leave me? Why couldn't we talk it over?"

Discard the stewed celery.

The curry needs only its invisible essence.

Guests will wonder about the flavor

and Joel will ask for seconds.

Slice and stir in fresh mushrooms

even if you do not like mushrooms alone.

Brush off the loose dirt first, but don't be too fastidious.

When you cut them, notice how white and delicate they are inside.

They will add texture to the curry.

Their flavor will blend with the others

and you will learn to love them.

Give some extras to Margo to take home for soup.

Serve with garnishes of chopped green onions,

whole cashews, curved like little moons,

flakes of coconut, and dark chutney.

The chutney may smell mysterious

but diversity is important to the success of the evening.

Each guest may help himself to as many garnishes as he wishes.

If Alison wants to bring the chutney, let her,

even though yours is better.

The most essential condiment is crystallized ginger,

to give the curry a sweet bite.

Josie and Michael may be nervous about controversy

but no matter how much ginger you chop

the ginger dish will always be empty

at the end of the evening.

And you, remembering laughter illuminated by candlelight

and even Luke's tears,

will always be filled.

**I Buy the Dress**

**by Nedra Rogers**

Because I love

aquamarine. I don't

need it, and I've never

spent so much

on a dress. A luxury.

That's what it is.

Because it's pastel,

perfect for a summer

wedding, should there

be one. That's not

true. I buy the dress

because I want

to look beautiful

for you.

Because I hear

a woman in the mirror

whisper *please*. Because

I want to slip

myself into a sea

of blue and green.

Aqua marina, salty

waves breaking against

my knees. Cold foamy

ocean I can't keep

from flowing through my toes.

I buy the dress

because I know

it's what I'll need

to wrap myself in as I watch

your mighty vodka

ocean swallow after

swallow win.

**I Am from**

**by Rob Meyer**

I am  from maple syrup,

From the  hills and the trees.

And from  the big pine tree.

I am  from the old dogwood in my backyard.

I'm  from sweets that melt in my mouth,

And from  the Fahrenholz.

I am  from the mash

potatoes  on the kitchen table.

From  hand-me-downs,

To  boom-boom and tiger.

I am  from my broken leg,

To my  father's heart surgery.

From my  grandparents who passed away.

Growing  each year,

Learning  new things,

I am  from the woods.

**Night**

**by Jeffrey Wellman**

At night came news of our departure,

We took our packs and then not much more.

To those who warned us in their grief,

We looked on them in disbelief

They shrunk our world with barbs and wire,

And yellow bands on our attire.

Then herded us in cars like cows,

Until we came to Birkenau.

Faster, faster lazy swine!

Loved ones split in separate lines.

And there before the fiery grave,

I lost my faith, I filled with rage.

They stole our names and shaved our heads,

We clung to life on crusts of bread.

And yet some hung onto their faith,

And chose to fast for God, to wait.

They hung a child, we watched and cried,

And turned to God and asked him why?

Forgotten were the dead among us,

We lived to serve our hungry stomachs.

They beat my father 'though he was old,

Then took my tooth to harvest gold.

We marched in fives, a bleak procession,

Those of us who passed selection.

A march to death on weary feet,

We left our dead in frozen heaps.

To their amusement, bread as feast,

Sons fought fathers beast on beast.

When last I law my father's face,

'Twas bludgeoned in his weakened state

I felt his weight, I felt the burden,

And in my heart I had deserted him.

When bombs at night brought liberation,

Too late for my divine salvation.

In my reflection I do not see,

The **hopeful** child I used to be.

We lost our faith, we lost our light,

Now all that's left is one long night.

**Akinyi, Nyar Kadem**

**by Daniel Gildersleeve**

You listen to the faces in a Kenyan field,

each one  a blank expression of earth

and you  smell the dirt, its fidelity

on the  skin, a sweat that clings to everything.

There  are days where you can taste the crop

of  empire rotting between your perfect teeth

and when  you cry at night alone

you are  crying from the centre of the world.

*Teacher,  now you know what it is to build with mud.*

Whatever you imagined, treading into Africa,

you will not leave unspoiled. Your white skin,

your hips, even your eyes will be bent by dust

and on a foul Chicago street you will recall -

not the sunset - but, the stampede of nature followed

by silence and the words that emerged, a mother-tongue

that nursed you in your early twenties.

You were  not dreaming - you could not sleep -

the  world came to you with all its dark hands

reaching.  They dragged you under to the place

where  living stops, then, mother to child,

gave you  the gift of sense again and every hand

carried  you, every head balanced

easily  your burden. It wasn't giving up, but learning

how to  carry everyone else's unwanted things.

**In Love Again**

**by Lisa Michelle Atkinson**

Your love drives me mad with emotion,

So you get all my devotion

Till Death do us part -

you'll live in my heart.

But, what did you put in that potion?

**Island in the Sun**

**by Betsy Humphreys**

"Do you ever miss the mainland?"

I ask the old islander,

and a tsunami of Nevers

drenches my wispy question.

He drowns my tide of Buts,

licks the ebbing salt of neap,

consumes the catch-of-every-day,

and pays  I'll Hop, his wet mistress,

to stock  the larder each month.

He  etceteras his assets -

fish,  beer, nails, books -

to  confirm the debits

of urban  honks,

endless  plains,

interstate  tangles,

legislative  dumps.

He ignores my parting wave,

my continental drift,

my insularity.

**Deadheading**

**by Lisa Michelle Atkinson**

Where we now dwell so

satisfied there is no hell

but fertile earth. We feed the soil

of paradise without turmoil and

strands of us wind up to creep at

night sometimes into your sleep.

Our hair: your grass, a tangled treat:

the tickling morass beneath your feet.

**Our Lives are Measured in Good-byes**

**by Brooks Carver**

Open your paint box again

Squeeze paint onto your pallet

Use  luminous primary colors

On a  large brush loaded

With  bright swirling brilliance

Just let  it flow freely

Don't  stay in the lines

Only you  will see the finished product

Only you  will know when it is final

Only you  understand when it is

Truly  good-bye

But it is still there on your canvas

Living in that personal place

Where good-byes dwell

Now tuck your new painting away

Into the personal scrapbook

Of private masterpieces

Carefully saved

**Untitled**

**by Elizabeth Matt Turner**

Backlit locust pod

Dangles from bare branch. Dark mate

Of white crescent moon.

**Mishigami**

**by Michael E. Strosahl**

Maybe

it was all a joke

when that Frenchman

named the great lake

after the Ouinpegouek,

misunderstanding the honor

bestowed upon them

by the Mesquakie,

who named them

people of the algae waters,

people of the river

and of the great lake.

Maybe

it was just arrogance

for that Frenchman

and the others that followed

to name and rename

what has always been,

what the great spirit himself

left beautiful and nameless.

Those French may call it

Lac des Puans -

lake of the stinking people -

and  laugh,

but we  Ojibwa

know  these waters

and we  know the land

of the  mishigami -

the  great water -

and  there is no joke.

**Untitled**

**by  Mark Davidsaver**

Sacred  music surrounds

Prisoner  and child

Dance  slowly

Listen,  learn

Sad  rhythm of the heart

**Refreshment**

**by  Sharon Wilhite**

Up on  the mountain

I hear the sighing of the wind,

The whisper of the pine needles,

Far from the sound of men.

My spirit stretches Heavenward,

My cup of joy is full,

My whole being revitalized,

No wish to return below.

But, God gently nudges me downward,

Down toward the noise of men.

"Lo, I  am with you always ... "

His  promise comes to me then.

Lord,  give me stability as this mountain,

The  gentle strength of the wind,

The  endurance of the pine trees,

And the  courage to descend.

**Survival**

**by  Gayle Rein**

Far from the highway

farmsteads,

trees

grafted onto the soil

for windbreaks,

silhouette small and scorched

against the dusk-red sky.

Wind scours

the April earth,

land so flat

the devil has nowhere to hide.

Generations

have scratched dirt and

coaxed seeds

with prayers, potlucks,

and fingers

crossed in pockets -

tight bargains

for sun

for rain,

for bounded rows

complete, contained, controlled.

Our heads

cowled,

bent in to the wind,

struggle to ignore the caws

from distant wooded ravines,

gnarled oaks rooted in

ancient leaf mold,

dionysian dance floors

toeing the edge of order,

circling

circling.

**Untitled**

**by  Cynda Strong**

Frosted  pumpkin fields

Crystallized  words in mid-air

October's  brisk breath

**In Autumn**

**by Jill B. Weissbrot**

I.

Across your upturned face I move.

I see your stalks bend toward the sun,

lean away from the wind,

golden in their death and shining,

less their corn,

before the men will come

and crush them for another harvest.

II.

Your fields are knit in patchwork,

slipping from the crotches of the forests and the stiffness of the roads.

Greens dim beneath the rising mists

barely white, ghostly in the day,

rising slowly with me, with my

slow heart, as I take all of you in,

cold and clammy still in morning, warming.

III.

Demure,  you cross your legs, arch forward your neck

beneath  your blanket and drink,

cool,  from your trough.

Shake  your white mane

flecked  with gray and

see me  not though you look up.

IV.

Your  trees are as knots,

rising up from their gray Earth.

Twisted, shocked, dead things -

follicles stretch above

the life that looms below -

the living, breathing, spreading roots that

pulsate in the Earth.

V.

Calves mild judiciously their cows,

lowing in a voice I do not hear.

We nurse at the swell of the road beneath us,

all the colors of the changing leaves feed us,

greedy as we roam.

We do not stop, and

you do not cry out.

**Memorial Day Morning in an Iowa Cemetery**

**by Julia Meylor Simpson**

Stray  scraps of gray wool weave

above  ancient humus, new grass.

Purple  irises in aluminum foil

guard  names on ordered marble.

Breeze  embraces earthworms,

lilacs,  a child's laughter shushes.

Old  farmers finger dull medals,

shattered  boy memories unvoiced.

A family  encircles a slight stone

leaving  them wordless long ago.

Minister's  wife assembles children

to place  plastic wreaths on cue.

Taps  from lone high school bugler

patter  off grain elevator on Main.

Later,  iron gates keen in rusty alto,

meadowlarks  resume their matins.

**Raining in Sedona**

**by Ginna Wilkerson**

Red earth uncleft is not defiled by touch

By sudden rain anointed, sanctified

With halting fingers parted, reddened blush

The smallest opening, smallest movement tried

Falling wet and trickling down my hand

The dust of waiting earth is moistened new

Enjoining passion, melting tight-closed land

Red-earth is cleft and glistening with dew

If holy tender rain becomes a storm

My hand, my touch, your body sorely bruised

And hot with hurt the crevice that was warm

Should love's soft earth become so roughly used

Only gentle rain the earth takes in

Only touching tender hand to skin

**Were You the Winter?**

**by E.P. Schultz**

As these gray days grow longer,

or, perhaps night's restive purpose shorter;

turned over and the bottoms up,

leaving me all out of sorts.

Winter's sleep lies to me with stealth,

whispering cold forbearance into bitten ears.

This pale mask prone to physical demise, and I

half asleep, weak-hip somnambulant -

congenital German dysplasia predisposed to therapy.

Thanks Gramps!

The piano closed to little boys'

life's purpose, "worn boots, torn gloves."

But I found a piano, and as well,

the will you gave me in the truth of spring;

when hard matter melts in the credulous sun

and pours through a stream of conviction, dreams ...

Were you the winter?

You with your hard truth that my soft britches

thought untrue.

Gray lands find me here,

looking back into gone-away hills,

thankful for you, and winter.

Thankful for finding out

that there are many truths, and no real lies,

only childish musings and things wished for.

You old German, old winter wind

bellowing to fill my languid sails,

come, come to me this night's shallow sleep

Tell me more, whisper again to this childish mind.

**Night Road**

**by Mary Reeves**

Falling down into the night road I see the snow.

Each individual flake flutters down from the sky.

The darkness does not consume such beauty.

Such glittering is defined.

You, I watch from behind the plastic and glass.

The liveliness of the snowy mass.

Cold air will carry you safely.

And ever most soundly.

Onto the night road.

**How to Care for Your Phoenix**

**by Christina Beasley**

You see, she is a painter. She draws her lines in thick black contour,

draws and redraws them with horsehair bending to fit the plane,

and tonight

she will ask you to let her break for a while.

She will ask for the feeling of joints against palms,

to snap limbs,

echoes of stalks breaking and petals tousled regressing

brushes  living branch and bough: she will place them at the wrist newly

formed;  smelling of pine sap.

Her eyes  will beg for sunlight

and her  respiration measures

one part  stardust, two parts carbon dioxide.

Do not  be surprised when each bramble catches, ignites,

it will  smell of bread burning in the oven and she

will  inevitably wake.

There is only the occasional rupture in her canvas, but you must sew quickly.

Too much oxygen to the fire, and the entire undergrowth will burn to ashes.

**Sunshine**

**by Mary Reeves**

Stepping out I saw the sun shining.

Like it did before.

Bright & blue ...

Like it was before.

Sadness compels me as I stare

Starting to cry,

Absorbing the air.

Stepping out the sun is refreshing.

Crisp & intense.

Bright like it was before.

Stepping out I become saddened.

Sad like before.

Overwhelmed with emotion I stay out.

Stay with the sunshine.

Until it must go.

And the brightness is gone.

For now I must stay.

Stay for the day.

Until the sunshine goes away.

I will stay & share.

Share the memories with the air.

Until then I'm with you.

You, sunshine.

**Dime Store Music**

**by William Perry**

I see it even now,

This bazaar of many-faceted artifacts.

Think of a glossy Xanadu with wax

Apples, punk and penny pencils -

Something for everyone in that well -

Preserved Howdy Doody Generation swell.

Dime stores kept our nation intact

And our houses from crumbling, and

Some said, an Empire of hum drum necessities

When Anne of Green Gables type girls

And two to a counter at $17 a week

Smiled pretty for the rush of hoi polloi.

Red silk stockings and green perfume,

Oil cloth and plaster saints where Sentinels

Of swat floorwalkers shepherded swarms

Through piano music hawking syrupy pops.

But Hey, a thin dime was passport when

"I Met a Million Dollar Baby in the 5 and

10 Store" where dreams were smaller - Wow,

rubber half soles and 2500 hardware items

Easy on as multitudes advanced like armies

Crazy over hat pins, gold fish and the

Photo  booth producing grinning Kewpie dolls

Anticipating  forever and a day.

But now  dime stores are defunct,

Gone  with the curving wind of change,

And with  them their cargo of precious

Junk:  tie pins, incense and fat jelly beans

With two  girls to a counter at $17 a week

Smiling  pretty for the masses,

Their  heads happy as a May morning

And just  for the heck of it.