

# Balloons



BALLOONS Lit. Journal

Issue  
Ten

Oct 2019

Annie Ma • Daniel Miller • Geary Smith • Jennifer Ann Richter • John Grey •  
Juan Mendoza • Mikaela Wallet • Julia Aloï • Kathy Good • Lauren McBride • Lee Ho-  
cheung • Liam Martin • Linda Kohler • Mindy Wulff • Padmini Krishnan • Patrick Garrido •  
Phil Huffy • Soramimi Hanarejima • Sue Gagliardi • Susan Yoon • Tyler Shustarich



**“A professional writer is an amateur who didn’t quit.”**

**– *Richard Bach***

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**BALLOONS Lit. Journal (BLJ)** is an independent biannual online literary journal of poetry, fiction and art primarily for school-aged readers from upper elementary school years onwards. BLJ sees it an important mission to bring the art of literature, and the creation of it, to our younger generation. The journal is freely accessible to all electronically. BLJ welcomes submissions from people anywhere in the world and in all walks of life. We love something that is fresh, surprising, unforgettable, extraordinary, mind-blowing, humorous, bold, unique, layered, witty, educational, original...etc. In short, we want something exceptionally good. For the most updated information about the journal, please visit the website of BLJ:

**[www.balloons-lit-journal.com](http://www.balloons-lit-journal.com)**

Submissions are welcome year-round. Writers are advised to read and follow the guidelines stated on the above website. Enquiries and submissions should be sent to:

**[editorblj@yahoo.com](mailto:editorblj@yahoo.com)**

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**Ho-cheung LEE (Peter), Ed.D.**

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\* Cover Art





## Words from Founding Editor

Besides literarily, it is certainly of personal importance that the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of **BALLOONS Lit. Journal** is produced during this period of time when the world seems to be infested by disturbed minds and reckless forces. I need to find inspirations to regroup myself. And I'm glad I did find some excellent materials as displayed here.

Issue 10 of BLJ touches a few important themes. It rediscovers the beauty and significance of seemingly trivial things like the flowing of a brook, reflections on a pond, pieces of cloud, a sweet dream of a child, a bird swallowing a fish, and a night without stars. It also explores the many what-ifs such as a girl becoming a rat, a child turning into a tree, a school teaching you to forget, and a dazzling galactic collision. Furthermore, some works here deal subtly with the depths of ethnicity like the portraying the struggles of a new immigrant and revisiting one's own culture. All these offer a spectrum of perspectives through which we look at the world we live in. This balloon ride is surely more than having a clearer view, more than feeling humble – it is a strong indication to me that arts is healing and indispensable.

I am especially grateful to the Braille Institute of America for sending over five pieces of brilliant artwork crafted by artists with visual impairment which I wouldn't have noticed had I not been informed. Their stunning representations of the natural scenery are simply mind-blowing. To go with the cyan tone of this issue, perfectly set by the cover art, I couldn't help but share with you one of my photos taken at the beautiful Manly Beach (Australia) towards the end the book. Cyan is an extraordinary hybrid colour – green and blue signify harmony, nature and peace. It is magically comforting.

While this issue may be the lightest of the ten, its importance is certainly no less than any of the previous ones – these 40 pages will tour you around the oceans of vibrant imagination and give you a new lens to understand yourself and beyond. 40 is a good number too perhaps. It is a number for new opportunities, for new hopes. Happy reading my friends.

Dr Lee Ho-cheung  
Founding Editor, BLJ





## Foreword for BLJ Issue 10

**T**“Ten” is a very auspicious number. In Chinese we say: “shíquán shíměi” (Completeness and Beauty). I have been very privileged to witness the birth of BALLOONS Lit. Journal up to this present 10<sup>th</sup> Issue.

In this issue, as in the previous nine, we have before us a full smorgasbord of beautiful pieces of poetry, fiction, art and photography laid out before us.

The poems tend to touch on all the senses. We are led to feel the “ripples at... fingertips”, that “cushion bones” as “trees grow downward” and “dreams dance a dance”, “like a feather in the sky”, where “a sliver of light on the water” can be “continued exploring”, or a “spear-beak pointed to the sky”, turns into “a rainbow... on a muddy puddle”, and also savour “fruits... from every branch”.

The fiction too, covers a wide spectrum of experiences. We share the unique but moving experience of a timid immigrant student when he exhibits his home-made musical instrument in class and ends in triumph as he teaches them a song from his home country. We turn into little mice and explore the world through their angle. Appearances can be deceptive and a rather run-down restaurant serves the most authentic and genuine home cooking, or go through the quizzical and yet so immediate class time sessions of forgetting.

The photograph of the beach speaks volumes to the viewer, who can vicariously enjoy the sun, the sand, the sea and the close father-son relationship.

And by coincidence, the cover of this 10<sup>th</sup> Issue is a tree. In Chinese there is another saying: “shínián shù mù, bǎinián shù rén” (It takes ten years to raise a tree, and one hundred years to raise a man.)

Let Issue 10 be the fore-runner of another ten-fold issues to come.

Simon Tham  
Advisory Editor, BLJ

**Simon Tham** was an English Literature teacher at secondary school level and headed several sections of the Education Bureau of Hong Kong before his retirement. Currently, Tham works as an English Language Consultant as well as an adjudicator for speech and drama contests.



# John Grey

## The Brook's Role in All of This...

The brook's cold water  
is a sign that  
it's always winter somewhere,  
like high in the mountains,  
where the melt lasts long enough  
for new snow clouds to move in.

The brook  
scrapes stones white,  
pokes at, digs into,  
its boundaries,  
hollows out the earth beneath,  
rolls new-born stones like dice.

The brook is always here,  
always on its way somewhere,  
ripples at my fingertips,  
and other hands down south.





## Winter Boy



The child in me thrills  
to the first snowflakes

I still wander fields and roads,  
leave my footprints in the white.

Away from wind,  
stillness is held together  
by temperature tension  
and still-warm blood  
that cushions bones.

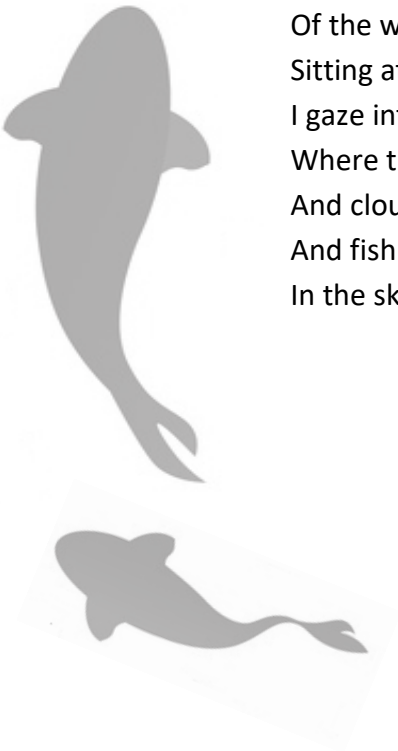


**Sue Gagliardi** writes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for children. Her books include *Fairies*, *Get Outside in Winter* and *Get Outside in Spring*. Her work appears in children's magazines including *Highlights Hello*, *Highlights High Five*, *Ladybug* and *Spider*. She is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She teaches third grade and lives in Hatboro, Pennsylvania with her husband and son.  
[[www.suegagliardi.com](http://www.suegagliardi.com)]

## Secret World



Morning sunlight  
Reflecting on the pond  
Reveals the secrets  
Of the watery world below  
Sitting at water's edge  
I gaze into this secret world  
Where trees grow downward  
And clouds drift beneath my feet  
And fish swim  
In the sky



# Sue Gagliardi

Poet



**Patrick Garrido** is involved with painting and mosaic at the Braille Institute of America. He is a true Renaissance man who also takes Taekwondo and music classes.

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## Crashing Waves



Acrylic, sand, seashells and mixed media on canvas panel, 9 x 12 inches, 2019

# Patrick Garrido

*Artist*



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Author

**Daniel Miller**

# A Familiar Song

David liked lunch time best. The food was weird and too sweet, but it was reliable. A carton of milk, fruit, and some meat or cheese and bread invention every day, five days a week. He sat in the big cafeteria by himself. Well, other kids sat beside and around him, but he might as well be sitting alone. He could not understand their conversations. Sounds and social rituals arranged in ways that made no sense to him. And so loud. Some kids tried to include him in their talk. A trade usually. My milk for your chips. Your apple for my mashed potatoes. David smiled and tried to please. He smiled even when he did not understand the trade and lost a bunch of grapes, his favorite, for a bowl of soggy green beans. David could easily tune it all out. He could transform the jumble of strange vowels and consonants into white noise like background static from a radio, while he hummed a familiar song from home. He envied the other kids. They told each other stories with big expressions and laughter. David had

stories too. He wanted to tell them of the big tree he and his older sister used to climb. Its trunk was as big around as a car and the leaves so wide they made terrific hats when the rain fell unexpectedly. He pictured and counted in his mind all the foods and plants and animals and insects from home. Then he remembered the soldiers and their guns and the fires and running. David looked at the happy kids around him and he wanted to tell them that even this strange food and the school's scrawny, thin leafed trees were better than the tent camp his family had lived in for the past year. He wanted to tell them that David was not his real name, just another foreign sound his father had given him in hopes of making him seem less foreign in this new country.

At least during lunch no one expected much of David, other than a bowl of sweet grapes or his chocolate milk. In class he had even less to offer. His teachers gave him papers full of words that felt sharp and hollow. Though he recognized



a few and was learning more every day, David found it impossible to put together this puzzle with so many missing pieces. Some of his teachers, like Ms King, sat near him and pointed to words and pictures. She smiled and encouraged him to repeat the sounds. Other teachers simply spoke at David louder and louder as if an unfamiliar word said more loudly made it any more familiar.

Recess and gym reminded David of home the most, before the soldiers and the tent camp, and for this reason they were also was the most painful times in David's day. He loved to run and play ball. He was strong and had always been team leader back home. Now he was often picked last. He was faster than many of his classmates, but he did not understand their games. Just when he thought he had it, a rule would change or disappear, or some new rule would pop up unexpectedly. Still he tried to play their games, tried to fit in.

In music class one afternoon, David sang with the other kids to a song their teacher had recently taught them. David could match the tune and words even if he didn't know every meaning. When the song ended, the teacher left her piano to retrieve a small cardboard box from the closet. Students pressed forward to see what prizes she had brought them for a job well done. She pulled out an empty can and soda bottle, three different sized rubber bands, toilet paper rolls, and several other pieces of trash. David's classmates expressed groans of displeasure and disgust that needed no translation. While the teacher gave instructions, she carefully poked holes into the bottle with scissors. She blew over the open top while fingering the holes as if it were a musical instrument. Combining the can and rubber bands, she plucked out a simple tune. She motioned for them to do likewise. This was their assignment, David inferred, to create music out of something no one thought could sing.

Most of the kids reacted with up turned noses or hesitant laughter. But David just smiled. He knew exactly what he would create. After school he raced home to cobble together supplies. For an entire week he was consumed with his project. He cut a wide oval from the side of a two-liter soda bottle. He wrapped the bottle in three layers of plastic wrap and poked four small holes in the part that covered the oval. To the bottle's mouth, David attached a curved neck of cardboard he had cut from a pizza box. When he tied strings from the neck to the base of the bottle, the cardboard bent and the strings went slack. David's father wanted him to build a more American instrument instead of this saung harp from their homeland, but David was confident. He cut in half the rim of a broken bicycle wheel and strung several tight strings from it. With thick markers he colored the whole instrument black and gold.

At school the kids enjoyed sharing their homemade drums and flutes and guitars. When it came time for David to share, he plucked and sang a song from home. The music room was silent. Oh no, David thought, no one had understood his song. His face grew red and he thought he might cry until he heard soft clapping, now louder, now cheers. Kids gathered around him to admire his harp. Some motioned to take a turn plucking it. Others gave him their own sad instruments to mend or improve. David smiled and they smiled back and he taught them his song.

**Daniel Miller** is a Texas-based writer and teacher. He holds degrees from the University of Edinburgh and Duke University. His short fiction and nonfiction have appeared in literary journals such as *Alfie Dog Fiction*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Cleaver*, *Entropy*, *Gulf Stream*, *Short Story Sunday*, and *The Tishman Review*. [www.drdanielmiller.com](http://www.drdanielmiller.com)

## Our Sky Full of Light

Ancient astronomers predicted this plight –  
our closest galaxy destined to collide.  
Our fears now allayed by this breathtaking sight:  
radiant stars swirling by, filling the sky  
beautifying day and glorifying night.

# Lauren McBride

*Poet*

**Lauren McBride** finds inspiration in faith, family, nature, science, and membership in the Science Fiction & Fantasy Poetry Association (SFPA). Nominated for the Best of the Net, Rhysling, and Dwarf Stars Awards, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in dozens of publications including *Asimov's*, *Songs of Eretz*, and *The Caterpillar*. She enjoys swimming, gardening, baking, reading, writing, and knitting scarves for troops.

**Linda Kohler** is a South Australian poet who likes living near water. Her poems are published in *The School Magazine*, the *Wakefield Press* anthology, *'Tadpoles in the Torrens'*, *Pink Cover Zine*, *InDaily*, *Pure Slush*, and others. Linda has worked as a teacher, television scriptwriter, proofreader, and barista. Now, among other things, she is a homeschooling mum.

## Starless Night

Why do the stars not shine tonight?  
Why have they left their lights behind?

Here is such a grandeur place,  
why wouldn't the stars illuminate?

Outside my window, trees hold hands,  
leaves dream a dream; dreams dance a dance,

beyond my street, city lights  
do their best to twinkle bright,

beyond my state, a sandstone rock  
holds tiny shrimp safe in its monolith top,

tendrils of an ancient song  
gather wisdoms, soft and strong.

Outside my continent, little boats  
fill to reach this hopeful home,

if only the stars would connect the dots,  
so those brave boats would not be lost.

Poet

# Linda Kohler





# Juan Mendoza

## Beach Sunset



Acrylic, sand, seashells and mixed media on canvas panel, 9 x 12 inches, 2019

### Artist

**Juan Mendoza** is passionate about making art at the Braille Institute of America, and he's involved in mosaic and painting classes. Juan likes to draw with textured Wikki Stix that help him feel the lines he places on his canvas.

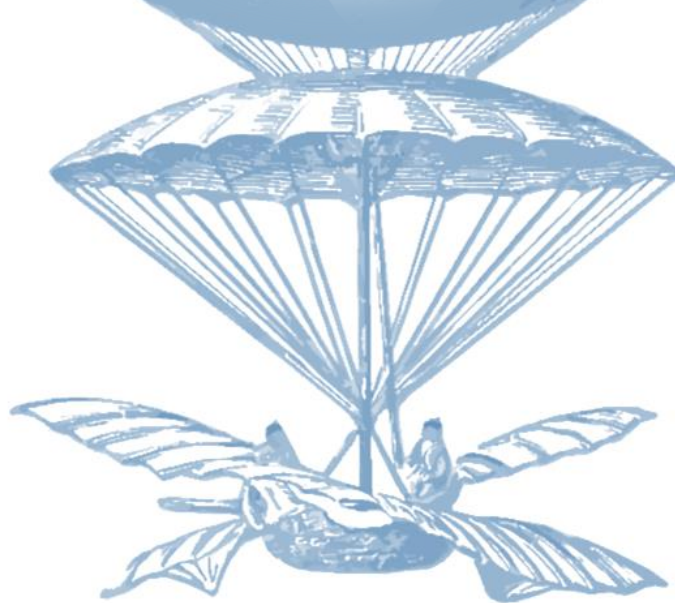


**Liam Martin** is a writer from Nottinghamshire in the United Kingdom and he has a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Derby.

*Poet*

## Balloon Ride

Today we went on a hot-air balloon ride,  
We floated like a feather in the sky.  
High above the cities and the towns,  
Past mountain ranges and over millions of trees.  
It all just seemed to blur beneath me,  
Like a watercolour of browns, yellows, and greens.  
Normally the world seems big,  
But from up there everything seemed so small,  
And it made me realise just how much,  
I had yet to explore.



# Liam Martin



**Julia Aloï** is a writer based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is an editor for *BatCat Press*, where she also practices a variety of bookbinding techniques. She serves as the managing editor of the award-winning literary magazine, *Pulp*.

## Cotton Candy

wisps of clouds –  
pale pink,  
grace the oceanic skyline  
like angry tufts of cotton candy  
the herons sing (silently),  
the breeze rushes and speaks  
in tongues galore.  
the clouds part ways,  
distant lovers once more,  
replaced by a foreign thing,  
a bold thing.

the trees thrash around and around,  
infinite madness;  
the breeze now roars  
like that of a tortured metal carcass  
and the eye of god  
screams;  
shoving blunt needles  
into the  
muddy earth  
in hopes of restoring  
the cotton candy clouds

# Julia Aloï

Poet



## A Goodnight Dream

Before bedtime, and I go to sleep  
And crickets outside singing a tune.  
The nightmare of crawling creatures creep  
Beneath the watchful eye of the moon.

At night our school is still and dark  
And the night stars began to arrive.  
And old oak trees in the park  
Seem to come alive.

At night my big brother began to snore  
And baby sister will roll over and cry  
As shadows slide across the ceiling and floor  
And witches flying by.

At night I hear the floorboards creak  
And dogs bark, and cat's meow.  
I put my pillow over my head and press my cheek  
And the fan blows cool air over my brow.

I think about my dreams of the distant past  
And plans for the new day  
Until I fall asleep at last  
And dream the night away.

Poet

# Geary Smith

**Geary Smith** has been writing for children for over 31 years with published stories, quizzes and poems for such magazines as *Highlights for Children*, *Child Life* and *McGraw-Hill*.



# Kathy Good

## Seaside Seats



Acrylic, sand, and mixed media on canvas panel, 9 x 12 inches, 2019

### Artist

**Kathy Good** takes ceramics, mosaic and painting classes at the Braille Institute of America. She's an especially avid painter and challenges herself to create textured landscapes, collages and portraits.





## At the Water's Edge

Two poets sat watching the sun set  
from the deck of a seaside hotel.  
The first was inclined to great sadness  
as it sank away into the swell.

The second was more optimistic  
and saw what her colleague had missed:  
a sliver of light on the water  
against all odds prone to resist.



*Poet*

# Phil Huffy

**Phil Huffy** writes all manner of short poetry, often at his kitchen table in Western New York. Dozens of his poems have been published, including placements in *The Lyric*, *Eunoia*, *Bindweed*, *Hedge Apple* and *Light Poetry Magazine*.

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## Editorial Advice

While I wrote came a spider,  
wending its way  
across my words so fair.

She stopped at an adjective  
as if to say  
it was not needed there.

It continued exploring,  
circling verse three  
set forth a bit below.

I pondered those words and could  
only agree —  
they really had to go.



---

# Phil Huffy

**Padmini Krishnan** is a Web Copywriter. Her short stories for children have been published in *My Light Magazine*, *Short Kid Stories*, and *Children's Stories*. Her haiku and haibun have appeared in *Shamrock*, *The Neverending Story*, *Cattails*, *Chrysanthemum*, *New Wales Journal*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Wild Plum*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, and *Haibun Today*. She lives in Singapore with her family.

# The Rat-girl

## Padmini Krishnan

*Author*



**L**ennie stared at the torn papers of her mom's glossy women's magazine. The rat was at work again. In fact, Lennie's parents had tried everything to drive the rats away. The rat trap did not work. They had bought a huge cat and even named him, Tiger'. But, Tiger was tame and docile. One night, Lennie's parents heard loud noises from the living room. The rats scurried away when Lennie's mom turned the lights on. Tiger crouched under the bed, looking ruffled and petrified. From then, Tiger would sleep only in Lennie's bedroom.

The rats had a free run of Lennie's house, wreaking destruction all around. They tore magazines, cut wires and even meddled with cylinder tubes. However, Lennie would get the naughty corner even if she scratched a paper, she thought bitterly. She would be shouted at if she ate cake in the midnight. I wish I were a rat, she thought. Lennie felt something moving beneath her legs. It was a dark tail. She was about to shout when the owner of the tail turned back to look at her. Wow! The rat has huge eyes, she thought. Rats never stayed



in a place this long and certainly not long enough for us to admire their eyes. The rat looked at Lennie in the face, absorbing all her thoughts.

Lennie stood rooted to her spot, mesmerized. She felt giddy and her legs disappeared. She found her 6-year-old body shrinking. Her body shrank until she turned into the size of a newborn. In fact, she looked smaller than a newborn. Her head shrank too. She acquired a long tail in the place of her legs. She looked at her creator, the head-rat, and scampered away with him into the hole in the corner of her study.

After an hour, Lennie's mother entered the study. Lennie's clothes lay on a heap in the floor. But, where was Lennie? She was not in the shower or any of the other rooms. Had she gone to the play area? Her parents searched everywhere, calling her friends and even her teachers and principal. But, no one had a clue. The following day, they lodged a complaint with the police.

Meanwhile, Lennie traveled in a dark hole with fellow rats, reaching a dirty floor. There were baby rats, cockroaches and even some men sitting on the floor. Lennie and the other rats rolled in the floor, looked for hidden passages, chased each other and even climbed on the men. But, the men did not seem to care. When it was darker than ever, they slipped again into the hole on the floor. Lennie thought that she was going to her study. But, all 4 of them slipped into the kitchen of a huge penthouse. Lennie's rat instincts were stronger than ever. She looked alertly around while entering a bright, chilly room. Her friends were beside her. It was not a room, but a fridge, she realized. Somebody

had left it open. The other rats rampaged the contents of the fridge. Lennie took a small bite of a cake. She could not eat more than a bite, she realized with disappointment. Did rats eat so little? She licked other items in the fridge, guiltily. You see, though Lennie had the instincts of a rat, she still had the thought process of a human.

After this, the rats visited a couple of houses, poisoning everything on their way. They unnecessarily shredded many answer papers in a teacher's house. After a couple of days, Lennie found herself crawling into her house with her friends. They chased each other around the kitchen with frustration. There was no smell of food. Had mom not cooked that day, Lennie wondered. In the study, Lennie found herself crawling across a human. It was mom, Lennie realized with a shock. Why was mom seated on the floor, her head buried in her knees? She did not even seem to be aware of a rat crawling across her. Lennie sat on the floor, her small body still, her huge eyes staring at her mom. After a few minutes, mom raised her tear-soaked face. She looked thin and sad. She turned to the rat, surprised, and said, 'shoo', but there was no life in her voice. It was as if she had lost all interest in life. Lennie felt a deep pain in her heart. She wanted to sob out. But, rats neither sobbed nor produced tears. She felt anguished as she stared at her mother. Lennie squeaked weakly. Her mom looked sharply at her. Now, Lennie, the rat, looked nothing like Lennie, the human. Nor did it display Lennie's mannerisms. We don't know how Lennie's mom did it. But, she recognized Lennie.

"Lennie" she cried. Lennie squeaked happily and jumped onto her mother's

shoulders. Her mom's heart revolted between disgust and maternal love. But, maternal love won and she patted Lennie tenderly.

"Darling, what happened to you?"

Lennie squeaked softly, resisting the urge to lick her mother's shoulder.

Just then, Lennie heard the sharp squeak of the head-rat. She jumped down and scurried behind the other rats. Rats had a code of conduct and the leader's call had to be obeyed.

"Lennie! Lennie" her mother called weakly after that.

Lennie was filled with thoughts about the home she left behind as she crawled with the other rats.

The head-rat wanted to return to the open fridge in Lennie's neighborhood. So, when Lennie took a turn to go to her house, the head-rat squeaked. Lennie looked at him, pleadingly. The head-rat looked keenly at her but decided to follow her. Lennie slowly crawled to her kitchen, her sharp ears alert. Whoa! What was this? There were small plates all over the kitchen floor. Each plate contained small quantities of food. Mom must have placed these. The other rats helped themselves as Lennie crept into her study. She could hear her father and mother in conversation.

"You have gone mad." Her dad spoke in a low, angry voice.

"No. I am sure the rat was Lennie." Her mom said in a shaky voice.

"I will not stand here and listen to this nonsense. I hate coming to the house. If only I could stay overnight in the office."

Lennie turned away, pain raking her little body. She had not realized that her parents' lives centered on her. In her

absence, the house no longer seemed like home. It had turned into a dark place with empty rooms that contained two walking zombies. Lennie crawled in front of the head-rat. Was she going to be trapped in the rat's body forever? She was already tired of living a rat's life. How could she convey her thoughts to the head-rat? Lennie, the human, could not have put her feelings into words. Leave alone Lennie, the rat. The head-rat looked at her. It was the same look he had given her a week ago in the study.

All of a sudden, Lennie found herself growing in size. She looked on in delight as a pair of legs appeared below her body. Her head was steady and her curly hair was intact. In her hurry to dress, she did not notice the rats disappearing through the hole.

"Mom! Dad!" she called out, running to her parents' room. "Lennie!" they cried, rushing to hug her.

"Where had you been for the past week?" her dad asked, after a couple of minutes.

Lennie took him to the study and pointed towards the rat-hole. Her dad looked at the hole and the trail of food from the kitchen to her study. Then he turned towards Lennie and her mother. "What if..." he wondered. Then he shook his head. This was ridiculous. He was not going to believe in anything that was illogical. He was a pragmatic man. He would dwell on this later.

"Mom! Dad!" Lennie began in her 'adult' voice. "We should block that hole in the study. Immediately!"

## What I Missed

I've been watching this living statue  
for two whole minutes. A waiting game:  
I'm by the tree; he's at the edge of the  
pond holding a great big fish in his  
beak. The biggest fish I've ever seen a

Great Blue Heron attempt to eat.  
I shift against the bark — photo snapped  
and ready to move — but he challenges  
me to see this through. So I sigh, pocket  
the phone, drop my gaze to leaves at  
my feet. Then back to pond's edge,  
where Mr. Heron poses stock-still  
amid the bending reeds, a great big

lump in his snake-curved throat,  
spear-beak pointed to the sky.



*Poet*  
Jennifer Ann Richter —



## Turning

Today I need hope as real as the  
raindrops pelting my skin

Or the mud that just ruined  
my white canvas shoes

Or the zero I got on that  
pop math quiz.

So I turn the rain into  
golden rays warming  
my face

The splashing into  
chickadees laughing  
in a tree

And haven't I seen a rainbow  
swirling once on a muddy puddle?



**Jennifer Ann Richter** has worked as a foreign service officer, teacher, and investment representative before rediscovering her love of writing. She now writes and records audio description scripts for television. She has published short stories and poetry for adults and children and is currently querying a middle-grade novel set on the moon.



## Poisoned Hate

why do you hate me  
a lack of explanation  
you say my breath is stinky  
and that my ego  
is inflated

is it because  
i'm always cold  
or 'cause i  
constantly complain  
i can change those things  
i swear  
the suspense is  
driving me insane

is it because  
my nails are long  
and i scratched you  
long ago  
it was an accident  
i guess,  
one can only  
hope

is it because my thighs are  
big  
and i shouldn't  
be playing  
sports  
or because  
i'm bad at math  
and truly  
not that smart

is it because  
i gossiped about you  
although i don't  
remember when  
or is it very simply  
because  
of the colour  
of my

*skin*



Poet

# Mikaela Wallet

**Mikaela Wallet** is a 12-year-old girl living in the chilly outskirts of Ontario, Canada. She enjoys going to the gym with her friends, reading, playing volleyball and living life to its fullest. Her mom always told her to “enjoy the little things in life, because one day, she’d look back and realize they were big things.” She strives to live by that quote for as long as possible.



# Mindy Wulff

## Celebration of Monet



Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 12 inches, 2019

**Mindy Wulff** is a retired teacher and takes painting and ceramic courses at the Braille Institute of America. Her enthusiasm for art is clear to everyone she meets; she always dives right in to any new art project that comes her way.

*Artist*





# Qing Ping Guo



*Author*

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**Annie Ma**



I could tell by the faded posters plastered onto the heavily tinted windows that the restaurant I was walking to was one of those restaurants. Restaurants with dingy lighting, sticky chairs, and even stickier tables; restaurants with faded milk tea advertisements peeling from the walls. I could even predict my experience at such a place. I'd be greeted by the smell of dirty dish-water and a waiter with a heavy Beijing accent. He'd hand me some greasy menus undoubtedly made with Microsoft Word; I'd look at the gray pictures with their awkward English translations and order some questionable items. My meal would arrive drenched in oil on scratchy old chinaware, and I'd eat staring out past the grimy windows, thinking about anything but the food.

The girl I was with clearly wasn't thinking the same, however. She walked with a spring in her step, and her ponytail swung from one side to the other. The nearer we drew to the restaurant, the more she smiled, as if she was visiting an attraction she had waited for her entire life. Then again, maybe this strange excitement was just a part of who she was. My mom told me about her this morning: "Annie, my best friend from college is visiting from Iowa today. They have a daughter named Melody who is your age, and I know you are going to make great friends! She's very spirited and energetic, but not overly so. Very sweet. Take her to Qing Ping Guo for lunch. I know you haven't been there before, but trust me when I say that it's better than the others. You'll enjoy it, and so will she. Her mom told me she loves Chinese food!"

I rolled my eyes. It was almost hilarious that someone from Iowa who probably had only eaten at Panda Express was

claiming to like Chinese food. If Qing Ping Guo was any bit like the others, I knew Melody would take one look at it and regret her statement.

Melody had somewhat exceeded my expectations: she laughed too much and had not stopped smiling since I met her, but like my mom said, she was not too chatty or hyper. During our conversation, she gushed about her life, her friends, her school, and all of her classes, even the mundane ones like math and history.

My predictions about this restaurant were confirmed when I opened the door and breathed in the trademark dishwater smell. Melody, however, skipped past me and quipped, "Table for two, please!"

After we were seated into our sticky chairs and were given our Microsoft Word menus, Melody bombarded me with questions: "What should I order? Everything looks so good! I want to get the gong bao ji ding, but the suan la tang also sounds delicious! And then there's the classic yang zhou chao fan! Help me!"

My mom had made me promise not to carp about Chinese food to Melody, so I refrained from telling her the truth that she would likely be disappointed no matter what she ordered. "You should start out with the gong bao ji ding, just to be safe," I offered.

After an eternity, our food arrived. Melody had insisted on choosing for me, and I received a plate of tofu and vegetables covered in brown goop. I watched as Melody took her chopsticks and started in on her spicy chicken. She chewed and chew-ed. I looked down at my dish and was just about to take a tentative bite when I looked up again to see her eyes brimming with tears.

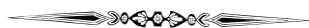
Startled, I instantly reached for a napkin. “Oh my gosh, are you okay? Is it too spicy?”

She sniffled. She was still smiling. “I’m fine,” she said quietly. “This . . . this is the best damn chicken I’ve ever tasted!”

It took me a moment to process what she was saying. Okay, I think, this girl is crying over a soggy piece of chicken.

“I know you think I’m crazy,” she laughed. “But the truth is, I’ve never had real Chinese food until today. My parents don’t cook, and these kinds of restaurants are non-existent in Iowa. It’s terrible! I’m Chinese, but I’ve never been able to taste the authentic food of my culture. This is phenomenal, isn’t it? What do you think?”

Her question caught me completely off guard. No one had ever asked for my opinion on Chinese food. Momentarily speechless, I looked away from Melody’s sparkling eyes and down at my tofu for the first time. Mapo dofu. I mixed the vegetables in with the tofu and took a mouthful. I chewed, and I chewed some more. Melody looked at me expectantly, but I kept on chewing. I closed my eyes. Finally, I swallowed. “Yeah. Yeah, I guess it is.”



**Annie Ma** is a 17-year-old high school senior at The Harker School in San Jose, where she is a co-editor-in-chief of the school’s literary magazine, *HELM*. She loves to make origami and has a thousand cranes hanging in her room.



# Practicing the Art of F<sup>o</sup>rgetting

*Author*

Soramimi Hanarejima



As soon as we're in the schoolyard for morning recess, we lose no time circling up, cross-legged on the grass, like we do every Tuesday before our class's time for forgetting, for freeing up space in our minds for new things — important things like long division and weather patterns. Starting with Diandra, we take turns showing each other what we've chosen to forget this week. Sticking to the plan I've come up with, I let everyone else go before me and make as many comments as I can.

I tell Diandra she's right that it's pointless to remember how bored she was at the car dealership on Saturday afternoon.

"I mean, look at how long that memory

is," I add, pointing to the sluggish scene glowing on the patch of clovered field in front of Diandra. "And it's pretty much all the same thing." Just her sitting in showroom models, looking at dashboards and out windshields.

A few minutes later, I tell Marzon, "I bet you are going to get these all approved right away. Just like Foirene and Cyania do."

His eyes become bright at the mention of these classmates who get full approval so easily, the catchy songs and cartoon episodes they've picked to forget always pleasing Ms. Perdont. We're getting there though. We've come a long way from bringing in whatever bad memories we have and now choose

memories that are bad for good reasons.

Last month, I overheard Marzon protesting, “But memories of the fight make me upset,” followed by Ms. Perdont saying, “That will make you think twice about fighting in the future.”

“I guess so,” was all he could manage to murmur.

But now Marzon’s five for the week seem *solid*. Two are of video games he’s been playing. These memories look very similar to us: hours of a glowing screen showing monsters and explosions in fantastical worlds, *minus* the final moments of each game — when he dropped his controller to the carpet, his almost-cramping hands shooting up into the air. He’s keeping those exhilarating minutes.

“For sure Ms. Perdont will like how you’re giving up a ton of video game violence,” I say.

This comment gets Quido to chime in.

“Yeah, and it’s cool that you’ll still have the best part of playing those games — *beating them*,” he says, impressed.

I grin at Quido’s words, at what they mean. Even though he’s been excused from forgetting time since his recent growth spurt gave him plenty more space in his mind, Quido still hangs out with us on Tuesday mornings because he still likes finding out what memories we’ve chosen and how we decided on them. And because of this, he’s helping me with my plan without knowing it.

Quido goes on, telling Marzon that he’s bound to feel better after forgetting his annoyance at his brother for eating that last brownie. Then in the middle of Lumina’s sharing, Quido says there is definitely no

need to remember her parents’ most recent argument because it’s “so petty” — easily using that word I don’t know but now feel I should.

Before Lumina gets to share her third memory, the bell rings. We head back inside to set up for forgetting time, and I feel a little bad that Lumina’s gotten interrupted. Mostly though I am relieved that recess is over before anyone could ask about my picks for this week.

When Ms. Perdont comes over to my desk to look at the memories I have laid out, I’m smiling expectantly. This lineup is my strongest yet. Taking a cue from Foirene and Cyania, I have the two game shows I watched when I was bored last night. Then there’s last week’s daydream of kissing Trina, totally random and *weird* — I’d rather a times table than this in my memory. Finishing things off, I’ve got a nightmare where I am struggling to restrain a man with big scissors (shears?) and morning recess last Friday when Wenderly gave us a lesson on using a swear word I don’t like the sound of.

But Ms. Perdont doesn’t immediately approve these, and my smile fades. She leans over my desk for a closer look at the bright, little scenes. I thought if there was a memory she’d take issue with, it would be the one with Wenderly because even though swearing can be bad, understanding how people express feelings can be good. Instead, it’s the daydream that Ms. Perdont peers at, as if searching it for something I haven’t found but she’s sure is there.

“Nice work overall,” she says. “This one though.”

She points to the memory she’s been scrutinizing, and my chest shakes as my heart flings up against my ribs.



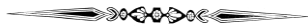
"What? Why would I need to remember that?" I blurt, surprising myself. Ms. Perdont's eyes widen for a moment.

"All right," she says. "Forget it then, if you feel strongly about it. But before you do, write about it in your journal. You don't have to show me what you write, but promise me you will write something."

"OK, I promise," I reply, really meaning it.

With that, she checks off everything on my record-keeping sheet but puts a star (asterisk?) next to "daydream about Trina." Instantly, I'm smiling again, not as widely as before but with pride now. I just got my first five out of five! Ms. Perdont smiles too, like we share a secret, and if we do, it's one I don't yet understand.

My gaze follows Ms. Perdont as she walks over to Diandra's desk, moving right past Quido's where he's reading a book. Instantly I'm again jealous that he doesn't have to go through this, but then I'm not so sure that I should be jealous. How would he forget something like my daydream — just ignore it until it fades away? Or get rid of it the way we're doing now but without any approval from a teacher? I'll have to ask him during lunchtime.



**Soramimi Hanarejima** is the author of *Visits to the Confabulatorium*, a fanciful story collection that Jack Cheng said, "captures moonlight in Ziploc bags." His recent work can be found in *The Best Asian Speculative Fiction 2018, Book XI* and *The Esthetic Apostle*.

# Autumn Leaves



Acrylic and puffy paint on canvas, 12 x 9 inches, 2019

## Susan Yoon

**Susan Yoon** has participated in the Braille Institute of America's painting, mosaic and ceramics classes. Prior to vision loss, she was involved in the fashion industry. She loves painting – especially with her fingers.

*Artist*





## Do Not Eat the Seeds

Grandma told me not  
To eat any fruit seeds.  
She told me that my tummy  
Would be filled up with fruit trees.

Well grandma doesn't fib  
And she surely doesn't jest.  
So, the markets where I went  
For my fruity, tummy test.

I bought ten pomegranates,  
Six apples, and a melon.  
Lychee, oranges, coconut,  
Whatever they were selling!

I ate them in my kitchen  
When grandma was asleep.  
Every core and every seed,  
I didn't make a peep.



I washed it down with water  
And a swig of sody-pop.  
Suddenly I hear a gasp,  
And a panicked, hearty, "STOP!"

Grandma had awoken  
And saw my fruity mess –  
The sweetest peels and juices  
From the floor up to my chest.

"See?" I grinned at her,  
"My stomach is just fine!  
I ate them whole, seeds and all,  
Straight down to the rind."

Well, suddenly my stomach  
Started to expand.  
It grew, and blew, and puffed up true,  
Until I couldn't stand.

My hair started to turn to leaves.  
My skin a scratchy bark.  
My legs were trunks, my arms a branch,  
As grandma watched in shock.

I grew up through the ceiling.  
Roots sprouted from my toes.  
A squirrel ran on my ear.  
There's a bird nest on my nose.

Fruits grew from every branch.  
You'd find them all with glee.  
The little boy who ate his seeds  
Is now a massive tree.

Grandma scolded me for days,  
But now she's rather pleased.  
'Cause every morning for her meal,  
She plucks it straight from ME.

Poet

# Tyler Shustarich

**Tyler Shustarich** is currently a Peace Corps Volunteer in Myanmar, serving as a secondary English Educator. He is a full-time volunteer and a part-time Mohinga cook (beautifully flavourful dish in Myanmar). He has a passion for poetry; reading and writing it in his free time, as well as educating children in any form that takes shape, like poetry.



Photographer

Lee H-cheung



# marine



**Dr Lee Ho-cheung** is the founding editor of *BALLOONS Lit. Journal*. His poetry, prose and artwork could be found in a range of journals. His photography was featured in *Rattle and Typehouse Literary Magazine* as cover art, and also published in *\*82 Review*, *Adirondack Review* and *Front Porch Review*. This picture, “Aquamarine”, was taken at the beautiful Manly Beach in Sydney, August 2019.





# Balloons

BALLOONS Lit. Journal

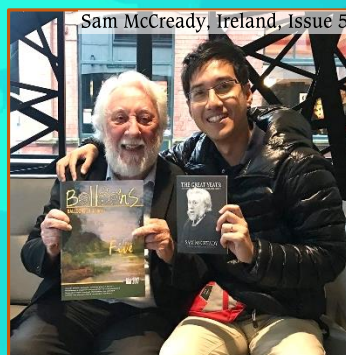
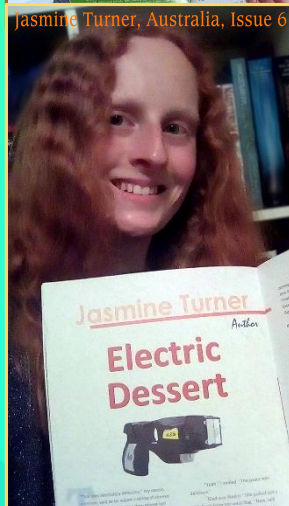


Jasmine Turner, Australia, Issue 6



Jenny Hu, USA, Issue 7

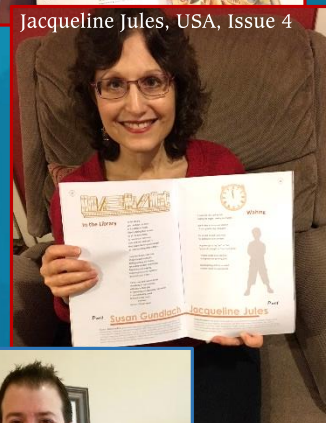
Celebrating



Sam McCready, Ireland, Issue 5



Celine Low, Singapore, Issue 6



Jacqueline Jules, USA, Issue 4

5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



Jesús Mérida, Spain, Issue 6



Susan Gundlach, USA, Issue 9



Seth Ruderman, USA, Issue 6

NOT FOR SALE

