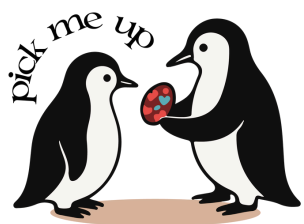


Jim Bellanca
Kat Bodrie
Sarah Browning
Karen DeGroot Carter
Luanne Castle
Deborrah Corr
Megan Diedericks
William Doreski
Margie Duncan
Mary Anne Griffiths
Tresha Faye Haefner
Jay Howard
Jacqueline Jules
Sarah Laskin
Kirk Lawson
Marjorie Maddox
Jess Simms
Meghan Sterling
Andrea Tillmanns



PAINTED
PEBBLE
LIT MAG



Issue 6 , Winter 2026

submission guidelines

Our submissions are open the full months of October,

January, April and July of each year.

- We welcome work on any subject, including and beyond works celebrating reading, libraries, and books.
- New and established writers are welcome. 18 years or older, please.
- Please find our full submission guidelines on our website.

PaintedPebbleLit.com

editor-in-chief SARAH ANN WINN

editor TWILA LIGITT

production manager JENNIFER SUTHERLAND

pdf design ALEXIS M. COLLAZO

web design ALANA TORREZ

community outreach NIKKI "DB" FRAGALA BARNES

readers ALEXIS M. COLLAZO

SARAH DEWEERDT

SHERRY EASTWOOD

EMILY PATTERSON

ALANA TORREZ

PAM WINTERS

Copyright (c) 2026 Painted Pebble Lit Mag

The creative work in this issue are works of fiction. Names, characters, places, events, and incidents are products of the authors' imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is entirely coincidental. The views expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect those of its editors or sponsors.

Cover image:

Photo by Ahmed on Unsplash

WPSU-FM Poetry Moment host, assistant editor of *Presence*, and Professor Emerita at CommonwealthU, **Marjorie Maddox** has published 17 poetry collections—most recently *Seeing Things & Small Earthly Space*--a story collection, 5 children's books, and the anthologies *Common Wealth* and *Keystone Poetry*. Her middle-grade biography, *A Man Named Branch*, is just out. www.marjoriemaddox.com

Rebecca D. Martin is a Virginia-based writer, museum docent, and educator whose work has appeared in *Isele*, *Susurrus*, *Dappled Things*, and *Asterales*, among others. She can be found at rebeccadmartin.substack.com, where she talks about books, nature, poetry, and being neurodivergent.

Bob McAfee lives with his wife near Boston. He has written nine books of poetry, mostly on Love, Aging, and the Natural World. 118 poems have been accepted by 46 different publications. He hosts a Wednesday night Zoom poetry workshop. His website, www.bobmcafee.com, contains links to all his published poems.

rm mist (she/her), queer Boomer, lives in Western North Carolina and has published three chapbooks, a full poetry collection, and a new trilogy of illustrated poems, *Composting Temples* (Wild Rising Press, 2025). Her poems have appeared in *Sacred Fire magazine*, *Friction*, *Sundress*, and in several local anthologies.

Susan Bucci Mockler's collection, *Covenant (With)*, was published by Kelsay Books in 2022. Other work has appeared in the *Mid-Atlantic Review*, *The Delmarva Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, and *Lunch Ticket*, among others. She teaches writing at Howard University.

Jess Simms is a co-founder of Scribble House and the managing editor of *After Happy Hour Review*. They are the author of *Cryptid Bits* (Last-Picked Books, 2024) and have published stories and essays in *Mythaxis*, *Orca*, *SLAB*, *Atlas Obscura*, *Rinky Dink Press*, and elsewhere. Find them online at <https://jesssimms.com>.

Meghan Sterling (she/her/hers) is a queer/bi writer and working mother living in Maine. Her poetry has been published in *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Rhino Poetry*, *Hunger Mountain*, and other journals. She became Poet Laureate of the city of Gardiner, Maine, in 2025. Read her work at meghansterling.com.

Andrea Tillmanns lives in Germany and works full-time as a university lecturer. She has been writing poetry, short stories, and novels in various genres for many years.

about us

Painted Pebble Lit Mag is a journal founded with the aim of publishing quality short form writing. Like “little” pockets of kindness which exist solely to help one another, we think small works can have a big impact. Our mission is to celebrate our wonderfully diverse world of writers and readers by reaching them wherever they are.

Each issue is published both online and as a PDF, each available for free. We hope readers like you will help bring our lit mag to any place someone might enjoy finding a bite sized read.

Share it with friends! Keep a copy for yourself! Pass it into the hands of a kindred spirit who might like it! Please visit our website if you'd like to download the free pdf to this issue to keep, print, or share.



Made to Share

Megan Diedricks writes poetry and fiction; everything from meek to macabre can be found in between the lines. The 2025 Rhysling Award Nominee is the author of *the darkest of times, the darkest of thoughts* (2022, self-published) and *The Coffin Chronicles* (2025, Island of Wak-Wak). Learn more: bit.ly/megandiedricks

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Matt Dube teaches creative writing and American lit at a small mid-Missouri university, and he reads queries sent to JackLeg Press.

Margie Duncan lives and hikes in NJ with her husband, Brian, and the ghosts of two dogs, while their two soon-to-be-elderly tuxedo cats mostly sleep at home. Her poems have appeared in various places online and in print.

Mary Anne Griffiths (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer living in Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada. She is presently working towards her debut collection of poetry and microfiction. Her work can be found in *Dark Winter Lit Mag*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, *Macrame Literary Journal*, *The Lothlorien*, and *Your Sudden Flash*.

Tresha Faye Haefner is the founder of the online writing community, The Poetry Salon, and author of *When the Moon Had Antlers* (Pine Row Press 2023). She is also the winner of the Robert and Adele Schiff Poetry Prize, Pangaea Prize, and other awards. Find her at thepoetrysalonstack.substack.com

Jay Howard is a teacher and poet living in Springfield, Missouri. His poems have appeared in *The New Territory*, *Frogpond*, *the Thieving Magpie*, and elsewhere.

Jacqueline Jules is the author of *Manna in the Morning* (Kelsay Books, 2021), *Itzhak Perlman's Broken String*, winner of the 2016 Helen Kay Chapbook Prize from Evening Street Press, and *Smoke at the Pentagon: Poems to Remember* (Bushel & Peck, 2023). Her poetry has appeared in over 100 publications.

Sarah Laskin (she/her) is a poet and creator-artist. Her work has appeared in *Painted Pebble Lit Mag* and was nominated for Best of the Net. She works in wildlife conservation and lives in Washington DC, with a fabulous dog.

Kirk Lawson lives in Ulster County, New York, and the Shawangunk Mountains. He enjoys poetry as a creative outlet to explore and enhance meaning in living. Publications: *Discretionary Love*, *Months to Years*, *Thorn and Bloom*, *Pulses*. Grateful to husband Jim and dog Leo for joining his journey.

contributors

Jim Bellanca began authoring poems 66 years after his careers as an English teacher and publisher. He favors celebrating the green world and the travails of old age. The *Ethereal Haunted Journal*, *Down in the Dirt*, *The Aerial Journal*, and *Witcraft* have accepted Jim's work.

Kat Bodrie is the founder and editor of Bramble Press and *bramble*, an online poetry lit mag. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry South*, *West Texas Literary Review*, *Poetry in Plain Sight*, and elsewhere. She frequently collaborates with George T. Wilkerson, who lives on death row. katbodrie.com

Sarah Browning is the author of *Call Me Yes* (FlowerSong Press, 2026), *Killing Summer*, and *Whiskey in the Garden of Eden*. Co-curator/co-host of *Wild Indigo Poetry*, she teaches with Writers in Progress and coaches writers. Co-founder and an early director of Split This Rock, she now lives in Philadelphia. www.sarahbrowning.net

A native of Syracuse, New York, and a graduate of Syracuse University, **Karen DeGroot Carter** (she/her) (@kdegrootcarter) lives in Denver. Her first novel, *One Sister's Song*, is in print with Pearl Street Publishing of Denver, and her fiction, poetry, and nonfiction have appeared in *BigCityLit*, *Interim*, *Publishers Weekly*, and elsewhere.

Luanne Castle's poetry and prose have appeared in *Copper Nickel*, *River Teeth*, *JMWW*, *Grist*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Verse Daily*, *Cleaver*, *Bending Genres*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, and many more. She has published four award-winning poetry collections. Her hybrid memoir-in-flash, *Scrap: Salvaging a Family*, will be published by ELJ Editions in spring 2026.

Deborah Corr is the author of *Naked Rib* (Finishing Line Press). Her poems have appeared or will appear in several journals including *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Booth*, *Catamaran*, *The McNeese Review*, and others. She received honorable mentions from both Connecticut River Review and the Streetlight Magazine 2024 contests.

Paola Jo Corso is an award-winning author of poetry and fiction books set in her native Pittsburgh, with more public stairways than any other city in the country. She features them in her poetry and photography book, *Vertical Bridges* as well as art exhibits.

contents

New Year's Eve	Andrea Tillmanns	4
On Becoming a Great Auk	Jess Simms	5
Sonnet for the Janus Bird	Meghan Sterling	6
Until I Met You I Was Merely Human	Margie Duncan	7
UFOs and Euphemisms	Megan Diedericks	8
Breakfast with the stars	Sarah Laskin	9
Making Apple Crisp on New Years Day	Deborah Corr	10
Let Them Eat Cake	Marjorie Maddox	12
For the Editor Who Called Grandmother Poems <i>Sentimental</i>	Sarah Browning	13
Dear Kitchen	Luanne Castle	14
Winter Cleaning	Jay Howard	15
Haiku	Karen DeGroot Carter	16
A Reminder	Tresha Faye Haefner	17
The Prescription	Jim Bellanca	18
sauna secret	Kirk Lawson	19
Pinecone Dolls	Margie Duncan	20
Moon Rocks	Mary Anne Griffiths	21
What Did Widows Do Before the Internet?	Jacqueline Jules	22
Where Do Trees Go after They Die?	Kat Bodrie	23
Snowy Morning before Cleveland	William Doeski	24
Flags in the Breeze	William Doeski	25

Andrea Tillmanns

New Year's Eve

At first, we only saw the exploding lights, as we do every year. But when they were supposed to go out, they refused, seeking a common shape instead.

Just as scales enveloped a fish and defined its shape, scaly lights shifted until they enveloped an air-filled body in the air and defined its shape. The fish of light floated on slowly, moving its fins of light and pushing off from the night, moving faster and faster until it disappeared behind the distant houses.

We didn't know where it swam to. But perhaps it would return to the place of its birth next year, when the lights lit up the sky again and hid the night for a moment.

William Doreski

Flag in the Breeze

Stiff in gray air, a flag accents a slab of industrial landscape. Dull windowless metal-sided warehouse capped with ventilators.

Who works in such a bland setting? I lasted two weeks in Hallmark Cards' facility in Enfield, sorting greetings for shipment,

unloading boxcars arriving from Kansas, where steam presses spewed thousands of glitzy cards for birthdays, graduations, griefs.

I couldn't take all that sentiment and quit to paint snowflakes orange at the state highway garage. Rushing past this warehouse with flag

proud on its stem, I remember orange paint in my hair, everywhere. Scrubbing myself for date nights nearly deprived me of my skin.

Still, I liked working outdoors. Just as I like traveling by train past these ordinary places that adroitly rhyme with my life.

William Doeski

Snowy Morning Near Cleveland

Seen from the train, the slur
of wooden houses muddled
with snow looks like disaster.

The snow-slur is on the window,
though, an ethereal avatar
that doesn't damage anything.

I'm glad. These square Ohio
houses look homey enough
to linger in the memory of those

reared here and gone away
to Chicago, LA, New York
where money flirts for real.

Maybe tired of urban glamor,
some will return. Maybe
by train, the familiar back yards

gaudy with snow, and the blur
on the window a teardrop
any old traveler might shed.

Jess Simms

On Becoming a Great Auk

You were king, once. Before strangers invaded, you ruled
benevolent, a giant in small lands, so secure in your
belonging, you lost the knowledge of flight. Once upon a
time, your bones were seen as holy, your feathers magic.
And they were, once. When you needed for nothing.
When you were free to swim and nest and thrive in your
secluded kingdom.

Meghan Sterling

Sonnet for the Janus Bird

In the dream, I was writing a poem for a two-headed bird. I only remember the last line—*the self, past and current*. Current as in the pull of the sea. Current as in the electric truth of who I have become. How much I have changed, wild bird. Even in dreams, I see pieces of my past drifting away, broken like the hulls of ships dashed on rocks that block the route forward. The only way through is through, they said. You will spend much of your life alone, they didn't. How much I have lost, strange bird. I am covered in sores, blisters where my flesh chafed at change, wounds where I strayed too far from the path. How much I have gained. I look in the mirror at my beaks, my helixed head. What I know now: The past creates a current. It drags you toward yourself.

Kat Bodrie

Where Do Trees Go After They Die?

I wake to hear a fresh *craack* outside, a thud. The house hasn't trembled but I don slippers and sweatshirt anyway, make sure we don't need to get flashlights ready. Beyond sideways sleet and rain, past the wooden light pole, a hemlock from the public park has fallen into the street. Tomorrow, a tobogganed man will chainsaw through the body, haul away limbs on his four-wheeler. But now sharp, splintery fingers point to snow-spewing heavens and all I can smell is Christmas.

Jacqueline Jules

What Did Widows Do Before the Internet?

Alone in the house, late at night,
the toilet flushes with a whistle,
followed by a squealing sound,
like tires skidding on black ice.

Is it urgent? Worth the extra price
of an after-hours plumber?

Alone in the house, late at night,
there is no one to ask except Google,
who thinks I can wait till morning.

What did widows do before the internet?

Without a 24-hour source to consult,
like warm arms inviting me back to bed.

Margie Duncan

Until I Met You I Was Merely Human

Turtle loves its shell, that weighty carapace
that makes anywhere on earth a home,

and shell loves its turtle, the promenade
through any thicket toward adventure.

You're my palankeen through brush and storm,
and I'm your speckled shelter from the beasts,

though there's an argument to be made
for the other way around.

Megan Diedricks

UFOs and Euphemisms

When the shooting star
is just an alien spacecraft,
be careful
what you wish for.

Mary Anne Griffiths

Moon Rocks

My mother is in the turquoise sewing room, trapped with
her hate of mending and thread, stitches, needles, and
scissors, all things that cut and bind. I walk in, crying and
crying, unable to remember why. But it's all upheaval, an
out-of-control thing I can't possibly rein in with my
littleness. She tears the cloth she has just sewn together
and is wringing it over and over, and the room is too blue
for me, and I can't breathe, and the room pales and
begins to fall away. She saves me by taking a murky bottle
out of the sewing box, holding it up in my face. Inside I
see a part of the moon, small white rocks with jagged
craters floating in brown-black bile, and she yells and
yells, shaking me with her other hand saying, *This is
what they have cut out of me, these are the rocks they
mined out of my gut. Look, look, look!*

I am floating back to earth, gravity tugging at my pant
legs, thinking if they had taken the moon out of my
mother, what will they pull out of me?

Margie Duncan

Pinecone Dolls

Dried leaf mosaic
a faded quilt –
olive, amber, flax –
covers sleeping pinecones
lined up in the battered box.
Dressed long ago
in petals and ferns,
we buried them
under sky and swings.
Dig them up, release
their seeds, feathery
as child-whispers, as wings.

Sarah Laskin

Breakfast with the Stars

Up walking Rocky in the proto-dawn,
turn the corner where the trees open
and Orion is exposed to view, always
steps behind the seven sisters, his prey.
Stand and watch, wait for the signal
that says *Orion, time to give your bow*
back to the prop master, make way
on the stage for the Sun, her chariot
arrives soon. Is it a specific tone
of cobalt that allows the hunt
to slow overhead? Or some cosmic
horn I can't hear? At the first bands
of lavender and pink, the chase is over,
the hunter and hunted faded out. I wait
for Rigel, Betelgeuse, Alnitak, Alnilam,
Mintaka and the Pleiades sisters to change
into their street clothes, descend together
to the corner of 18th and California. We
walk to the Diner to fill ourselves with eggs,
hashbrowns, joke about each star's timeline to
cosmic retirement, watch the Sun take the stage.

Deborah Corr

Making Apple Crisp on New Year's Day

The apple fits the curve of my left fingers.
With the right, I wield the peeler.

Its soundtrack, a soft scrape and grate
as I rotate the globe, round and round

until it trails a long tail that falls to the sink,
like holiday wrappings that fell to the floor

just days ago. I lift this damp ribbon.
Its spiral is a triumph. No breaks

in its twisted narrative. Translucent
in the window's light, it sings

as it hangs and sways while bits
of apple flesh cling and sparkle.

The knife splits the sphere, a crunch
and a thud on the cutting board.

Two white halves tumble open,
reveal outlined trenches where

the fruit clenches seeds, protecting
the future, like any other mother.

This new year is already slicing in
with explosions, hunger, and death.

Kirk Lawson

sauna secret

nestled in your dreams
a tiny cedar haven

and three granite boulders

naked inside

our steamy spirited sweat
the red-hot stones

rocky ledges

wet pine needles
and chilling falls

the water
whispers
wake up

Jim Bellanca

The Prescription

My
left hip
creaked, shrieked,
moaned "I hurt."

Doc says,
"Pay first."

I stir my worries into the syrup,
oats, and cinnamon. Let them bake

and soften with the apples, serve it
to my son and his wife when they

sit at our table, where we eat
the sweetness of still being here.

Marjorie Maddox

Let Them Eat Cake

attributed to Marie Antoinette

Why not lose yourself in Black Forest,
dress yourself in Red Velvet, speak German Chocolate
fluently while upside-down in Pineapple? Because. Because.
Look past your own table. Sure, in this no-cake-walk of a world,
savor
Carrot, Apple, & Strawberry; weigh Sponge & Pound; choose Devil's
over Angel, but always pass the thickest slice to your neighbor.

Tresha Faye Haefner

A Reminder

As you approach the road through the desert,
the coyotes howl, their high, silver cries.
Proof that something lives in these hills.
Moon-quiet. Valley purpled with thought.
Boulders gather like lost gods
broken by the angels.
Raven's large wings swoop so noisy
she reminds me what it is to be human. In the sage,
the invisible owls bark
their warnings.
Ghosts of the Cahulla watch over
these large spiders crossing a road,
birds twisting into sand.
When the road dies,
the desert finds you. An emptiness
so complete you can almost call it home.

Karen DeGroot Carter

Haiku

Winter longing slopes
from drifts of weighted worry.
Burial defied.

Sarah Browning

For the Editor Who Called Grandmother Poems *Sentimental*

I never saw my English grandmother cook
a single thing. She was raised by Victorians,
vegetarian. Dinner was store-brand
canned vegetable soup and cottage cheese.
Lunch, canned peaches, and cottage cheese.
Breakfast, cold cereal, or maybe cottage cheese.

So, a surprise! The *Sunset Magazine Vegetarian
Cookbook* she gave me to begin my adult life
was actually good! Not 80s good – tofu stir-fry
and lentil soup – but good as in I still make
the French white bean salad with mustard,
tarragon, and a touch of honey.

Nana gave strict orders on tea: A rolling boil and
steeping until the tea *had authority*. But then she
drank it with an A&P graham cracker. Nothing
hand-baked, home-stirred, whipped, or kneaded.
She needed very little; she ate almost nothing.
She tried, she failed, to teach us this, the art of restraint.

Luanne Castle

Dear Kitchen

Stop with your drooping face when I pull a supermarket meal from the fridge or let the bananas go black and-- goddess forbid--throw them in the trash instead of making a loaf. I suspect you remember the days of floured counters, the scent of rising dough, and baking bread. Other days, the air redolent with curry or bibimbap or a crispy-skinned ThanksgIVING turkey with fixings. The sizzle of pan-fried breaded yellow squash. Our specialty, crispy latkes with dill and chives, sour cream. All those years, I took the lead. I'm worn out. Isn't it your turn to feed me?

Jay Howard

Winter Cleaning

Dad's old garage is full of gadgets, some with small engines. The instruction manuals always contain many languages, but there is never any diagram or mention of the essential thing. The wall is cubbies of gently shifting objects that take definite form when touched. I carry them with me. I empty the garage. They appear again, intracably. Somehow, it is the way we want it. In the middle, obscuring the workbench, rests a hill of boxes full of The Collection. A still life. An old metal pitcher. A milk can. A belt sander. That time we made a wooden folding knife with a jigsaw and nail. An old go-kart. A reincarnation. The Golden Gems of Life and other books. A lifelong marriage in the grand old style. Fifty years running. A coffee can full of pull handles that will let me open anything my whole life long.