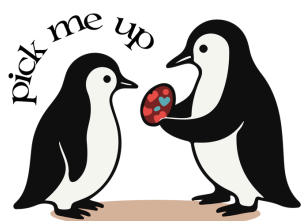
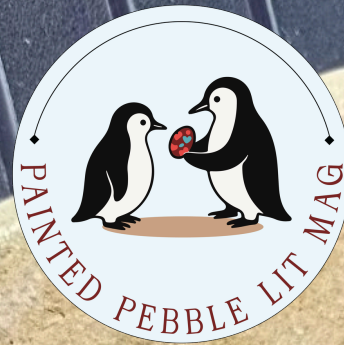


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Joseph Chelius
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Brian Duncan
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David Lee
Cora McCann Liderbach
Bob McAfee
Ana Stevenson
M. Benjamin Thorne
Ruth Ticktin
Jessica Walsh
Sharon Waters
Brenda Wildrick



PAINTED PEBBLE LIT MAG



Issue 7, Spring 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

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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

contents

In Celebration of Spilled Milk	Ana Stevenson	3
How West Virginians Talk	M. Benjamin Thorne	4
The Trilobites Would Like a Word	JR Fenn	5
A Poem is a Place	Sharon Waters	7
Never A One Hit Wonder Villanelle	Dustin Brookshire &	8
The New Pope is a White Sox Fan	Sarah Browning	9
2 Haiku	Kevin Browne	10
One More Note of Your Song	Brenda Wildrick	11
Radical Acceptance	Jessica Walsh	12
Slicing Cherries the Day After a	Diane LeBlanc	13
Federal Agent Murdered Renée Good	Ruth Ticktin	14
Hauling Water	JR Fenn	15
The Erie Named Her Crooked River	Cora McCann Liederbach	16
Early Days	Allison Burris	17
Bradwoods Blackbirds	Meredith Chester	18
Blue Billed Brothers	Deborah Corr	19
Nearly Remembered Dream	Brian Duncan	21
Spring Feedings	Ed Ahern	22
Moby Bob	Bob McAfee	23
Bird Feeder at a Local Branch	Joseph Chelius	24
Seven A.M. in the Garden	David Lee	25

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contributors

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty-odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had over 600 stories and poems published, and twelve books. He's on the review board at Scribes Micro, and is the idle figurehead at Scribes Micro.

Dustin Brookshire (he/him) is the author of four chapbooks and the forthcoming full-length poetry collection *For All Of Us Faggots* (Iron Oak Editions, 2027). He's the editor of the 2025 Lammy finalist, *When I Was Straight: A Tribute to Maureen Seaton* (Harbor Editions, 2024). More at dustinbrookshire.com.

Kevin Browne's (he/his) poetry, prose, and photographs have appeared in literary journals in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia. His haiku have appeared in *Frogpond*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Akitsu Quarterly*, and numerous other publications. He lives in southern Wisconsin.

Sarah Browning is the author of *Call Me Yes*, forthcoming, *Killing Summer*, and *Whiskey in the Garden of Eden*. Co-founder and 10-year Executive Director of Split This Rock, she now teaches for Writers in Progress. She lives in Philadelphia, where she co-hosts Wild Indigo Poetry. More at: www.sarahbrowning.net

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Joseph Chelius is the author of three full-length collections of poems, the most recent being *Playing Fields*, published by Kelsay Books in 2025. His work has appeared in *Commonweal*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Rattle*, *THINK*, and other journals.

Meredith Chester studied creative writing at Florida State University. Her poems appear in *La Picciolletta Barca*, *Assignment Literary Magazine's Micromag*, *The Clayjar Review*, and others. She lives with her lovable goldendoodle in Chattanooga, Tennessee, beneath enormous oak trees.

Deborrah 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.

Ana Stevenson

In Celebration of Spilled Milk

There's a troche in my
bones, an over eager
heartbeat pulsing through the
marrow, pushing out a
current fierce inside my
arteries, syllabic word-pool.

Milkweed broth spills Monarch
children. Words like these are
medicine to girls like
me who spoon-sip prairie
phrases, hungry for a
spoken garden. Eden
is in Hallelujah.

M. Benjamin Thorne

How West Virginians Talk

Sometimes it feels like my pronunciation
is parked on the berm of your understanding,
like the way you look at me as if I broke the law
when I say the river's name, but it's not
"KAN-uh-WAW" but "kuh-NAW", the waters
of dialect smoothing out the word. This is
what you do in economies of scarcity:
we sometimes swallow syllables
like the last morsel of ramps,
or hide them in the damp bowls
of mountains; you can almost
feel the pressure changing
vowels into diamonds,
precious treasures to be hoarded.

David Lee

Seven A. M. in the Garden

The garden sleeps in shades of gray;
a beetle crawls beneath the basil.
Sunrise hasn't decided where to begin,
but it's already everywhere.
A single crocus unfolds like a secret,
petals pale against soil that still dreams.
I kneel to lift a stone: tiny spiders scatter,
a whisper of worlds too small to name.
Coffee steams like a quiet promise;
two sparrows skirt the fence, unafraid.
Everything is becoming something else:
light, movement, thought, prayer.

Joseph Chelius

Bird Feeder at a Local Branch

At the branch of a bank,
the tellers in little snatches
throughout their day
have a view outside
of wrens and finches
taking turns at a feeder—
spilling seed in the manicured grass.
As I waited in line, I wondered
whose idea to set it up.
Did they need permission,
the approval of management
to change décor? No matter.
Here in this regulated climate,
as they swivel to Muzak
in matching chairs,
they can see beyond
the transactional world
of deposits, withdrawals;
beyond their courteous smiles
and the bright trill of their
how-may-I-help-yous,
to a fluttering frenzy—
to the business of birds.

JR Fenn

The Trilobites Would Like a Word

We mutter about it here in our glass case in the hallway.
We once lived in the sea and on land. All our adaptations,
frozen in stone—our exoskeleton, our spinosity, our
miniature eyes. The jawless fish beside us is always
whispering, whispering about the great light in the sky,
the arrival of more cosmopolitan species. Whispering
continually, whispers pouring out of his jawless mouth.

The living ghosts drift by on the other side of the glass.
They can't hear a thing. We remember the clips and pops
of the ancient ocean. We sense the movements of the
weather. We are giants, longer than the forearms that rest
on the ceiling of our case. We taste the chemoreactions of
humans' love, their fear.

After us came the great fauna, the proliferation of the
small animals. We are the foundation of complex life. If
we had to choose one word to describe our experience, we
wouldn't. How to speak of the movements of the earth,
the supercontinents converging into one? We sing of
most species dying, everyone dying around us. We sing of
the rich, humid atmosphere incubating plant lives, roots

growing up into carboniferous forests, woods we never
saw. We sing our own extinction songs, calcified and
muted, here in the dark.

We sense our relatives creeping, rustling, swimming
through this new world—arthropods, crustaceans,
arachnids—without whom, none of this. We hear the
heartbeats of those they nourish echoing, joyous, as they
stream beyond us out into the light.

Bob McAfee

Moby Bob

I am standing in the garden at Adam's Farm,
my first year digging in this plot, spaded
shovel for the virgin turning, using the point
to break roots, shaking the dirt off grass clumps,
clearing fringes. I am aware of black birds
above me, circling slowly, vultures, lining up
for the feast like hearses queuing at a funeral.

They are singing, like the Reguod's crew
following a harpooned sperm whale,
Hill and Gully Rider. Look,
there is Queequeg, all sinew and tattoos,
in the prow of the whaleboat, feeding out
cable in the wake of the onrushing leviathan,
unconsciously speeding toward oblivion.

They call out to me, "slow down Big Boy –
we'll join you for supper, we will."
I continue to dig. Meanwhile, raucous robins
gather around me, tucking in their dinner
napkins, appreciative of all the freshly turned
annelids, grazed and glistening in the newly
exposed earth, my gift to them this Saturday.

Ed Ahern

Spring Feedings

The bread scattered for house sparrows
is plucked by a murder of crows.
The peanuts strewn for the squirrels
are absconded with by blue jays.
Table scraps left out for the possums
are (judging by odor) eaten by skunks.

My chosen dinner guests get hungrier
while the party crashers feast al fresco,
reminiscent of family gatherings,
corporate outings, and vacations
where the ill-favored unwanted
drain the bar and gobble the desserts.

Sharon Waters

A Poem is a Place

after Isabelle Correa

where words skip-count hopscotch
and leap frog over themselves
until they form prayers, songs,
stories, and conversations - with you,
their favorite playmate.

Dustin Brookshire & Beth Gylys

Never A One-Hit Wonder Villanelle

*A contoured villanelle using Kimiko Hahn's
"Villanelle with a Line Borrowed from Bishop"*

I hated high school. I wanted to be out at the barn
with the goats and horses & away from her:
woman of gripes and guilt, bent over the stove.

Even if one of us offered to cook, she took to the stove,
stirring a pot, or kneading sourdough bread
while refusing our help, so I'd walk to the barn

to saddle up, Lady, a gift when I was three
before I learned to scale rafters to the roof.
Ever annoyed, Mom stuck to her stove.

I'd hum a song while sitting on the roof,
daydream of being someone else's daughter,
in a life that was far away from our barn:

country clubs, watching polo from the stands,
and shopping sprees on Rodeo Drive as
our hired chef worked at home, bent over the stove

preparing meals for the week ahead, but today
we're arguing again, even though I'm gone. This song
that I wish was a one hit wonder plays on repeat while
I wait for her call. She'll berate me, hovering over the
stove.

Brian Duncan

Nearly Remembered Dream

Just out of reach,
like a spring ephemeral
in dense woods, briefly
blazing bright,

then tucked back
into its duff bed

as summer greenery
casts its shade.

Then one day, there were only two, still in step with each other. Two-thirds of a brain, we laughed.

And then—one third. He scurries and mumbles.
Loneliness on webbed feet. I think he's hunting. I think he's haunted. Though, with this brain of mine I think is whole, I know. I'm the one who is hunting, the one who is haunted. I want them back. I want them all back.

Sarah Browning

The New Pope is a White Sox Fan

And that news alone brings
sobs to my sweetheart's body
just recently made separate
from the body of his Catholic
baseball-loving father.
*I don't know where he ended
and I began*, he texts a friend.
The new pope loves the Sox –
the arcs of baseball and life:
nothing happens and then
all of a sudden, it does, *blink
and you miss it*. If we were
outside our bodies, we could
watch the replay on TV:
see how you made the catch?
See how you're safe at home.

Kevin Browne

Two Haiku

scraping lichens
from the passing years...
stories hidden

an old broken bridge
dumped in the county park
prairie blooms

Deborah Corr

Blue-Billed Brothers

We arrive at this pocket of a park, tucked between the
flow of a river and the hard stand of industry. As if a
floodgate opens, the hungry, hopeful, greeting committee
pours over the grassy mounds. Quack and feathers,
hurried bodies bob back and forth. Obedient to the signs
that say, "Don't feed the waterfowl," we disappoint them
every day. Mallards, neon green heads, and puffed-up
breasts of brown. The uniformed army reluctantly parts
to let us pass.

The one I watch for wanders on the periphery,
bewildered. I anthropomorphize, I know. But I have been
watching these ducks for a year. One third of an act, he
was. The *blue-billed boys* we called them. Triplets.
Almost identical, taller than the rest, bills tinted blue.
They ran side-by-side, in parallel lines. Like synchronized
swimmers, they stopped on cue and turned, three heads
pointed in one direction. As if hatched from one shell. We
joked they had one brain among them. I talked to them
often, cautioned them against the street. They didn't
seem too smart.

Meredith Chester

Bradwoods Blackbirds

As a child, when I first noticed oak trees move their branches in a breeze, my surprise was like first realizing soccer jerseys mix their purples and oranges on the field, drawn from their separate sides toward the ball; or the polka dotted bows on my shirt becoming an unwelcome conversation piece; or being suddenly pulled into a little chair facing the beige church nursery wall, unaware of my crime. So it was startling, but not the same. I watched patches of sunlight skip over the ground as the branches stirred the shade, listened to the leaves and absorbed the cooler air, enamored by the pleasant shock of no shocks! It was more like the day we saw blackbirds eating French fries in the parking lot of Bradwoods Pharmacy. My jolt at this unexpected scene was soothed by Mom's soft voice bouncing down from the bright blue sky, "I don't blame them!" her laugh covering me in a coolly dazzling shade.

Brenda Wildrick

One More Note of Your Song

A golden shovel after a line from "Joy" by Dorianne Laux

How long have I ignored the magic? Is there a secret world? The foundation of ordinary is so solid I can stomp on it without it breaking. But is a miracle waiting for me just outside the pull of earth's gravity? As I sink with the air in a hurricane's eye, something whispers my name, and the voice sounds like you, but it can't be you, not in this world. How I would love one more note of your song. Still, I learn to dance with you, because two worlds are about to recognize each other. You say I need only receive the wonder. When I see sunshine, and later the moon, when tomorrow I hear birdsong and roosters welcoming morning, when I witness still tiny buds on trees, I will know you are here and be thrilled. When a crocus emerges, I'll be amazed.

Jessica Walsh

Radical Acceptance

You can't have that world,
not the one you want. Still.
One day, you'll pause at the pump
to watch a pink-flame sunset
over McClarney's Industrial Smoothing
and the scrapyard beside it
and you'll love that sunset hard,
the way you love a hot bath
even though parts of you stay cold—
knees, tits, a bit of soft belly—
because you'll get it by then,
that your particular deck lacks the cards
for soaking tubs or Santorini!
but not all moments are jagged
in this world you have.

12

Painted Pebble Lit Mag

Allison Burris

Early Days

Spring is cutting her milk teeth
dipping a proverbial toe
into the waters of sunshine
intermittent showers
easily lost, she's continually turning
the map to orient herself
left from right, up from sideways
Spring confuses "up the street"
and "down the street" as if
these were not interchangeable
approximations of continuation
Spring leaves the path
because cherry blossoms are fleeting
bulbs are an event
Spring is a little unsure
where the crocuses fit in
after Winter's silent
ice stark branches
Spring clears her throat,
relearning the birdsong
trill of her voice

17

Painted Pebble Lit Mag

Cora McCann Liderbach

The Erie Named Her Crooked River

For too long, the Cuyahoga ferried factory oil and debris. The river caught fire in the sixties. Today, she's healed enough to nurture young sturgeon again. Hundreds of Clevelanders line the winding waterway, wait for a bucket holding a single juvenile. My husband and I stare at ours—seven inches long, striped with ancient ridges, fins finely etched. Sweating in the heat, we descend a ramp, loose her into the water. With luck, she'll outwit predators like catfish and migrate to Lake Erie—where sturgeon once grew enormous and outlived humans. Eighteenth-century sailors reported a fearsome, fifty-foot, flippered snake roiling the lake. They named her Bessie.

*our small fry
the next Lake Erie Monster
watch her wriggle away*

Diane LeBlanc

Slicing Cherries the Day After a Federal Agent Murdered Renée Good

My fingers crack and bleed
in winter, but blood is nothing like this

deep red juice seeping under my nails
as I slice cherries into a bowl of yogurt.

Yesterday we marched. Today we mourn.
Yes, Renee Good was a poet.

But her blood on the airbag was not
an elegy. Bullets, both tenor and vehicle.

Remember Audre Lorde's truth:
Your silence will not protect you.

Every time my knife breaks skin, I feel
barriers thinning between flesh and force.

Ruth Ticktin

Losing our Essence

First, we lose surface water in creeks, the freshwater in ponds diminishes, and our lakes dry up. Then rivers recede, leaving us with lines of moist rocks.

Dead fish and decayed flora smell putrid. Every breath is filled with foul odors.

Over time, the seas turn into bays. Miles of landlocked boats and piles of shells line the sandy shores that used to lap up water.

There are mansions up the mountain roads. Their lawns are irrigated, and they probably have laundry machines and dishwashers.

Let's hoard all the rainwater possible. By collecting water, how can we lose?

JR Fenn

Hauling Water

After a laundromat shower, \$10 for 30 minutes, our skin is newborn-soft, burnished from heat-lamps and nozzle pressure. Our jugs, filled outside ShopRite, weigh us down as we climb the hills to our cabins. When we bear water over the paths, through the forest, we know its rarity; the water table so far down its reservoirs elude the dowers. We fill our cups; we taste glaciers, fireweed, coal in the sea cliffs. Though we live by the ocean, we crave freshwater. Our ancestors crawled out of that salty pool. This water sustains us. We've carried it here with our own hands.