

Through sun-glinting particles. 2012

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Through Sun-glinting Particles

Poetry by **Allegra Jostad Silberstein**

PARALLEL PRESS POETRY SERIES

A Parallel Press Chapbook

Through Sun-glinting Particles

Poetry by
Allegra Silberstein

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Honorable Mention for the following Poems:

CFCP contest '06 "Old Woman with Springtime Eyes"

CSPS contest '08 "Goodbye Cabin at Bolinas"

Poets Corner "My Empty Footsteps"

This book is dedicated to the beautiful land of my growing up, a hill top farm between Holmen and West Salem Wisconsin and to my Mom and Dad who gave me my name, Allegra, from Longfellow's "Children's Hour." It is also for all those who have inspired me along the varied paths of my life, and to my children and grandchildren who are my hope for the future.

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In this moment

singing pines stroke
a gray-blue sky

bare branches extend
to swelling tips of twigs

sunlight polishes
grass to green luster

the clock
measures these moments

(infinity unmeasured)
and in this moment

I want for birds that have not
come this morning,

for birds that have not
sung their evening song,

for candlelight—
the glass of wine, the loaf of bread

for the conjugation of touch
coming back to present tense...

for sunlight and rain
to ease the long drought.

I want and again I want
for birds that have not come.

Let Us Sing Aubades

Do not acquaint me with the dark of night
or tell sad tales to rend the willing heart.
I want to see the morning dove in flight

and know the healing balm of spoken art
with simple words of single syllables.
I'll vision that the world is at its start

and see that all creation's blossoming-pull
is carried forth in nature's ragged cart—
kaleidoscope of the impossible.

Do not sing to me of broken hearts
or speak of winter's cold and dimming light.
I know that soon enough we all must part.

Let us sing aubades to morning light,
to each new day, to each new start, to all
the wild birds that whisper hope in their flight.
Do not acquaint me with the dark of night.

Over and beyond the hills I left behind

nautical miles and knots ago
a call comes across an ocean of space
delivered like a sudden rush of hail...
now, now, who are you.

Tell me, fingerlings of grass,
how you survive,
how melting becomes forgiving--
an evolution of new growth.

Tell me, angels and astronauts,
how atmosphere and space
illuminate realities that send
their perfect imperfections, the way

on and off the air spits a little rain,
to tease, like those insistent tattlers
retelling lies that enter sanctified
in the body politic of the unstudied heart.

Tell me, self: who am I now,
hands wrinkled in the work of the day,
questions asked and unanswered,
remembrance, the day's ration.

Somewhere in the over and beyond
swallows return each spring
to the barn where they nested last year,
to the hill-top farm I left behind.

My Joseph

We envied you, the youngest,
as if you had been singled out
for a coat of many colors.
We said Mom spoiled you.

We were wrong.
Love made you strong.
You grew to manhood with courage
enough to hold at bay

the gnawing years that would
chew upon the heart remorselessly,
the way packs of wild dogs
devour the downed lamb.

You stayed with Mom and Dad—
held back the dark
that folded in on the farm,
holding fast to our mother.

You stayed to tend the fields,
to mind the cattle and we were free
to leave: to embroider our garments
with threads of red and gold.

You stayed,
steadfast in your faded coat.

distances

I embrace the dark pillow...
the night where feathers drop
in moist air
to imagined laughter

bedded in phantoms
splashed in an aching arc
out of the deep pool...

my flowers still bloom

rising up from the dark pond
wild geese call through the misty
air barely lit by the crescent moon

maneuver their flight catching the V
to ride the current
into distances beyond the rooted
trees—silhouettes in a garden

where flowers still bloom

Finding the Light

Growing tired I grope for
tattered bits of wisdom:
words tangled in the years.
My eyes, accustomed to the dark,
revel in shadows.

Candle light seems brighter now.
I would linger here
waiting for some unexpected truth:
the meaning of life,
the meaning of meaning—

but everyday thoughts intrude:
the clothes that need folding,
the mail that needs sorting
and mostly tossing,
the Icelandic poppy, bought on sale,
that needs planting, the thank-you
I need to write.

The sun rises.
Tomorrow becomes today.
Maybe I'll be finding the light
in the ordinary of this day:
the planting, the sorting,
the weeding, the digging,
the bits of thought
that come unannounced or
some sight delighting the eye:

two ladybugs
attach on a blade of grass—
sprigs of memory bring
a wordless flowing-in of light.

My Empty Footsteps

I slide the panel between sleep and dreams,
that peasant harvest gathered in the night,
until the old cock crows. He stitches seams
that piece dark edges with the morning light.

Awake, I walk a deeply shadowed road
my *ought to's* shout without a kind reply,
my *but I had to's* just an added load
that holds me down when I would rather fly...

The day drags on, my duties call, but then
they fade away, the tail of a parade,
for noon brings me your letter, quiet friend,
It's tucked between the bills and pleas for aid.

Your words of love cross over crooked hours,
and fill my empty footsteps full with flowers.

The Pause

Selah.

Between hallelujah and hosanna
between holy and amen

over and over, the pause
that pulls us into depths
anchored in antiquities of the spirit.

Selah.

Universe circled inward
stalactites and stalagmites of the starry cave.

I pause in hieroglyphics of night,
in the alphabet of dawn

Selah.

I would wait a while
between the holy and the amen.

Old Woman With Springtime Eyes

I remember you:
busy at simple tasks
your dustpan flashing
through sun-glinting particles
as if gathering stardust.

I followed you:
climbed the orchard hill with you.
Afternoon light wrapped 'round us
as we filled our baskets
with red and gold of autumn apples.

I remember you:
in your long green gown,
shadowed in purple twilight.
You watered young plants
with a rusted sprinkler.

Always
I remember your springtime eyes
that bid me welcome—
that lighted my way
when I needed to leave.

Aunt Delia

Three score years she held fast
to simple tasks
never dropped her knitting needles
no sudden looking up
no startlement strong enough to dent
orderly hours that kept at bay
certain feral strays that circled the hedges
of her hours.

In the summer of her 60th year some
restless remembering brings back
words of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya:
*Why are you wilting away...let yourself go
if only for once in your life...*
Though her youth is spent and past
she allows her knitting to fall, needles askew,
bends to take off her shoes.

She goes outside, walks barefoot
through tall grass, to a remembered place
where wild strawberries came each year
without planting or plan.
She searches in the shade of trees grown older
for fruit that once tantalized her tongue—
desire still nibbles there:
a yearning for what might have been.

Notes from Aunt Lil

I'm feeling old and tired and lost
and think of days gone by and cry
about the young folks going by
without a thought of miseries cost
or how the apple trees will bloom
and lilacs come to scent the air
without shop windows for compare
to dress our wishes with aplomb.

I sit and rock and take my rest
remembering poems learned by heart.
Then singing songs of long-gone days
consider how my hours are blest
by touch that's kept in memory's cart—
the votive and the migrant strays.

Sunday afternoon near the causeway:

The Great White Egret stands
alone on a little rise of land
by a small lake:
water left over from spring's
over-flows.

By the edge of the gravel road,
mustard flaunts an abundance of yellow.

Where the ground has gone dry
ragweed brags its russet seed.

Near the water, green reeds make
a landing place where red-winged
blackbirds swoop down and up
singing their gymnastics.

And close by
Queen Anne's Lace shows off
her seed-cups of grayed brown
with Bluebonnets by her feet.

Past its rippled edge a mirror lake
becomes blue sky and clouds
with trees and grasses leaning in.

The egret stretches out its wings,
lifting beyond sight
behind the dark branches
of a dying tree.

In a Seaweed Tangle

The ocean god played
in the seaweed tangle of her arms.
With each wave she felt urged upward
and outward...at last
letting herself be uprooted
from the soft sands of home.

Letting go that rooted place
she floats freely in the persistent pulse
of his coming in and moving out.

The ocean tides
like gods
come and go,
obedient to the moon mistress.

One shining day little children
came upon her silent and dry on the shore.
Look, they cried, a lady with green and golden hair.
They took her home to their garden...
the dried and lovely piece of seaweed.

Forgotten in a garden of childish joys,
fragmented in shattering light
she disintegrates, becomes a part of earth.

Dreams come on rainy days
when moisture swells her broken
particles with longing...
in a greening dream she remembers
how the ocean god played
in the seaweed tangle of her arms.

Seven days from the new moon

Peonies root in my pelvis,
blossom in scarlet lungs,
press against the throbbing gate.

I am one with the half moon
seven days from the new moon
each night diminished
in the dark of my wanting.

I am a winter dance, the cold snow,
a summer chance,
the planter box that holds me.

Magnolia Blossoms

White petals larger than the leaves
open wide around the stamen
that leaves red tipped lines
like deliverance on the oak table.

When the petals fall
they turn a soft bronze,
curl at the edges into a brown cradle.

We say goodbye.
Our hands curve
one upon the other.

Even as we say we need space
our bodies move one toward the other,
even though we say this is best
a prodigal thought cries *wait*

and all the while, the world
moves right along.

Magnolias blossom.
The petals fall.
In the cupped spaces
they hold whispers.

Goodbye, Cabin at Bolinas

cabin by the sea
cabin of memories.
Goodbye, amaryllis and wild blackberries.

Goodbye, morning sun
shining in this kitchen window the way
you shined in my mother's window
long ago in Wisconsin.

Goodbye, you of memories
sweet and bittersweet:
how you loved blackberries,
how you rode the crest of the waves.

Goodbye, ocean,
beautiful and indifferent to the wreckage
spilled upon the shore.
Goodbye, cabin at Bolinas.

You ask me

and what do you want—
and I wonder if it is words: those fragments
of thought that came and vanished
on the way to work,

or finding words strong enough to enter,
to be engraved like a poem remembered
or those foreign words:
Je vous aime beaucoup.

More than words, though,
I want arms to hold me close
without making a prison.
Arms, not armaments,

reaching out in the world.
And feet, free to dance
feet, soft on the hard ground,
trudging toward peace.

My hurried days
drift into cottonwood snow
I want more time
no—need to make time—take time:

feel the breath that fills me,
know it lets go . . . lets go.

Off the Page

those high sea-worn cliffs
eaten by thundering waves
the dark ocean
the rush curling in
the pulling back
the intoxication
the mirage
the wild bird
...oh...
let us drink to collaboration
to passion
on the page
off the page
to forever
the possibility

Late Afternoon in October

The sun gives the air a golden glow,
leaves a silver sheen on the olive leaves and gilds
to luminosity the brown edged walnut and oak leaves.
Occasionally a leaf flutters its way to the ground.

My friend, an organic farmer who tasted the earth,
ended her life last week with a shotgun she used to kill rodents.
The memorial service was Sunday. Today another friend calls
to tell me of heartache so deep she feels she is dying,
her crying like wild laughter. She does not see this golden day.

Shadows come as dark clouds, their upper edges still shining,
cover the sun bending closer to the towering ash and houses to the west.
Now, for a few moments the sun breaks through to golden light.
My cats are waiting for their evening meal.
I need to get the mail, bring in the garbage cans.

Where I Walk

Shadows seem long in this wide
valley where I walk. Fences
have replaced shepherds.

Gentle cows rest in golden pastures
chewing again the fruit of their grazing.
In Putah Creek speckled trout find

the still waters where a valley oak
bends and shadows the sun dappled surface.
Red-winged blackbirds cannot help but sing.

Hawks circle on currents of air—
They have killed my sweet hens, all but one.
I bring her to my neighbor's small flock,

hope for safety there. Hawks were made
to hunger and thirst like me, but I
won't prepare a table for them.

Some days the tending trail grows steep.
A broken branch with knobbed end
makes a staff to help bring me home.

Olives hang heavy with oil on my trees.
Hummingbird wings bring halos of blessing.
I have prepared nectar for them.

Expectation

All through February, each morning came
a minute earlier, each evening a minute later—
now there's nearly a hour more to light my day.

A cricket sings in the tall grass
by the fence, a close-to-earth sort of lark
pleasuring my heart.

I do not stop the task at hand: pulling weeds,
searching for roots, pulling to create room
for prairie-cone flowers and scarlet clover—

I just listen: waiting heart,
light nearly gone, as this wee Pavarotti sends
mating notes to the dark beauty he implores.

California Eucalyptus

Fragrant Eucalyptus trees
tower high above the orchard
like ancient prophets.

Though old and shaggy
they're newcomers here
but they hold fast.

They daven against the sky,
one with the ebb and flow
of westerly winds.

At night they brush against stars
and the moon may nestle awhile
in their long fingered limbs.

Careless, they scatter on earth
tiny pink jewels—November blossoms
absurdly small for so large a tree.

A surge of autumn wind
swells through the high branches.
Like an incoming wave

it rushes to one moment
of silence at the apex—
then splashes through

with a clatter of leaves,
a tingling, keening crest that curls
into falling leaves, like tears.

Entering

The sun enters, a stream of bright light
edging over pines and valley oak
filling my upstairs bedroom.

I rise: my body more space than substance
and leave behind the sharp, dark edges
of the night's worries.

Today I will wrap forgotten dreams
in little boxes with tinsel tissue and red ribbon.
There's room on my holding shelf.

Clouds rub against my window
framed by olive trees still bearing fruit.
A brown bird flies from branch to branch.

The world finds entry here.

In Diffused Light

A piece of paper, a scatter of ink,
messages, like bridges we cross,
water below, blue sky above
spanning channels of gain and loss.
Outside my room, trees tangle thoughts:
their falling leaves, their golden flight
like butterflies weaving in and out
through diffused morning light
without shadows, yet how it glows:
wraps a theurgy on my heart.
This divine waking on me bestows
a new beginning, a fresh start
and the old words and songs I've sung
come to poems I've just begun.

Alleluia of the Countryside

A liturgy of sparrows sound their twilight song:

here, here, then trill *lu lu-lu-lu lu...*

John Burroughs heard them singing—

their evening song seemed the loveliest of the day—

he named them Vesper Sparrows.

They love the open field:

their nest on the ground like an open cup

under a clump of grass.

A little cloud by the side of the road

tells their special treat: a dust bath.

When they fly you can see white flares

at the edges of their tails.

Today the male chooses a telephone wire

for his high perch to sing to his mate.

Tomorrow it may be the solitary oak nearby.

Further on, wide fields all around,

there's a small country church.

Its bell still rings on Sunday mornings

calling congregants to worship,

to sing their songs of blessing.

Every evening outside the church

a liturgy of sparrows

sings their twilight song:

two sweet sharp calls: *here, here*,

then an alleluia trill.

Toward Galaxies

Breathe
into spirit.
Let the body move
into dance,
creation spiraling
toward galaxies
where colors spin:
a kaleidoscope,
a starry night.

Enter the unknown:
the quest for meaning.
Parameters of the body
will anchor your search
with understanding
held in the genes
ancient as Abraham.

Take your soul by the
hand and let it touch
the beaten heart,
let it feel the soft
wind's whisper.
The breath.
The body.



Allegra was born in the middle of a blizzard on a farm in Wisconsin. Her Norwegian ancestors by-passed the flat prairie land and settled in the coulees and hills of the non-glaciated area near the Mississippi River. Love of poetry began as a child when her Mom would recite poems as she worked. She has lived in California since 1963 but her growing years on the farm brought a deep appreciation for the out-of-doors world that stays with her and sustains her.

She has over a hundred publications in journals such as *Blue Unicorn*, *California Quarterly*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Poetry Now*, *Rattlesnake Review* and others. Her work is included in anthologies like *The Sacramento Anthology: 100 Poems*; *Gatherings: A Woman's Place*; and *Where Do I Walk*. She has two chapbooks: *Acceptance*, published by Small Poetry Press and *In The Folds*, published by Rattlesnake Review. In March of 2010 she was selected as the first Poet Laureate for the city of Davis, CA.

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