Timed: A Collection of Original Manuscripts

Rebecca E. Davis

University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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Timed
[a collection of original manuscripts]
Becky Davis
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Senior Project Description
Chancellor’s Honors Program

Working title: Timed – A Collection of Original Manuscripts

The student, Rebecca Davis, will study the poetry of Marie Howe, Mary Oliver, Yusef Komunyakaa, Brenda Hillman, Lucille Clifton, and any others deemed appropriate through the course of the project. These will serve as models for movement, structure, and general craftsmanship. Then, drawing from experiences as a nursing student in hospitals and other healthcare settings, the student will compose eight poems that will be revised, examined by the advisor, Dr. Marilyn Kallet, and further revised. The final versions of each poem will be turned in, along with any major versions that have been printed for editing. This will help track progression and improvement. This will be completed by the exam period at the end of the fall semester 2007.
Emergency Department
Becky Davis

I.

The first time, I am a patient, a high school kid with a baseline of insomnia who just slept sixteen hours, suddenly has little muscle response, does not move much.

My waxen legs do not hold me, and I lunge from wheelchair to stretcher, much to the chagrin of the sardonic orderly. I beg to go home and they place me in the fetal position to draw spinal fluid for a bacteria culture, and when they are done I do not move. I stray in and out of sleep until the results say no meningitis, and Mom takes me Home.

II.

Next I am a volunteer, curious but shy, wearing the same pair of khakis all three times a week, swimming in the extra-large uniform shirt.

It takes three weeks to be comfortable giving the instructions to “Go ahead and take your bra off, so we can do some x-rays” because I am insecure in this grave Adult world, secretly infatuated with the change and the rush and the importance.

III.

I am an innocent bystander when the grandfather of a friend of a friend falls over in church, and I instantly become the support who can drive and breathe and be calm and steady and comforting.
I wait outside for an hour and a half while the family crowds into the room for the End, my only company the six week old little boy in my arms, whose great grandfather is dying.

IV.

I am a student, standing behind the forgotten desk, counting people in the trauma bay ready to perform their life-saving function on the woman who is probably already dead. I spend the day doing what I’ve learned for three years, breath catching and fingers tingling at every crackle on the radio.

The next time I am here it will be for an interview, that will bring me back to finish out the last of my degree, that will bring me back for the job that all this time I have Belonged in.

[Handwritten note: flushing, every]
Therapy

Therapy (n):

All day I monitor
Therapeutic effectiveness of drugs
Therapeutic range of blood components
Physical therapy
Occupational therapy
Speech therapy
Respiratory therapy

So when I go home
I participate in
A little therapy of my own
Pet therapy
Writing therapy
Alcohol therapy
Sleep therapy
Sex therapy
Massage therapy
Crying therapy

Works wonders when
You have to feel
All of your feelings at once
Because you are a nurse –
a detached
objective
unemotional
nurse –
and you are excellent
at faking it,
so sometimes you forget
that you really do
have feelings –
that being privy to
the suffering and
dead and
stupidity
is painful
because you’re human
too

and sometimes you just need
your own dose of therapy
Becky Davis

A minion of death hovers at the doorway to room 916.

First he stands by the light switch, foot tapping, tassles on his loafers skidding across the polished brown leather.

Then he crosses his arms, elbow dangerously close to the emergency call light, and leans on the peeling taupe wallpaper.

His short fingers lead a biscuit-like palm into the pocket on his gray pinstripe vest to pull out a grainy, silent pocket watch.

As if he’s running late.

He flickers into solid form when her blood pressure drops, her heart quickens, and her breathing stops keeping a rhythm.

And he is overcome again by pallor when the cardizem drip does its job and her heart can function again.

The shriveled grandma in 916 is the unconscious owner of newly-minted Do Not Resuscitate orders.

The DNR is three years overdue, and should have been instituted 241 family fights and $50,000 ago.

Death will not be waiting much longer.
The Difference You Don’t Make
Becky Davis

You get off work late enough to miss
The 7 am news, so you buy a paper on
The way home. After you’ve changed
And your scrubs are in the
Laundry, bleach in the washer, you
Pick up the paper to
See what you missed while you
Worked – nothing –
So you thumb through to the
Obituaries, because even though
Patients and names blend
Together in time, you will
Recognize – some –
Today it is the same, but the name that
Jumps out is that of your very
First patient, who was thrown from
A moving car by her – drunk – boyfriend –
And you start to wonder if it’s a problem that
You can fall asleep without
Caring but still remember her
Name when you – wake –
Feeling of Healing
Becky Davis

There is a thick wicker basket
In the corner of the
Staff break room, full
Of knitted stocking hats.

The bright yarns clash and reflect
Off the sunny window. They
Wait there, used to soften the
disappointment of hair loss for our
Chemotherapy patients.
Most of them have big, concerned
Families, who make the floor
Crowded and hopeful.

They say it increases the
Survival rate, but I didn’t believe
It until I gave away a
Hat.

Emma was four and a half, there to join a
Long stream of visitors for her Grandpa,
Including her Great Aunt Barbara,
Who was still having trouble
Growing hair after finishing her last
Round of chemo for breast
Cancer. Emma was cautious at
Best, and she took steady
Refuge behind her mommy’s knees
From Great Aunt Barbara’s baldness.

So Mommy whispered with me
In the hall, asked if there was
Any way we could deal with it.

Emma whispered to me, too, that
She wanted the bald lady to go
Away from her Grandpa.

I promised to brainstorm, and brought
The hat basket back with me. Emma
Picked sparkly purple and carefully
Offered a smile with my solution.

Three days later, Grandpa’s questionable
State of health had improved enough that
He went home. He winked as they rolled him
Into the hall and said, “Thanks for the hat.

Seeing Emma made my day.”
The Real Thing
Becky Davis

Somewhere there are statistics on how many of the babies born at twenty-something weeks are orphaned crack babies.

They come to the neonatal intensive care unit with translucent pink skin, gummy bones, and veins like they were drawn on with a fine-point blue pen. A tube the size of a spaghetti noodle disappears into the thumbnail-sized noses to deliver formula into a stomach the size of a large marble. Sometimes breathing tubes the size of straws let the ventilator breathe for them, so the ribs and lungs and wax paper diaphragm can grow.

Somewhere there are statistics on how much the skin-to-skin contact in kangaroo care improves outcomes in preemies.

We wear button-down shirts when we go as kangaroo volunteers, always the maximum of two hours, three times a week. It takes ten minutes to untangle and unwrap the essential lines and the credit-card sized diaper. An hour per baby. An hour of love and hope, of being a mother to the forgotten and unstable.

The nurse hands you a little being, and the skin is like that of a sun-warmed peach, and it breathes and squirms against your sternum until settling, absorbing the life that seeps from the soft skin below your collarbone, between your breasts.

You cradle close the hope and know that even if heartbreak soon follows, you haven’t wasted your love.
The fat pregnant belly sways (swore) violently with each chest
compression, threatening to build enough momentum to flip
the body off the table, until the
paramedic trainer locks down
the wheels and straps the legs in
place. She's from a rural hospital
without documentation, in
arrest maybe for four hours, maybe
for twenty minutes. They say
shocking things like open heart
massage and perimortem C-section
section until her stomach finally
fractures and ultrasound shows
extensive blood clotting in the
dead veins of the 36-week fetus.

The family wails,
the body goes to the morgue.

Autopsy photos come back that
afternoon, like they come straight out
of a forensic nursing textbook, with	
the pasty hue of death, amber
expanses of abdominal fat, and
rotting, purple-brown blood
and body tissue blur together
around the perfectly-formed, sleeping
baby, posed as if the cyanosis can
be dispelled with the first grasping
breath that cannot come.
Feeling of Healing Hat Basket
Becky Davis

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in the corner of the
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of knitted stocking hats.
The bright yarns clash and reflect
off the sunny window. They
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chemotherapy patients.
Most of them have big, concerned
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crowded and hopeful.
They say it increases the
survival rate, but I didn’t believe
it until I gave away a
hat.

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II.

Next I am a volunteer, curious (but) shy, wearing the same pair of khakis (all) three times a week, swimming in the extra-large uniform shirt.

It takes three weeks to be comfortable giving instructions to “Go ahead and take your bra off, so we can do some x-rays” because I am insecure in this grave adult world, secretly infatuated with the change (and) the rush and the importance.

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I am an innocent bystander when the grandfather of a friend (of a friend) falls over in church, and I am calm (and quiet) as my car fills with white-knuckled red-eyed strangers who take gulping deep breaths as I drive an unfamiliar
route behind the screaming ambulance.

I wait outside for an hour and a half while the family crowds into the room for the end, my only company the peace of the six week old little boy in my arms, whose great grandfather is dying.

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(Next time I am here it will be for an interview, that will bring me back to finish the last of my degree, that will bring me back for the job where all this time I have belonged.)

Don't cap concepts — we get it.

Try this one as prose?
Therapy
Becky Davis

Ther-a-py (n):
  1. treatment of illness or disability
  2. healing power or quality

All day I monitor
Therapeutic effectiveness of drugs
Therapeutic range of blood components
Physical therapy
Occupational therapy
Speech therapy
Respiratory therapy

So when I go home
I participate in
A little therapy of my own
Pet therapy
Writing therapy
Alcohol therapy
Sleep therapy
Sex therapy
Massage therapy
Crying therapy

Works wonders when
you have to feel
all of your feelings at once
because you are a nurse –
a detached
objective
unemotional
nurse –
and you are excellent
at faking it,
so sometimes you forget
that you really do
have feelings –
that being privy to
the suffering and
death and
stupidity
is painful
because you’re human
too

I think
other care providers
will really respond to
this one.
The Real Thing  
Becky Davis

Somewhere there are statistics on how many of the babies born at twenty-something weeks are orphaned crack babies.

They come to the neonatal intensive care unit with translucent pink skin, gummy bones, and veins like they were drawn on with a fine-point blue pen. A tube the size of a spaghetti noodle disappears into the thumbnail-sized noses to deliver formula into a stomach the size of a large marble. Sometimes breathing tubes the size of straws let the ventilator breathe for them, so the ribs and lungs and wax paper diaphragms can grow.

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The Difference You Don’t Make  
Becky Davis

You get off work late enough to miss  
the 7 am news, so you buy a paper on  
the way home. After you’ve changed  
and your scrubs are in the  
laundry, bleach in the washer, you  
pick up the paper to  
see what you missed while you  
worked – nothing –  
So you thumb through to the  
obituaries, because even though  
patients and names blend  
together in time, you will  
recognize – some –  
Today it is the same, but the name that  
jumps out is that of your very  
first patient, who was thrown from  
a moving car by her – drunk – boyfriend –  
And you start to wonder if it’s a problem that  
you can fall asleep without  
caring but (still) remember her  
name when you – wake – //

Needs a better title - it's a dynamic poem and deserves a better last
Timed

Becky Davis

A minion of death lingers at the doorway to room 916.

First he stands by the light switch, foot tapping, tassles on his loafers skidding across the polished brown leather.

Impatient, he crosses his arms, elbow dangerously close to the emergency call light, and leans on the peeling taupe wallpaper.

His short fingers lead a biscuit-like palm into the pocket on his gray pinstripe vest to pull out a grainy, silent pocket watch.

(As if) he's running late.

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The DNR is three years overdue, and should have been instituted 241 family fights and $50,000 ago.

He flickers into solid form when her blood pressure drops, her heart quickens, and her breathing stops keeping a rhythm.

And he is overcome again by pallor when the cardizem drip does its job and her heart starts to function again.

Death will not be waiting much longer.
When the Dominoes Fail
Becky Davis

For three nights straight I work the Adult side of the unit – the alcoholics and Junkies and manics are a welcome Change from the crazy old people who I spend all night chasing and cleaning and Cussing. They tell their stories in group Sessions, and we talk in layman’s terms about Triggers and coping mechanisms and positive Habits and negative actions and weaknesses and Strengths.

Two months later, away from the memory Loss and addictions, in the realm of broken Bones and surgery and physical therapy, I Recognize a name, a face, a story.

His name is common and unremarkable, like Bob Jones or Tom Smith, and he was detoxing From oxycontin for the second time when he told Me his story, about pain and highs and stress and Money and family. His dad rejected him, lied to His four year old son, and his wife is nearly Done with him.

Then a spontaneous –
Blackout –
When he is –
Clean –

From the –
Antidepressants –

Car wreck –
Helicopter –
Surgery –
ICU –

When he comes to the step-down unit, his Dad comes to visit, stays all night, and I Decide that vital signs can wait until men’s Tears are dried. Reconciliation. He refuses the Oxycontin prescribed, despite the pain of Two broken legs and fractures wherever he
Landed. After two weeks, his wife starts taking
Turns with his dad, staying in the stunted
Fold-out cot by the bed. Three weeks later he
Proudly maneuvers his wheelchair down the
Hall, his son in his lap, grinning as he responds to
“Faster, Daddy, faster!”

ω + tighter -
this is prose

is simpler word
than “responded”
The fat pregnant belly swerves violently with each chest compression, threatening to build enough momentum to flip her body off the table, until the paramedic trainee locks down the wheels and straps the legs in place. She is from a rural hospital without documentation, in cardiac arrest maybe for four hours, maybe for twenty minutes. They say shocking things like open heart massage and peri-mortem cesarean section until her sternum finally fractures and ultrasound shows extensive blood clotting in the dead veins of the 36-week fetus.

The family wails, the body goes to the morgue.

Autopsy photos come back that afternoon, they are straight out of a forensic nursing text, with the pasty hue of death, amber expanses of abdominal fat, sticky purple-brown blood and rotting body tissue blur together around the perfectly-formed, sprawling baby, posed as if the cyanosis will be dispelled with the first gasping breath that cannot come.
Author’s Note
Regarding “Hat Basket”

This poem is the entire reason I have sections for Revisions and Final Versions. While it may be argued that a poem or any piece of writing can always be improved, final in this case means that it is final for now. After rewriting and rethinking what the moment I wanted to convey in “Hat Basket” is, I have decided that I am still not satisfied with this piece. Either it is in need of a lot of intense revision, or it is a moment better fit for prose. Therefore, this one will not be included as a final version, and I will continue to consider it both as a poem and as prose.
Hat Basket
Becky Davis

There is a large wicker basket in the break room that once held party favors and get-well gifts, now full of knitted hats, brightly colored, soft, made to ease the disappointment of hair loss for our chemotherapy patients.

But the floor is crowded with families, hope, and busy hands.

The hat supply dwindles slowly, swells predictably with the skill of the two or three nurses who have worked in oncology for half their lives.

Even when the manager reminds us all to participate, my intentions to rediscover my knitting needles fade by the time I get home. In my closet they hold my place on a half-finished scarf, buried in beige yarn, until one of my patients needs a hat.

Her granddaughter visits but stays anchored behind a chair in the corner.

The four year old is only lured out by bright colors in the hat basket – the promise that Granny’s scary baldness will be covered by pink and yellow.

The little girl’s delight and Granny’s recovery inspire me to buy rich, variegated yarns, unearth the needles, and knit some healing into my mediocre hats.
Hat Basket

The important parts of the hat basket moment are the basket itself and the breast cancer survivor putting on a hat so the little girl can visit her grandfather. Maybe that’s because I hadn’t connected them before. I knew the nurses knitted hats for the cancer patients, and part of me wanted to be able to give the joy, to use that caring and good nursing interventions, and I promptly forgot about it because at the time we were still students and didn’t have the autonomy or authority to do anything like that.

Then we’re in this patient’s room, setting things up for a blood transfusion with our instructor, chatting amiably with his sister and sister in law, hearing her humorous, brave, but slightly embittered version of their extensive family history of cancer, including her very recent second triumph over breast cancer. She was still bald, proudly wearing a survivor’s pin. I can remember Mary twisting the caps off saline flushes that kept on coming out of her pockets. Then the patient’s daughter comes in, her own daughter in tow. Almost literally in tow after the little girl sees the bald but obviously female sister.

We each took a turn trying to convince the little girl it was okay, and we didn’t want to make the sister leave because she couldn’t stay long and lived an hour and a half away. Mary put her hands on her hips, drawled out a “well” and shrugged. And then I thought of the hat basket. I quietly asked Mary if I could bring a hat, and she beamed. She threw an arm around my shoulder and said, “Becky, bring the whole thing.”

So I toted the basket down the hall. The room was on the end, a formerly semi-private one that pretty much never held two patients anymore, and we either put patients with big families or big problems there. This patient was the former, and it was even more full by the time I got back.

The little girl was still clinging to her mother’s sweat pants for dear life, face pressed into the backs of her knees. I squatted down to the little girl’s level, propped the basket on my knees, and whispered, “Hey, Gracie. Do you want to pick out a hat for your great aunt?” She kept hiding, but I think she saw the bright colors and was intrigued.

I tried again. “What colors do you like? You have a lot of pink on your shirt. How about a pink hat?” She grinned, pulled her two middle fingers out of her mouth, but shook her head. “No? What color, then?” She whispered, “Purple,” and pointed to the edge of a hat, purple and sparkly. I pulled it out. “Okay. I like that one, too. Here. Do you want to take it to her, or do you want your mommy to?”

She took the hat in her hand, rubbed her cheek on it, and raced over to the woman, dropped the hat on her lap, and ran back to hide behind her mother’s legs. One thank-you and five minutes later, Gracie was in her grandfather’s lap. Three days later, he went home. A week after that, we got a family thank-you card “For the hat, and for everything else.”
Conditioning

Becky Davis

You get off work late enough to miss the 7 am news, so you buy a paper on the way home. After you’ve changed and your scrubs are in the laundry, bleach in the washer, you pick up the paper to see what you missed while you worked – nothing –
So you thumb through to the obituaries, because even though patients and names blend together in time, you will recognize – some –
Today it is the same, but the name that jumps out is that of your very first patient, who was thrown from a moving car by her – drunk – boyfriend –
And you start to wonder if it’s a problem that you can fall asleep without caring but still remember her name when you – wake –
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And he is overcome again by pallor when the cardizem drip does its job and her heart starts to function again.

When the secretary pencils in the name of the next patient for the room, Death steps forward, the wait over.
Emergency Department  
Becky Davis

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I wait outside for an hour and a half as his family crowds into the room for the end. I keep company with the peace of the six week old little boy in my arms whose great grandfather is dying.

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Respiratory therapy

So when I go home
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A little therapy of my own
Pet therapy
Writing therapy
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Sleep therapy
Sex therapy
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Works wonders when
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Two months later, away from the memory loss and addictions, in the realm of broken bones, surgery, and physical therapy, I recognize a name, a face, a story.

His name is common and unremarkable – Bob Jones or Tom Smith – and he was detoxing from oxycontin for the second time when he told me his story, about pain and highs, stress, money, and family. His dad rejected him, lied to his four year old son, and his wife’s nearly done with him.

Then a – blackout – when he is – clean –

from the – antidepressants –

car wreck –
helicopter –
surgery –
ICU –

When he comes to the step-down unit, his dad visits all night, and I decide that vital signs can wait, that men’s tears are private. Reconciliation. He refuses the oxycontin despite the pain of two broken legs and fractures wherever he
landed. After two weeks, his wife starts taking turns with his dad, staying in the stunted fold-out cot by the bed. Three weeks later he proudly maneuvers his wheelchair down the hall, his son in his lap, grinning when he hears “Faster, Daddy, faster!”
The fat pregnant belly swerves violently with each chest compression, threatening to build enough momentum to flip her body off the table, until the paramedic trainee locks down the wheels and straps the legs in place. She is from a rural hospital without documentation, in cardiac arrest maybe for four hours, maybe for twenty minutes. They say shocking things like open heart massage and peri-mortem cesarean section until her sternum finally fractures and ultrasound shows extensive blood clotting in the dead veins of the 36-week fetus.

The family wails, the body rolls down to the morgue.

Autopsy photos come back that afternoon, like they are straight out of a forensic nursing text, with the pasty hue of death, amber expanses of abdominal fat, sticky purple-brown blood and rotting body tissue blur together around the perfectly-formed, sprawling baby, posed as if the cyanosis will be dispelled with the first gasping breath that cannot come.
Good of you to get back to me—I've been in over my head.

The NYU mag is called Bellevue Literary Review Dept of Medicine N.Y.U. School of Medicine
550 First Avenue NYC, NY 10015

They are slow to respond.


I'll send your other poems back to you by Thursday. It's not necessary to show me revisions.

You should submit work to the Knoxville Writers' Guild anthology. The theme is frontiers and fences, broadly interpreted. The editors are Jessie Janeshek and Jesse Graves: jjaneshe@utk.edu and jgraves6@utk.edu.

Do I need to hand in a grade for you--how do we manage that?

More soon, all good wishes, Marilyn
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10th Year Anniversary
2008
NEW WOMEN’S VOICES
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A prize of $1,000 and publication will be awarded by Finishing Line Press for a chapbook-length poetry collection. Open to women who have never before published a full-length poetry collection. Previous chapbook publication does not disqualify. All entries will be considered for publication. The top-ten finalists will be offered publication and will be included in the New Women's Voices Series. Submit up to 26 pages of poetry, PLUS bio, acknowledgments, SASE and cover letter with a $15 entry fee by


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Portland, OR 97296-0500

** Best source of info:
Poets & Writers, Inc.
72 Spring Street, NYC, NY 10012 $19.95 one year

Poets & Writers online:
http://www.pw.org/c19701.htm
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Department of English
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208

Poetry Editor,
The Yalobusha Review
University, MS 38677-0186 (Sept. thru April)

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Glendale, NY 11385

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Gallatin, TN 37066-3188

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Cailin Santy, Editor,
Gage Union #1193
Coe College
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Cedar Rapids, IA 52402

revitalized and handsome: Blue Mesa
reads July thru October
Vince Gotera, Ed.
Creative Writing/English
U of New Mexico, Albuquerque
NM 87131
3-6 poems, no multiple submissions
Amy Beeder, Editor

Dr. Danielle Ofri, Editor-in-Chief,
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very slow to respond
Department of Medicine
N.Y.U. School of Medicine
550 First Avenue
NYC, NY 10015

Petroglyph (a journal of creative nature and science writing)
Christopher Cokinos, Editor,
Dept of English Utah State University
3200 Old Main Hill
Logan, Utah 84322
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Johnson State College  
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Quarter After Eight  
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wants "fresh and rousing" poetry up to 5 poems  
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Dept of English, Central Missouri State U  
Warrensburg, MI 64093  
Editor, Claire Hero

Feminist: So To Speak (George Mason U);  
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Fairfax Virginia  
wants music and book reviews, poetry fiction, collaborative work, lyric essays, poetry, experimental work, etc.

Feminist: Lilith  
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Also:  
13th Moon; Earth's Daughters (theme issues, query).

Shenandoah  
Troubadour Theatre, 2nd Floor,  
Washington and Lee University  
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Online resources: (http://www.newpages.com/litmags/)  
www.bpj.org--The Beloit Poetry Journal. Hit "links". Also:  
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Addendum

These are pieces of poetry written by the student at various times before the project. These are intended to provide a point of reference for noting improvement and changes in the student’s writing.
Au Naturel

Becky Keith

There is simple joy

Like ripe, red watermelon
Cool and sticky
Dribbling, sweet, down my chin
In sultry summer

When the first spring rain

Warm like chocolate pancakes
On late mornings
Of deep snow and no school
Well into winter

And first sunny day

Needed like strong black coffee
During finals
When late, blurry-eyed nights
Ruin sanity

Violently collide

Like a runner’s strong bare feet
With hard wet sand
Where waves lick the dry beach
Pounding curved footprints

In a thunderstorm

Poetic and picturesque
Like midnight dreams
And color photographs
Building epic memories

Sweeping out winter

Decisive like a tired
Fussy baby
Finding the end of the day
In blissful slumber

To make way for spring

Welcome like stark naked toes
Relish freedom
Savor the chemistry
Of rain-wet pavement
Ebb and Flow
Becky Davis

The last warm spell in November
Before winter begins in earnest

I linger in the sanctuary,
One hand on the warmth
Of a window in sunlight,
And the other palm next to it,
Cool in the shade
Diffusing up my arms,
Fearful that the prayers
Whispered into my elbow,
The sleeve of my sweater
Will evaporate
When I step outside.
Dream and Rain
Becky Davis

impromptu spring
in February
midnight thunderstorm
and, I, alone
semi-somnolent
blissful
Distracted
  Becky Davis

The first storm since
the beginning of October
is rolling in like a
steam engine,
hot and puffing
and bowing the trees,
twisting their branches,
rendering their varicolored leaves.

Inside the sanctuary,
my slow exhaustion,
aching passion
glow like the oak floor,
smolder like the blue carpet.

I am drawn outside
to sleep in the hot grass,
while the dark clouds
blow past,
comb through the trees,
cool the heat
that is melting my
heartstrings.
Milky Way

Becky Keith

In feverish exhaustion
Writhing, wakeful
In sweaty sheets
Until a rainstorm
Chimes against my window
And the irrrhythmic
Rolling thunder
Kneads away tension
Muscles finally relax
Eyelids flutter and close
And rest finally comes
Like starlight on snow
Cool and fresh
Making snow angels
In my sleep
Nightcap
  Becky Davis

I lick the acrid lime
From my fingers
While I put the tonic
Back in the refrigerator,
The gin behind the wine bottles.

Soon, knuckles swollen
From the quick heat of alcohol,
I crawl in bed alone,
Raw skin under hangnails
Still stinging
From the dour citrus.
I’m sitting in the university center, two thirds of the way done with a now-tepid cup of Earl Grey, killing time between classes – procrastinating. I’m reading poetry, thumbing through my ample textbook, whose waxy, translucent pages host a mosaic of works: familiar, good, ancient, detestable, foreign, and captivating. I read for the first time “Piano,” by D. H. Lawrence. Something about the title – the connotation of the word, or maybe the instrument itself – is ageless, elegant, engaging. Line three quickly catches my eye – “I see / a child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings / and pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.” And I think of you, in vivid, obscure memory – moments from rehearsal in a room with blacked out windows, timeless and chaotic. In the confused, steady sounds of time being wasted, you’re lying beneath the piano, embraced in its dark, aged shadow. Under its mesmerizing spell, you are still, at peace, consumed by the rich, booming vibration of the “tingling strings,” hearing the sonorous melody in your elbows and ankles and hips and knuckles, until it is in your chest and your heart and your soul, and the only movement is a wayward thumb tapping the rhythm on your stomach, slightly out of synch with the white-socked feet of the pianist.
Emergency Room
Becky Keith

It’s been a long time
since I’ve held a baby.
But Ian’s voice is
low and shaking,
booming loudly in the
foreboding, white sterility
of the waiting room,
and his words smell
of morning breath
that has festered
all during church,
and I’ve already risen,
nervous,
when he prompts me
to offer to his cousin
to hold the baby.
I don’t even know her name,
nor does she know mine,
when, baby in one arm
and phone in the other,
she recognizes the
arms-outstretched gesture
I approach with,
and the sleeping infant
lands lightly, warmly
in my arms,
without a word
having passed between us.
Relieved of her
fifteen week old burden,
she leans heavy into the wall,
gasping softly and darkly
into the telephone,
and I tiptoe back to my corner
to cuddle the sleeping boy
close to me.
His head, at rest below my shoulder,
is covered in soft, black hair,
like puppy fuzz
that smells of laundered towels
and walking through the door
into a warm house on a cold day.

The little rib cage,
just smaller than a
cardboard carton of orange juice,
is nestled between my breasts,
rested so his tiny heart
is tapping against mine,
and his shallow breaths
lift his back up and down,
in a quick motion
almost imperceptible
under my hand
that spans from
one tiny shoulder blade
to the other.
His miniature fists
are clutched in habit,
in blissful ignorance
much like they were
before he’d been born.
And peacefully he sleeps,
the occasional baby noises,
grunts and gurgles and sighs,
painting smiles on the faces
of our waiting companions
so that briefly,
each individual smile
is followed by a
reminiscing light
in the eyes of strangers
that are focused on the
easy slumber of youth,
and for a moment
the room isn’t
quite so uninviting.
But for all the
sweet wonder
at the boy in my arms
I can’t quite enjoy it,
because the baby’s
great grandfather
is dying – is dead.