

The Avalon Literary Review



Winter 2025

Welcome to the 2025 Winter Edition of the *Avalon Literary Review*. We are grateful to mark our 13th anniversary with this edition. With this issue, as with all the issues of ALR, we celebrate diversity.

We celebrate the diverse locations our contributors come from. This issue includes work from artists across the United States, Canada, England, Africa and the Netherlands.

We celebrate the diversity of writing styles and types of contributions. This issue includes poetry, short fiction, flash fiction and personal essays. In particular, we celebrate the diverse points of view of our contributors. Each voice has value and deserves our full attention and respect.

As we celebrate this diversity we are simultaneously cognizant of the recurring themes that appear in these pieces: aging, remembering loved ones, facing illness, raising children and the eternal search and celebration of human connection. It is important to remember that even in diversity we find reminders, again and again, of what unifies us.

There are forces in my country right now who are trying to silence diversity. What these small minded people continue to ignore is that in our diversity is where we will find our greatest strength. Thank you for sticking with us on our journey and continuing to value what is at the core of what keeps us human.

Valerie Rubino

Editor

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Table of Contents

The Boy on the Beach	5
by Kendall Lawless	
Spun	6
by David Zopfi	
4 AM.....	7
by Frisk Normandy	
Cows	10
by Matthew J. Spireng	
The Namesake.....	11
by Melissa Dyr Dahl	
Mother	15
by Nancy Story	
Shattered	16
by Daniel DiStasio	
playground	19
by Lee Clark Zumpe	
David D's Waffles.....	20
by Jessica B. Sokol	
Chasing Peace in the Labyrinth of Grief	23
by Nwodo Divine	
Ode to Missing.....	24
by Nina Avedon	
From the Mother Sky	25
by David Hutto	
Enough.....	29
by Dominik Slusarczyk	
The Bandage	30
by Robert Boucheron	
Leveraging My Elbow.....	32
by Myles Weber	
Cold.....	33
by Jenny Fosket	
Holy Places	37
by Lesley Hart Gunn	
Blanks.....	38
by Darren Montufar	
Shadow in the Shade	40
by Brian Builta	
Tender: Notes on Dating	41
by Sean Ferrier-Watson	
Taught	45
by Shontay Luna	
A Dutch Christmas	46
by Valerie Nichols	
7	50
by Al Maginnes	
Sunrise Descent.....	51
by Stacey Gordon	
James Bay Tea Room	53
by Nancy Carol Moody	
Biographies	55

Sunrise Descent

Stacey Gordon

My younger brother Will climbs out of the van after me and rubs his skinny, bare arms. "Damn, it's *freezing* up here," he whines.

"Someday you'll learn we're not idiots when we tell you to bring a coat," my mother says. "The rest of us took the tour company's advice to dress for a forty-degree difference at the Haleakala summit." She herself is decked out in a Patagonia puffer, gloves, and a beanie under her bike helmet.

A second van pulls up and lets out eight more riders. Everyone stumbles around in the parking lot, dazed with sleepiness. There's only just a hint of lighter blue on the eastern horizon. Thousands of stars still paper the dark sky in layered depths.

My parents started arguing after dinner last night and still have barely spoken to each other, besides the occasional grunt necessary to herd their family to the top of a volcano before sunrise. I don't know what exactly they're fighting about. Their grievances, like the stars, have been piling up in layers for months.

The day we arrived in Maui, Mom handed us schedules time-boxing family fun in three-hour increments: snorkeling, hike, scenic drive, shaved ice runs. Every morning my father has slipped out early to take work calls before mandated vacation activities begin. From the hotel balcony, I've spied him on a lounge chair by the pool, balancing his laptop on outstretched legs.

The sunlight pops up from the horizon line abruptly, like a toaster waffle. We're above the clouds here. In the surreal light the clouds look deceptively like the brutal moonscape of a rocky southwest desert. It reminds me of Utah, which we once visited on another, happier family vacation.

The sunrise comes on fast now. A glorious burst of light ignites as the globe turns and we tilt toward our mother star. The guides, three scruffy guys in tour company polo shirts who would look more at home on a beach with surfboards, corral the bike riders into a line. One of them bellows the rules: no racing, no sudden braking, stay on the shoulder, no wandering off the road.

We begin our descent on the clunky, one-speed bikes. My mom leads. She's wearing tan capris, which embarrassingly she calls pedal-pushers, and wears an overstuffed backpack containing a picnic breakfast. I take second place behind her.

We try to ride in single file, but people ahead of us are slow. Will and my father are impatient. Will's front tire comes within centimeters of colliding with my back one. "Will!" I shout. "Do better!"

"Fuck you, Hallie."

"Shut up, miscreants," Dad yells from the back. He doesn't sound like he's joking.

We shut up.

We coast through the clouds. The world becomes a gray, dreary oblivion, and the temperature drops even further. "Why is it so *cold*?" Will gripes.

"It'll warm up soon," Mom calls. "And maybe you'll finally learn your lesson."

"Maybe we'll all learn our lesson," my father snarls under his breath. I don't think he meant for anyone to hear him.

Will snuffles. I can't tell if he's fighting tears or just a runny nose.

More vans ascend the mountain coming toward us. After they pass, my mom leads us around slower groups. We coast out of the clouds and into a sunny morning with blue skies. The pitch of the mountain levels off. We start pedaling. Around a curve I catch a glimpse of the patchwork sugarcane fields and hazy blue ocean below.

We ride in silence until my mother spots a picnic area, where some tour riders have pulled off. "You guys want to stop and have some breakfast?" she calls over her shoulder.

None of us answer. I'm nervous about sharing an opinion. Will and Dad apparently are too grumpy to gift her with affirmation.

"Are we stopping?" Mom shouts again. Silence. I'm about to answer her when she slows and turns her head. "Dammit, people..."

A van comes toward us around a blind curve. Startled, Mom brakes. I swerve and Will follows me, but my father stops hard. I watch him, my mouth agape, as he flips almost comically over the handlebars. He lands on his side, his knee buckled under him.

"Oh my god!" my mother screams. We drop our bikes and scramble to my father. His knee is bloody and raw, speckled with rocky bits of asphalt. But the real spectacle is my dad's face: sheet-white and livid. He's glowering at my mother with steely hatred.

"Mike, are you okay?" I can hear each emotion discretely in her voice. Remorse. Worry. And fear of what's about to happen.

"I am *done*, Jessica," my father seethes. "I am fucking done."

A group of riders from behind us stops to help. My father seems basically okay, nothing broken, but his wound needs stitches. The four of us wait in silence for the tour van to pick him up for a ride to the ER in Wailuku.

The people who've stopped try to strike up a conversation with us. In spite of his pain and anger, Dad chats companionably with them until the van arrives, ignoring the rest of us.

When the guide has loaded my dad in the van, Will climbs in beside him.

"Hallie and I are going to keep riding," my mother says.

They pull away. Mom picks up her bike, brushes herself off, and leads me across the road to the picnic area.

We claim a table. She sits down and unpacks the breakfast she prepared. Other picnickers, who witnessed the accident, eye us curiously.

My mother hands me an egg sandwich. I eat the whole thing despite my queasy stomach.

I feel guilty thinking about my father at the hospital, but it's sort of nice to linger here, in exquisite peace, in the coolness of the island morning.

"So! We can check this one off the list," my mother says briskly. "And tonight at six we have tickets to the luau."

Biographies:

Nina Avedon is from Massachusetts.

Robert Boucheron worked as an architect in New York City and Charlottesville, Virginia. His stories, essays, book reviews, and translations have appeared in *Alabama Literary Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Fiction International*, *New England Review*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Brian Builta lives in Arlington, Texas, and works at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth. His work has been published in *North of Oxford*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *New Ohio Review*, *TriQuarterly* and *2River View* among others.

Nancy Ciucevich Story is a retired English professor and academic dean at Community College of Denver. She was born in Savannah, GA and lives in Carthage, NC. Her poetry has appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Hard Ground: Writing the Rockies*, *kentucky poetry review*, *Gertrude*, *the black fly review*, and other journals.

Daniel DiStasio's work has appeared in *The Louisville Review*, *Summerset Review*, *Reed*, *Bodega*, *45th Parallel* and many others. His first novel *Facing the Furies* was published in 2012. He earned his MFA in fiction at Spalding University. He is currently working on a historical novel based on the 1897 Gold Rush in Alaska, and a collection of short stories focused on the magic of bears. His obsession has led him to trekking bears in Alaska, India, Greece, Peru, and Rumania.

Nwodo Divine is from Africa.

Melissa Drydahl is from California.

Sean Ferrier-Watson has pieces published or forthcoming in *Lovecraftiana*, *Discretionary Love*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Hawk & Whippoorwill*, *Hellbound Books*, and *Illumen*. He was recently a finalist in Crystal Lake Publishing's Shallow Waters Flash Fiction Contest. His book *The Children's Ghost Story in America* was published by McFarland in 2017. Follow him at www.seanferrierwatson.com.

Jenny Fosket is from California.

Stacey Gordon writes book club fiction and mystery novels as well as short stories. She has worked as a magazine journalist and authored non-fiction books on design and online retail. She is based in the San Francisco Bay Area where she manages a team of software writers at a tech company and lives with her husband, daughter, and a black Lab named Winston. staceygordonauthor.com

Lesley Hart Gunn is the winner of the Fall 2022 F(r)iction Poetry Contest and has upcoming or previous publications in *Carve Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *PseudoPod*, *Abyss and Apex*, and *Phantom Drift Journal*. She is originally from the lakes and lighthouses of Atlantic Canada but currently lives in the mountains and desert of the American west with her partner and three children.

David Hutto's work has appeared in *Galway Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Mudfish*, *Crazyhorse*, and other magazines. His experience includes a writers' retreat in Mérida, Mexico, a residency at the Vermont Studio Center, and an upcoming retreat in Dublin, Ireland, as well as first-place poetry awards in Alabama and Georgia. Website: www.davidhutto.com

Kendall Lawless is from Oregon.

Shontay Luna is a native Chicagoan whose has appeared in *Umbrella Factory*

Magazine, *Brittle Paper* and *Riverbed Review* among others. The author of four books, the most recent entitled 'The Goddess Journal.'

Al Maginnes has published ten full length collections and four chapbooks of poems, most recently *Fellow Survivors: New and Selected Poems* (Redhawk Publications 2023). New poems appear in *Twelve Mile Review*, *Tipton Review*, *Salt, Cimarron Review* and others. Al lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Darren Montufar lives and works in Des Moines, Iowa. He enjoys exploring photography, fiction, and the great outdoors.

Nancy Carol Moody is a mixed-media artist and the author of the poetry collections, *The House of Nobody Home* and *Photograph with Girls*, as well as a *chapbook*, *Mermaid*. She wouldn't mind living on a train, but is content at home in Eugene, Oregon, with her partner and more than a thousand pens. Find Nancy online at nancycarolmoody.com.

Valerie Nichols has published poetry, short stories, and a hopefully comic piece, as well as writing and performing a script at a small theatre in Utrecht in the Netherlands. She is co-organizer of the Eindhoven Creative Writing Group. For more information, please see her website: <https://arboles321.wixsite.com/arlenescholvi>

Frisk Normandy lives with his partner and dog in the mountains of Vancouver, British Columbia. His free time is dedicated to writing and creating music. Most recently, his work has appeared in *Heart of Flesh Literary Journal* and *Muse-Pie Press*.

Dominik Slusarczyk is an artist who makes everything from music to painting. His poetry has been published in various literary magazines including *California Quarterly* and *Taj Mahal Review*. His full-length poetry collection *Reaction* is out now with Cyberwit.

Jessica B. Sokol writes scandalous creative nonfiction. She's the author of *For Better And Worse: Short Stories and Tantalizing Tales—From Coast to Coast* (published in 2016), and her stories recently appeared in *The Long Covid Reader Anthology* (Long Hauler Publishing, 2023), *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *Dorothy Parker's Ashes*, *"I DO" Wedding Guide 2023*, *Music Museum of New England*, *Hosmer Gallery at Forbes Library*, and in *The McNeese Review's Boudin*. She's a vegan cook living in Western Massachusetts.

Matthew J. Spireng's 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize-winning book *Good Work* was published by Evening Street Press. A 12-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is the author of two other full-length books, *What Focus Is* and *Out of Body*, winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and five chapbooks. Website: matthewjspireng.com.

A professor of English at Winona State University in Minnesota, Myles Weber is the author of *Consuming Silences: How We Read Authors Who Don't Publish*. His work has appeared in the *Georgia Review*, the *Kenyon Review*, and the *Southern Review*.

David Zopfi is from Wisconsin.

Lee Clark Zumpe, an entertainment editor with Tampa Bay Newspapers, began writing poetry and fiction in the early 1990s. His work has appeared in a variety of literary journals, genre magazines, and anthologies over the last two decades. Recent publication credits include *Space & Time*, *Lovecraftiana*, *Illumen*, and *The Literary Hatchet*. His work is featured in several single-author collections, including *Wearing Winter Gray*, *Feed Me Wicked Things*, and *Whispers from the Intoxicating Abyss*. Lee lives on the west coast of Florida with his wife and daughter.

