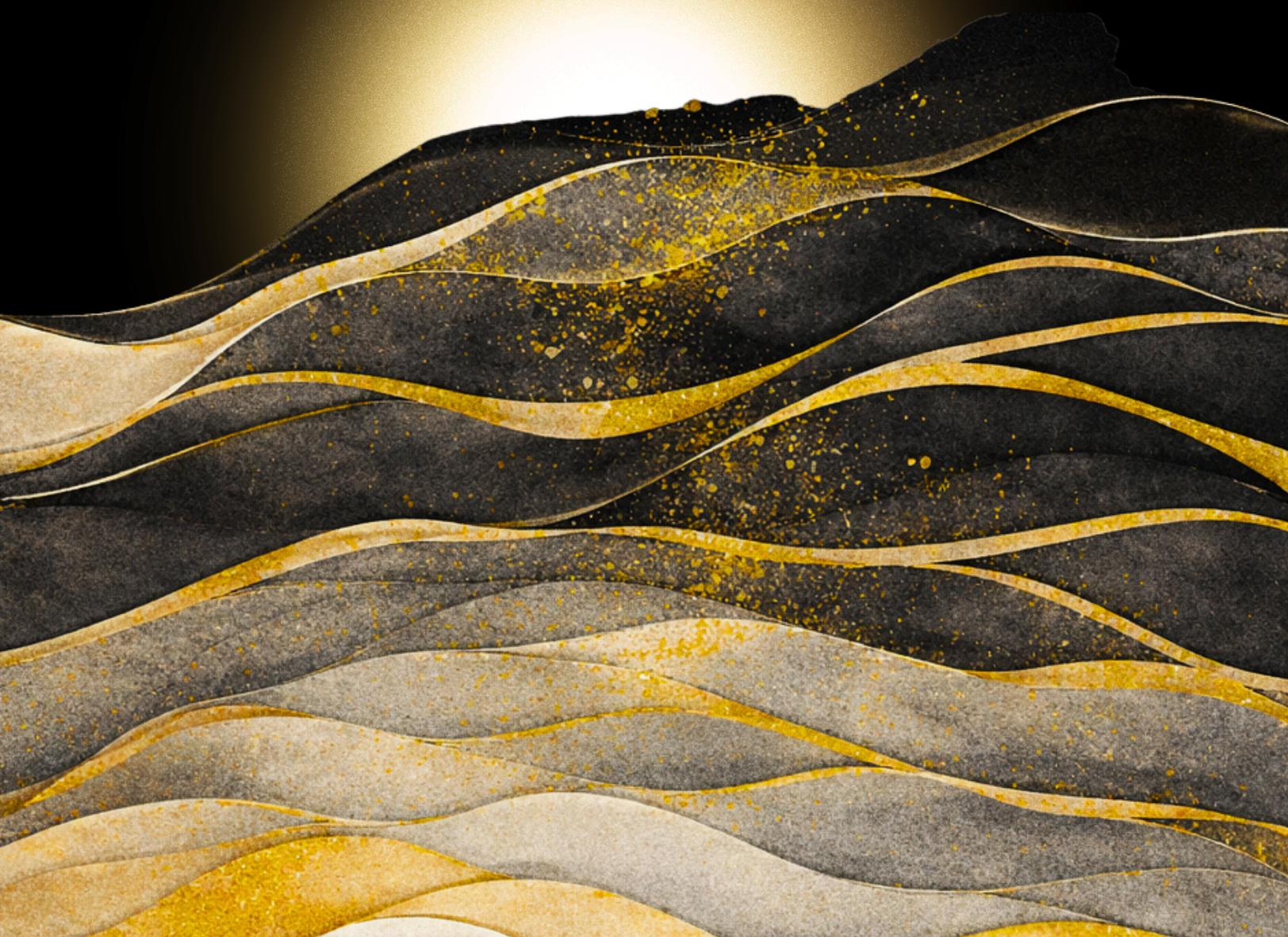


# GOLD

a poetry anthology on aging



the age collective



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The poems gathered in this anthology were written across many lands that have long been home to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. We acknowledge these territories and honour the enduring relationships Indigenous communities have with the land, water, language, and story.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

To our poets, thank you for sharing your words, your stories, and your honesty. Whether or not your poem appears in this anthology, your enthusiasm to reflect, create, and contribute is what made this project meaningful.

To our judges, thank you for the time, care and thoughtfulness you brought to reviewing and selecting the poems for this anthology.

We are grateful to the individuals, community organizations, collectives, institutions, and partners who shared our poetry calls, amplified the voices of poets, and helped this project reach across communities, disciplines, provinces, and territories.

We are especially thankful to organizations committed to arts, storytelling, justice, aging, and community-building, whose values align with the spirit of the GOLD Poetry Project. Your support affirmed that poetry is not only an art form, but a method of connection, resistance, remembrance, and care.

Lastly, we are grateful to the GLOCAL Foundation for supporting this work through the CANCONNECT Grant and for believing in the power of connection, storytelling, and community.



“At 11, I could say ‘I am sodium’  
(Element 11), and now at 79,  
I am **gold**.”

— OLIVER SACKS



This anthology is dedicated to older people across  
Canada, whose lives, memories, and voices remind us  
that growing older is not an ending, but a **deepening**.

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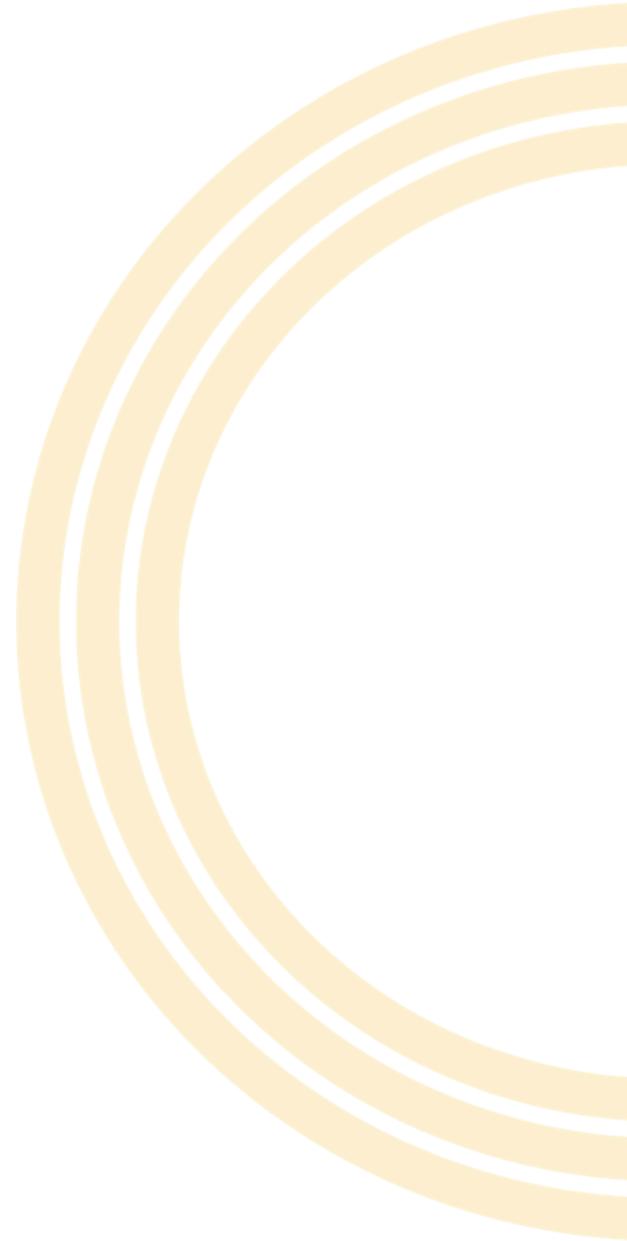
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## INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

The Growing Older Living Deeply (GOLD) Poetry Project was sparked to honour the talent, mastery, and creative force of older adults.

The project name, GOLD, declares aging as a time of value, continued meaning-making, and creativity. Oftentimes, aging is flattened into extremes: either decline and stagnation or masked by forced optimism. This anthology instead approaches aging as a continuum, revealing the nuanced, complex, and personal experiences that are seldom talked about.

The poems presented to you in this anthology were selected from four Canada-wide calls for poetry organized around the themes of *Power and Resistance; Time, Memory, and Legacy; Place and Belonging; and Self and Identity*. These themes were intentionally chosen to invite poets to reflect not only on individual experience, but on the wider social, historical, and emotional contexts that shape how we age.

In response to these calls, we received 319 poems from older adults between the ages of 55 to 95 from across the country. From these submissions, our judges selected ten poems for each theme, resulting in a final collection of forty works.

We are grateful to every poet who entrusted us with their work. It has been a privilege to witness the range of voices that answered these calls.

We invite you to read these poems attentively, and in doing so, to consider how your own experiences of time and aging continue to evolve, no matter your age.

With appreciation and gratitude,

Shanuki & Michelle Goonasekera





# Self & Identity

“We are the sum total of our experiences. Those experiences – be they positive or negative – make us the person we are, at any given point in our lives. And, like a flowing river, those same experiences, and those yet to come, continue to influence and reshape the person we are, and the person we become. None of us are the same as we were yesterday, nor will be tomorrow.”

— B.J. NEBLETT

# AS IS...

**CHRISTINE PALICHUK, 55 YRS**

VICTORIA, BC

The furniture is on sale due to some scratches or dents, or other imperfections, it's on sale "As Is"

Someone will take it, maybe bargain for it.

Since it's not new. Not perfect but "As Is"

I'm not perfect. I have many years of scratches and wounds and dents. I am flawed. I have a past.

The mental scars, the physical scars

Would someone take me "As Is" ?

Am I worth it?

Part of me is faded, worn out, scarred, imperfect.

Would someone love me?

"As Is"

My story, my character, are from those dents, those scars, those imperfections.

In all the rough, tattered, slightly used parts of me

Is what makes me stand out, shine.

Is what gives me character

I can take me "As Is"

It's what makes me. Beautifully me. I can take me.

"As Is"            Can you?

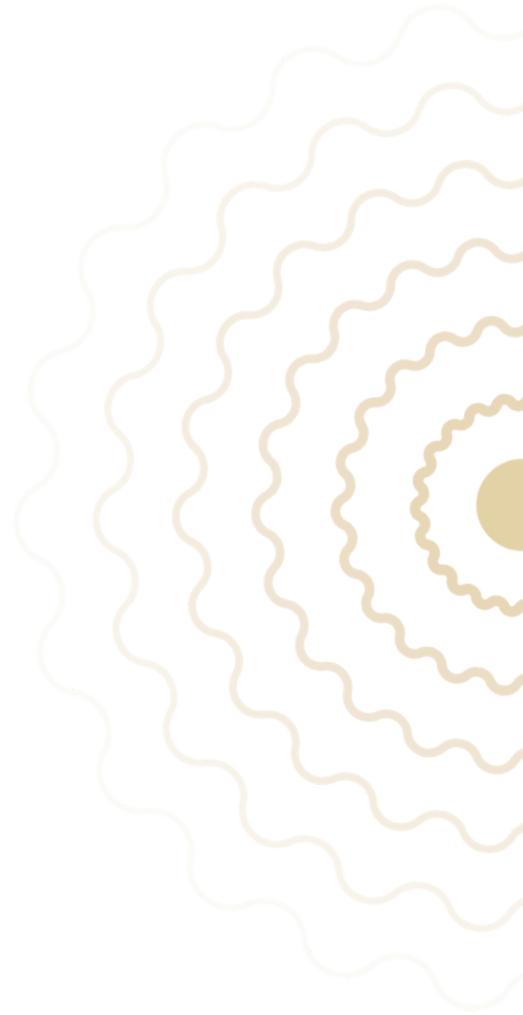
# Sensuality

**DARLENE ROMANKO, 64 YRS**

PEACHLAND, BC

movement in delight  
radiates beauty  
awakens me to  
imitate what it's like  
to be a goddess  
in a godless time

aware of the dance  
called aging  
body and mind  
leading and following  
choreographed steps  
in life's decline



# The Slate

**LAURIE KOENSGEN, 68 YRS**

OTTAWA, ON

Tint of my lineage:

my nipples are pale

I learned to speak Spanish

I learned to sing the blues

but white skin drapes these glacial veins

these freeze-frame hips.

Print of our vintage:

we were raised to be chaste

no cameras sweep

the bedroom scenes

the fifties' creed *keep one foot on the floor*

is encrypted in our scripts.

Hint of my dotage:

the dialogue blurs

I'll learn to play the pauses

I'll learn to improvise

when sepia seeps behind my eyes

my silent movie lips.

# I am an oak

**RONNA JEVNE, 76 YRS**

EDMONTON, AB

I walked among the oaks today  
One spoke to me as friend.  
She whispered Welcome Elder.  
What wisdom do you seek?

In the silence of the forest  
I felt her grace from storms long past.  
Felt her love of summer heat and gentle rains.  
Knew she had swayed in autumn breezes.

Her roots run deep.  
Her branches are strong.  
I felt safe beneath her canopy.  
Felt calm in her sacred place.

She whispered again –  
You are one of us.  
You are an oak.



# Architectural Disintegration or My Superpower: Predicting Weather Changes

**LYNN TAIT, 69 YRS**

SARNIA, ON

I was once almost five feet tall.  
Missed by a quarter of an inch.  
Then the crumbling began.  
The ovaries dried up by forty,  
the left hip joint protesting climate change  
since my early thirties turned ceramic by forty-five.  
Stepped off a two-inch stair in my mid-fifties—  
saved the wine glass, not my ankle.  
Now, at the tender size of four feet ten,  
my back bends in the direction I'm going,  
discs hide or bulge depending on relative humidity—  
where and how they press against  
disintegrating bones, degenerative joints.  
I finally have enough calcium,  
but it's all in my shoulders,  
tendons yelling at me at odd hours,  
before low-pressure fronts breeze through.  
Only thing doing me a real solid—  
the gallstones waking me up at night  
belting out bad karaoke about breaking free.

# DARK ROOM

**KATHERINE MATIKO, 65 YRS**

PRIDDIS GREENS, AB

I'm in the basement, purging.  
I'm sluicing, dodging, burning,  
sorting through decades of detritus.  
They call it downsizing.

I'm pouring memories into a plastic tray  
and swirling to see what comes up.  
There are my old friends: pain and disappointment.  
There are my younger faces, traced with rue and worry.

And then, speckled with years, streaked  
with tears, softened by grace, today's face,  
emerging from the negative.

I dust off my hands and shut the door  
on this dark room of memory.  
No more downsizing for me.

Today I'm enlarging,  
wide open to the light.

## overhaul

**REBECCA CLIFFORD, 65 YRS**

CALEDONIA, ON

I long for the day when the local garage  
can put me up on the hoist  
change out the old and brittle for young and supple  
let the cellulite out of my spare tire  
and adjust the headlights  
so my bra fits better.



# Spring, Death Valley

**JANNIE EDWARDS, 73 YRS**

**EDMONTON, AB**

Noon blisters us into  
the canyon's fierce shade.  
Overhead, a swath of black  
shadows Raven's iron croaks—  
the sound rock would make  
if it could speak. You flick a crust  
of sandwich and Raven snatches it  
midair, bends to his life mate,  
feeds her, beak to beak.

Tenderness  
in this parched place.

Remember? in the new flush  
of you and I becoming *we, us*  
I wrote that if you dried up  
I would carry you  
in my mouth until rain came.

# At the height of my depression

**KIKI MAY HEALEY, 60 YRS**

**ST. ALBERT, AB**

the door squeezed shut on my sanity  
forcing me to ride into the  
Valley of the Dread.

It took a lifetime of training  
to begin to see how my sense of self  
succumbed to the social quagmire of  
“Who does she think she is anyway?”

The voices became needles that glistened to blind me  
And then plunged into my cerebellum with venom  
And placed the poison just behind  
my eyes: a stabbing Veritas.

The truth?

Despite my age, I wasn't strong enough yet.

I am an evolution not a revolution.

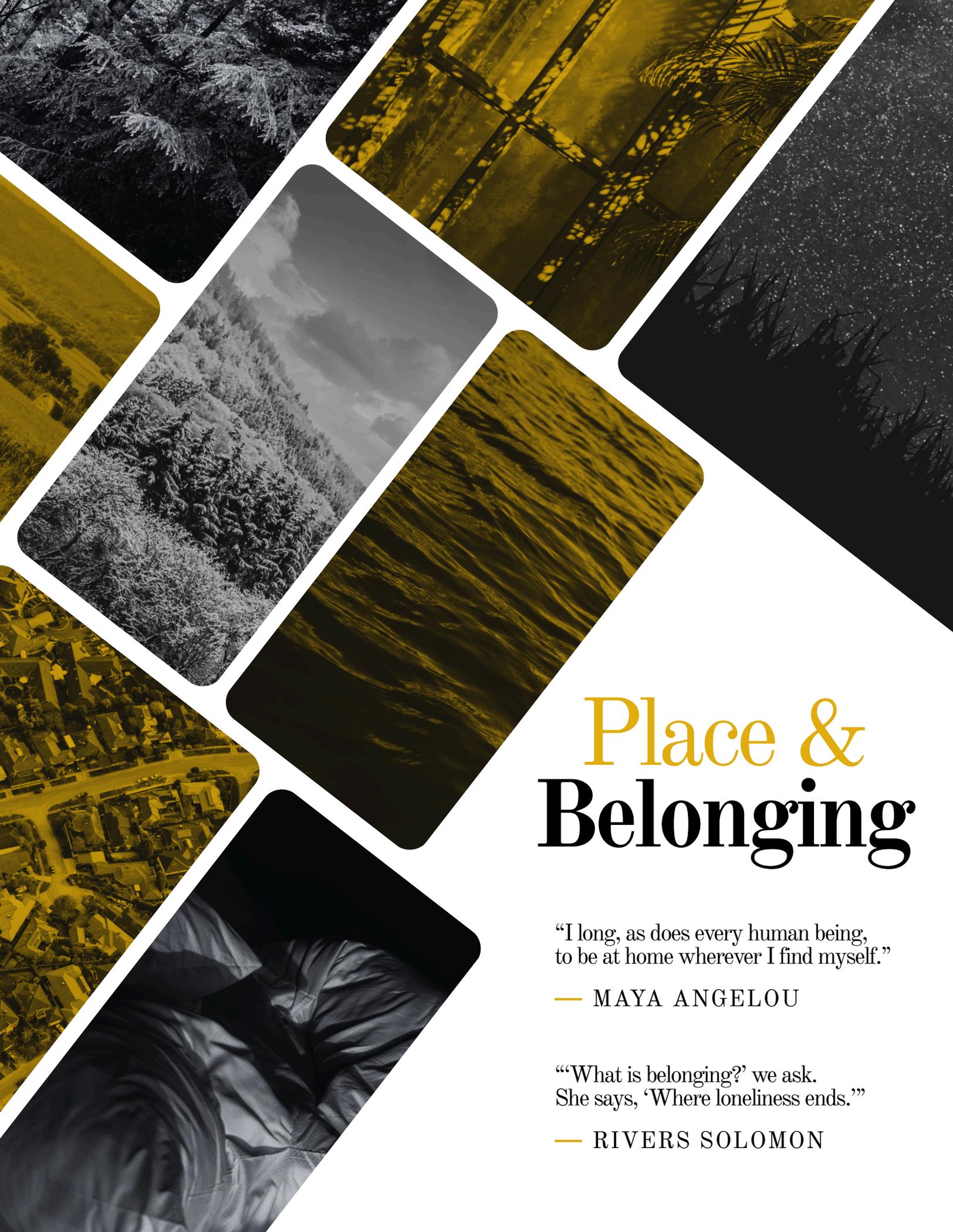
Sometimes, NOTHING is all you can do properly  
and regret is the only sandwich  
left in the fridge.

# what took me so long

**H. FAY WILKINSON, 74 YRS**  
EAGLE LAKE, ON

the veil of doubt  
lifted from my eyes  
a new light opened  
up my tender heart  
a seascape of possibility  
unfolded before me  
the chains that shackled  
cracked into a thousand pieces  
sending shockwaves across the oceans  
fear evaporates  
like wisps of smoke  
from the pipe of dread  
no more, no more  
new adventures await  
sails are set  
winds are favourable  
anchor is lifted  
the map unclear  
I can and I will  
what took me so long





# Place & Belonging

“I long, as does every human being,  
to be at home wherever I find myself.”

— MAYA ANGELOU

“‘What is belonging?’ we ask.  
She says, ‘Where loneliness ends.’”

— RIVERS SOLOMON

# Years in My Mirror

**GREG TURLOCK, 66 YRS**

PARKLAND COUNTY, AB

From my window, this changing world is my home  
so many people, yet so many feeling alone  
we have many ways to keep in touch and explore  
yet we'd rather google than talk to neighbours next door.

I was lucky to grow up in the country  
we played and frolicked in the fields  
gladly helped our folks with their garden  
worked hard for fresh vegetables every meal.

Now I live near the city, concrete under our feet  
parks aren't so green, grass don't grow on the streets  
if you smile at someone, they stare back at you  
and waving at strangers, isn't what people still do.

I stare into my mirror, years stare back at me  
but with sunshine every morning, I accept what will be  
I give thanks for memories and my kitty purring softly  
watching chickadees from my window, as I savor my coffee.

# Keeping

**JAIK JOSEPHSON, 65 YRS**

BEAUSEJOUR, MB

I reach for you in dream  
Slow withering arms across an empty bed  
I hug air and try  
To keep where you would be

Slow withering arms across an empty bed  
Hear your voice and find sandalwood sleep  
To keep where you would be  
I've gotten slow to untangle from the home we made

I hear your voice and find sandalwood sleep  
Nod off and into that same story of us  
I've gotten slow to untangle from the home we made  
But always comes a cruel morning to seize this nestle

Nod off and into that same story of us  
I hug air and try  
But always comes a cruel morning  
to seize this nestle I reach for you in dream



# Early Morning

**CARRIANNE AGAWA, 57 YRS**

BIRCH ISLAND, ON

In the wisps of early morning

my feet stumble to find grounding upon wet grass  
as memories of my little feet dancing upon the land  
cascade through time and place.

I gently move my cold, wet feet

towards the cloudy curtains of autumn dawn  
in hopes of catching a glimpse of my dad's spirit  
getting ready for a day that has already passed.

He was raised on this land (aki)

where my little feet used to play  
running to catch moments with my siblings, mom, and him.  
He had little feet once.

Aki holds the DNA of all my relations

whose feet were once small like mine but grew  
to stumble on wet grass in the wisps of  
early morning.

# The Place of Bark in My Soul

**LINDA H.Y. HEGLAND, 72 YRS**

CLARENCE, NS

You, my woods, are silent today,  
birds stilled, shuffling through spent leaves,  
the dust and heat of the departing summer  
turning my steps to a crackle,  
like a low fire, guttering.

My bones sing with you, the same guttural sound.  
My skin is as thin as the membrane of a leaf  
I hold in my hand, a ghost of itself, the  
veins in my hand identical; my body akin to the  
roots and the branches and the sap of this place.

Old woods, wise woods, a place that mirrors my life -  
roots deep, scarred limbs and sap of tears;  
the joy of turning a face to the sun, catching  
wind in my arms; bare feet in the puddled rain.  
This place is me; I am this place.

We are slowly disappearing, though; becoming invisible, ghosts.  
No one sees, anymore, our fragile tenderness; our being here.



# Gather the Stars

**KAT CAMERON, 61 YRS**

**EDMONTON, AB**

The server in I-Hop charges us  
the seniors' price for coffee and my heart  
seizes. Am I really this old? I look  
in the mirror and lose the woman I once was.

Sometimes I just wish for the silence  
of a dark sky. The Big Dipper.  
Orion. The Pleiades, a meteor shower.  
Fortune's wheel slowly revolves above us.

The Greeks thought each star was caught  
in a timeless sphere, but they are  
drifting farther apart.  
Where do we belong? Each day  
we reach for one another.  
Let's gather the stars.

*Let's gather the stars.*

*Ghazal II — John Thompson*

# Grey and Fissured

**PHILIP ARIMA, 61 YRS**

TORONTO, ON

Mine is the only picket fence  
left on the street. The rest, I am told,  
have been replaced with steel pipe  
and chain-link, shrubbery  
or nothing at all.

Its once-white paint is peeling;  
the wood beneath is grey  
and fissured, and the children  
it kept from running into the road  
are grown and gone.

If my knees and back, arms and hands  
would let me, I would sand it smooth,  
paint it the way I did when I built it,  
scatter some toys between it  
and this window

where I sit.

# Winter Bird

**LORRI NEILSEN GLENN, 77 YRS**

HALIFAX, NS

New year: first big snow. Buoyed by a deep sleep under heavy quilts, you lean a scraper into ice on the car windshield. Something about home in this cold. Yesterday you watched a hawk hover in stiff wind above, looked in vain for its prey below, the rabbit under the barn, perhaps. This raptor circles often, skims the trees near the shore where deer bed down. It's a hungry time.

What do you need from this world to survive?  
Once in a Herc over Cambridge Bay, the pilot said: forget your life jacket—no point. Old weirs blink in the cove; the sun is hard light. You stamp life into your feet knowing it's weeks before St. Brigid, mother saint of poets and new birth, faces the vernal equinox. You've learned how to wait until the folds of her green cloak quicken, open the light like wings.

# Crackled

**JOANNE KLOEBLE, 65 YRS**

OTTAWA, ON

paint, peeling off our old house,  
the place where our stories live on.

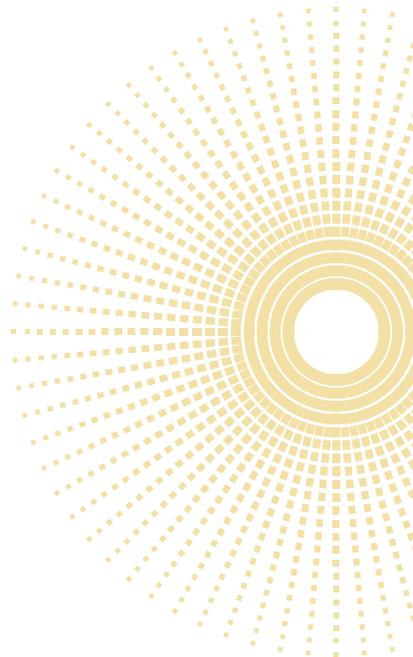
wood, black and ashy,  
still smoking as fireside tales waft away.

records, our favourites,  
that flash of suspense before the song begins.

faces, aged with lament and laughter,  
etched in lines of remembrance.

voices, a lifetime of calling and crying,  
singing and smoke and schnapps,  
worn, lived and cherished.

My love, stay and be  
Crackled  
With me.



# The Collector

**JAN BULEY, 67 YRS**

ST. JOHN'S, NL

My elderly mother's sunroom is a home for other homes—  
A place for wondering about delicate finch nests on windowsills  
A tiny hummingbird nest woven into a forked twig  
with softest thistle to cushion the babies  
A hornet's nest suspended in the corner,  
Its delicate grey paper case now empty and silent  
Limestone fern fossils and seawormed driftwood,  
Spider webs in the corners, residents all the same.

My elderly mother's sunroom is a world from other worlds  
Shells on the windowsills lined up—smallest to biggest  
Feathers from red-tailed hawk and partridge  
A fragment of a robin's egg  
And if you linger and listen,  
she'll tell you of a time  
when she found a sparrow's home  
Her long chestnut hair woven into it  
A memory thread  
A story given  
A gift to another.

# ROOTS OF GOLD

**DIANE SMITH, 70 YRS**

HORNBY ISLAND, BC

I am becoming more golden as the years pass by.  
My roots are embedded in island soil, wrapped around rock.  
I was lithe, haunted and seventeen when I came here.  
I am now newly seventy and the ghosts are gone.  
This island has been a steadfast rock beneath me  
while I've transformed over decades and seasons.  
Its firm ground, always solid underfoot  
as I've stumbled, grown, healed, and matured.  
Its trees are taller, I've aged into wisdom,  
and together we grow, rooting down and reaching up.  
I look outward into the forest, at these magnificent friends.  
I look inward into me, and love the girl,  
and the woman inside who made this island her home.  
Stories create community and they tumble upon one another here.  
Petroglyphs on the rocky foreshore speak with a fading voice,  
as islanders keep spinning their tales.  
Stories layered and interwoven, carve characters in stone.  
I erode, disentangling myself from old worn out stories  
and remain freestanding as new ones emerge.  
My hopeful sights are set on aging gracefully, like gold.



# Time, Memory & Legacy

“I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding – not even that – no. Just for some recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all.”

— TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

# SKIN BOATS

**CHERYL LYON, 77 YRS**

**PETERBOROUGH, ON**

Skin boats

carried the ancient Irish monks  
across the northern sea.

None ventured alone.

Maps in their heads,  
prayer beads,

a few hard biscuits,

stars

for their guides.

Within her coracle of old skin,  
my mother sits with her tea and toast

lost in the sea of her self

that once had shores,  
trying to find the map  
she once had.

Her son comes in,

and in her eyes

shines a small blue star.

# My Friend Died Today

**LYNN GALE, 68 YRS**

**SPRUCE GROVE, AB**

My friend died today.

It made me think of you, Mom

the times I would call and you'd tell me

that so and so died and I'd inwardly sigh

listening with half an ear to your sad, quavering voice

as you reminisced while I jotted my grocery list

or growing impatient at the Dollar Store while

you perused the greeting cards,

buying more sympathy cards than birthday ones,

each one chosen for the message written within.

It's just a card, I would say, and you'd reply

I like to read them and take five more minutes

leafing through the stack to make sure you had enough.

At Tim's, I'd buy you a chocolate dip doughnut

and a black coffee into which you'd stir the sweetener

you always had in your purse.

You'd talk about the person who had passed

I'd wonder if that was what getting old was about

... just sympathy cards and memories.

My friend died today, Mom, and I thought of you.

# Nesting Dolls

**JENNIFER PAQUETTE, 63 YRS**  
STRATFORD, ON

You began, a tiny egg inside me  
while I grew  
in my mother's womb.  
Strands of life,  
the weft we weave into the warp  
upon our family loom.

This magic,  
this intergenerational chain —  
you inside me inside her;  
like nesting dolls  
one carries the next,  
each linked to the others.

Connected  
in this wondrous way,  
the mother heart beats on.  
Her inside you inside me;  
and on, and on  
and on ...



# forgotten

**ENJAY, 76 YRS**

**TERRACE, BC**

you remember sunny days warm and bright  
forget cold rain wet clothes and shivering

you remember flowers in scented fields ablaze with colour  
forget cold ashes cinders ugly and grey

you remember gentle praise helpful hints happy stories  
forget cruel gossip slander retributions

you remember honey  
you remember happiness  
but  
eyes squinting  
that face  
you forget that face  
that tired face on your daughter

# When You Are Sleeping

**RACHEL ARISS, 60 YRS**

TORONTO, ON

Sometimes, when you are sleeping, I look at your face,  
and time collapses.

I see your beautiful, bright young face,  
and I remember realizing how much I loved you,  
how I wanted only to be with you.

And that I would take as many days and years  
at your side, as I was given.

Sometimes, when you are sleeping, I look at your face,  
and time expands.

I see all the time you have spent loving me,  
in small and sweet lines around your mouth and eyes.

Our children's lives fulfill your caring,  
their futures dreamed in the gentle strength of your arms,  
the shape of your hands, the light in your eyes.

Sometimes, when you are sleeping, I look at your face,  
and find myself here, in the ripening of our lives,  
children grown and generations turning,  
all the days at your side I so desired.

## In his 84<sup>th</sup> year

**SUZANNE WOOD, 64 YRS**

**BONNYVILLE, AB**

The old man has given up on God  
yet here he is on his knees  
not to pray, but to protect his lush green lawn  
while he curses neighbours  
who never keep their weeds in check  
He bends forward, supporting himself on three limbs  
lifting a screwdriver in the palm of one hand  
digging deep, encircling roots  
to be rid of the unwanted dandelions  
constant invaders thrusting upward  
He does not remember his daughter  
bringing him a gift of vivid yellow bloom  
strong, resilient, forcing itself free  
from concrete cracks and pavement edges  
He does not remember his son  
blowing the dry seedy globe of the  
spent blossom, making a midsummer wish  
He sees only what is in front of him, unaware  
his vigilant preference may be getting in the way  
of what he desires the most.

# Small Town Broadway

**PETER NORMAN LEVESQUE, 60 YRS**  
BROCKVILLE, ON

The sugar maple in the front yard just shrugged  
She shivered and dropped most of her leaves  
Her branches now mostly bare  
Except for a tenacious few

This reminds me of you and the stories you tell  
Always a few words hovering above your head  
Hanging on, even when you are done  
Echoes of the time when your mind was clearer

These tales have all been told before, I still listen  
It's your voice I want to remember  
The way your round your Rs and punch your Ps  
A slight twang of a New Brunswick you memorized

Stories of picking potatoes for fifty cents a barrel  
Riding balloon tired bicycles down a small town Broadway  
Wandering among the wells in the rocks below the Falls  
I guess we all fall eventually, like those last leaves

# Mother's Passing

**FRANK BELTRANO, 71 YRS**  
LÉVIS, QC

Abracadabra, you were gone.  
You didn't want to go.  
You loved the world even though  
you judged it often and harshly.

Like a parlour trick you levitated  
above the bed, not yet dead  
your last days of trance gave the family  
a chance to assemble. Then you became fairy dust  
sleight of hand, misdirection and illusion.

Now from your holy place  
occasionally you show your face  
wave your magic wand, help me win  
games I am fond of, but this hocus pocus  
allows me to focus on  
the miracle that was you.

# To-Do List

**TARA WOHLBERG, 58 YRS**

**VANCOUVER, BC**

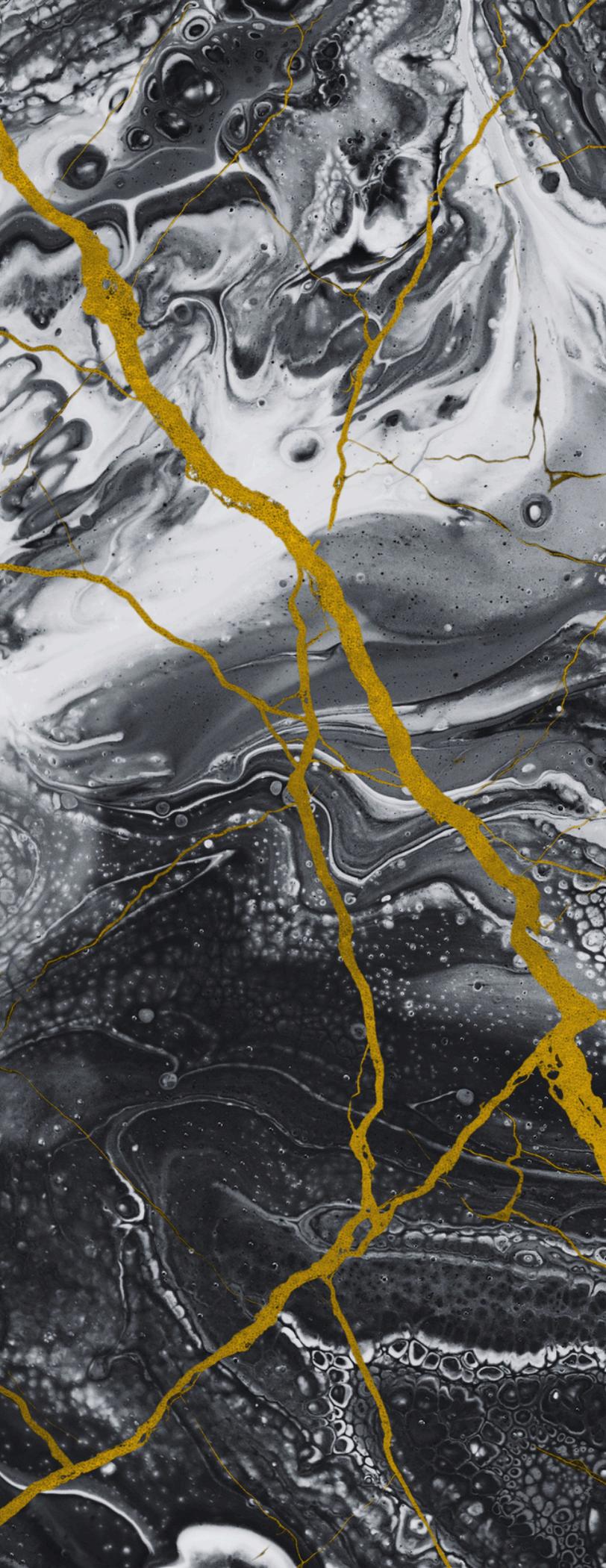
a simple item: dropping my mother off  
in a long term care home the next  
sensible stop on dementia's excruciating  
route of the unremembered  
a compassion of care aids now mind her  
framed family photos form a personal altar  
chubby cheeked kids or cousins weddings or graduations  
her fidgeting hands busy themselves unpainted nails  
she thrums a non-verbal chorus without her teeth  
without her face on ceaselessly staring vacant  
her Voguish style replaced with a wheelchair  
I tug her jewelry box drawer open  
traces of her perfume catch my breath  
sentimental Somewhere, My Love tinkles  
I remember my parents dancing like  
Fred and Ginger under a full moon  
the champagne bubbles of their indelible love  
spilling everywhere like today's tears  
my mother is gone but here

# My grandmother's poems

**VIVIANE BRIAND, 61 YRS**

LAC-SUPÉRIEUR, QC

I found the old book of poems you wrote  
inked in elegant cursive  
ancient scriptures buried deep  
each poem unveiling a piece of your untold story  
each verse a silent cry that went unheard  
a tale untold of a wife who endured  
a husband's dark and unpredictable moods  
an entire life kept silent  
I add fresh ink to yours  
casting a healing balm over old wounds  
new words to erase the final traces  
of trauma from my own hands  
so that one day  
my grand daughter may turn these  
same pages  
unscarred and unscathed by her lineage  
to stand fierce and free  
in the warm glow of her own light



# Power & Resistance

“Never tease an old dog;  
he might have one bite left.”

— ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

# Spell for Staying Unbroken

**DENISE LANDRY, 57 YRS**

MONTREAL, QC

I am a disabled body, aging on my own terms.  
My muscles argue, but my spirit refuses retreat.  
Each day, I reclaim the map of myself.

Strength shifts shape: I learn new magic.  
I steer my mind with practiced, quiet power.  
Adaptation becomes a spell I cast daily.

The world doubts disabled fire, but I burn steady.  
I rise louder, anchored in years of resistance.  
My voice carves space where none was offered.

Age sharpens my defiance into something luminous.  
I keep fighting for breath, freedom, and presence.  
I keep choosing myself, again and again.



# Protocol

**VIVIANE BRIAND, 61 YRS**

**LAC-SUPÉRIEUR, QC**

Confined to a cramped sterilized room  
propped up in your wheelchair like a child's forgotten doll  
listening to the commotion of panicked staff in the hallway  
Covid outbreaks multiply  
already a dozen residents have died  
today they dress you up in full protective gear:  
N-95 face mask, gown, gloves and goggles  
and wheel your chair two doors down  
you hold your wife's hand as she lay dying  
"Keep the mask on, it's protocol!" they warn you sternly  
you take her hand, frail and blue-veined  
cradle it gently like an injured sparrow  
kissing it through streaming tears, awaking memories  
your body, too, remembers  
in an unexpected surge of strength  
that could rival your younger days  
you kick the discarded goggles and mask  
swiftly and skilfully under the bed  
propelling them with athletic precision  
into the farthest corner

# I Do Not Want to Behave

**PETER NORMAN LEVESQUE, 60 YRS**  
BROCKVILLE, ON

I do not want to behave

Age gracefully, dress appropriately, or be dignified

I have worked for fifty years (maybe more)

Worn the suit, choked on the tie, paid the dues

Said all the please & thank-you, Sir, Ma'am

Now is the time of poets, artists, and nude beaches

I want to stand before a painting and weep

Feel music so deep in my bones that I melt

I want to understand beauty and love profoundly

That it becomes the very last thing in my lungs

I understand your concern and I hear you

You are worried that I may get hurt

I have been hurt, many times, I have scars

My soul was ground so that you may grow

Do not worry about me, I have done good

Now, please understand, I will not behave

We are a light, sometimes we catch fire, then burn.

# For Crying Out Loud

**MADELEINE NATTRASS, 81 YRS**

**PARKSVILLE, BC**

*Eroticism is the human desire to live*

*...it is our sense of Being. \**

Desire never leaves – though voraciousness shrinks. Drive fades to notion or niggle (golden hair on a muscled chest, summer-scented limbs under thin silk.)

Age tends to give it up, sweet completion relegated to the young, the virile. Shameful to think it a poor gamble, a lame horse, fat chance of satisfaction.

I once met a woman who married four times (or was it five...) Hung on to desire, hooked up again and again – never stopped replenishing. The surprise of a body beside you, a hand to grab at shortens the long dark night as the years sweep away, someone to call your name before everything goes quiet.

*\*Eikoh Hosoe, renown photographer awarded the title of Japanese Person of Cultural Merit, as quoted in Brick Books, Issue # 92, p.8, Winter 2014*

# Baggage

**LESLEY HEBERT, 77 YRS**  
NEW WESTMINSTER, BC

In my great-grandmother's day  
women were "baggage",  
a burden to be carried:  
a servant, a lazy baggage.  
an inquisitive woman, a nosy baggage,  
an assertive woman, an impertinent baggage.

I do not wish to be luggage,  
a valise on someone else's voyage.

Let me be a nosy, impertinent baggage  
who unpacks her life  
from beneath the cracked lid  
of a suitcase faded with age and use,  
and covered with labels of memory.



# OLD WOMAN TREE

**CHERYL LYON, 77 YRS**

**PETERBOROUGH, ON**

I was Child,  
sweet body  
flesh glowing from the speed of my orbiting  
the galaxy of my days.

I was crescent Youth,  
hot and perfect  
skin slick with desire  
stretched in the crossbow of sex.

I was Mother  
full with child,  
thick green vine  
releasing red fruit.

I am Old Woman,  
rough-barked tree,  
the sap of experience  
and memory  
ready to be tapped.

# Contrapuntal

**LINDA H.Y. HEGLAND, 73 YRS**

CLARENCE, NS

The powerful wind does not ask permission to bend the  
Black Locusts; but the trees resist, standing strong, unbending.

The mountain does not apologize for the shadow it throws  
across the valley; those small yellow and blue flowers grow  
nonetheless in the sunless places, fragile but bravely insistent.

Power is a heavy weather sitting in the lungs,  
a white heat that makes even the stones sweat.

Power tells us where to stand, and when to hush.

It forces upon us a literacy of scars - like the  
scars that trees carry from the force of lightening;  
or the fox from the trap. I name the silence

‘Mab’ and the grief ‘Helice’, tucking them into the wet,  
turning stones of the stream. Power can take the breath  
from a room, turn promises into salt, but it cannot  
un-name what I have christened.

Resistance is not a shout; it is the way the  
roots of the trees dig deeper when the soil  
turns to stone. Resistance is dancing on the feet of  
my own ghosts, my hoary age having found, like lightening,  
a means to find the ground. Old is my power.

# Admit One

**MARGARET HALL, 72 YRS**

**GANANOQUE, ON**

Registered, eligible, referred  
My condition progresses  
Still no healer in sight  
More testing required  
Once more I'm deferred  
We'll be in touch  
I wonder how long  
Then one day a breakthrough  
My place is assured  
Stuck once again  
Radio silence I find  
Waiting for surgery  
A soul sucking game  
Ignore me perhaps  
I'll not be deterred  
Tenacious and stubborn  
There's more life to be lived  
My persistence is rewarded  
At last I am heard



# On The Eve Of My 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday

**SUSAN J. ATKINSON, 61 YRS**

OTTAWA, ON

On the eve of this new year, I have grown  
from goddess to crone, learning as I go  
to master the aviary inside my head.

The squabble of starlings whose black scribble  
scratched constant murmurings in my mind  
has quieted their dance to a nimble  
choreography, leaving no lasting imprint  
other than where beauty had rested.

My congress of crows, that caused chaos and confusion,  
is now tamed into a hushed harmony.  
Their indigo feathers softened into velvet,  
their humbled voices melodic so  
my nerves no longer desperate to take flight are  
stilled from what was once incessant worry.

On the eve of this new year my aviary sings  
sweetly, each note perfected into gentle chatter,  
each bringing a small whisper of comfort.

# I refuse

**ADÈLE FONTAINE, 86 YRS**

EDMONTON, AB

I'm not that little old lady  
Who keeps swallowing tales  
Told by whiners and sad sacks  
Their words and ways  
Defining old age  
As a time of uselessness and invisibility

I'm taking care of myself  
Striving to eat well and dance everyday  
I am not too old to learn  
I am not too old to change

I stand on this threshold of wisdom and grace  
Challenging myself  
To really listen  
To practice all that I'm learning  
Living my dream of seeing all things as new  
Writing poetry and drawing birds  
I'm not that little old lady  
And I shall never be

“It takes a long time to become young.”

— PABLO PICASSO

