

Thoughts On Paper

WBPL's Writers Group Quarterly Journal



**Julie Newman is our
featured member!**



Oysters & Clams

By Julie Newman

(an opinion piece in response to the article "Toxic-algae funds sought," found in Newsday this year)

Fun to look at and enjoyable to eat. They are not especially pretty but collecting the shells and painting them pretty colors to be decorative and sharing with friends is an alternative pastime. Did you know that oysters and clams are "natural filters of pollution?" I read this and it renewed my interest in these shellfish. It reminded me of the snails in the fish tank I had, of various types of gold fish. The snails rode along the sides of the tank and crawled along the bottom of the gravel, sucking up all the excrement left behind from the fish and old food. They did a good cleaning job but the tank still needed to be cleaned weekly, even with a filtering system. Imagine all the excrement in our ocean and the bay, from all of the fish! Imagine the debris being tossed into the waters, no one pays a penalty for oil sludge and garbage.

Well, we do pay a penalty. People love to eat oysters and clams. Some even eat them raw. It is also said that oysters and clams are raised in clean areas that make them safe for eating after cooking. People consume these shellfish without any side effects. Not all side effects happen immediately. If there are pollutants in the water, surely fish must absorb some of the chemicals.

Years go by, all is fine. Then one day a lump a limp, not feeling well at all. What could it be? No one has all the answers. We cannot be sure if we consume oysters and clams or beef or any other food, that they in some way contribute to our ailments. I believe there is a reason for many things that are, not hereditary but environmental. It is just not spoken about. Frankfurters and nitrates. Canned vegetables with lots of sodium. Packaged foods with preservatives. This is no joke.

Now there are outbreaks of "rust, brown and blue - green algae found across Long Island in recent years." They can be harmful to shellfish, finfish, eelgrass, small animals and even humans, depending on the types of algae. It is caused by nitrogen pollution. Luckily, we have Senator Schumer, who is trying to get a bill passed called the "Harmful Algae Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act." If this bill is passed, it will keep tabs on the harmful blooms and be assessed every five years. It is said that these blooms have the potential to affect our drinking water.

Oysters and clams, they do not want to scare us with this news. Rather than sending caution, these shellfish and other marine life must be careful. For many fish, their days are numbered anyway. It is important to keep our waters clean, so we consume healthy fish.



Title?

A Collective Piece

**By Nicole Peters, Patricia Soper, Christine Colligan, Carlo Frank Calo, Rita B. Rose,
Julie Newman, Charles Bobell & Megan Goff**

Sometimes, it takes me a few steps backwards to leap forward. To recollect my 'self,' carefully unfolding each leaf of time as it passes through my tree of memory. Like leaves falling in Autumn, leaves change color with my own various perceptions. Sometimes, the spirit of the burgeoning fruit sleeps within the bud. To express myself, the gradual blossoming of petals and stamen to release the fragment perfume of my words. Like an apple thunking to the ground, the ripeness of my heart rots. Those memories that once shaped my life also seem to haunt it. It is these memories that I find so incredibly difficult to let go of.

But letting go I must, one must, as it purges the darkened soul; shakes the decaying leaves from within, awakens fond memories as we prepare for another season of our lives - another rebirth. Yes, rebirth I think, as I look at the weeds sprouting through the concrete cracks, competing with their fruit-filled cousins to catch the sun and rain. Rebirth, I think, is the substance of everything as I watch my son tickle my grandson. To leave behind the heartache and anger of the past is to be reborn and to move forward. To re-initiate one's life, to accept myself and others without judgement and prejudice. To move on with the knowledge that life is in fact, precious and not to be wasted.

Yes, the old must be shed to make room for the new. It takes courage to let go what we know, what gives comfort, even the familiar shroud of grief wrapped 'round for protection. It takes faith to trust in an unknown future. We see the vibrant beauty of autumn, trees that don't resist the cycle of change and know we too must release what needs to be set free. The letting go of the past and moving in a new direction sounds good to me. The brain doesn't really work that way. The beauty of a tree's life is to bloom in the Spring only to have its leaves fall to the ground in Autumn. Then, miraculously, the buds and new leaves reappear the next Spring. The life cycle remembers. To move on in our life is necessary. It is important not to dwell on past issues, but sometimes we have to resolve what is of the utmost importance. The beauty of the Autumn foliage will happen soon. The remarkable transformation of colors on the leaves is a sight to behold. It is one step away from moving on to another part of its life.

And so, my perceptions change with each new thought, each leaf, various colors. What began as negative and sour, is now positive and fruitful, as is my future. So now, full of energy and light I forge ahead into the blissful unknown with memories to hold and many to make. While I may still hold those memories close to my heart, I know that there is a bright future ahead if I do not let the past that once held its grip on me tightly continue to plague my future endeavors. If I look to the future with an open mind and an open heart, I can truly accomplish anything that my heart desires. I can soar across the sky like an Eagle, float as if a butterfly, fall gently as crystal rain and stand proudly upon the Earth basking in all it has to offer; to remain for the shifting seasons until my time is done--

In our collective piece (see page 2), many members of our group participated.

You can see how each writer added their own creativity to this piece (colors and initials).

This was a fun experience for us all and helps all writers think about different ways we can be inspired to write - write as individuals and write collectively.

(unedited version)

Sometimes, it takes me a few steps backwards to leap forward. To recollect my 'self,' carefully unfolding each leaf of time as it passes through my tree of memory. Like leaves falling in Autumn, leaves change color with my own various perceptions (NP). Sometimes, the spirit of the burgeoning fruit sleeps within the bud. To express myself, the gradual blossoming of petals and stamen to release the fragment perfume of my words. Like an apple thunking to the ground, the ripeness of my heart rots (CJ). Those memories that once shaped my life also seem to haunt it. It is these memories that I find so incredibly difficult to let go of. (MG).

But letting go I must, one must, as it purges the darkened soul; shakes the decaying leaves from within, awakens fond memories as we prepare for another season of our lives - another rebirth (RS). Yes, rebirth I think, as I look at the weeds sprouting through the concrete cracks, competing with their fruit-filled cousins to catch the sun and rain. Rebirth, I think, is the substance of everything as I watch my son tickle my grandson (CC). To leave behind the heartache and anger of the past is to be reborn and to move forward. To re-initiate one's life, to accept myself and others without judgement and prejudice. To move on with the knowledge that life is in fact, precious and not to be wasted (CB).

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Stealing From The Gods

by Megan Goff

Autolycus ran away from the war god's shrine as if his butt was on fire. Stealing a sword from the god of war, Ares, now that was a brazen heist indeed he thought to himself. Man, if I can get away with this, there will be no doubt I will go down in history as the greatest thief that ever lived. King of thieves, he thought to himself now that has a pretty nice ring to it. As he continued to dodge in and out of the throngs of peasants selling their wares within the town square, Autolycus did not watch where he was going and he ran right into Hercules.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry, Autolycus?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular, Herc. Just out for a run, it's such a beautiful day."

Hercules' eyebrow raised. "With a big sack on your back."

"Yeah, the weight will keep me in shape. Thieves have to keep in the best shape."

Iolaus rolled his eyes. "If the crap gets any deeper here I am going to have to buy myself a pair of boots."

"Iolaus, buddy you know I would not lie to you." Autolycus knew that if he did not get far away from this town soon and put some space between him and that shrine he might as well be dead. If Ares discovered the missing sword, he would probably torture him.

"Autolycus, you and I both know that if you told the truth cows would fall from the sky."

"Really, I must be on my way now," Autolycus said praying Hercules and Iolaus would let him continue his journey before it become too late.

"Sure, you don't need any help that sack looks rather heavy."

"Nope." Autolycus heaved it back onto his shoulder. He started out towards the edge of town hoping that neither Hercules nor Iolaus would attempt to follow him. All the while praying to the Gods that Ares had yet to discover that his precious sword was missing. Autolycus would soon discover that he would have no such luck on this day.





Blame Yourself
by Nicole Peters

I am angry because you are SELFISH
The Blame, The Hate,
That you tell others about ME

The Lies
That you tell others about YOURSELF

I am angry because you BLAME everyone else
For your Hate, For Lies
That you tell yourself about OTHERS

I am angry because you HATE yourself
But you BLAME others for that hate
And so you lie about YOURSELF
OTHERS blame themselves, they think they are SELFISH

I play a game of SILENCE
You are the only one SPEAKING
I will not be SILENT anymore

I will not place BLAME
Nor LIE
Nor HATE
Upon myself
Nor will I become SELFISH

I release my ANGER
It dissipates
Vanishing into the air

I am free from your grip



Eclipse

By Patricia Soper

Like the Sun, hidden by Moon,
your fire hovers in shadow.
It still smolders,
its glowing embers unseen,
denied, even by you.
You have warmth to share,
burning passion in your soul,
that yearns to create, to transform
your life and our world.
Like the Phoenix,
fan your flame 'til its blistering blaze
devours the darkness.
Then, take us with you
as you soar in Resurrection.





White Hallow Bones

On a crisp autumn night
When the crescent moon is waxing
And the stars are bluest bright

Plump maggots chomp on my waning nose
As pearly beams pierce my shadowy orbs
This thirty first of October as I wait in repose

Recounted stories of ghosts by teens I hear from above
Their verses sift into the soil
Some as soothing as a Mourning Dove—

Other ghastly words disturb my nightly rest
Crumpling my pall; my white hallow bones
Yet they invigorate my skeleton with a new zest

Oh, young marauders you have come to cast a spell, overturn
stones, and conjure corpses
Reciting mantras for all the cemetery dead to rise
Keeping a midnight vigil; as do I...do I
So what can be said when I oblige?

I rise up from my grave; my teeth all a chatter
With a trick or treat
I watch as the teens shriek and scatter

I did not want my guests to leave
I just wanted to partake in the fun
As I and ghosts dance upon our graves; grinning, we grieve
Giving so many a fright
On All Hallows Eve night

Prayers to Catholic Virgin Martyr Saints from a Queer Transgender Protestant

by Christine Colligan

Saint Agatha of Sicily

You with lips of honey
They broke the bread of your body
Crunched your sugar bones
Severed your creamy breasts
Your nipples bright maraschino cherries

In 5th grade's brief day of sexed
I learned that the flat unleavened dough of my chest would one day
Rise, my body a cake for men to have and consume
Suck the granules of love from me while calling me "Sweetie"

Saint Agatha, blessed virgin
Did you too see girls stuff their training bras
While you looked down and saw only the hair that grew
Thick as a dark forest around your navel and down
Down to your thighs that constantly frictioned?

Saint Agatha, blessed martyr
When your body finally bloomed into a curving flower of flesh
And blood flowed like lava down your unshaved legs
Did you ever think of yourself as a walking earthquake
A natural disaster, a freak act of the Divine?

At age 20 I bound my breasts down with compression bandages
That like the constriction of the sin-snake squeezed my bones
To the point of pain, but that pain was lesser than the one I felt
When I looked into a mirror and saw my creamy breasts
My nipples bright maraschino cherries

Saint Agnes of Rome

You with hair curly as lamb's wool
Each strand numbered by the Divine
Flowed down to cover your body
A warm golden fleece
To protect you from the naked eyes of the crowd

In a busy hair salon overlooking Main Street
My mother held my hand
As at age 13 I donated 6 inches of my hair
Which I had called 'mermaid length' because it covered my breasts
Just newly encased in a real bra

Saint Agnes, blessed virgin
Did you have a middle school teacher
Who said that a girl's pride is her hair?
A teacher who regularly pitted boys against girls
To 'prove' which gender was smarter

Saint Agnes, blessed martyr
Would you have thought that the cutting of hair
Has been compared to circumcision?
I felt no loss, no gain as my locks fell
Just a lightness and a chill at the back of my neck

At age 20 after two more hair donations
In the same salon, I took my hair numbered by the Divine
And had it cut at the nape, not to donate
But to feel that lightness and chill at the back of my neck
A baring of the body unashamed

Saint Barbara of Nicomedia

Your gunpowder eyes, storm eyes
Revealed your tri-windowed heart, chambers for the Divine
The ivory pale tower of your throat
Housed a voice as thunder
Tongue pickax sharp in your mouth-cave

My smile sank as a cannonball
When at age 16 a girl in blue wouldn't dance with me
I tried to mine through the meaning of "infatuation"
And "girl crush" in hope of lightning clarity
As the word "love" turned into a four lettered bomb

Saint Barbara, blessed virgin
Did you run quick as wildfire from her hall locker
Where you had placed a note, sizzling with nerves
Pen ink running as a fuse,
From her name to yours?

Saint Barbara, blessed martyr
Did you snap your flint lips closed?
Did the ivory pale tower of your throat constrict?
The spark of your silence thought of as defiance
When your mouth was full of fire.

At age 20 my hands brushed against my college roommate's
And I felt electric hot shame as she shouted, "I'm not a lez!"
The tri-windowed chambers of my heart shrinking
Like a candle lit from both ends

Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Through the vein of love
The Divine cartwheeled into your life
Gave you the circumference of eternity
And you traded your cardboard crown
For a ring encircling your finger

At age 16 in the dark
I wanted to stop the stars wheeling
From night to day to night to day to night
The Sun was an unwelcome pet in my bedroom
A slobbering, golden dog licking my eyes open

Saint Catherine, blessed virgin
Did you wonder about the story of Medusa
Where her severed neck became a bloody canal
For the virgin birth of monsters
And whether bleeding wrists could birth the same?

Saint Catherine, blessed martyr
Did you ever dress for bed in a pure white gown
Blowing out candles so your cats wouldn't get burned
More concerned for them than tomorrow
As you paved your tongue with pills?

At age 20 I watched The Wheel of Fortune with my family
A nightly ritual in front of the glowing TV
The answer "Pegasus" rolled from my lips
Born from Medusa's bloody brood
A beautiful monstrosity, flying high from the past

Saint Cecilia of Rome

Your heart was an orchestra
An instrument for the Divine
Organ, harp, flute, violin, all singing
Bright as birdsong, bright as a sword
Bright as an angel on fire

At age 17 I sat on a too soft couch
Sinking almost as low as my depression

They want me to speak, to sing
My throat closed tight, silent
As my heart continued to play a dirge

Saint Cecilia, blessed virgin
Did you ever compose lyrical confessions
False as the moon, false as a heart
Just so your therapist would stop
Plucking at your strings of guilt?

Saint Cecilia, blessed martyr
As you sang for three days, your throat thrice cut
Did the music of your blood, the slowing drum beat
Glorify the pure white virtue of death
The beauty of a pearl necklace of maggots

At age 20 in the steamed mirror after a shower
I saw the reflection of my body obscured
From the neck down I was a flat, thin ghost
And I realized the rhythmic effort of existing
Continuing to breathe wasn't as hard as I had once thought



St. Philomena is the patron saint of infants, babies, and youth. She is often depicted in her youth with a flower crown, a palm of martyrdom, arrows, or an anchor.

Her picture is placed here in essence of the theme in Colligan's poetry. How innocent we are until culture and society shock us into believing we should reap our own retribution.

-editor. Nicole Peters



About the Authors' Six Word Biographies

Carlo Frank Calo: **Pondering life's journey; enjoying it more!**

Christine Colligan: **Star-drop in a cosmic sea.**

Megan Goff: **Always writing from the heart.**

Gail McGurty: **Spiritual, optimistic, lover of learning, dreamer of possibilities**

Julie Newman: **Perceptive, honest, kind and open-minded.**

Mary O'Brien: **Trust God; Faith, Hope & Love!**

Nicole Peters: **Forging the road ahead, endless skies.**

Katherine Regina: **Shelving books, writing stories, exploring worlds.**

Rita B. Rose: **Resilient, Perceptive, Honest, Kind, Sage**

Patricia Soper: **Discovering mystical wisdom in nature & crone-hood.**

J. Roland Sullivan: **Womb to crypt; so be it!**

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