

Eighteen Poets,

selected by *Will Hochman*

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Karen Head

Military Wife

“If you have any more children you will die.”
My brother’s tiny hand wrapped
around my mother’s index finger.
Staring into the doctor’s eyes—
only seventeen, in a foreign country—
she agreed to have her tubes tied.

Ten years later they told her,
“Impossible!”
she dug her heels into the stirrups,
in America, she would not acquiesce.

Death almost took her
with no recollection of my birth
she was sent home alone
forced to leave me in an incubator
with doctors trained for war.

I never suckled
did not see my mother’s breasts
until I was fairly grown
until they sagged
weighted under years of being told *no*

* * * * *

My mother never went to college,
did not have a public career.
She married at fifteen,
exhausting her individuality
somewhere between
the jungles of Panama
and a base near the Berlin Wall.

She was a good wife, a good mother,
but lately when I stare hard at her face
I notice that she is old.
When I encourage her to try new things
she smiles—her eyes glaze.
A couple of years ago she said,
“I don’t think you will ever have children;
I want you to know I’m okay with that.”
Now she shows pictures of my cat,
along with those of my brother’s son.
When I first began college, I didn’t talk much,
thought she wouldn’t understand.
Now, every morning, over coffee, she telephones
and I tell her everything I learned the day before.

Karen Head is a fourth year Ph.D. student at the University of Nebraska, where she teaches writing and works as part of the *Prairie Schooner* editorial staff. Her work appeared in *New Millennium Writings*, *The Southwest Review*, *The Chattahoochee Review* as well as other journals and anthologies. Her collection, *Shadow Boxes*, will be released by All Nations Press in August, 2003.

Maxianne Berger

Scout Leader

be prepared to answer questions
the Scouting Manual doesn't address

bears? drug dealers? venereal disease?
be prepared for leukemia—a pernicious strain—
to waylay one of your spirited charges

be prepared to watch him shrivel into shadow

be prepared to find his 15-year-old sister
wailing in your arms—his gregarious mother
silent with her twisted handkerchief

be prepared to camp out in palliative care—
your share of a death watch: graveyard shift

be prepared for morphine drips,
for beeping monitors; for doctors
—Lord knows they tried—
who press a firm hand to your shoulder
when there's nothing left to say

be prepared to curse

be prepared to curse God
and be prepared to pray
the boy will hold on long enough
his grandma who lives overseas
can make it in for one final hug

be prepared for nurses in tears

be prepared when his father requests a eulogy—
practice saying it without sobbing

be prepared for a half-sized coffin

be prepared for a funeral
for a troupe of boys in uniform
who'll follow your every lead

be prepared to show them how
a real man weeps

Maxianne Berger is an audiologist at the McGill University Health Centre in Montreal. She reviews poetry for *Arc*; her translations have appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago) and *Maisonneuve*, and she is co-editing a haiku anthology. She has work forthcoming in *Fluent Ascension*, *Mixed Nuts*, and *Island Dreams*. Her book of poems, *How We Negotiate*, appeared in 1999.

Michael S. Casey

PBR Diary

Today,
as we rode at anchor,
waiting for our turn to fuel,
a body floated by.

Most of a body, anyway.

Torso, legs, arms.
The shape was distorted,
But a close look and you could tell.

Tiny little sharks swam around it,
occasionally tearing off a little chunk of meat.
Didn't seem much point in fishing-out the body.
I mean, what would we do with it?
Besides, we were mesmerized.

Here's the whole damn war,
the real essence of the Vietnam "experience,"
bobbing up and down at our feet
as we all sat and watched.

How's that for a metaphor?
It took our breathes away.
Eventually
somebody said
"Hope you choke on it,"
and spit in the water.

Michael S. Casey teaches Humanities and History at Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa. A retired Navy Commander and a specialist on the American military "experience" through history, literature, and film, he previously taught at the Naval War College. His

publications include *America's Technological Sailor: A Retrospective on a Century of "Progress" in the United States Navy*, as well as scholarly articles on various battles, campaigns, and commanders.

John Guzlowski

Danny

He wasn't even one of my students
Just one of my advisees, a shy fellow
And a slow talker. When he first came in
Two semesters ago, I thought he was slow
In other ways too, but his grades
Have been strong. He's smart enough.

Today, he came to say he's been called up
With the local National Guard unit,
Boys from Mattoon, Neoga, and Tuscola,
Boys from small farms and small towns,
And he was worried about his registration
For classes next semester. Would he be able
To cancel it and get his tuition money back?

I called the registration office. He wasn't
Their first, and I told him what they told me.
You'll need to sign some forms, and cancel
Your housing and then check in with the cashier.
And he thanked me for helping, but I couldn't
Speak, so I just took his hand in mine, and held it.

John Guzlowski is the author of *Language of Mules*, a book of poems about his parents' experiences as slave laborers and displaced persons in Nazi Germany during and after the Second World War. His poems have also appeared in such journals as *Atlanta Review*, *Negative Capability*, *Manhattan Review*, *Madison Review*, and the Polish quarterly *Akcent*. He teaches contemporary American Literature and poetry writing at Eastern Illinois University.

Caroline Sarracino

Sharpsburg at Sunrise in April 1866

The morning blooms out of blackness
as out of nothingness itself.

Faint light

pours a shy green
into pokeweed and mullein,
into the tender, shooting
new grass covering all;

stirs clouds into
bluebrown Antietam Creek;

touches gold
a cord of braid
in the beak of a robin,
her breast reddening
like remembered joy.

On a sandy patch
she snapped the threads
from a rag of sleeve.

Small bones there
in perfect order lay,
like the exhibit
of a marvel:

The Human Hand

(which can
set a gunner's level
or trace at parting
the outline of a lover's chin.)

With her prize the robin hops
to the dead mouth of a brass gun.

She glances quick left and right,
then drops straight in—

out of sight.

The Battlefield Museum Guide Speaks

1.

Here they come,
in SUV's, minivans, RV's, Honda Accords
converging on this town from north and south.

Just as did those thirsty, dust-choked troops,
marching, staggering...booted, barefoot... sunstroked
...on the Carlisle Pike, the Taneytown Road... jammed
with caissons, cavalry, ambulances, beeves on the hoof.

Banners snapped in the wind. Riders pulled up shouting,
pointing. Drovers cursed and cracked their backsnakes,
the wagons, heaped with ammunition, rations, dog tents,
stoves, kettles, pans, entrenching tools, and with stacks
and stacks and not nearly enough pine boxes.

Before the lines could even form
surgeons rushed setting up tables.

2.

What myth
what delusion
draws them to Little Roundtop
The Wheatfield, Devil's Den, Cemetery Ridge?

What do they imagine happened here?
 (“Now I see” Whitman wrote, “war is just *butchery!*
 The glistening weapons—tools for slaughter!”)

Don't they know what?

Or is there still a truth that draws?

3.

See the Rotarian in baseball cap and oldguy shorts,
 how his shoulders hunch around the place in his chest,
 scarred still, aching since the morning his daughter,
 just nine, was diagnosed. How he cared for her
 giving every pill in proper order at 2 AM... at 5 AM...
 petting her hair, touching a small sponge to her cracked lips.

Intently he points his camera at the spot
 Chamberlain and remnants of the 20th Maine
 —bleeding, outnumbered, without a round of ammunition—
 refused to give up. Facing odds as impossible
 as surviving leukemia in 1960. As impossible
 as surviving the death of one's child. He snaps
 a picture of where they charged—by God!—
charged.

4.

So they come and they come, bumper to bumper.
 The young for what they suspect true.
 The old for what they know true.

5.

And you, reader?
 Haven't you been marched
 toward what you could not bear?

Didn't you fear
you might run?
Did you run?

Haven't you carried
a comrade hanging on your neck?

Does the cold ache your scars?

You know, then, don't you
what hallows this ground?

And why they come.

6.

I have arranged the exhibits.
Polished the glass.

I unlock the doors,
and open them wide.

For you?

Carmine Sarracino was born in 1944 in Providence, Rhode Island, and grew up in the community of Italian immigrants on Federal Hill there. His first collection of poems, *The Idea of the Ordinary*, was published last year by Orchises Press. He is working on a collection of poems about the Civil War. A chapbook of these poems will be published next fall by Parallel Press; poems from the collection have appeared in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Laurel Review* and *Prairie Schooner*.

Jeff Mock

A Life in the Day

Ja, hello, good morning. My name is Franz,
But you may call me Herr Stukker. At dawn
I rise to hang myself, and find the rope
Is frayed. So, on the menace of breakfast.
After which I reset my jaw and brush
And shave my fingerprints away. The swirl
Of water down the drain leaves only me.
At work all day I slaughter pigs. It is
Like opening letters. Fond memories—
A flood, a trickle. Ja, think what you will,
But I do not like you either. At noon
I hide in the alley and crunch a brick,
And eat it, and eat another. I eat
A wall. I eat an entire tenement,
Light bulbs, saucepans, TVs, cradles, and all.
It is not enough. Bah, who needs work when
All the city is built of brick? You, too,
Your heart is nothing more. But I, I am
A blade and in the afternoon I slit
Another thousand pigs. I am a blade.
I am a shard of glass. I am the safety
Razor that isn't safe. I am the humane
Guillotine. I created France, and what
In return did I receive? I forget
Myself: I am Franz. Once I was a pig,
Or so I once thought. At day's end I let,
For compassion's sake, one fat pig go free
And hone my knife to make tomorrow quicker.
There are too many throats. Some soon day
I will hone its edge to air. At sunset
I sheath my knife and sing it—*la*—to sleep.
I know this knife is far too good for me.
Then it is tomorrow. I rise at dawn

And count the pigs who live, and don't know why.
Bless me, I am Franz and human by birth:
I eat and drink and piss and shit and sleep.
At work I breathe and do as I am told,
So I take no responsibility.
I take none, I don't, you may have it all.

Jeff Mock is the author of a chapbook, *Evening Travelers* (Volans Press), and a guide-book for beginning writers, *You Can Write Poetry* (Writer's Digest Books). His poems appear in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *The North American Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Southern Review*, and elsewhere. He is an Associate Editor of *The Laurel Review* and teaches at Southern Connecticut State University.

Allen Learst

Prisoner

—For Frank “Foo” Fujita

You will go to war.
That’s how time works.
The *Abilene Reporter* asks:
“What’s it like being drafted?”
You say, “I’d rather draw cartoons.”
You are an artist.

Your father is Japanese.
Your mother’s name is Pearl.
She’s from Texas.
The *Abilene Reporter* says,
“He’s a bright-eyed youth.
He feels no desire to visit Japan.

Just like that.
You are a prisoner of war.
You keep a diary full of cartoons.
You resurrect time:
Days, months, years.
The diary is not allowed.
The soldiers watch you.

You are not allowed enough food.
And the Japanese soldiers beat you;
They beat the Dutchman.
He steals food, and they slam you.
A baseball bat:
Wham! Wham! Wham!
You write in the diary.
And remind yourself,
Oh how that did hurt.

You stand upright.
You are American.
Stare into your captor's eyes.
In there, somewhere, is a picture
Of a Japanese soldier, drunk.
He laughs, sprawls on the floor.
Soldiers pour boiling water.
The Dutchmen's throat.
You keep your voice hidden in the dairy.

Souma, souma, one guard says.
His skin is like yours.
You are one of them.
You are just like me.

You eat rice from bowls alive with maggots.
Your comrade's bowels twist.
By morning he is dead. You survive.
Your flesh falls away.
You feed on yourself.

You draw pictures in the *benjo*.
This is not allowed.
The Japanese put up a sign:
You will be killing to death.
But the maggots join you.
Blackbirds come to eat them.
You eat the birds.
You are part of the Lost Battalion.
Your uniform hangs in a closet.

What connects any of us to ourselves?

Allen Learst's stories and poems have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly*, *The Literary Review*,
Ascent, *Hawaii Review*, *New Plains Review* and **WLA**.

Ryan G. Van Cleave

Willow Herb

my Japanese neighbor swears,
the simple rose bay willow
herb is magic, how it stripes

the woods, her window garden-
box with pink, little mushrooming
whorls of color just like the ball

of fire that tore through Nagasaki,
she once admitted, where she lived
as a child. The bodies burst like

pockets of grease inside bacon,
everyone screaming as the ceiling
opened red with death, liquid fire.

What got her through it was a green-
house—her mother took her there
to buy geraniums and a fruit tree—

and when the blast cracked the earth,
trays of willow herbs fell atop her,
the cloy of thick petals in her mouth

and eyes as her mom and the grizzled
gardener grew translucent, then gone.
The unornamented green plastic pot

my neighbor handed me one evening
to celebrate my 27th birthday has since
sprouted willow herbs, three tiny bulbs

the color of a matchhead. I watch them
in a slant of sunlight, wondering if today's
the day they'll explode into flame.

Ryan G. Van Cleave is Assistant Professor of Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. He is the author of a creative writing textbook, *Contemporary American Poetry: Behind the Scenes*, and his work is forthcoming in *Harvard Review* and *Ontario Review*.

Gerald R. Wheeler

CASUALTY

Graves Registration found him
buried under a mound
of gleaming shell casings
beside a melted machine gun.
25 torn bodies in uniforms
the color of wintry trees,
lay in heaps
on blood-stained snow
around him.

A G.I. kneels beside the casualty,
glances at death's stare,
yanks off dog tags,
stuffs one in bag,
the other between teeth
of pried-opened mouth.
Next, he grasps blood-caked hair
and the chin,
executes a quick jerk,
cracking the jaw.
Suddenly, eyes blink,
pleading mercy.

Year later,
after army surgeon
removed bullet
from casualty's brain,
President Truman
bent down
to a man in wheelchair,
awarded him

the Medal of Honor.
The veteran
told his grandchildren,
“I remembered it all.”

Gerald R. Wheeler of Katy, Texas, received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. His photography, fiction and poetry have appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals, including *North American Review*, *The Macguffin*, *Louisiana Literature*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Descant*, and *Sundog*. He is the author of *Tracers* and *Tracks*.

T.B. Rudy

Night Vision

The grainy electric green of NVGs
reminds me of late-night sci-fi flicks
I saw as a kid: heroes of future ages

patched with lightning bolts, wired
in gizmo tricks, called on desperate
missions to the moon, and beyond.

After sign-off, I'd wander outside to fix
my telescope on pastel planets, stars
creeping along the dark disk of space,

constellations outlining ancient
fantasies of other worlds, the midnight
daydreams of some Roman bored as I,

maneuvering all over Germany
with nothing to do but wargame, standing
aimlessly on guard duty four hours long,

watching for pretend fires to ignite
on distant hills, listening to the hollow roar
of battle machinery toppling through darkness.

Our difference is merely technical: these goggles
milking the moon and stars, the eyepiece a cup
of light, quenching what's always boggled my mind:

this galaxy and gadgets: pixels of men
flicker across the curved screen, staticy
as an old TV; the nebulous silhouettes

of trees billow into the pinpoint sky;
a lazy meteor parachute flare pops
and glares, spilling over my mask—

as it slowly refills with eerie light,
I marvel as moonglaze glows my skin
like 1950s isotopes, and stare

at alien hands that float before my face, a man
disembodied by imagination,
stepping into blind spots deep in space.

Stars

—for JCF, Stationed in London during WWII

Her kitchen window's helpless to stop the sun
that day by day shines through, fades the one
side of a thumb-tacked cloth, its thin blue star.
Night by night, she can only dream of war,
a sky exploding with memories of light
from golden stars already burned from sight.

T.B. Rudy currently teaches English at the State University of West Georgia. He served two years as an army tanker in Germany and attended college on the GI Bill. Other poems of his are available online at *Painted Bride Quarterly* and *Salt River Review*.

E.M. Schorb

Troop Transport

We love to be hit by the spray
while watching the wake as the bow dips
five stories down and rises again
as if to take off for the clouds
where the gulls look down at us
as if we were sardines on toast,
to snatch in their snooty hooked bills.
We love the sea, who knew only
the green rolling land and cattle and horses:
but cowboys can't swim.
So I stand to forward
with my life-jacket on and stare
at the mountains of water and valleys
that keep changing places, loving the buck
and the crash of the bow and its wake
that sprays me with spindrift, mad
for its plunge full of colors, for
my face in the face of the moon-drawn,
gravitied deep. What ecstasy is,
is the danger of down, then returning,
like riding a bull till he drops.

The Survivor

The tugs towed us out, two on each side,
then left us alone. There loomed the sea,
slate in the slant of sunlight at dawn;
here, hecatombs hoped, the hundreds aboard,
boys nearly babies, boys fat and thin,
homely and handsome, helmet-haired boys,
among whom myself, woman-cheeked, pale.

Daylight saw dolphins, wagging dogs of the sea.
Gulls at our garbage —grand, that display!—
and sharks, shining-finned, sure on our path.
We drilled out on deck, dodging white wakes,
the escorts escorting scorned in vainglory.
No sooner sun shined than set the same sun.

Not long before light, a large ship appeared
and held the horizon, hovering there,
a carrier, cruising, crossing, recrossing,
then bombers, like bees, buzzed in the sky.
A bomb amidships! We scrambled on deck,
where booms lowered boats as bombs blew them up.
No escorts escaped! Scrapped in the deep!

Our shuddering ship, shadowed with death,
slid on its side and sank slowly down.
I rose on a raft and reached for survivors.
Hope in my hand, I hauled them aboard:
boys nearly babies, boys fat and thin,
homely and handsome, helmet-haired boys,
among whom myself, woman-cheeked, pale.

E.M. Schorb's work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Southwest Review*, *The Yale Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Texas Review*, *The American Scholar*, *The Notre Dame Review*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *A Fable and Other Prose Poems* and the novel *Paradise Square*, which was awarded the Grand Prize in Fiction from the Frankfurt eBook Award Foundation in 2000. Earlier books include *50 Poems* and *The Poor Boy*.

Robert Hedin

Bells

—for M.L., killed in Viet Nam

I remember it was 1965, the summer

I was put in charge

of the bells. Above me

and high up, they waited

like thunderheads at the top

of the First Presbyterian Church.

And so each Sunday I would pull,

and down out of that dark

ringing would fall,

like flecks of glittering mica,

dead moths, flies, and the small

luminous bones of bats.

But most of all it was dust.

And all summer with the sun

high in its arc,

and the heat building slowly

by degrees, I rose, lifted
by that long bell rope,
and, swinging there, would pull
the dust down, like light,
over the bowed and sleeping Bibles.

The Old Liberators

Of all the people in the mornings at the mall,
It's the old liberators I like best,
Those veterans of the Bulge, Anzio, or Monte Cassino
I see lost in Automotive or back in Home Repair,
Bored among the paints and power tools.
Or the *really* old ones, the ones who are going fast,
Who keep dozing off in the little orchards
Of shade under the distant skylights.
All around, from one bright rack to another,
Their wives stride big as generals,
Their handbags bulging like ripe fruit.
They are almost all gone now,

And with them they are taking the flak
And fire storms, the names of the old bombing runs.
Each day a little more of their memory goes out,
Darkens the way a house darkens,
Its rooms quietly filling with evening,
Until nothing but the wind lifts the lace curtains,
The wind bearing through the empty rooms
The rich far off scent of gardens
Where just now, this morning,
Light is falling on the wild philodendrons.

The Bombing of Dresden

It was the night of Fasching,
And those crossing
The Marienbrücke
Saw the cold drizzle
And the black winter sky
Suddenly ignite
Into summer.
And for an hour

The pipes in every cellar
Dripped and ran dry,
Glass doorknobs
Flowered into jewels,
And the grapes
That were left out
To smolder on their vines
Burst into stones.
For an hour
The earth was a jar,
And every beet and potato inside
Began to bleed.
The next morning
Those gathered along the Elbe
Saw the cold smoke
Of a blossom
And couldn't be sure
It was dawn,
That what they saw

Was the sun striking a fish
And the singed weaving
Of its gills.
And nothing was left
But the snails
Gripping the dry
Walls of the cisterns,
The snails that overnight
Turned into limestone
To survive.

Robert Hedin is the author, translator, and editor of fifteen books of poetry and prose, most recently *The Roads Have Come To An End Now: Selected and Last Poems of Rolf Jacobsen* (co-translated with Robert Bly). He serves as director of the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Red Wing, Minnesota, and co-edits *Great River Review*.

Rolf Jacobsen

—translated from the Norwegian by Robert Hedin

When They Sleep

All people are children when they sleep.

There's no war in them then.

They open their hands and breathe
in that quiet rhythm heaven has given them.

They pucker their lips like small children
and open their hands halfway,
soldiers and statesmen, servants and masters.

The stars stand guard
and a haze veils the sky,
a few hours when no one will do anybody harm.

If only we could speak to one another then
when our hearts are half-open flowers.

Words like golden bees
would drift in.

—God, teach me the language of sleep.

Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994) published a body of work that earned him international recognition and established him as one of Europe's great poets. His poetry has been translated into twenty languages.

Olav H. Hauge

—translated from the Norwegian by Robert Hedin

From The War

A bullet came to rest on the hall floor.

I weighed it in my hand.

It had gone through glass and

two wooden walls.

I'd no doubt it could kill.

Olav H. Hauge (1908-1996) was one of the most distinguished 20th century Norwegian poets. He was largely a self-educated man who earned his living as a farmer, orchardist and gardener on a small plot of land near his birthplace of Ulvik, a village in the western fjord district of Norway.

W.D. Ehrhart

Home Before Morning

—for Lynda Van Devanter (1947-2002)

If life were fair, you'd be a millionaire,
ambassador to somewhere really cool
like New Orleans, Tahiti, or the Ritz,

maybe the empress of everything—
not some female Job for all the world

Almighty God just seemed to have it
in for: pass one test of faith and here's
another. And another. Yet one more.

Suffer, suffer, die. Okay, we both learned
far too young that nothing's fair in life,

that's just the way it is, there's no use
whining. And you never did complain.
Not when your lungs were so congested

that you couldn't hold a conversation.
Not when your legs swelled up so badly

that you couldn't walk a hundred feet.
Not when your joints began to fail.
Then your kidneys, too. And all the while

you just kept hoping, struggling to go on
another day, another month, another year

* * *

with Tom and Molly. How you loved
your husband and your daughter fiercely
with the burden of the knowledge of those

far too many broken boys you had to fix
and couldn't, boys too young to have the chance

to demonstrate against the war that killed them,
to be an alcoholic, to get sober,
to be an advocate for broken souls,

a witness to the worst and best we are,
to marry, make a child, write a book,

call me late at night to say you're frightened
and you need to hear another voice who's
frightened by the posturing of presidents

and statesmen who have never heard the sound
of teenaged soldiers crying for their mothers.

Great-hearted woman, may the broken boys
you tried to fix and couldn't, find you now
and guide you safely home before morning.

[Lynda Van Devanter served as a U.S. Army nurse in Vietnam in 1969-70. She was the author of the memoir *Home Before Morning*.]

W.D. Ehrhart is a frequent contributor to **WLA**. His most recent book is *The Madness of It All: Essays on War, Literature and American Life*.

Paul Elisha

Dark People (A memoir of Manoag, P.I – 1944)

Surging from darkness deeper than that
They'd entered, waiting for a promise to be kept,
The dark people leapt to meet us,
Emerged from the thicket's thousand eyed night
Onto a sun up beach,
Ignoring its jumble of littered dead,
The dread rumble and clink of
Howitzered treads snaking forever forward;
Thronged to collect freedom, for them
As yet unseen but there, like the air we breathed.
This is what they believed would come
Of our coming but no such luck.

What came was more of what
They'd had, now clad in weasel-words
That subverted what was said
And instead, taught them the worth of 'Coke',
In a word, "profit;" greasing
The few who learnt it as we meant it,
Lent with an uncle's interest. For
The rest, we franchised the worst first,
Withheld the best in principal,
Left them waiting for us to equate
The unanswerable, learning
Nothing– and still they wait.

A combat veteran of eight major amphibious landings in the Pacific in WWII, **Paul Elisha** is a commentator and host of the "Bard's Eye View" on Northeast Public Radio, in Albany, New York. He is the founder of VIVE', the Voices in Verse Ensemble, devoted to an initiative for the reading of poetry aloud.

Rochelle Mass

Not the same as the Golan

The gooseberries were wide as 5 shekel coins, the veins x-ray clear. Some were pale green, some splashed with red plumped for picking. Thorns got my ankles, elbows and down my thigh. After an hour I had to straighten up wipe my face; the Golan sun poured over me. I thought of jams and fruit muffins moved on to taller bushes. Blueberries grew dusty as they purpled, tipped with crowns, like a pomegranate's cap. Near me people laughed and ate sandwiches. *Not since the Kolchoz, 8 years since the Datchah*, the woman said filling a big basket; the sun snapped at the gold as she smiled.

Berries are my homeland.

You can't blame me for being excited

she said, patting her crop as though it was a child. I turned to other berries so slight I had to pull one by one. Took me well past noon to get a handful. I watched how the Russians picked, looking for memories in the fruit. Years ago I picked berries on the way to Falcon Lake, along the highway, put them into pies. Not the same as the Golan where signs warn:

Losing the Golan is losing the country.

Leaving the Golan is leaving home.

The Russians gather memories and

I see where the land really is.

Canadian born, **Rochelle Mass** moved to Israel with her husband and young daughters in 1973. They lived on Kibbutz Beit HaShita in the Jezre'el Valley for 25 years. Today they live in a small community on the Gilboa mountains, where they cure olives from their own trees. A Pushcart nominee, short-listed by the BBC for a radio play, and other awards, Rochelle's poetry and prose have been widely published. A third poetry collection, *The Startled Land*, has just appeared with Wind River Press.

Kristin Alberts

To War Writers

—upon reading W.D. Ehrhart

You stepped off a ledge into the heart of a fight
to learn that evolving means counting yourself dead.
I drink of your lives by candlelight.

Wondering why old men from wars take flight
while you could lie in a white-sheeted bed,
you stepped off a ledge into the heart of a fight.

Don't mean nothin' when faces harden ashen white
and your own unplugged wounds like the dawn, bleed red.
I drink of your lives by candlelight.

Blank eyes locked ahead without sight
after futile fighting for a hill—another shot in the head.
You stepped off a ledge into the heart of a fight.

Now, pacing silently, the world isn't right—
always knowing each next step might explode into dread.
I drink of your lives by candlelight.

Stories of snipers, screams, and fooled dead no longer bright
and fading, I find it here in the books I've read:
You stepped off a ledge into the heart of a fight—
I drink of your lives by candlelight.

Kristin Alberts is a senior at St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin studying English and creative writing with a special emphasis on war literature. She wrote "To War Writers" after studying under Vietnam scholar Dr. Thomas Myers and meeting poet Bill Ehrhart.