Turning Again to the Well:

Poems of the Energy Necklace Project,
Jackson Homestead, 2014

Jackson Homestead, late nineteenth century
Foreword

On April 6, 2014, sculptors, poets, museum staff, and other members of the community gathered for the Opening of the Energy Necklace Project at the Jackson Homestead in Newton, MA. The sculptors were there to celebrate and introduce their site-specific work on the themes of sustainability, preservation, and place. The poets had been invited to explore these same themes in language in the temporary sculpture park. Before the reception, a man greeted me who had wandered onto the property through a back gate. Drawn to the array of colors, textures, and shapes, he told me that, although, he lived just down the street, he had never before visited the Jackson Homestead. “It looked so interesting,” he said. “I had to see what it was all about.”

His response was a testament to how art can transform a landscape. When I shared this anecdote with Cindy Stone, Director of Historic Newton, and Susan Israel, Curator of the Energy Necklace Project, they both agreed. The installations had truly brought the property to life, uncovering themes inherent in the site’s history, yet hidden from public view until the sculptures drew them out.

On June 1, eleven poets read their original work aloud, weaving their voices into the visual and tactile experience of art and landscape. We have reproduced here their 25 poems in an online Poetry Walk. We hope that you enjoy these poems, which emphasize our rootedness to the earth, and the bonds that connect us to history and to each other.

—Susan Edwards Richmond, Curator, Poetry Walk at the Energy Necklace Project, Jackson Homestead

Poets

Zachary Bos
Polly Brown
Linda Fialkoff
Lynn Horsky
Neil Horsky
Terry House
Cheryl B. Perreault
Lila Linda Terry
Joanne DeSimone Reynolds
Susan Edwards Richmond
bg Thurston
Invitation  by Terry House

Winter’s fierce course calmed,
Gold crocus lights the dooryard –
Come – let’s celebrate!

**

The Good Witch Who Rides Milan Klic’s Acquisitions of Light  by Polly Brown

With her wand she waves out iridescent spheres.
She’s wearing fireworks and sunrise,
and the bubbles she creates hold light overflowing

from hundreds of frames Klic has fashioned
to catch and preserve it. Sometimes she cycles
on these rickety but serviceable wheels—or can fly,

due to her vehicle’s overall elegant lightness of being—
to scatter, to disperse light as needed.
When survivors turn to stone with sorrow

light can guide their way from one breath to another;
where thieves lie about our planet
or the virtuous motives

of oil barons and bankers, light reveals their greed
in its slime; and wherever people hold tight
to a boat that’s sure to go down—

this light will help us let go and swim.

**
Grandmother by Linda Fialkoff

They called you Naomi. We called you a slave
to slaughter and pluck
to the searing heat of
kitchen and sun, fire
of the smokehouse,
hauling of water,
to unceasing backbreaking
labor of pulling, putting up,
churning and making.
You never complained.

You called them "The Darkies"
We thought them free, who
lived down by the river in
broken down shanties with
a dozen crammed in and
no running water, or heat,
trolling for crayfish.
We wondered how;
we wondered why.
But when we walked by
we heard them singing.

**
Love Is The Flower In Us  by Cheryl B. Perreault

If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile and blossom like a flower, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace. —Thich Nhat Hanh

When one seed
of some small flower
let us call … the one of we
is hurled out from the waters
of its roiling mother sea
the seed, afloat how it listens
to a thousand sounds beyond,
until eventual arrival
into the wait of mother’s arms
saying, “here I am” to all the earth
waiting for the songs of afterbirth
We all hope and we sing
Let the blooming begin

Oh little seed now can examine
and take the new world wide in
with so much of life
that now comes spinning
and surrounds around
its newborn feet and stems,
oh how the little seed
does in earnest reach its mouth
to mother, to cry, to sing, to coo
hoping to receive her love
and the longed-for tending-to
we all hope and we sing
Let the blooming begin

After many a fall and rise
of the constant moon and sun,
little seed’s new stems so high
while leaves stretch wide to everyone
little seed’s mass of brilliance
makes the world pause to catch
its waiting, baited breath
while love pours out
like the rain pours down
like a wild, welcome deluge
that brings the water to nurture another
soon to arrive from sea of a mother
one more time
we hope and we sing
_Let the blooming begin_

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**

D**r**one** by Susan Edwards Richmond

_**a sculpture by Milan Klic**_

Sun riding on lacquered dew
an insect falls with folded wings
before the blasted Hawthorne tree.

Newton traffic speeds by
when the light goes green.

Who owns these antennae
of surveillance, technology
searching for a new queen?

Mourning dove coo hoos
from lightning struck limbs.

Steel wrought, it looks like
cane, something alive, catches
the spectrum, glint in our eyes.

Who hunches in the bunker in the Arizona desert
bringing the blinking locust to life?

Bee buzz summer hum, lazy afternoon.
A wasp daubs its mud palace,
the numbing sounds of ordinary work.
**Christmas Cookies**  by Lila Linda Terry

I was not an anxious eater.
Then my daughter moved home pregnant . . .
with twins.
The father to be
babyman
screaming with rage as there might be
Responsibility
to the infants, and the lover now mother.
Love awry, the dream dasher
Responsibility.
so . . .
me,
nonny-to-be
eats Christmas cookies, with vanilla icing
and glittery colored sugar sprinkles
I eat:
Stars
Christmas trees
Angels.
They all taste good.
They momentarily numb the pain of little lives, divided up into numbers, dollars, hours
supervised or not.
Little lives still floating inside her.
I prefer to eat vegetables
and to speak of swaddling them
with Love
when they arrive on a summer day.

**
Class  by Susan Edwards Richmond

Every day
8 Children are killed
and
48 Children are seriously
wounded by guns
in America
—Gail Bos, The Children’s Chairs Project, sculpture light by John Powell

The sculptor shuffles under the not quite
shade of the spreading oak,
drill in her hand, securing the wooden
straight-backed chairs to earth.

Blue, yellow, lime, purple, orange, white
face inward, absent children attentive
in empty seats. At the center of the circle,
eight red chairs, the brightest color,

color of fire, exuberance,
of passion, fruit, of blood.
The other empty seats know what
they know and will never not know it.

Sun on this April day pours
through a tree without leaves,
where another artist has filtered its beams,
little lanterns on the hard-packed mud.

The architect of chairs has left her paints
on a few empty seats, awaiting the children
who will come with their families, fill them
with their odd designs, their concrete prayers.

Look, they are already here
brushes in their hands:
spray of dots, teal on white.
2K the Swirl.

**
The New England winter is hanging on.
our souls pounded by the inverse flame of cold
beating our Downeast character into its roots.
They say human beings have depth in New England.
We live apart from the La-di-da of the West Coast,
the sweet fried donuts of the South.
Though sometimes we long for that taste, or the place where smiley faces rule.
If we did not travel to 3rd world countries where we can live on a song
amid the beautiful bougainvillea,
this year
we travelled to Iceland, Greenland,
and the Northern Isles free of charge.
We just stayed put and shoveled.
We stoked the fire.
We made cups of tea.
We dreamt and slept more.
Some people skied and ice fished.
I made soup and became deeper friends with solitude.
I watched my daughter grow twins.
We prayed.
We prayed.
We prayed.
There is so much to pray for in this world.
Winter helps our prayer work.
For that I am grateful.

**
Bright painted
Colors play
Figures gesture,
Hey, we won't pester
But, Sister Spring,
Step it up for a day.
Strut it up and stay
Sunny on the avenue
Through the afternoon
Come on in they say
Planted together
In all kinds of weather
Taking our chances in
Skinny bare branches
Twisting it up from roots and trunks
Like quirky dancing sassy punks,
Spunk; arms and feet going in four directions
Pruned, runed, tattooed,
Tuned in tribal urban inflections.

Art like the Cubists’ breakaway
Way back in the early day
Cracking classic semiotic codes
like jokes, okay
Themes of dressy Watteau woodland scenes
Filling walls in fancy French salons and
Silky satin lace boudoirs,
Say your au revoirs.
Even a picnic with Manet and mates
would be tame,
Lame; when you see them cut the rug to pieces
Shaking leaves like tambourines
Listen to our merrymaking,
Memories of photosynthesis.

Put your right foot in
Turn it all about
Don’t pout.
Take yourself aside
That’s enough, now let’s go inside.
Behave, be serious.
Curious, like old fashioned boys.
A room’s chock filled with all kinds of toys.
Train tracks puzzles dominos,
Maps to tell you where to go
Big old picture books
Ones from a great great grannie’s attic nooks.
You can learn by playing.
Take your hand in mine.
Just saying,
I read the sign.

**

Dreams of Trees  by bg Thurston

Trees of autumn dream of spring
before the long night of winter.
But summer trees never dream—
they bask in sun and pungent air.
At dusk they sigh, surrounded
by the serenade of nesting birds.
They shine under percolating stars
and cradle the moon in their branches.
They are church – from seed to steeple,
piercing the grace of morning,
 wreathed in their halos of fire.

**
Three Sculptures by Zachary Bos

I. Jeanne Williamson

She pinned a cloth upon a fence
and called it a universal
bandage for the world's injuries.

What kindness she has. How immense
and unflagging her ambition
to help us is. I wonder how

often the dressing needs changing.
When she's out of cotton, what then?
Tears her shirt into strips, I bet.

Or weaves fresh gauze from any old
floss or fiber she finds at hand.
Penelope would understand.

II. Linda Hoffman & Margot Stage

They knotted sisal and nylon
and jute and hemp and so on, then
hung the worried cordage in skeins
dangling off a branch twelve feet up.
They shamble in the wind like the
ends of a vagrant's unshaved beard

who's been abroad ten years and wants
only to get home. All those knots
I bet are meant to trap and hold

ill will and envy until rain
and wind and seasons of light can
break them down into harmlessness.
What's the use of a bird or a bicycle built from reclaimed steel, and light-catching foil, and gobs of amber resin wastefully poured like a golden corrosion over their airy armature?

Ask him who makes things unextinct. Ask the artist, who saw some use in saddling a bicycle like Dimetrodon with a sail, who made a bird, like Brontornis, stately and unassailable.

**

How to Save the World by Terry House

Only the outlandish act will do. That clean white cloth your mother starched? Lop it off in rounded intervals, And stamp its scalloped edge In designs as intricate as the newsprint Smudging your prickled finger tips.

Know urgency, know a tempest brews: Reel in your inky washing from the line, Hoe deep, true rows While there’s still time; And when the rain arrives and freezes, Defy all reason. That handiwork of yours? An improvised bandage now, Though quite unlike the ones The Baptist ladies’ sewing circle rolled. Use it to wrap the gash Where the wind-lashed branch once grew.
Stop circling the wagons;
Try bales of timothy or
Dead toddlers’ empty chairs instead.
Think Principle not Self-protection.

Since you’ve already plowed up
That lovely, ornamental lawn,
Plant vegetables there and eat them.
Lead a procession.
Harbor fugitives from injustice
And invite them to dine by candle light
At your table until dawn.

Before you go to bed, check again
The progress of that wounded tree.
Note how the prosthetic bark appears –
So like lichen or fish scales or
The chain mail hide of an armadillo,
The impenetrable plates of a pangolin.

How do you save the world?
You breathe, you think, you move.
You do what you can -
Only this outlandish act will do.

**
Turning  by Polly Brown

Forest Fall

Hung from a tree, a hundred knotted kite tails
or quipus, story strings. Wind sifts
and reads them, lets them fall.
To look up is to climb something falling:
Jack with his beanstalk turned into a river.

Umbilical

After the loss, she unpacks her mother’s clothes;
adds some of her own to cut in strips, braid
and rebraid—a long rag rope. White-blue-green, the fibers mix like blood in a birth cord,
and she recovers herself.

Reaching Hand

He likes the way clay feels,
but casts in concrete (so they’ll last)
these roundels: small ponds where a hand emerges,
a snake curls; a bird’s splayed-out wings reveal
evolution repurposing fingers.

Tempest Tossed

The old slave boats turned
their owners gold. Here the sail is black rubber
ruffled like kelp; the keel’s a rusty beam.
We haul toward the flagpole, a ruined tree, any shore
where our cargo might claim safe harbor.
Collaboration

Along the fence, something like driftwood,
remains of vines long gone—
the iron grid so embedded in wood,
wood so tightly clasping iron
it cannot be cut out.

Procession

This plow will never open a field again;
nobody will risk a life to these wheels;
but field hands’ bones remember; bend and gather
a harvest of rust, iron pulled from the earth
and aging, aging back.

with thanks to all the sculptors for the Energy Necklace Project
at the Jackson Homestead

**
Water

by Cheryl B. Perreault

All this water
that we have around us
like an orb of quiet offering
from the universal womb
of an ever-expectant mother.
All these vast, patient puddles and ponds
and cool, clear pacing ripples
of pooled glacial waiting lakes
and the rhythmic rock
and pound and pave
of the mighty ocean waves
and the rain that falls down
from the clouds that
hover above the ground
as the solitary drip-drops
seem to nearly stop mid-air
before landing on the ground
or before falling on even
the smallest open hand
like deliverance.

How they fall even on the small, quiet boy
waiting in the dry and distant land
with bare feet and outstretched hands
to beg for water from the foreigners
who smile, yet do not understand
why he begs for water instead of money
until the day of eventual rain comes again
and falls down upon him.
How then the boy shouts out “amen”
as the tiny drops descend
upon him and once again offers up
his outstretched hands
and simply stands there smiling in
all this water.

**
Ordinary Pine by Joanne DeSimone Reynolds

What happened?

That is to say, what happened to us? Or between us? What will become of us now?

True, you were older.
Suffered the deluge.
Cast a shadow more borrowed than your own.

I came shortly after.
Not so much a part as a go between – a link. I remember the way you reached out to the youngest – your great hands – how well they played!

Facing away from you now, I long to see you.

Both of you.

Such a hole in each of us.

**
by Neil Horsky

***
Comfort  by bg Thurston

No matter how old, we become orphans when our mothers die. We wail and rend our clothing into shreds.

In the hope of healing, we braid ourselves into an umbilical rope reaching for Heaven.

Then we imagine our mothers’ faces searching for us, seeing the vivid colors woven out of love.

Our souls recognize what our eyes cannot. That tether that binds us—the knots at either end.

**
Lockybirds  by Lila Linda Terry

Yes there are two! a boy and a girl.
they are swimming, spiraling near one another
in separate balloons.
One heart is a lot for a person.
First time Mama has three right now.
Waterbirds, their tiny hearts 158 beats per minute
Haven Grace and
Theo.
They are not panting, they are relaxed inside her.
With little hearts beating like the sparrows
at the winter feeder
when the world is white.

I am free when I swim in summer.
I feel as if I am in the blue sky.
I wonder if they feel the same?
all worries non-existent
hands wafting through sparkling water
eyes seeing white clouds moving
I am
in it,
with it,
paddling away. . .

God is guiding us
Sure as the sun’s rays
follow me across the pond.
Days continue
the pond  that is her, will shrink.
We will hold the lockybirds in our arms soon, one green summer day
the warmth of our love
will set them free
into new Earth lives.

**
Spring Returns  by Lynn Horsky

*after The Procession by Linda Hoffman and Gabrielle White*

Spring wheels forth from winter’s grasp
Dreams of fields in sunlit breezes
Forgets the cold and dark untimely freezes

Ceremoniously, she guides her maidens
Upward on her sacred path
Cracks through shells fire and ice have ground
Emerges not unscathed
More determined for life again

Hearts be hers in this hard labor
Full force of will entailed
Backs to work pick axe and shovel
Hands to plow hot sweat on brow
Kneeling before her as a planter

Her flute in air calls seeds to swell
Row by row her vision multiplies
Showers release her tears of gratitude
Awarding multitudes divinity’s food anew
Anointed, fresh, imbued

**

**Having Chickens**  by Cheryl B. Perreault

For some strange reason, these days I am preoccupied by the thought of chickens. I think I’d like the luxury of having a few in a little heated barn that I could build in my backyard to let them roost and roam about throughout the day at home. How good life would be if I could collect even a handful of eggs for an occasional omelet to make on the weekends. Mother tells me that she hated chickens. This is possibly because there were perhaps two thousand chickens at a time in the wire fence coop of her childhood mind. “Too many filthy chickens.” Mother says, shaking her head. According to Mother, chickens were everywhere clucking, kvetching and pecking at her ankles and hands,
stinking up the yard so that she’d have to wear big mud boots
when she’d go out to clean the chicken house or gather up the eggs
to sell to the hungry neighbors who begged for them to get by
in the post-Depression times. It was her father who was the one to re-stock the feed
and every morning he would also be the one to check for any overnight chicken
casualties.
Mother says there were always a few prolonged or tragic deaths in the coop.
He’d take care of that too. And then her father would leave the chickens
for his other day-job at the rubber shoe company
so that he could perhaps bring home bread enough to eat with all their eggs
as well as the occasional unfortunate sacrificial chicken served up on the dinner plate.
Mother confesses now she would try not to remember the names
that she would give the chickens when she saw them there on the dinner table.
You know, ordinary chicken names like Theodora, Gertrude, Hester and Carol.
“But who cares about their names anyway,” says Mother “…they were just a bunch of
dirty, old birds.”
However, when you get Mother in a corner, she just might admit that those chickens
really got them through all those days on the farm in the post-Depression times
when people didn’t have choices of things like eggs at the store,
like whether to get the jumbo or standard size, brown or white,
organic or hormone-free or home free on the range.
Back in those days, people just had chickens,
usually just the one kind that pecked at seed that was within their limited range of
mobility.
Mother has confessed on more than one occasion,
usually after she has had a glass of wine,
that these same chickens had an inexplicable, nearly mystical gift of sometimes
making a momentum of clucking sounds in such holy-seeming unison,
as if they were a bona fide church-ordained spiritual choir singing each other necessary
offerings
of sacred songs about the divinity of life,
sometimes when it seemed that they had nothing else to live for.
“Perhaps,” she tells me in a near-whisper, “they were songs of their survival.”
And so now, Mother has me thinking that … who knows,
maybe if all of our ancestors and neighbors were standing still long enough outside,
perhaps they were witness to those chickens passing on their legacy of survival songs
and just maybe those songs are resonating somewhere inside of all us descendants of
those people
back in time having chickens. And if we continue to listen carefully out in the world,
perhaps we can still hear those chicken songs teaching us about survival. In fact, I don’t
know if it is just
my imagination since we are talking so much about chickens but I swear that I just now
heard Gertrude
inviting me to join her in song about life … with a “call and response” opportunity.
Procession

by bg Thurston

I was holding down a convulsing ewe,
when my friend said People need to know
that farming isn’t a Norman Rockwell painting.

No one understands why I want to live here
in the middle of nowhere, at the end of the line.
Sometimes I cannot remember myself.

My great-grandfather, Charles Bartholomew Lorenz,
was a dairy farmer in Waterford, Pennsylvania.
My other ancestors raised sheep and crops.

Farming comes with its own stark language:
ring-womb, wool-break, star-gazing, milk fever.
One learns to pay attention to nature’s signs.

Life and death entwine here every single day
and all I am certain of is that I am not in control
of what survives and what will escape my grasp.

But each day, I try, pray, cry and stay patient.
Sometimes I even remember the reason I am
rooted so deeply to this earth—to raise up

these living, breathing beings. The ewe recovers
and her twin lambs gambol around her.
Crocuses bloom in places I did not plant them.

A silent hand stretches up from the soil
and offers comfort of the kin I never met,
yet knowing this is the only place I belong.

**
Would That We Might  by Joanne DeSimone Reynolds

The day-sky is dimming, dimming he said, the sun is losing gold.

With alloyed reeds, with great delicacy he fashions a vehicle:

toothpicky, rickshaw-wheeled. A prairie-lost contraption of wheat gone to seed. System unto itself in jeopardy of collapse. He attaches a sail to it that all might be saved.

A web of resin. A stung amber spun from fingers like spinnerets. He inserts a matrix of rectangles. Open-ended as outlet boxes. Input-output rooms particles speed through, glitter-splattering, that they might breed sparks like Mary’s womb.

**

Oasis  by Susan Edwards Richmond

Jackson Homestead, circa 1830

From out of the trees comes a knock at the door hailing light, a sturdy farmstead fenced around, bulwark against a demon night.

**
Tikkum Olam  
by Lynn Horsky

_after Solar Shards by John Powell_

Heal the breach, repair the world.
Connect the broken shards of light.
Earthbound spirits rise,
Duty calls with little time.

While we walk to hear the artists talk,
A prophetic voice begins a descant
Mourning for our home on earth
Ruptured by greed.

There is no reparation that can be made
Our planet is truly broken,
Our planet is really dying.

_Civilization, our species, perversely flawed, all other beings prey._

Woe, I see mushroom clouds rise like keyholes to extinction.
Atoms bombard television sets in small New England villages, in India, China, Korea, Pakistan, in Russia, and the Middle East
I travel cross the globe in split seconds watching
Armageddon’s battles and fragmented continents sink.

Another voice will hope
for a little leaven.
Physician heal thyself.
Here is a remnant to seal the great divide
Hanging lanterns in the tree
Festive solar collectors swing
Saving rainbow prisms light for dark
Every night a holiday of mending.

**
Elm, Jackson Homestead  by Joanne DeSimone Reynolds

for Ellen

Diviner. When the farmer dug a well, he dug, here. One house. Two. And on – a homestead keeping up with the canopy lit from within like a carnival. A Gothic-arched cathedral of green.

Ulmus Americana – Main Street loved it. Just ask Olmstead. His allee along the park at Fifth Avenue – each tree branching upward and out as if attracted to its opposite, a clasping of hands – forms an arch as if to usher out the bride and groom. It still stands there, a century on.

But a tree can fall in the ring – one-two punch, fungus-plied beetle – the whole of it hollowed out. And worse.

So we turn again to the well, draw upon memory, upon words. A grace. A preservation.

Note:
Inspired by a drawing of the old house by Ellen Jackson (1825-1902) in 1894. Having never seen the house, she drew it as described by her father, William. It depicts a well under an elm tree beside the earlier salt box house.

Inspired, also, by the work of the following sculptors:
Milan Klic: Acquisitions of Light
John Powell: Solar Shards
Peter Kronberg: Reaching Hands
Peter Lipsitt and Susan Israel: Tempest Tossed, 2013
Linda Hoffman: Ordinary Pine
About the Poets

Zachary Bos is director of the Pen & Anvil Press, and has had work published most recently in Battersea Review, Bellevue Literary Review, and Spare Change.

Polly Brown is a member of Every Other Thursday https://sites.google.com/site/everyotherthursdaypoetry/home, and writes about progressive education at ayeartothinkitover.com. She has two chapbooks, Blue Heron Stone, and Each Thing Torn From Any of Us, and a full-length manuscript perpetually in the works.

Linda Fialkoff is a life coach and psychotherapist who lives in Massachusetts and Vermont. She enjoys writing poetry to connect to the earth, and to people, both living and those who have died.

Lynn Horsky owns a graphic arts production management company, and is a mixed media artist, food blogger, and participant in spoken word events. She lives in Boxborough, MA.

Neil Horsky’s Found Poetry imbues poignant historical texts with critical contemporary meanings through the selective reduction and artistic alteration of the source material.

Terry House is a middle school English Language Arts teacher and a member of the Robert Creeley Foundation. She lives in Westford, MA.

Cheryl Perreault is founder and host of Wake up and Smell the Poetry at HCAM-TV in Hopkinton, co-created and facilitates The Women's Art Forum, and is host and creator of the Meet Your Neighbor tv program. She also offers workshops and group sessions for creative writing and life review story-sharing.

Joanne DeSimone Reynolds' chapbook Comes a Blossom has just been published by Main Street Rag.

Susan Edwards Richmond is the author of four poetry collections, Increase, Purgatory Chasm, Birding in Winter, and Boto. She is on the board of the Robert Creeley Foundation, and lives in Acton, MA.

Lila Linda Terry is a health counselor/medical massage therapist, and lives in Cambridge where she has maintained a private practice for 30 years. She grows lightroot, a therapeutic plant at Old Frog Pond in Harvard, MA and is a certified Sage-ing leader.

bg Thurston’s second book, Nightwalking, was released in 2011 by Haleys. She lives on a farm in Warwick, Massachusetts, and teaches poetry workshops year-round, except in March when she is busy with lambing season.