

Trish Hopkinson loves words and digs poetry slams. Her mother tells everyone that she was born with a pen in her hand. She has been published in the Brevity Poetry Review and UVU's Touchstones, the latter in which she won second place for poetry. She recently placed fourth in the Poetry on Canvas competition and received an honorable mention from the League of Utah Writers for her poetry anthology, Emissions. She is a project manager by profession and resides in Utah with her handsome husband and two outstanding children.

"Inventive, original and a great sense of humor alongside very serious subjects. Great skill in writing form as well as free verse." ~League of Utah Writers

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# Souvenir

poems by Trish Hopkinson

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# Crosshairs

My mother stood soft  
on the sidewalk, her absentminded fingers  
playful in my plain ten-year-old hair  
as she spoke with her friend  
from across the street.  
Out in the open  
all families are calm  
and simple.  
I stayed in front  
of her, facing outward,  
pretending to participate, smiling  
at all the right times,  
but really just enjoying  
the tickling caress and closeness.  
Concrete steps to porches to brick to  
front doors enclose truths  
we learn not to speak of—  
but I knew her friend's daughter still wets  
the bed, that I had an absent parent,  
that prescription drug abuse caused two suicides—  
maybe intentional, maybe not—  
and the combination homicide slash suicide on the corner,  
all within the crosshairs  
of four not-so-big city blocks.

# Waiting Around

*after "Walking Around" by Pablo Neruda*

It so happens, I am tired of being a woman.  
And it happens while I wait for my children to grow  
into the burning licks of adulthood. The streaks  
of summer sun have gone,

drained between gaps into gutters,  
and the ink-smell of report cards and recipe boxes  
cringes me into corners. Still I would be satisfied  
if I could draw from language  
the banquet of poets.

If I could salvage the space in time  
for thought and collect it  
like a souvenir. I can no longer  
be timid and quiet, breathless

and withdrawn.  
I can't salve the silence.  
I can't be this vineyard  
to be bottled, corked,  
cellared, and shelved.

That's why the year-end gapes with pointed teeth,  
growls at my crow's feet, and gravels into my throat.  
It claws its way through the edges of an age  
I never planned to reach

and diffuses my life into dullness—  
workout rooms and nail salons,  
bleach-white sheets on clotheslines,  
and treacherous photographs of younger me  
at barbecues and birthday parties.

I wait. I hold still in my form-fitting camouflage.  
I put on my strong suit and war paint lipstick  
and I gamble on what's expected.  
And what to become. And how  
to behave: mother, wife, brave.

# Ripened

Apricots swelled  
heavy, blushing in July seduction  
and dropped dully to Kentucky  
bluegrass with a thud  
when supporting stem gave way  
to plump.

We had just moved in.  
Mid-century modern eaves  
watched over supple trees  
and graying fence.

My daughter rode her beach cruiser,  
encircling pines and flowering  
pears, admiring the length and width  
of her new back yard.

We tried to pick them before  
they fell from bruising heights,  
but some ripened  
without permission.

# Marked

What once was smooth is creased with purplish-blue,  
the middle rumped after being pulled,  
the stretches marked where form began and grew.

I touch the lined and ridged skin, tattooed  
with time—the nine you curled confined and walled  
where once was smooth is creased with purplish-blue.

At first, the flutters moved within my womb  
as cells were reproduced, my skin enthralled  
by stretches marked where form began and grew

until I felt you press, then push and soon  
beneath my ribs, atop of hips you sprawled.  
What once was smooth did crease with purplish-blue.

And next you stood before me, fully bloomed,  
a man, but still a boy as I've recalled  
by stretches marked where form began and grew.

Your youth will seem to fade in front of you,  
but I retain with honor, love, and awe  
what once was smooth now creased with purplish-blue,  
the stretches marked where form began and grew.

# Replicas

Wrapped in a white handkerchief at the bottom of a drawer,  
the impression of my five-year-old palm rests within a clay discus.  
Once it dried, my kindergarten teacher let me select what color paint  
to use.

I remember, my favorite color then was red, to match my mother's.  
I remember, I wanted to be just like her. (Sometimes, I still do.)  
The tempera paint remains unchipped and unspoiled,  
preserved at the bottom of a clothing drawer,  
and has made many moves from childhood home to childhood home  
(fourteen of those to be exact) and then from grownup home to  
grownup home,  
where my own children bring their replicas—little palms and  
fingers  
pressed into clay, initials carved to make their marks.

# “The Sky is Crying”

Watercolor clouds devour the horizon, the sun dipping  
behind evening’s hem like a timid child to the dark visitor.

Vines pose their arms across arbors  
thick with summer fruit,  
soon to be winter’s wine.

We arrived just in time to swoop up the last room.

A slow wind followed us in on dusk’s bookends.

You found the last open table on the lawn,

brought me a vodka tonic with lime,

and with an extra splash

from your pocket flask, we settled in

to lyrics and guitar riffs of Stevie Ray Vaughn—

a cover band—next to the calm vineyard

and muted voices of surrounding strangers

with a deep inhale, a twirl around,

and the familiar warmth of taking it all in.

# Pink Pillow Shams

Your house always smelled like coffee grounds  
and the ashes of fresh cigarettes hanging in the humidity  
like a see-through shower curtain.

I remember watching you pick lint up off the carpet  
bending at the waist in your fuzzy socks  
and navy polyester slacks.

You used to sleep on that itchy brown couch with legs  
in the living room, while your perfectly made bed  
slept alone in the bedroom.

Once Grandpa died, your bedroom became the guest room  
for Mom and Dad when we visited.

You showed me how to gently remove the pink pillow shams  
and fold back the bedspread, since the bedding  
was just for looks and not for sleeping.

The bedspread was one of the quilts your Momma made.  
Sunbonnet Babies pattern for the girls  
and Overall Boys for my brother Jon's.

We used to sit on her lawn with the bugs chirping in the trees  
and play Canasta. I may have been too young,  
but you let me play all the same.

I was five when Granny Webster passed away. She left us  
a little bit of money that we took to the department store  
and used to buy a microwave.

Your microwave was a Radar Range with turquoise dials and  
buttons  
that matched your melamine coffee cups  
and saucers, slightly stained.

When you washed the dishes you never rinsed them,  
just washed them in hot water with soap  
and then dried them.

I used to ask you why your thumb nail was so long and you said  
it was to tear tape, which you must have done a lot  
since you worked in the old folks home.

When I came to visit and introduced you to your great grandson,  
you had bought me Sugar Smacks and Jello,  
because that's what I ate when I was little.

The same red linoleum floor sat beneath the kitchen table  
where I once dumped out blocks and created  
castles with Uncle Jim.

You still put curlers in your hair and took a bath on Sunday  
mornings.

You still had your coffee in the turquoise cup,  
but you gave up cigarettes.

I saw you one more time when I was pregnant with my daughter.  
You died before she was born and never knew  
that I named her after you.

# Great Grandfather's First Press Conference

The only story ever offered me  
about her youth, about her father's time,  
was told of how he stood before the press,  
before the horde—Missouri's governor,  
but still her dad. So eager, proud, and young;  
she wore her sailor dress and t-strap shoes.  
All crowded gazes aimed at both of them.  
The host was speaking fast and loud to drown  
the murmured words and shoulders chafing tweed.  
Her father strode up front when introduced.  
Then sudden loud bangs like bullets erupt  
the air, the powder flashes echoed floor  
to wall. Her palms then grasped her head in fear.  
He calmly bent to meet her eyes and crooned  
“Don't worry dear, they're taking photographs.”

# Rumi once said “Poetry can be dangerous”

like a swan dive into a sonnet,  
balancing blank verse while posing for William Tell,  
dueling pistols of Haiku, “in five,” “no seven,” “ok, five,”  
and parachuting couplets falling from cockpits found  
on the wings of flapping poets.

Dangerous cinquain snipers  
sit atop sestina sky scrapers  
and aim for iambic secret agents,  
each with five feet with only two toes.  
Lyrics and limericks eat tanka Twinkies  
and smoke epic cigarettes,  
chase them down with bourbon ballads  
and shoot villanelles into their veins.

The bad boys of poetry slam  
their fingers in rhyme doors  
and set fire to free verse  
until the microphone melts  
and the audience yelps, “PUSH poet,”  
pushing like poetry pimps, like word lords  
that eat risk for breakfast  
with stanzas on the side. Literally  
daredevils, heroes, and heroines—  
poets that produce,  
poets that dance,  
poets that write dangerously.

# Embalmed

by you, I inhale your skin  
to desiccate the drowning  
edema of swollen living,  
the carcinogens of risk,  
the humblings of failures.  
Your solvents seep and dissolve  
me into inescapable fixation.  
Autopsy reveals excision,  
an organ gone missing,  
pumped through while my head  
tilts fifteen degrees to your right.  
Dr. Ruysch would be proud  
of your whip stitch.

# Whimper

*In response to Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"*

Allen wore his skin inside-out. When he blushed, the air around was rose-colored. When he cried for his lovers, for himself, for his mother, the tears poured within; a well for which there was no bottom, no bucket from which to draw or drink. He sacrificed the sacred, his lamb of passion—a savior of poets. He pushed his spectacles to the top of his nose to see forward and envisioned emotions as alphabetic symbols. I whimper.

His organs and intestines stretched out from left to right, neatly arranged in rows and bound with string, then sold under City Lights. Pieces rich with iron-clad allegory, some chewy, some tender, all meta-life. Unadulterated exposition, sun-seared and out in the open, beneath heat, atop cold, blue veins lay aching. Flip the front cover and let the oxygen in. He howls, "Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religions! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!"

Turn hope humbly on its heels and send sympathy to Hell. Our sensitivity is bullshit. Our smallness is truth. God is an excuse—flippant and fantastic, fiery and crude, spun from cells spun from atoms, all still spinning cerebral. I turned thirty and left God roadside to hitchhike his way home, his back toward me, his thumb outstretched.

# Mollusk

I often think my chest  
holds three hearts—  
like an octopus  
with a bag for a body  
and light-blue pumping blood.  
One heart is for mechanics,  
one is for vision,  
and one is romantic.  
I'm a puppet  
persuaded by organs,  
diving in on instinct,  
deficient in reason,  
pressed soft by my environment.  
The air has gone missing  
and so have my bones.  
My fingers are suction cups;  
my eyelids are gills;  
my mouth and nose, a beak.  
My skin begins to blend  
into patterns on the walls,  
on the floor—  
now the hearts cannot divide me,  
my eyes cannot fool me,  
my mouth cannot speak.  
My body collapses  
beneath the pressure  
as the ocean sits heavy  
like cream atop fresh milk.

# Barbershop Protest

Aspen safety matchstick strikes protest signs within  
ignites sulfur friction at paraffin combustion. Exclamation  
points put across headstands dangling to the neck. Smoking  
barrels sucks in oozing wafts in whiskey drink  
down exhaust to the Glencairn glass.

Amber termites bend and break in  
scraped sandpaper. Roughsawn feet faces  
pavement, crowds cram catchphrases under fingernails. Rip  
out teeth in drunken insects, chew on smoke  
signals under rawhide flags stolen at masts. Breathe in  
buffalo feathers and beads stuck at oyster tongue.

Calloused borders snap off scabs  
at fingertipped bloody newspaper clipped.  
Thumbtack sun to eyelids toothpicked, thirsty  
nightsticks torch pepper gas constellations padlocked  
to bike racks. Spoked shadows make  
the moon. Snap to it.  
Rubber quartet.  
Haircut.

# Breast-giver\* (a found poem)

Beggar-pickpocket-hooker,  
breast-giver—she creates in the  
blind alleys with chapped feet and  
large round breasts. Take your wife,  
greedy crow, unthinking bull driven by  
lust. You eat rice and stolen samosas by  
the oil lamp. Countless beings raised a hue  
and cry in deepest night. She creates as mother,  
pinched skinny even while your flies were  
fat. Her capacious bosom, a seething vat  
of milk. Her offspring, a better human  
material created by devotion, by  
mother's will. I put flowers on  
her belly, her languid-hipped  
body, her motherhood.

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\* Devi, Mahasveta. "Breast-giver." Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Breast Stories*: 38-45. Print.

# Worlding

She holds her palm like a cup  
for fear she might lose the tiny grains  
to the ground. She's worn to the soul  
beneath tattered cloth, her bare toes  
pressing against the earth.  
She nearly blends into the stone,  
the vines at her feet, their leaves  
bowing as if to worship.  
But it's her stare that haunts,  
surreal and smart, like  
a child that knows too much  
and holds the universe in her hand.

# Sister Shadow

I gave away my breast today.  
It slipped from beneath my skin in my sleep—  
its terminal flatness in the shadow of its sister,  
sloped shallow instead of lifted,  
lessened and declined, instead of soft.  
When I swallow, the omitted catches in my ribs  
where there used to be room for motion,  
where mammary once pressed swollen,  
before converting cannibal,  
before destruction.  
My nerve endings tell me she's still there.  
In waking dreams I feel her weight,  
the fear of what's growing inside—  
waiting to be taken out,  
while I wait against her silhouette,  
while I wait to survive.  
I gave away my breast for life,  
to save the work within. A sacrifice  
of moving onward, to right the cells gone wrong  
and leave behind the tortured tissue—  
nothing but a temporal trade,  
she's still here.

# Christ of the Abyss\*

They found a clay mold of you,  
but your arms had gone missing.  
You too had lost a hand,  
knocked off by a boat's anchor.  
They pulled you up out of the bay  
to repair the bronze stump,  
severed where the wrist and hand  
once stretched to the surface.  
You stare blankly,  
beyond the mirrored blue,  
your arms reaching out  
as if you're letting something go,  
as if it's gotten away from you.  
Your colorless eyes reflect  
the emptiness, the longing for heaven.  
Your feet permanently affixed  
to a plate mounted to concrete.  
Divers find their way to you,  
for love of the sea,  
for love of you.

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\* Inspired by *Christ of the Abyss* sculpture by Guido Galletti

# Footnote to a Footnote

Jacuzzis are holy.

Garage door openers are holy.

Back-up cameras and recycle bins—all holy.

Putting the red flag up on the mailbox, waving at the elderly getting my toes wet with dew—holy, holy, holy.

Keeping my eyelids open and trying to sleep like fish, signing my name with less letters and more scribbles, counting crows feet, counting yellow toenails, counting haircuts, counting plucked whiskers, counting constantly.

Bookshelves are holy.

Missing dust covers are holy, magicians and black and white T.V. shows, Penn Jillette theories and Andy Griffith justice, Uncle Walt songs and Ginsberg poems—holy, holy, holy. Drinking beer before noon, drinking liquor right after, drinking it warm (or on ice) with a friend (or not).

Waking up drunk, waking up sober, waking up tired, waking up hungry, waking—always holy.

Table wine is holy.

Candle sticks are holy, dishwashers and cloth napkins, the folk art cricket made from wire and a railroad nail, rock salt from the salt flats in a salt cellar—holy, holy, holy. Opening an empty cedar chest to still moths and crumbs, staring at stretched cobwebs immersed in the sun,

swallowing nests, swallowing nectar,  
swallowing chimes, swallowing saliva,  
swallows—always holy.  
Self-portraits are holy.  
Ceramic urns also are holy.  
Tape recorders and keyboards,  
drawing pads and gold-plated ball-point pens,  
calligraphy and stipple—holy, holy, holy.  
Unfolding a letter, unfolding a chair, unfolding  
into downward dog, from child's pose, into corpse pose.  
Picking apricots, picking green grapes,  
picking out a husband, a shower curtain,  
selection—always holy.  
Twist-off caps, dresser drawers, remote controls,  
carpeted stairs, revolving doors, product recalls,  
keycodes, passwords,  
restaurant reservations,  
last-minute invitations,  
cell phones, voice recognition,  
land minds, and secrets—holy,  
holy word, holy water, holy book,  
holy soap boxes, bathtubs, soap dishes—holy,  
holy drains and draining, empty.

