

Foreword

When we consider aging, most of us think of growing old. Indeed, that is how the editors of the *Bellevue Literary Review* conceived of it when we first called for manuscripts for a special issue on aging. However, the varied response from the writing community suggested a broader interpretation: aging, in fact, is a lifelong process, beginning from the moment we are born, extending—in fits and starts—until our last breath. This issue of the *BLR* reflects that continuum, each piece focusing on a particular nuance of aging.

In the story, “Eggs,” by Susi Wyss, the 15-year-old Central African protagonist can no longer be a child, now that her mother has died and left her an orphan. The aging process is turbulent, but Grace is determined to become an adult. So too is Min, the 17-year-old in Adam Tamashasky’s story, “Sex in the Starless Universe.” Despite his leukemia, Min would like to move beyond his adolescent innocence, but he finds that he ages in a different, more distressing, manner.

David Wagoner’s poem, “For Their Second Childhood,” appears to refer only to the elderly. But when juxtaposed with the above stories, it can offer another view: “There’s hardly anybody/ left alive to remind them/ to stop that/ slouching to stand up/ straight to quit playing/ with their food...”

A young mother, in “Looking at Aquaman” by Kim Foster, is forced to contemplate mortality when she is diagnosed with a serious liver disorder. Despite “aging” sooner than she had expected, she learns that there are no special dispensations from either family or the rest of the world. Only her toddler and his superheroes seem to understand.

In “The Father of Joan of Arc,” by Ron Rindo, a father and mother are rapidly aged by the sudden death of a teenaged son, but in vastly different ways. The mother turns in to herself, while the father is inexplicably drawn toward a historical counterpart.

David Farris, in his essay, “Saturday, First Call,” relates the events of one 24-hour hospital shift. But, in reflecting on his quarter-century as an anesthesiologist, he also is able to examine the maturing of the humanistic side of his doctoring.

The middle-aged narrator in Susan J. Newell’s story, “Mourning Dove,” is visited by memories of love and sex in her youth. The intricacies of the aging of sexual desire add complexity to her current life. Alison Townsend considers a different aspect of aging and sexuality in her poem, “On Finding One Grey Pubic Hair Four Days Before My 48th Birthday.” Another facet of

love, despite infirmity and dementia, is described in Alice Wirth Gray’s poem, “Love on Death’s Doorstep.”

Joan Kip, in her essay, “Solitude,” contemplates being alone in the years after her husband’s death. She examines the tension of aloneness against loneliness, and the evolution of her current state of emotional wellbeing at age 90.

Several of the pieces in this issue deal with facing death. Billy O’Callaghan’s story, “Waiting,” is set in Ireland. A young man recalls his grandmother singing old Gaelic songs, while she hovers in her final days. In the poem, “Curling Willow,” Elizabeth Spires writes: “A trip was in the offing./ You would travel light,/ without valise or passport.”

The elderly man in Abby Nance’s story, “A Brutal Sweetness,” slips in and out of consciousness, as early memories of his courtship of his wife-to-be blend with the conversations of the nurses who are bathing him for the last time. The narrator in Barry Sternlieb’s poem, “Autumn Crickets,” gently brushes the elderly mother’s white hair, but worries: “...now you’re afraid/ because in the perfect/ clutter of this farmhouse/ the only thing/ there has never been/ room for is absence.”

What began as a special issue about becoming old has transformed into a collection of meditations on the ongoing process of aging. We hope that these stories, poems, and essays provide insights into how our lives unfold as we age from the first page to the last. We hope you enjoy the journey.

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