# SMOKY QUARTZ

## An Online Journal of Literature and Art

## Spring 2026 Issue

*Bob Irwin, Crawford Notch*



**A Monadnock Writers' Group Publication**

# Spring 2026 Contents

*Daniella Vitale-Warner*, *Rainy Cosmos*

**Poetry**

CLIFF SAUNDERS
**The Conga Line**

RODGER MARTIN
**Art Song from the Balcony of Redfern**

PATRICK BRADSHAW
**Assisi**
**In Praise of the Insulating Properties of Snow**

BARBARA BALD
**Witness**

CHRISTOPHER L. DORNIN
**Ghosts**

MICHAEL KESHIGIAN
**Head in the Clouds**

JEN DROCIAK
**Picea glauca (White Spruce)**

GEORGE DREW
**The Torment Possible**

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSS
**Our Unopened Mail**
**In Evora**

JANA WATSON
**Détente**

MARTHA ANDREWS DONOVAN
**There**

REBECCA UPJOHN
**Weapon**

NH TEEN POETS LAUREATE TEAM
**How to Leave Home**

**Prose**

FELICITY POOL
**Putting Away the Dolls**

STACIA TOLMAN
**The Viking of Vickerman Hill**

PEDRO SANDÍN-FREMAINT
**Estonia 555**

CORNELIUS BULL
**Xenia**

**Artwork**

REBECCA K. BROWN
**The City in November**
**Dare to Dream**

BARBARA DANSER
**Forest Stroll**

KELLY DUMAR
**Playa Pelada**
**Autumn Graffiti**
**Moon, Boat, Wings**

BOB IRWIN
**Crawford Notch**
**Parade**

BOB MOORE
**Sunrise—Shoals in the Distance**

JAN REISS
**Abstract in Turquoise and Yellow**
**Wings and Reeds**
**Purple Flower**

ADELE V. SANBORN
**Spider Moon**
**Ferns**

ALISON DELAND SCOTT
**Surfacing Lily Pads, Francestown**
**Magnolias, Francestown**
**Looking Down on Hooper Road Near Cornish**

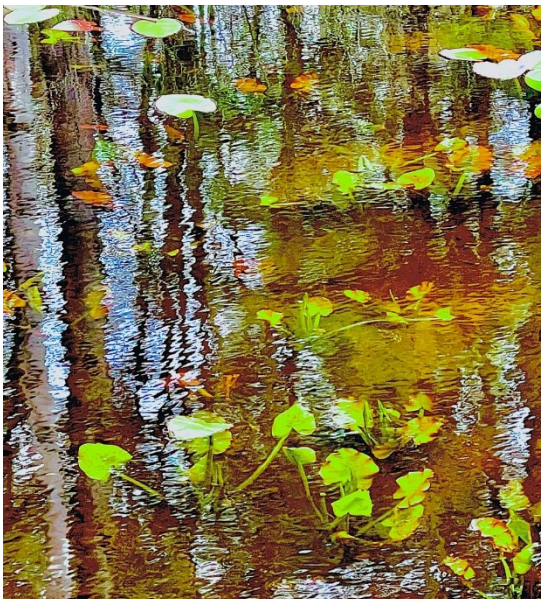
DANIELLA VITALE-WARNER
**American Lady**
**Rainy Cosmos**

**Contributors**

**Read about our contributors**

## MARY ANN MAYER

### Swimming with Dogs in Franconia



*Alison Deland Scott*,

*Surfacing Lily Pads, Francestown*

Because we drop our clothes on the river bank
and enter the murky stream.
Because women are beautiful. And seek.
Because we are playful and will not last.

Because of leavings …
silt-drift, sand that quick-sinks,
sucks our feet in,
we wade, until we float.

Because the dogs—because of them.
Because the best stick in the world
is worth swimming whole rivers for …
we *become* the stick, floating downstream …

As a stream's nature is to be elsewhere,
we *become* the stream—float there—
breasts grazing tadpoles, bottom-stones, silt.
And because of the Perseids; tonight they peak.
Comets glimpsed, then gone.

Dogs, unbounded, disappear around the bend.
Terrier Rudy, water-shy, motor-crosses the muddy bank,
Jilly the herder, who *is* the river, runs through me,
while Butters the pup finds her pluck, paddles freely.

Amidst all these affinities, these leavings,
what choice have we, on *this* very day,
this gift of a day, but to be?
Instinct, comet, water, arm, paw, stick, pack.

Hold this day.  Play this day.
The current is swifter now, clearer, deeper …
carrying us to a secret pool, to linger.
Because we are hot. Because it is cool.
Because it is *so* hot. Because we are *so* cool.
Cool (dare I say?) cats.

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## WILLIAM DORESKI

### A Hundred Dollars

The way we speak of the city
lends it color and dimension
it otherwise lacks. Towers

scratch at the blooms of smog.
Brick town houses glower
with recently fabricated wealth.

We refuse to envy their owners
but admire the granite structures,
museums and brownstone churches,

and the thick plate glass facades
behind which arrogant jewelry
lurks without visible price tags.

We've parsed these streets for so long
they seem ancestral and alive.
When we lived around the corner

and were as poor as alley rats
I found a hundred dollars rolled
into a tube here on the sidewalk.

I bought two weeks of groceries
to surprise you when you slumped
in our only comfortable chair

after a badly paid workday.
That found money still haunts me,
but the many-windowed skyscrapers

saw nothing wrong with keeping it,
impossible to tell who dropped it
or from which pocket of the mind.

*Rebecca K. Brown*, *The City in November*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## PETER MORTON

### [Dorset Vermont, August 2002]

The low drone of locust
in summer's dead heat,

fingers, hesitating on buttons,
Flood Brook calling undress, undress.

Something shivers,
notices itself, folds your clothes

and lays them on sun
baked rocks, then glances

downward at what's been immersed,
feet wavering, legs like sticks,

sun dappled goose-bumped
refraction splintered everything,

Flood Brook singing its own chill song,
wild flowers bleeding on its banks.

*Kelly DuMar, Playa Pelada*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## JANE VACANTE

### Kitchen Tango

From the market stall
notes of green perfume
play up to me.
I choose my mango.

Sniff. Caress.
Anticipate tang
on the tongue.

Hurry home to kitchen,
my dance hall
for slow mating
of sight and scent.

I draw my instruments
from the drawer, join
the band as the dance unfolds.

I tilt my head, listen—
tender scrape of knife
on yellow-green peel.
Sandpaper sound like dancers
pacing back then forth,
tap-tapping on the tiled floor
hand to hand pointing—there!
To my senses entwined.

Tart sweet shock
of mango flesh
against my palate.
I stand, eyes closed
taste music pulsing
through the fruit,
inhale *Astor Piazzola's* last
wild accordion notes.

*Jan Reiss, Abstract in Turquoise and Yellow*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

**JOAN T. DORAN**

## Mid-March Through Wintery Eyes

The day dawned privately today—
*I couldn't see the sun arise*
though tentative light crept my way
and strained to somehow have its say
*it was suppressed by wintry skies.*

The day around us had no sound
*except perhaps, some muffled cries*
through trees that quivered all around.
They longed for dawn they never found,
*trees yearned in vain, and so did I.*

When I looked up, all I could see:
*The endless banks of clouds piled high*
with hovering snow above those trees
and windstorms too untamed to freeze,
*bore feigned regret, and other lies.*

No bird calls penetrate thick air
*wind freezes breathless, though it tries,*
to coax the crow that's hunching there
in lifeless pine that's almost bare,
*the winged bird stirs, but never flies.*

And even though I watch and pray
*some hint of lightness might arise,*
this grainy gauze of endless gray
enshrouds the mountains this dark day—
*the gloom encounters and defies.*

Why does this season differ so,
*why does it wear this other guise*
still wearing diamonds in late snow?
Where did Spring's grand enchantments go?
*I'm lost to all I can surmise.*

Tomorrow may this eclipse end,
*with dawning, hope may be the prize,*
spring-scented winds may beckon then,
and bring the robin back again—
*to cheer the clearing April skies.*

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## LIANE ST. LAURENT

### upon hearing canadian geese while out walking

I cannot tell
if they are coming
or going.

ours fly north
theirs fly north
become ours.

what is ours
after all—listen,
you say, listen to me

and I will listen to you,
be your bird in hand.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## CARLA SCHWARTZ

### I Let it Slip

Approaching neighbors
in the street, I stop my bike.
Over dogs—we talk
of new construction,
of bad shoulders,
of holiday plans.

*None for me*, I said,
*Unless there's a death*
with not too much emphasis
I hope, on the dark.

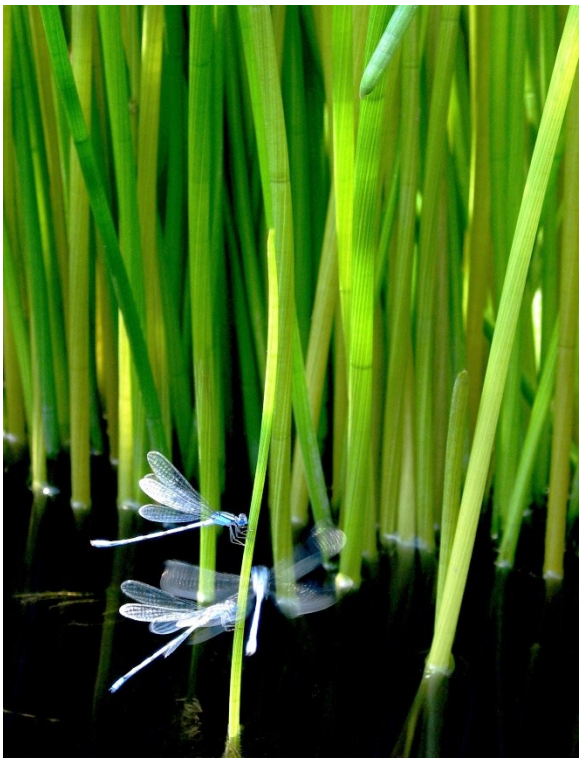
I ride away wondering
how I could have said that,
but then, how could I have not,
when there's a big black blotch
on the calendar of hope?

*Daniella Vitale-Warner, American Lady*

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## CARLA SCHWARTZ

### This day



*Jan Reiss, Wings and Reeds*

is a daffodil
smiling
and genuflecting
as if
it awakened
spring
all by itself.

But on this lake
there are no daffodils,
just fresh leaf shadows
dappled
onto boulders,
in motion
with the wind—
a stone movie
in sync
with the light,
ripples on the lake
eddying
into our cove.

This day
welcomes
the sun
like a birthday
and, having emerged
drenched from last week's womb,

it is a day
to swim
hard and long
through cold water,
a day to relish
work outside,
a day
to hang sheets,
a day to remember,
as you look down,
to lose yourself
in the dirt.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## CLIFF SAUNDERS

### The Conga Line

*Kelly DuMar, Autumn Graffiti*

You've been carving the same
jack-o'-lantern for thirty years.

It's sad when you burn out
your own guardian angel.

The dandelions are doing
better than ever, though,

and the stars seem so bright
and close that you can practically

reach out and touch them.
They want you to color your dreams

with every crayon in the box
so that you will never be bored.

Do your eyes shine like the gain
and treble knobs on a Marshall amplifier?

Perhaps you are not getting enough sleep.
The neighbors are complaining about

you yodeling at the moon again, easy
to do when you love your dance partner.

At long last, there's your answer:
Who among us can resist a conga line?

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## RODGER MARTIN

### Art Song from the Balcony of Redfern

Jacket-zipping, this night-white overcast, then
A burst of light from a star-shaped clearing
opened for the waning moon to pour
whatever life it has left onto the dark
impressionist sheen of Brickyard Pond.
The violet deep water echoes the moon
its glow. And grounded here, at each star point,
a lamppost flickers its glitter onto the shimmering
just as other moons, decade after decade, shimmered
for those young enough to sing or tap or dance along
the shoreline, dreaming lunar possibilities.

*Kelly DuMar, Moon, Boat, Wings*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## PATRICK BRADSHAW

### Assisi

This is the place where they hid
his bones and then forgot
where they put him.

What else would be lost
if he put his shoeless foot
down and made them sell
the marble and gold
pull the frescoes off the wall
to feed the sick and clothe the poor?

Would he find anything worth keeping?
Would there be any corner
for a mystical experience to hide?

What do Peace and Goodness feel like?
Can they be found at the shops
on Via San Francesco?

I left a candle in the basket
without knowing what it meant.
Put out a hand to touch
the tomb as I passed the pilgrims
kneeling at the altar. Pondered
what to keep and what to toss
without throwing transcendence
out with the holy water.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## PATRICK BRADSHAW

### In Praise of the Insulating Properties of Snow

We took a walk before the storm.
Eight degrees Fahrenheit, hard and gray.
The neighbors' goats were all in the barn.
The coyotes and bobcats hunkered down
piled together in their dens and hollow logs.
Forecasts say the cold will make for fluffy snow.
None of this heart attack stuff that kills old men like me.
I hear that snow is an excellent insulator.
It promises a day or so of peace
with the view in the distance obscured by flakes
that will not melt when they hit something hard.
Just until the roads are clear, and the mailbox
has been dug out. Then we can look
at the clock again and prepare for the noise
and flashing lights approaching in the distance.

*Barbara Danser, Forest Stroll*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## BARBARA BALD

### Witness

I watched his wrinkled hand lift the lid
of a garbage can, kiss his letter and toss it in.

With the mail box just beside the trash, I wondered
if he had done it on purpose or by mistake.

Had his mind been on auto-pilot
like my father's when he tossed his underwear
into the hopper instead of the hamper?

I imagined his daughter waiting on the other end,
checking her mail daily, hoping to catch sight of
her dad's scratchy scrawl, waiting
for news of his safety.

Then again, maybe it was bound for a new love
who would never know the feelings tucked
in his 85-year-old heart.

It might even have been a goodbye kiss
to what-might-have-been, a wish-you-luck,
or surrender flag that would never go up.

No matter the truth, I watched in silence.
Staring as I had when a water snake sat
with a frog in its mouth, my body ached
to remove it.

## CHRISTOPHER L. DORNIN

### Ghosts

I remember the way Laconia State School
would grind and grind its people down,
staff and residents alike.

Time has split the porch pillars
of McLane into shards. Plaster
peels from the ceilings in King.

It covers an obscene row
of toilets in Powell. One of them
dangles from the moldy wall.

A cherry bomb must have torn it free.
A spray-painted curse
defames a tub in Floyd.

Boards cover its windows to keep out
the homeless. Tangles of vines
climb the stairs into Keyes.

Bird shit blankets a mattress
in Felker and carpets
the floor an inch deep.

A desk waits for a writer
in the green shallows
of the swimming pool in Towle.

Nobody mows the grass on the quad.
Its sapling maples and birches
rise like apparitions.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## MICHAEL KESHIGIAN

### Head in the Clouds


*Adele V. Sanborn, Spider Moon*

At least once a year,
on a clear, crisp Spring morning,
he hikes with a colorful backpack,
most of the 6,200 feet
of a Mt. Washington trail,
dodging boulders and brush
to find a clearing
where he can spend most of the day,
counting clouds that parade
the blue dome northward,
barely whisking the peak.
With any luck and to carry on comfortably,
he might locate a rather sturdy white pine,
climb a muscular limb
and build a nest
upon adjoining branches
with the gear he packed,
just in case,
then lay back and stare upward
with pencil and pad in hand
to connote quantity and types,
odd formations and densities.
Most friends think him a bit eccentric
and he somewhat agrees,
being obsessed with the abundance
and wonder of it all,
delicious moments of quiet
interrupted only by whispers
amid the leaves
or the occasional crow's caw
which awakens him
from the hypnotic state clouds invoke,
realizing the basis of his compulsion
rooted in a complete and utter fascination
with timelessness.

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

**JEN DROCIAK**

## Picea glauca (White Spruce)

Small and scraggly, its outward appearance
awkward like an adolescent but seeking acceptance
rootbound to a black plastic pot

    December was the first Christmas without her

So I decorated it with pinecones and red glass bulbs
draped it with strung cranberries
wrapped its pot in shiny paper

    and left it on her grave to brighten the dark winter days

In January, I retrieved it
stripped it of all its holiday attire
and overwintered it on my porch

    it shed its needles, now rigid and orange and making a mess

“It’s dead” everyone chuckled
at this little Charlie Brown Christmas tree
but I continued to water it, intending to transplant it in the spring

    Defiant, it lived, and I planted it in the front yard by the street

It became everyone’s Christmas tree
and neighbors would help decorate it each year
until the step ladder no longer reached the top

    our arms no longer long enough to place a star

Now taller than the adjacent two-story house
and home to a pair of tenacious mockingbirds
who delicately balance on its crown to sing
or flash their wings and divebomb the cat stalking below

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## GEORGE DREW

### The Torment Possible

In the mountains of New Hampshire
summer has broken camp
and headed down the Pemigewasset,

leaves dead bodies turning
in quiet pools close to shore.
Should he risk death by drowning

in the deep green of her eyes
pooling above the chianti bottle
on the small table with red cloth

in the intimate Italian restaurant?
And if he should, what comes after?
Conversations moistening dry lips?

Slight touches at her front door
before he says it's time to go?
Laughter edging into something more?

And if not, what happens then?
Long nights of writing bad poems
spiked by the cider of regret?

Letters stored in blue shoeboxes
and lovingly saved as antidote
to chances migratory as the geese?

Now it's October, his pet season,
and trees are giving up their green,
here the top of a maple, there an oak

testing the chilly currents as if
they were the waters of Babylon.
And in his neighborhood only one

turned fully—one small maple
massaged by wind and heavy rain.
There's only one thing to do,

*love that tree ....*


*Rebecca K. Brown, Dare to Dream*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSS

## Our Unopened Mail

**Once again**
**the local transfer station**
**lady grumbles about this—**
*Brown paper bags*
*are*
*cardboard*
*Not*
*recyclable paper*
**—not that I**
**was the one to**
**confuse the two—**
**but**
**someone clearly did**
**She needs**
**to make sure**
**to tell me**
**if only on principle**

It is Saturday morning and it appears to be
—at our kitchen table—a familiar
virtual blizzard
of unopened mail
awaiting my
attention. It is too early for this
to disrupt a
Saturday, a thought
expressed, but I
know better—perhaps
muttering and facial expressions—
I don't believe she can tell when
I think I've hidden it well
Me
I tell her
what we should do with all the unopened bills
and that's exactly what happens

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## CHRISTOPHER CLAUSS

### In Evora

Perhaps on our honeymoon, which she allowed me to plan
I should have skipped the Capela dos Ossos
Not much else to see in that part of Portugal
but when would we ever see anything like it

I should have skipped the Capela dos Ossos
a tourist attraction not for the faint
but when would we ever see anything like it
a chapel constructed of femurs and skulls

A tourist attraction not for the faint
I already knew she was not fond of mice
A chapel constructed of femurs and skulls
clearly it wasn't the most romantic destination

I already knew she was not fond of mice
Why I chose to bring her here I still don't know
Clearly it wasn't the most romantic destination
It seemed like a brilliant idea at the time

Why I chose to bring her here I still don't know
There are women who hold skulls and those who do not
It seemed like a brilliant idea at the time
My new bride was one who does not hold skulls

There are women who hold skulls and those who do not
She likely regretted letting me plan it
My new bride was one who does not hold skulls
I'll bet that she never expected this

She likely regretted letting me plan it
The bones to remind us our lives would be fleeting
I'll bet she never expected this
The rest of the trip would be beaches and scenery

The bones to remind us our lives would be fleeting
Not much else to see in that part of Portugal
The rest of the trip would be beaches and scenery
perhaps, on our trip, which she allowed me to plan

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## JANA WATSON

### Détente

There is an easing of tensions.
A stillness to the snowbanks,
but Little River is running and
we can hear it beneath the ice.
Nuthatches negotiate on the
bare branches of a white oak.
A Christmas wreath sags
on a Maple Street door and
wild turkeys convene in
an amiable driveway.
Five o'clock and the sun
still hangs in a lemonade sky.
We walk slowly with hoods down
and scarves loose like
flags of an impending truce, they
flutter brightly behind our backs.

Winter is a dream we are waking
up from yet we still remember.
A past life that has not passed.
Spring has not stolen it yet,
but it's only a matter of time.
The light is returning to us.
I remember an old alliance.
A bullish south node, my long
cycle in that belly is ending.
*I think I'm losing my accent*
I say as we cross Atlantic Avenue.
*No,* you say. *You can't lose*
*something you've had all your life.*
The subtext drips from a red roofline
and contracts around me.

I shed my gray coat as we
clamber into the car to drive
towards the plutonic north.
The circle of light in the sky grows larger.
*It's time.* I say silently. *Push.*

*Alison Deland Scott*

*Magnolias, Francestown*

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## MARTHA ANDREWS DONOVAN

### There

My neighbor has strung an old tarp among the limbs of the apple tree, there outside the window. Whatever remains in that hammock of green is for me; whatever falls through, the deer may have. She has taken down her ladder, leaving the rest for us. There is a bounty of apples, and she is sharing this sweet gathering with us. There is a bounty of apples, and so they keep falling, a feverish spilling, something that reminds me of the strangeness of this season, the way the wind picks up at night, the way the taller trees arrange themselves against the change, the way we hear the commotion at the edge of the sea, the way things swell, the way things disappear. There is a bounty of apples, and not much else arising from this dried-out earth. The rains came all spring, until they didn't. The tarp is all that is green out there now, that hopeful sling of canvas capturing whatever falls. I hear the thud of gravity, the crumple of fear, then, across the salt marsh, the heaving of wind and drought and sorrow. Darkness falls, like snow in winter, collapsing in the limbs of the tree. There is a bounty of apples from the apple tree, this tree that is all water shoots and overgrownness, this tree whose strange and unruly branches reach upward, as if in anguish, as if in prayer.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

## REBECCA UPJOHN

### Weapon

I can still see the field of kids, flustered teachers, the yellow school buses through the trees. I break the buddy rule. Always take someone with you when you leave the group, but I only need to pee. Three boys from another school appear. One holds a pocket-knife, blade open. I'm fast, here for the elementary school track and field finals, but I'm not fast enough. The boys herd me back against the outhouse door, body odour twisting with the smell of piss. The one with the knife barks something. Another snickers. The third unzips his pants, urinates on the metal door handle. Knife boy orders me to open it. I can't speak. I do as I am told, I'm a good girl after all. Cold metal, warm wet between my fingers. Dark waits inside. "What's going on?" the skinniest boy in my class, the one with the long dark eyelashes, stands on the path. Did he see? The three boys run. I say nothing, follow this boy, half a step behind, out of the trees, into the scent of mown wildflowers, the sound of whistles, teachers herding kids. I say nothing

new shoots

unearthed memory

fifty years on

*Adele V. Sanborn, Ferns*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## NH TEEN POETS LAUREATE TEAM

The **NH Teen Poets Laureate Team** consists of seven New Hampshire high school students: **Elizabeth Chung**, **Erin Han**, **Chloé Lind**, **Catherine Manley**, **Sophie Yu**, **Serena Yue**, **Chloe Zhang**. They are now actively involved in creating an anthology of collaborative poetry. All members of the team were involved in writing lines for this poem.

### How to Leave Home

Don't pack things in your Spiderman backpack with the frayed strap
& broken zipper because its shiny vinyl fabric will be too easy to spot.
Check the stove is off, the gate is closed, the blinds are down; it's sleeping beauty
til you return. Lock the door, then unlock it once more to make sure it still clicks the same.
You are walking, step by step, into the wild, only recently weaned from your mother's breasts.
Know that the midnight cicada-hum is only a reminder that you are loved.
Untie your shoelaces & run. If you trip, take off your shoes & leave them behind.
Quietly, so that the dog doesn't bark, the clock doesn't tick, & the lovers remain wrapped in slumber. As you lock the door on your way out, it'll be as if you never left at all.
Saunter backwards, barefoot, & feed the mailbox a letter you'll never send.
Distill memories into a single lung & land gently,
one last look before sunlight becomes a memory.
When the lights turn amber with astigmatism, stop to recognize the body
ripe with longing: in doing so, you learn to brave distance.
The price of your dreams is the size of home.

*Alison Deland Scott*

*Looking Down on Hooper Road Near Cornish*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## FELICITY POOL

### Putting Away the Dolls

What's on my page for today? I wondered, lying comfortably awake. At 5:30 a.m., robins, crows, and a catbird carried on about their own plans as the sun came up and slid its beams under my half-drawn window shade. Summer morning warmth wafted in, and I hoped God had written that I would swim later.

In Sunday School we'd been learning about His having plans for all of us. Prayer was the way to discover the plans and, it seemed, to put in a bid for our own agendas. The church where we learned about these things was New England white and tall, and the sky, where God lived, showed out of every window. There was that sky-reminder behind the altar, too, where the carved wood was backed by a floor-to-ceiling arch painted shimmering gold, its inside filled with the same deep blue color you see lying outdoors on a bright day and looking up as far as you can see.

But how did even God have time to write a page for everyone every day? I'd just written my first book, "A Raccoon's Night," copied over carefully on four-and-a-half blue-lined pages bound between pieces of purple construction paper. Those pages took third-grade me a whole week of off-and-on work, and even allowing for God's handwriting flowing quicker than my newly-learned cursive, a page per person per day would take Him all his time. He would have no time left to watch over us and figure out what should come next—and what to do if we didn't follow His plan and didn't pray.

The church spire I could see from the window in my parents' bedroom showed the shape hands take for prayer, palms together vertically, fingers steepling the way up to God. No one said that in Sunday School, I just thought it. As for the bells that rang before worship, I believed they were a way to remind God to look down and pay attention to what happened between 10 and 11 a.m. on Sunday mornings in that white building on a hilltop.

When I slept over at my friend Sally's house in the next town down-valley, we went to a stone church with a steeple that looked as though it had been stepped on. The windows all had colored glass, which meant you couldn't see the sky from inside, but all that color probably meant God extra-much enjoyed the view looking in. Being all-sighted, He of course could see right through stained glass, just as He could see through my skin into my soul.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

We went to Sally's church at 10 on Sundays, same as if I was at home, and it reminded me how powerful God was that He could pay attention to both churches at once and also to the one in New York City where my grandmother worshipped. The ladies there all wore hats and maybe that was for God's enjoyment, too, like colored glass windows.

How did God manage to handle all the prayers that went up to Him from all the churches, as well as writing pages for all the people? Heaven must be very organized, so nothing got overlooked. It would be calm and tidy there, everything white, blue, or gold as I saw it through airplane windows, flying near the sun just above Heaven's cloud floor.

Being organized was a good thing, then. It let a person see what needed doing and then take care of business. My business, at the beginning of third grade, was to practice the piano, keep my room tidy, and take care of my doll family.

The way I managed things, my dolls slept in their clothes, so on schooldays I had only to whisk each girl out from under the covers, brush her hair, and sit her up with a hug and a final fluffing. Dark-haired Charlotte and bright-blond Nancy were my big girls who slept in bunk beds. Candy, the baby, had a crib. Delicate Rebecca, given to me by godmother Aunt Becky, took after her namesake, with a smooth pageboy and lots of clothes. Her bed was head-to-head with Peggy's. Peggy was originally my mother's doll and had real hair and a china head.

All the beds, including mine, had to be made each morning. Since God was all-seeing and did not like mess or disorganization, I lay down on the floor to check the underside of the top bunk and the underside of my bed (the only two high enough to see under) to be sure the sheets were even and wrinkle free.

At bedtime, I tucked in each doll, my mother tucked in me, and then she read aloud for all of us. Just before lights-out, I asked God to bless my parents, sister, and doll family. If it was my father putting me to bed, he made up stories, and sometimes I had to remind him not to get scary because Becky and Peggy wouldn't be able to sleep.

On weekend afternoons, baby Candy went down for a nap and the bigger girls and I had tea seated at a table with the legs cut down to the right height for doll-sized chairs. We always started with the first Grace I learned:

“Thank you for the world so sweet, thank you for the food we eat, thank you for the birds that sing, thank you, God, for everything.”

“Nursery tea,” I called it, something old-fashioned families in the books I read were given. The often-mentioned bread-and-milk in a bowl sounded unpleasant, but I imagined it might be flavored with vanilla and sugar like a pudding. Sometimes children in the stories were given toast and jam, the bread browned over the open fire.

No one in my friends’ households knew about nurseries except the kind set up for newborns, and no one else lived in a house heated with wood-burning fireplaces and without a television. Few if any of the other parents had the custom of taking tea, that warming late-afternoon ritual that gets a person through from 1:00 o’clock lunch to 7:30 dinner.

When visiting, my friends were politely interested in having something to eat—an after-school snack—and they were truly interested in playing board games in front of the living room fireplace when logs were burning there and marshmallows could be toasted.  But tea parties and dolls?  Not so much.

Less sophisticated and a year younger than the other third grade girls, I took action to “grow up.” Certain that the idea of what to do came to me from God, I didn’t discuss it with my parents.

One Saturday, I chose four cardboard boxes from the attic shelf where my mum kept a selection of sizes and shapes. Tissue paper came from the linen closet, and string, too. Charlotte and Nancy, my big girls, were first. They were already dressed, of course, but I brushed their hair again and hugged them and laid them on comfy sheets of white paper, skirts smoothed underneath and arms at their sides. I folded more tissue around them and finally over their faces and closed eyes. The boxes were labeled with their names and the lids tied securely with string.

I carried each boxed-up doll, one at a time, up the steep attic stairs to a shelf in the toy section. Back in my room, I wrapped Candy and Becky together since they were littler and would mind being alone, and I took them to the shelf right next to the big girls. Last was Peggy, and then it was done.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

I know my father carried the big girls' bunk beds up to the attic that weekend, and Candy's crib and the tea table and the doll-sized chairs. My mother went up with him to wrap the mattresses in paper and put mothballs into the small trunk where I'd packed the dolls' wardrobes.

I think now that my parents were astonished by what I'd chosen to do, and nostalgic about their little girl growing up. Were they hurt that I did not consult them? We never spoke about it. Privately, I named the occasion "Solemn," and when I went down the attic stairs after the fourth and final trip, delivering Peggy to the shelf, I remember telling myself that I was leaving off being a child.

I believed God approved my growing up and showed me this way to do it. I followed through by never again at bedtime asking for blessings on my doll family. Instead, I copied what we did in Sunday School—praying for my parents, my teacher, the President, and a group of people called "world leaders."

I felt bereft for a long time after the Solemn event. Why did I believe it was God's plan that I do something so wrenching? Decades later, I still have no answer, but some part of me got left behind in the boxes—a playful part that I miss.

*Bob Irwin, Parade*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

STACIA TOLMAN

## The Viking of Vickerman Hill

My mother's sewing machine was not only a tool, but an ally. Her Viking was steady when all else was chaos, loyal when people betrayed her, and like her, it was a survivor. The Viking was probably the only major purchase in her life she had ever bought new, and she was proud of the fact that it had no plastic parts.

It was stationed in front of a second story window that looked out over the flowers in the front yard, lusty begonias in window boxes, and hollyhocks swaying around our house like bridesmaids in pastel dresses. Past the graceful locust trees that dropped strings of white blossoms on the grass was a vast vegetable garden that fed a family of seven through the long, deep winters on Vickerman Hill, sheds where our animals lived; and the grey barns of the neighbor's dairy farm. Beyond a rolling patchwork of cornfields and pastures, we could see the steeples and smokestacks of New York's Mohawk Valley far below. The room where the sewing machine stood was more a wide and well-trodden hallway than a room, a place that collected baskets of laundry and piles of mending and ironing. Sewing projects take space, but there was no space, so when my mother sewed, she either had to spread out on the floor next to her or else run up and down stairs to and from the kitchen table.

By the time we moved from New Hampshire to Vickerman Hill, my mother was in her mid-twenties and already a skilled seamstress. She made extra money sewing men's shirts, a skill she learned from her mother-in-law during her brief marriage to my father. My grandmother would take all winter to make a shirt, the cloth laid out on a big table, and she would proceed slowly and carefully, matching seams and fabric, considering everything before doing anything. That kind of painstaking precision was not my mother's style at all. My mother sewed like she did everything else: in reaction to the next demand on her, which left no room for planning. After my parents divorced, she worked nights as a bartender while getting a teaching degree. One guy at the bar would admire another guy's shirt; he'd be told that it was made by that good-looking gal who had poured their drinks. In that way, another sale would be made.

Overwhelmed by raising three small children alone, my mother had what used to be called a nervous breakdown and attempted suicide, although it would be many years before I knew

that. At the time, her younger sister, my aunt Sarah, left her glamorous life as a model and aspiring actress in Manhattan and moved in with us while my mother decided to live. Although my mother spent six months in a state of catatonia, she still managed to make all our clothes. I was the only girl in kindergarten who had a pair of suede culottes. She made my sister's winter coat out of a green wool plaid, trimmed with real fox fur. As kids, we didn't understand why our clothes seemed to be a continual source of admiring comments from our teachers.

After she recovered and graduated from college, she got a teaching job that took us to our place on Vickerman Hill, a narrow house wedged in between two dairy farms where we lived for ten years. Within a year of moving to our new home, she remarried and soon was making shirts for our stepfather. He was handsome and knew it, so her extra flourishes, like suede elbow patches and bone buttons, appealed to his vanity. It was during this time that she invested in the Viking and turned her life over to Christ, events that are not necessarily connected, but not necessarily not. We tried to fit in and look like everyone else in the Mohawk Valley, but we went to school either in my aunt's castoff Fifth Avenue finery; high-heeled crocodile skin thigh boots and psychedelic minidresses; or in something produced at the Viking, always with my mother's distinctive creative touches. When I was in seventh grade, my favorite bell-bottoms were the ones she made out of blue and white striped mattress ticking. When I grew too tall for them, she extended them by adding two inches of a contrasting bright floral print to the bottom. She ripped out the zipper and made a button fly, using the same material to cover the buttons, hiding frugality with fashion. A few years later, when the star quarterback of my high school announced he was going to the prom, he had so many options for dates, that by the time he chose me (which I pulled off by pretending I couldn't have cared less), the question of what I was going to wear became something of an emergency. We went to the fabric store, my mother and I, where she was well known. The pattern for the dress I liked was simple and elegant but cost a couple of dollars extra, as it was made by a designer label. No way was she going to spend that money. So we bought the fabric, and at home, she spread out the classified section of the daily paper on the floor next to the Viking and made the pattern herself, calling me in to run a tape measure from my armpit to my elbow, or elbow to wrist, speaking to me through a mouthful of pins. The dress was a standout, and I wore it for many years.

Over time, my aunt Sarah moved to the other side of the camera, becoming first a photographer and then a print journalist, covering conflict zones from Southeast Asia to the

Middle East. She would send bolts of silk from Hong Kong or Beirut, along with her measurements and a description of exactly what she wanted, and my mother would stay up all night, sewing until the Viking turned hot, biting off thread with her teeth. I have a snapshot of her in Lebanon in the black bikini my mother made for her.

The Viking, with its often-remarked-upon lack of plastic parts, survived a house fire, which happened not long after I left home. The fire forced her to move from Vickerman Hill down into the industrial towns of the Valley. By this time, her marriage had fallen apart and she was raising children alone again. She moved, along with my younger brother and sister, into the spare bedroom of a house owned by her friend Maria, who worked as an exotic dancer in a gentleman's club in Utica. By that time, I was living in New Orleans. When I checked in about the fire, my mother was not just cheerful, but positively ebullient. God was good, she warbled, and the Viking had risen like a phoenix from the ashes. All she had to do was get it cleaned and oiled, and it was back in service. Soon, she was going to a local Salvation Army and buying old prom dresses by the pound, raw material which she called "*horribilia*." She repurposed the sequined bodices and satin skirts into strippers' outfits. She was proud of her ingenuity, creating a matching set of G-string, bra, hot pants, and bolero out of a single gown. The first set was a gift for Maria, in thanks for her generosity. Word spread first to Maria's co-workers in Utica, and from there, to strippers all over central New York State, and even down to the city. Business boomed, and the Viking stayed busy.

In prayer, however, God informed her that for a schoolteacher and Christian, the optics of this particular side hustle were not ideal, so next she ventured into leather, replacing frayed cuffs and broken zippers on motorcycle jackets. In the shadow of Remington Arms, she bought a house, in front of which she hung a sign that said "Liz's Leather," in the shape of the Harley-Davidson bar and shield, created for her in the wood shop at the high school where she taught earth science for four decades. On weekends and school vacations, she took Liz's Leather on the road, going to motorcycle rallies and swap meets. The Viking came with her, and under a pop-up tent, she sewed and chatted with an itinerant community of vendors who became close friends. In addition to repairs and patches, her particular skill was knowing how to artfully insert extra panels and discreet tabs for those bikers who had gotten too fat for their jackets.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

She never sewed for herself. After my aunt died in 1979, a suicide at the age of thirty-five, something in my mother fell apart. For the rest of her life, she tended to dress in extra-large Harley t-shirts, even at school. As a teacher, she was popular with the students and was named Science Teacher of the Year for NY State. There was no tension between science and religion for her: science was the tool God gave us to investigate Creation, and that was the end of the argument. She was known to pull over at roadcuts on the highway and marvel at the faults, folds, and inclines, a language God had written in stone that only a science teacher could understand. Sometimes she would bring the Viking to school, where a club of sorts popped up, as she taught kids how to make simple quilts out of square pieces of calico to bring home as Christmas presents—while every now and then sneaking in a prayer meeting.

She married her last husband when he was still locked up in a maximum-security facility in Lewisburg, PA, a union that was to last for over thirty years. They met, in a manner of speaking, in the back pages of *Easyriders,* a counterculture magazine which catered to the outlaw biker trade. Jesus guided my mother to an ad in the personals section, where lonely prisoners made their appeals for female pen pals. The letter my mother wrote contained so many references to the Lord that it sounded like an evangelical tract. It wasn't quite what the guy was looking for, so he passed the letter on to his born-again friend Leo, whose prison job was in the chaplaincy. Leo wrote my mother back, and a correspondence began, which represented a chance for her to improve on the life she was actually living. Two years before her sister died, my step-father had run away with the young wife of a deacon. The church, blaming my mother for the scandal, summarily kicked her out of the congregation. But the letters she sent to Leo related none of these difficulties: they were dedicated to telling semi-true tales of "The Walnuts," colorful tales of life on Vickerman Hill, bearing little resemblance to the chaos her children actually lived in.

Again, the Viking deserves its share of credit for the success and longevity of her marriage to Leo. After his release, he took to the lifestyle like a native, and together they transformed Liz's Leather into a thriving business. While she was at school, he was home in the sewing room of their rambling farmhouse creating their line of motorcycle accessories, including seats, saddle bags, and fringed handlebar covers. As the business grew, they needed other machines. They found a stout black Singer, made in 1939, the year of my mother's birth, as well as a used industrial machine that she bragged could sew through plywood. Both machines were too

heavy to take on the road, though, so the Viking held the place of honor in events like Hog Heaven, AmJam, and the Rendezvous. In the spring my mother and Leo went to Daytona, Florida, for Bike Week, and in the summer to Sturgis, South Dakota, for the big ten-day rally. Their home became a refuge for others needing a place to land: kids in trouble or ex-cons in transition. There was always work to be done: cutting, sewing, or gluing the leather; loading or unloading bins from the trailer to the sewing room.

In the early 1980s, a writer who had seen one of my aunt's photographs on page one of *The New York Times* became intrigued by the story told in her obituary. To learn more about this glamorous, doomed beauty who had so much potential but died so young, he contacted my mother, her surviving sister. We traveled to his house in Rochester, NY, for an interview. My mother didn't like talking about the past—she preferred her own Disneyfied version of reality, stories which she would tell in a jaunty tone of voice. But she wanted her sister's story to be told, and the only way to do that was to tell her own: so she braved it, and told the whole truth, for a whole day.

The facts of their early life were not just bleak but tinged with an emotional horror that reminded me of Gothic mysteries I had devoured in adolescence. My grandfather was a professor of philosophy, who although hostile to anything he deemed irrational, nevertheless elevated cruelty to an art form. So they would not unite against him, he divided his daughters into good and bad, and pitted them against each other. My mother was the bad one. She was not allowed to eat with the family, but was forced her to eat her meals later, alone in the kitchen. Sarah was the golden girl, who could do no wrong, even as she got into more and more trouble as a teen-ager. My mother was homeschooled by the professor, learning Latin at age five and Greek at age ten. When she started public school, she was so advanced academically that she started tenth grade at eleven years old. Every morning, her father would lock an electric alarm clock in a toolbox, which she was to unplug every afternoon, so he would know what time she came home. Her conversion to Christianity was her ultimate revenge against him, although he in part was responsible for it, as he had assigned her the Gospels to read in the original Greek. Finally, I heard about the time she slashed her wrists in an attempt to end her life, something unmentioned before or since. That was when my aunt moved in with us so my mother wouldn't lose her children.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

Speaking quietly of their lives, tracing the places where they overlapped and where they veered far apart, my mother lucidly faced the traumas that she had spent a lifetime avoiding. At one point, she described herself as having a mind “like a shattered mirror.” I pictured jagged pieces all over the ground, impossible to pick up and put back together. Even her faithful Viking couldn’t help her with that project—although it did enable her to stay very busy. This busyness was her chief survival strategy, so that out of all those broken parts, she could fashion a whole life.

## PEDRO SANDÍN-FREMAINT

### Estonia 555

As a child, I would lie on the floor imagining what it would be like if the house were upside down and I could walk on the ceiling.

The hall was so narrow that I could brace my bare feet against the opposing walls and scale all the way up to the ceiling. Sometimes I would spook my sister by booing at her from up high: payback for the times when she used a clothes hanger to release the latch and enter the bathroom while I was in the tub.

I was three years old when my family moved to the house; twenty-one and married when I left it. But it never stopped being *home:* the only place where I could show up unannounced with my three young children and take a nap, entrusting them to my parents.

Why do children often develop such strong bonds with the home of their early lives? To me, that house could not possibly allow for replacements. No other house, regardless of how big and lavish, could have taken its place. It was not fungible; rather it was an irreplaceable hearth that I could touch with my body, with my mind, with my soul. I *in-habited* the house.

It was the seat of my early education, which was not of the kind valued in school. In this house, my imagination ran free, unencumbered by letters, numbers, blackboards, or desks, but rather fluid in its wonderment, mostly unaware of the borders that try to keep everything distinct and in its *mandated* place.

Years before school began, I already knew the different hues of chick down feathers, and I was fluent in the language they spoke with their mother. I marveled at how the hen, sensing a *guaraguao* nearby, would cry "danger," and her chicks would vanish beneath her wings.

And I knew how to tell when an acerola was red enough to be picked, or if a guava had reached the light yellow-green color and rounded shape that signaled the brief parenthesis between being ripe and being possessed by fruit worms.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

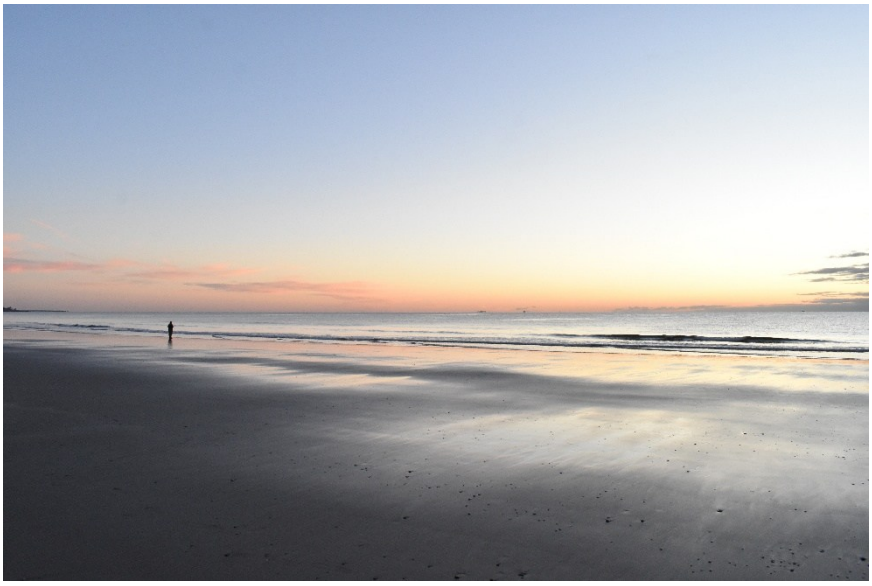
The alluring tones of the knife sharpener's whistle always found me, and I would run out to the porch to see him pass. The same happened with the pleading call of the *panadero* peddling his freshly baked bread. But the pungent odor of fish scales left in the gutter by the fishmonger was not quite as seductive.

◆

Fifty-one years after I had left home—my parents long gone—the house remained. I flew to Puerto Rico to meet my sister for the closing on the sale of Estonia 555. After signing the house over to its new owners, we drove to Caparra Heights to see it one last time. From the car, alongside the curb, I let my eyes drift over the façade: the security bars, the blue edge of the flat roof, the white and blue Portuguese ceramic rendition of *Our Lady* fastened to one of the external walls…

The house seemed drained, flattened, like a body that has lost its soul, compressed into a mere commodity that had just been sold.

As we drove away, I understood that this house must be left behind. And I felt untethered. Oddly untethered.



*Bob Moore, Sunrise-Shoals in the Distance*

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

## CORNELIUS BULL

### Xenia*

> *Every encounter produces, even if for only the flash of an instant, a* xenia*—the occurrence of co-existence which is also an occurrence of strangeness or foreignness.*
> *—Lyn Hejinian,* The Language of Inquiry

After breakfast at the Ponferrada *refugio*, an inn reserved for pilgrims, I begin Day 26 of the Camino di Santiago by finding my way to the outskirts of the awakening city. Once past the slag heaps blemishing its hem, I walk through a series of small towns beaded to this peaceful, rural segment of the pilgrimage trail. In the dawn quiet, a few lone figures wrapped in low-lying mist are curating the rows of ripening crops stretched like taut green wires between the villages. In one village, whose name I have forgotten, where festive clouds of flowers float above long window boxes, I pause to enjoy the busking of a thick tendon of black water flowing swiftly in an open conduit. A beauteous beast! I admire its speed, its long glistening body, and especially love the music of its whispery raga in the still, deserted street, an unbroken *hiss* played on the walls of its narrow channel, which I imagine to be a joyful song of farewell to limitation and restraint as it races towards freedom in the nearby fields. I am reminded of the antipodean beauties of its dreamy, more leisurely sibling at Rousham, the celebrated 18th century garden in Oxfordshire: a slender, stone rill meandering through a copse like a thread of light trailing on the ground, silently leading a visitor to a large stone basin where he may lean over, gaze into the water, and ponder the profile of his own darkness framed by stalks of trembling tree shadow branching against the sky.

As the morning lengthens, the silence accompanying its birth slowly ebbs, giving way to the day's gathering stir as, one by one, the voices of an eclectic, make-shift choir—the dawn chorus of today's Camino—join the measured, monophonic tread of my boots on the roadside gravel. I hear snatches of transmission gargle, motorcycle buzz, rooster kyrie, and baby holler: all the ingredients of a polyphony of wakening heard in many a semi-rural landscape. By late morning, temperatures have reached new heights of swelter. I walk under the battering sun, pausing now and again to snack on handfuls of ripe cherries from the roadside trees, and reach Villafranca, my destination, by early afternoon.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

As I descend into town, I glimpse the Church of Santiago sitting on the outskirts to the left of the path on a hillside, and the *refugio*, clinging to the edge of the small plaza in front of the church. Together, the two form one of the more mismatched architectural pairings of the Camino: one, centuries old, built of beautiful aging stone with a famous Romanesque portal; the other, a jerry-built, sprawling canvas structure that appears to have been pitched by nomads. I step inside the *refugio*, sign in, and then go into the dormitory to find an empty bed amongst the snoozing lumps of pilgrims melting slowly in the semi-dark. The siesta hours pass in sultry catalepsy and in silence broken only by the tinklings of a goat bell from the kitchen garden. Motion returns to the *refugio* in the late afternoon. After chatting with some Dutch pilgrims in the café, I take a chair out to the gateway and sit down to watch the raked light on the walls of the town below and to revel in the samplings of evening breeze that have *finally* started to blow from some mysterious location, one exhorted and prayed to by many a pilgrim during the calvary of today's trek.

An elderly man approaches, walking slowly up the hill from the town; a tourist most assuredly, judging from his clothes, camera, and the attentive way he studies the church from afar. He notices the incongruous structure behind me and pauses, his puzzlement evident. I tell him in Spanish that he is looking at a *refugio*. He asks haltingly if I am a pilgrim and, because he uses the word *Pilger*, I answer affirmatively in German and invite him to sit down. I introduce myself, and he tells me that he's a retired architect from East Germany, here on a Camino Art & Architecture bus tour. We chat for a few minutes about our respective journeys and then, for reasons known only to Hermes, he abruptly presents me with one of the most intimate gifts I have ever received: a genuine *hermaion*.[1] With no preamble or explanation, he breaks into the flow of conversation when he raises his head, looks me straight in the eye, and declares *Ich komme aus Dresden*. He says he comes from Dresden, but the look in his eye and the intensity in his voice betray a terrible subtext. The foundation of our friendly exchange falls away in an instant, seemingly at the flip of a switch, and, for a moment, a paradoxical abyss opens between us: a xenic gulf, dividing us together | joining us apart.

*[s]ometimes the world disrobes, slips its dress off a shoulder, stops time for a beat.*
*If we look up at that moment, it's not due to any ability of ours to pierce the darkness,*
*it's the world's brief bestowal. The catastrophe of grace.*[2]

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

Obeying the impulse to say *something* to show I've understood, I murmur *Ah…Dresden*—and wince inwardly. For there are no adequate words in the face of a vulnerability as radical as the one he has offered, no way to honor such a naked bestowal, except, perhaps, with silence and a stance of utter attending—for as long as one can bear such a catastrophic grace. The angel of such a look is *terrifying*, as Rilke tells us, and requires only two things: an instant to be absorbed and a lifetime in which to sort through the golden rubble of its wake.

The architect has surprised himself by his non-sequitur and even more, I think, by the degree of emotion weighting its utterance. Embarrassed, he turns away and hurriedly gropes for the frayed threads of our conversation as if nothing unusual has occurred. And this weak attempt to recover normality feels like a slap to the face, not to *my* face, but to *our* face: to both of us and to what we had briefly become, in that moment, lost, and found, in the long tunnel of his fleeting look.

In *real conversation*, writes philosopher Martin Buber, *what is essential does not take place in each of the participants…but it takes place between them in the most precise sense…in a dimension which is accessible only to them both*. Such exchanges, he says, *develop in mutual surprises*.[3]

It is instantly clear to me that the purpose of our meeting lies in the door that has just blown open, the moment that has just passed, one like the dreams sent to us on the shore of wakening, which, sensing *the truth and stir of day,*[4] quickly vanish if we don't act swiftly. So, before he can finish his sentence, I break in: "Wait! … something important has happened … the weight in your voice, in that last word…and I, an American…."

I realized later that the pauses and stutterings of my rusty German only served to highlight my sense of urgency; that those very breaks in my speech, like the aperture of a *camera obscura*, permitted the profound clarity and truth of that shared moment, or at least the radiance of its afterglow, to somehow slip back in between us and re-illuminate the retreating shadow of a rare immensity; one that, without warning, had suddenly, impossibly, loomed up out of the mist of comfortable pleasantries.

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

*so intimate this other, so infinite this otherness*[5]

The architect turns to look at me again, relaxes, and with an expression of relief mixed with sadness, slowly nods. Tears fill my eyes. He says, *Ich hab's überlebt*, the simple, heartbreaking declaration of every survivor: "I lived through it."

I find it difficult to keep looking at him, to keep meeting his gaze as he goes on to say that the rebuilding of Dresden continues slowly to this day. I tell him that art was my first religion and that I can't imagine the destruction of all that beauty. Soon he is looking at his watch and saying how pleased he is that we met. I agree and tell him that he has given me an unforgettable gift. We wish each other a *Buon Camino* and then he is off, down the cobbles, back to his hotel.

◆

I had only one unpleasant conversation during my entire pilgrimage. It had taken place on the previous evening, in fact, in Ponferrada, with a man who had refused to regard me as a fellow pilgrim and chose instead to focus on my nationality so that he could deliver his tiresome philippic on the pervasiveness of American bombs, hamburgers, etc. And now, to balance out that dispiriting exchange, here, on the very next day, I had spoken with a man who had first-hand experience of American bombs in all their apocalyptic horror;[6] someone who, with the years, had, I could see, forged a truce with sorrow and fashioned a measure of forgiveness for those who had succumbed to the fog and fury of war and obliterated his beautiful city in a storm of fire. For at no point during our brief communion did I sense the slightest whiff of malice or intent to inflict guilt.

No, he simply and spontaneously yielded to a holy impulse and, without fanfare, quietly unveiled what was probably the weightiest portion of his earthly burden, as if whisking a sheet off the statue of a perfect grief. And lighting it with an extraordinary look, he set it between us, so that we might witness it—together—in a perfect moment.

**Notes**

1. A Greek word meaning a gift of Hermes: a serendipitous encounter, a synchronicity, a grace.
2. Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*.
3. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 203-4.
4. Alfred Tennyson, "Morte D'Arthur."
5. Dan Beachy-Quick, *Intimate Duration*: On Forrest Gander's *Mojave Ghost, American Poetry Review*, Nov/Dec 2025.
6. Up to 25,000 people killed during the February 1945 firebombing of Dresden. (“Bombing of Dresden,” Wikipedia.)

*__Xenia__ is a glossary entry from *Ganesha’s Mouse*, a work-in-progress that employs the Camino di Santiago, a Spanish pilgrimage trail, as a through-line for a meandering exploration of liminality, or “betweenness.” **Xenia** is an account of the most remarkable meeting of my month-long trek across northern Spain.

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

# Contributors

*Jan Reiss, Purple Flower*

## Writers

**Barbara Bald** is a retired New Hampshire educator who served on the Poetry Society of New Hampshire (PSNH) Board. Her poetry books include *Drive-Through Window*, *Other Voices/Other Lives*, and *Running on Empty*. Barb worked at the Frost Place in Franconia and at NHPTV. She is interested in helping folks who think they can't write, write.

**Patrick Bradshaw** is a retired electrical engineer who really likes the word "Theopoetics." He has lived and worked in New Hampshire for 40 years. His poems have appeared in *Smoky Quartz*, *Touchstone*, *The Mountain Troubadour*, and *Portrait of New England*. He lives in the greater Nashua area with his wife.

**Cornelius Bull** is a full-time writer, composing and illustrating a book on the mythopoetics of liminality. Cornelius has resided in New Hampshire for thirteen years and can be spotted at work in his artist's colony: the cafes of Peterborough, Harrisville, Hancock, Keene.

**Christopher Clauss** (he/him) is a poet, organizer, ocean explorer, middle school science teacher, and "pretty ok dad" from Chesterfield, New Hampshire. His work has appeared in many publications, including *New York Quarterly Magazine*, *Plants & Poetry Journal*, *Sylvia Magazine*, *FreezeRay*, *Bureau of Complaint*, and in his book, *Photosynthesis & Respiration (2022)*.

Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents

**Martha Andrews Donovan**, author of the chapbook *Dress Her in Silk* (Finishing Line Press 2009) and lecturer at College of the Atlantic, lived in New Hampshire for a good while—at first on a hill in an old farmhouse near an orchard. She now lives on an island in Maine in an old cottage beside an apple tree.

**Joan T. Doran**, a former psychotherapist and family service agency executive, writes poetry from a ridge overlooking Mount Sunapee. She lives with her daughter Susan and cats Lulu and George S. Spottiswood (aka Spott.)

**William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. He has published several critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals. His most recent collection is *No Vacancy* (2025).

**Christopher L. Dornin** placed runner-up in the 2023 Swan Scythe chapbook contest and semi-finalist in the 2024 Finishing Line Press book contest and the 2025 Wolfson Press chapbook contest. He has earned 22 New England journalism awards and a New Hampshire Arts Council fellowship in poetry as judged by Donald Hall. He ran the second shift at Laconia State School when it faced a federal class action lawsuit.

**George Drew** is the author of ten collections, most recently *More Distant Than Olympus*, Bass Clef Books, 2024. Drew's connection to New Hampshire dates back to 1984, when he first attended the Conference at The Frost Place. He spends a few weeks every fall in the White Mountains.

**Jen Drociak** lives in southern New Hampshire and works full time as an environmentalist. Her poetry has been published in several literary journals, and her photography has been exhibited throughout New England and New York city.

**Michael Keshigian**, from Londonderry, New Hampshire, has been published in numerous national and international journals. His latest collection, *Poems from the Sky*, will be released this spring by Cyberwit.net. He has been nominated seven times for a Pushcart Prize and three times for Best of the Net.

**Rodger Martin** resides in Harrisville and writes from Hancock. *The Sleeping Dogs of Lubec* (NatureCulture Books), follows *For All The Tea in Zhōngguó, The Battlefield Guide*, and *The Blue Moon Series*, selected by *Small Press Review* as a bi-monthly pick of the year. He received an *Appalachia* award for poetry and was a 2024 Stanley Kunitz Medalist. See his website at http://www.rodgerwriter.com.

**NH Teen Poets Laureate Team** consists of seven New Hampshire high school students. They are now actively involved in creating an anthology of collaborative poetry.

**Elizabeth Chung** is a young poet from New Hampshire. Her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and she is the 2025 recipient of the New Hampshire Teen Poetry Prize. Outside of writing, she loves art, engineering, and thrifting.

**Erin Han** is a young writer from Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is a co-founder of Nova Literary Magazine and has been recognized by various circles for her poetry and prose. She enjoys reading with a London Fog in hand and the look of Times New Roman font.

**Chloé Lind** is a junior at Phillips Exeter Academy from Charleston, South Carolina. Her work has received national recognition from the American Writers' Museum, the Scholastic Awards, and the DiBiase Poetry fund. This summer, she will participate in the Kelly Writers House summer program at the University of Pennsylvania.

**Catherine Manley** is a youth writer attending Phillips Exeter Academy. Her writing has been recognized by the Dreams Come True International Writing Competition, the Lamont Younger Poets Prize, New Hampshire Poet Laureate Jennifer Militello, and many others. When not writing, Catherine enjoys volunteering, learning languages, and studying sociology.

**Sophie Yu** is a senior at Phillips Exeter Academy and a member of the NH Teen Poet Laureate Team. She is an author of two poetry collections and a co-founder of Nova Literary Magazine. Her work has been featured in various publications and she loves listening to music and scrapbooking.

**Serena Yue** is a sophomore from Phillips Exeter Academy and has lived most of her life in Florida and Shenzhen, China. She writes for her school newspaper *The Exonian*, and has been recognized by the Lamont Younger Poets and Eunoia Review, among others. Serena loves guzheng, horses, and Greek mythology.

**Chloe Zhang** is a Chinese-American writer from New Hampshire. Her work is published or forthcoming in the *Blue Marble Review* and 1455 Books. She is the 2026 recipient of the NH Teen Poetry Prize. Outside of writing, Chloe enjoys dancing, baking, and listening to music.

**Felicity Pool**, a nurse, writer and educator, grew up in Dublin, New Hampshire, in the same house where she lives now, with partner, Allen Davis. Her son is the fourth generation gratefully rooted here.

**Liane St. Laurent** has worn many hats: horse-drawn carriage driver, apple picker, English teacher. She is now a retired IT professional. Her debut chapbook is *un/winter* (Bee Monk Press, 2025.) Liane lives in New Hampshire with her husband, two dogs, and an array of woodland creatures.

**Mary Ann Mayer**'s most recent poetry collection is *Kissing the Shuttle – A Lyric History*. Her work appears most recently in *Brilliant Corners: A Journal of Jazz and Literature, Smoky Quartz Tenth Anniversary Anthology,* and Notable Works Publishing Co. anthology, *Voices of the Earth*. A retired occupational therapist, she lives in Sharon, Massachusetts, and Franconia, New Hampshire.

**Peter Morton** is a resident of West Lebanon, New Hampshire, and is a previous contributor to *Smoky Quartz*. He considers himself to be a New England poet and enjoys contributing to and supporting literary journals published in that region. His current work focuses on poetry of time and place rather than poems that work with titles or subjects.

**Pedro Sandín-Fremaint**, is a retired professor of French at the University of Puerto Rico and of Spanish at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Since retiring, he has focused on writing. His most recent publication is *Hello, Stranger: Thresholds of the Unfamiliar* (Pandora Press: 2025). He has lived in New Hampshire since 2019.

**Cliff Saunders** attended the University of New Hampshire as a graduate student in creative writing, studying under Charles Simic and others. His poetry chapbooks include *Mapping the Asphalt Meadows* (Slipstream Publications) and *The Persistence of Desire* (Kindred Spirit Press). His poems have appeared recently in *Quadrant*, *The Rockford Review*, *Shadowplay,* and *Bare Hill Review*.

**Carla Schwartz** lives half the time in the greater Boston area, and half the time on an unbridged island in Lake Winnipesaukee (Meredith, New Hampshire). Schwartz is passionate about the outdoors and the natural world. Her poems have appeared in many journals, including *Rattle*. See https://carlapoet.com and https://instagram.com/cb99videos.

**Stacia Tolman** is a writer, teacher and freelance editor who lives in Nelson, New Hampshire, with an assortment of people, chickens, dogs, and vehicles working their way through their difficult teenaged years. She comes from a long line of story-tellers. Her first novel, *The Spaces Between Us*, came out in 2019.

**Rebecca Upjohn** is the author of four books for young readers, a developing poet, and a long-time writer for *Common Threads*, the Harrisville town newsletter. With her husband, she divides her time between the Chesham woods in New Hampshire and the cityscapes of Toronto, Canada. See www.rebeccaupjohn.com.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

**Jane Vacante**'s work was published in several dozen literary publications, including *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Iconoclast*, and *Hole In The Head Review*. She has lived and worked in the Portsmouth area for over thirty years. Now retired, she enjoys solitude at her northern New Hampshire camp.

**Jana Watson** is a writer originally from Alabama who relocated to Exeter, New Hampshire, in 2025. Her work blends poetry and prose, exploring identity, memory, and transformation through close observation of the natural world and the rhythms of everyday life.

**Artists**

**Rebecca K. Brown** is a New Hampshire based writer and artist. Her mixed media pieces are full of color and detail, and her photography celebrates the natural and built world, often from unusual angles to capture a mood that makes the viewer pause for a closer look. She offers classes at local libraries and art spaces, and uses poetry, blogging, photography, painting, and sketching to share her creativity.

**Barbara Danser** is a New Hampshire artist working in multiple media, with studios in Hancock and Jaffrey. She paints and photographs the landscape with a focus on the earth and sky connection. A former teacher at Sharon Arts and the Currier Museum of Arts, Barbara conducts painting workshops in New Hampshire. You may view Barbara's art at http://www.danserart.com.

**Kelly DuMar** is a poet and photographer from the Boston area who spent vacations every summer for decades on Laurel Lake in the Monadnock region. Her images celebrate the beauty and organic complexity of nature from the habitat of her home on the Charles River, and have been featured on the cover of many literary journals.

**Bob Irwin** retired from a forty-two-year career in public health. One of his short prose pieces appeared in the Spring 2015 issue of *Smoky Quartz*. He lives in North Conway, New Hampshire.

**Bob Moore** has been dabbling in photography for the last 10 years. Most of his photographs are of ocean scenes, but he also photographs landscapes and native and migratory birds. He uses a Nikon D3500 for most of his seascape photography. Moore has lived in the seacoast of New Hampshire for the past 42 years, living in East Kingston for the past 26 years.

**Jan Reiss** is a photographer whose work captures the beauty, mystery, and patterns of our world. Jan brings a storyteller's eye to her compositions, inviting viewers to pause, look closer, and discover something new. Jan lives in Jaffrey and is a member of the Blue Fern Gallery in Peterborough.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*

**Adele V. Sanborn** and her husband dairy farmed for years in Boscawen, New Hampshire, and spent their time working the fields and tending to the milking chores. She also spent time creating mixed media pieces that included her photography and poetry. Today she still works in her art, spending time furthering her two loves in her wonderful studio in Concord, New Hampshire.

**Alison Deland Scott** trained as an illustrator, worked as a graphic designer, and now photographs nature and recycling centers. She also creates abstract images using Photoshop. In June of 2025, she moved from the Monadnock Region to Concord, New Hampshire. See her work on Instagram: @alisonascot.

**Daniella Vitale-Warner** currently lives in New Ipswich, New Hampshire, and is pursuing a B.S. in Environmental Science at Southern New Hampshire University. She enjoys photographing amphibians, insects, fungi, and flowers while exploring New Hampshire's forested wetlands.

*Smoky Quartz Spring 2026 Contents*