
BUTTONHOOK PRESS

POTTER'S VALLEY ROAD



RICHARD WIDERKEHR

THE O:JA&L 2023 PAMPHLET SERIES

POTTER'S VALLEY ROAD

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Image: *Cat on a Flowering Summer Meadow* by **Bruno Liljefors (1860-1939)**. Oil on canvas. 29.7 x 35.8 inches. (Shown here cropped to fit.) 1919. **Public domain.**

BILOXI

W

hen I fainted in the heat at the bake sale in Biloxi where I had taken a break from selling World Books door to door, she called 911.

I awoke, my face in her lap, scent of musk and violets, her hands crossed over one bare leg slung idly across a green, stuffed armchair.

Sirens. Porch swings. Two shattered statues of red roosters.

Twelve cradles. Why was I counting her things? When I put my hand in her cookie jar, she slapped my face, then said, "I shouldn't have done that." First Aid told me, "Stay out of the sun. You cannot afford even one of her twelve broken electrical circuits, not one cradle."

I was done with encyclopedias, rosters of unsold books.

What were these smoke signals on the ridge called Autanum?

As I squinted at one scarab insect on her gold screen door, I knew

I would not become an accountant like my father.

Why was I singing "Home on the Range?"

IN THE HALL OF NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS:
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Writing in the cool of the morning near the diorama
of the saber-toothed tiger—
no need to tell you about my tar pit of an apartment
near the river in Manhattan or the nettles I fell in when I fled
to Day Creek.

You don't want a woman, said the hooker
in red hot pants in Times Square. In the summer of love,
nights in Adam & Eve's,
I nursed Stingers 'cause that's what Bogart drank.
And yet,
under my Vodka-and-burnt-toast breath,

I muttered, *God, please take my life.*

In the cool of the morning, the frozen saber tooth
beige-gold. Sometimes, yes, I soared
like a god with his female city
in air, in fog with its/her orange-pink halo
at night over the Empire State Building,
the spire King Kong fell from,
his fist uncurling, fingers letting go,
setting down Fay Wray slowly,
tenderly,
at dawn, on her ice-gray platform,
not calling *God God*

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G*reetings and salivations*, says our cat, asking for her Bluebird Tuna, not parsnips.
Our calico cat, whose beige-yellow sleek resembles a top-down '48 Packard pastel

convertible, her belly's rascal satin too white to be more than a slight variation
of the truth. Her name is Science, and we believe in her as if she were God,

whom, if there were a god, we would believe in, just as we believe in subtle shadings—
elusive ecru—not Salvation Army reds. Above all, we believe in Packards

whose existence can be proven by glancing at old Sunday Times
magazines sections in microfiche.

Yes, we believe in wind, in rain, in words that open like umbrellas,
knowing their place, which is to shelter us.

After all, our cat knows we provide the bluefin tuna. So when our Saab Sonnet

equipped with roll bars veers on a hair-pin switchback on Mt Abora,
almost wrenching head from torso, our soul or something like it rises
from the crash scene, says *Don't die*, and somehow our larynx gets re-attached,
our head not on exactly straight, but we can still crawl home on all fours
to Potter's Valley Road, not unscathed, and yet, and yet,
under low stars that drift through cold conifers, *This is good*, we say.
Our cat wraps herself around our bloody ankles, meowing lightly.
Oh, Science, we call out. This is our place.

HER JACK-KNIFE:
SOUTH YARMOUTH, 1959

The facts are uncertain. Our summer began with Asra's jack-knife off the diving board at the lake on Indian Memorial Drive. How she stepped backwards off the board in her yellow two-piece, tucked in both arms, both knees, touched her toes—her tan, compact body straightened, and she dove through the clean space in air she had created. Hardly any splash. “Nice dive,” I said.

I practiced somersaults in shallow water, learned to do a forward one-and-a-half, though bumped my head on the board one time. At the center of the lake, we kissed underwater, our lips pressed together like two minnows. Now, she writes, the fireweed has gone spindly, white. Brown, crumpled cups of Queen Anne's Lace at the lake. The Woolworth ring I gave her, she almost lost in Red River. I plan to ride

my bike on the shoulder of the Long Island Expressway to the Whitestone Bridge, then up the thruway. We went skinny dipping one night. She let me look. Now there's this song on the radio, "See You in September." I thought they were singing, "Strip-tease and Summer."

WHEN SHE ASKS WHERE SHE CAN FIND MY POEMS

I he almost-full moon in fog, a low nest of shadows
behind black branches—I sang my song “Fruit Salad”
on stage, as requested. *A little silly goes a long way,*
I said, and this tall Asian woman with bare midriff,
hair down her back replied, *It's also profound,*
all the things we'll do for our Crush... Buy cherries,
raspberries, strawberries...

Now a yellow moon;
no last apples on on the boughs. She was stunning,
the woman, and I do not know how to gaze
at these branches—grateful, desolate?—
I am this black Victrola with just one song:
a melon scraped to the rind, a Lemon Crush,
her famished gown of shadows;
this gibbous moon lightly pared down.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

RICHARD WIDERKEHR's fourth book of poems, *Night Journey*, was published in 2022 by Shanti Art Press. *Main Street Rag* brought out *At the Grace Cafe* the year before. His work has appeared in *Open: A Journal of Arts & Letters*, *Writer's Almanac*, *Verses Daily*, and many others. He won two Hopwood first prizes for poetry at the University of Michigan, three prizes in The Bridge's annual awards, and first prize for a short story at the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference. He reads poems for *Shark Reef Review*.



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2022

Poems for Families

Poetry by Kirby Olson

Mogollon Rim

Poetry by Allisa Cherry

Hanno

Poetry by John-Michael Bloomquist

Poem scrawled on a maize-sheaf for her (last offering)

Poetry and art by Arturo Desimone

The Curve of the Open Page

A poem by Bruce Bond

Murder in the House: The "Nutshells" of Frances Glessner Lee

Poetry by Jessica Purdy

War and Riff

Haibun by Keith Polette

Family Photo of America

Poetry by Lynn Potts

Chester River Reverie

Poetry by Priscilla Long

Salton Sea

A short story by Mike Murray

RICHARD WIDERKEHR

[The Fiddler](#)

Poetry by Tim Hunt

[A Balloon Called](#) [YOUNG AMERICA](#)

Poetry by Jennifer Clark

[High Fashion](#) (Featured Collaboration)

Poetry by Adjei Agyei-Baah

Fine Art Photography by Jerome Berglund

2023

[Small Lantern](#)

Featured Haiga Collaborations

Haiku by Hassane Zemmouri and Photography by Megali Bretou & Bea Bauer

[A Sport and a Pastime](#)

Haiku (Americana) by Ron Scully

[Night Train](#)

Haiku by Jerome Gagnon

[The Aquarian Foundation](#)

Poetry (Americana) by Jeffrey Gray

[Once There Was a Way](#)

Poetry by Steve Myers

[Local Habitations](#)

Poetry by Edison Jennings

[Occasions for Listening](#) (Excerpts from a WIP)

Spencer Silverthorne

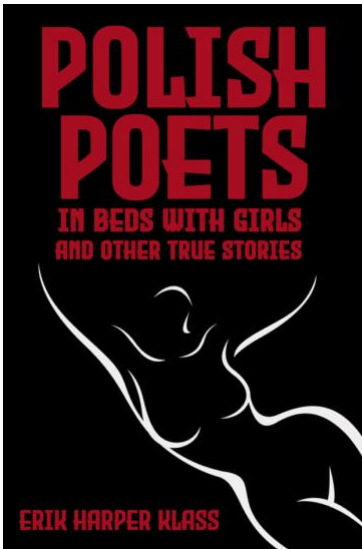
FORTHCOMING FROM O:JA&L'S BUTTONHOOK PRESS

POLISH POETS IN BEDS WITH GIRLS

And Other True Stories

A Novella of the Interwar Years 1919-1939

ERIK HARPER KLAAS



Polish Poets in Beds with Girls exhibits a fascinating and artful mix of history, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, footnotes, the semifictional (and autofictional) lives of Erik Harper Klass and his lover Rachel, and snippets about the actual lives of eight renowned Polish poets and their lovers. The force that holds this mighty mix together is the work of poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. Klass's book will awaken readers to the strangeness of literature and history, and to the strangeness of life and love.

PAMELYN CASTO

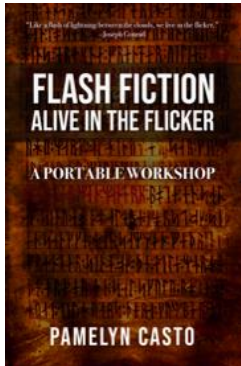
Author of *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker (A Portable Workshop)*.

Klass offers a dense, thoroughly researched story laden with symbolism, which seems, above all, to be saying this: art *exists*. This work *is*. Art stands (sometimes literally) above what changes and what doesn't, outlives giants, and imbues repetitive, sometimes hopeless lives with color. For anybody who finds that meaning important, *Polish Poets* is a work worth taking in. . . . [It is] a multi-layered, provocative, and well-told story about art for art's sake, language for language's sake, and meaning-making itself.

RACHEL CUSTER

NEA Fellow (2019) and the author of *Flatback Sally Country*

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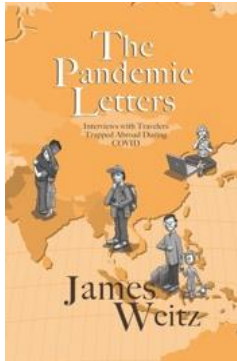


Pamelyn Casto

Flash Fiction:

Alive in the Flicker A Portable Workshop

Click on the title to visit the O:JA&L Amazon page.



James Weitz

The Pandemic Letters:

Interviews with Travelers

Trapped Abroad During COVID

Click on the title to visit the O:JA&L Amazon page.

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