



# *Onward*

Manhattan Beach Poetry Circle and Mira Costa High School Poets





# Welcome

We are the Manhattan Beach Poetry Circle, an Older Adults program of Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation. Ever since 2007, we've met twice a month, usually at Joslyn Center, to read and talk about poetry (and sometimes more). Our sessions are lively, funny, sometimes poignant, occasionally sad. We hope you will join us. Read your own work or that of favorite poets or just join the fun.

In addition to our meetings, Poetry Circle works with Mira Costa High School students, hosts and visits public readings, contributes monthly poems to the City's newsletter, and creates an occasional book of poems, of which this is our sixth.

We thank Kari Bell, Senior Recreation Supervisor for the City of Manhattan Beach and her staff – especially Mary McCabe – who do the work that makes our meetings and our projects possible. We are also grateful to Shannon Vaughan, exemplary Mira Costa High School teacher, and her students. They have invited us to their class, worked alongside us, and contributed award-winning poems to this book.

**Poetry Circle**  
**2nd and 4th Tuesdays, 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM**  
**Joslyn Community Center**  
**1601 Valley Drive**  
**Manhattan Beach**

## Acknowledgements

Violette Rice designed our cover using a photograph by Peggy Carter. Mary McCabe designed the back cover, also using a Peggy Carter photograph.

The photograph on page 33 is by Peggy Carter. Those on pages 3, 5, 7, and 27 are by Maria Z. Caponi.

Mary McCabe edited and produced this book.

“DARLING,” and “A NATURAL” were originally published in The Wormwood Review.

“Grafting” was first published in Borders and Boundaries.

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“Penny” was first published in The Bellowing Ark.

“Or waves. Or chickens.” was first published in the Delta Poetry Review.

“How I Travel” was first published in An Accidental Pilgrim, a memoir in prose and verse.

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## Notes From Our Contributors

**Lily Boettcher** is a high school senior at Mira Costa. She'd like to thank her left hand for writing this, because instead of getting her accused of witchcraft and subsequently burned at the stake, as it would have been in the 1600's, it got her this opportunity instead.

**Maria Caponi** was born and grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina and has lived in Los Angeles since her twenties. She is the author of the recently released *An Accidental Pilgrim*, a memoir in prose and verse. A poem from this book – ‘How I travel’ – is included in *Onward*. More details about Maria can be found at her website: [mariacaponi.com](http://mariacaponi.com)

**Gianna Goodman-Bhyat** says: I am a 16-year-old high school junior living in Los Angeles. I'm an avid reader and literary activist, and I run a Banned Books Club at my high school. I love poetry that confuses me as much as the world does, crying over sad books, and thinking about how wonderful it is to be alive.

**Eric Grow** lives in Manhattan Beach with his wife, two children and three cats.

**Bettycarol Kostan** grew up in Tecumseh, Oklahoma. She has written poetry ever since she was a little girl.

**Elaine Mintzer's** first volume of poetry, *Natural Selections*, was published by Bombshelter Press and is available online or ordered from any book store.

**Bob Olsen** Age 82. Artist, poet, musician. Married Kathy Olsen 6/4/1961. Two children born autistic. To get them help I came to Manhattan Beach in 1968, bought a house here and entered them in new autism research at UCLA and USC but no cure found. Joined Poetry Circle at its start in 2007.

**Kathy Olsen** Age 82/married to Bob Olsen for over 62 years. Been an actress in movies and television in the 1980s and 1990s. Born in Sioux City, Iowa but Mom moved us 14 times, usually to rural places, till I met Bob in high school playing bass. The rest is history.

**Bob Perkins** reads and writes poetry to help him figure it all out. He's 80, still puzzled, still hopeful.

## Notes From Our Contributors

**Bella Rawitz** is a 12th grade creative writer at Mira Costa High School. She's French-American, captain of her school's track team, and an artist. She loves focusing on vibrant imagery in her poems and working on different writing styles.

**Violette Rice** says: I express the creative side of myself on none other than my favorite type of canvas: an 8.5x11 lined sheet of paper. People often forget that writing and literature is an art- a truly immersive form of it. Immersive how? Purple cow. You saw that in your head just now...didn't you?

**Bonnie Hiller Schumann** grew up and was educated in L.A. Always loved words (Scrabble, crossword puzzles, books, English major). Pursued songwriting, which morphed into poetry writing. Worked for Manhattan Beach and Hermosa Beach libraries for 20+ years.



# Part One

## Poems from the Circle

A sample of our work



## Wilting Hope by Maria Caponi

I have hope, but it is wilting today.  
I have hope, for a kinder world,  
one where there is growth under the rain.

My plants need water, the herbs are  
dying, the flowers almost dead. I dream  
their colors, I talk to them and to myself.

The bees were first, able to spread  
sperm on flowers and trees.  
We call it pollen, but it makes  
male gametes. We are all  
covered in sperm.

Primroses, golden rods, daisies  
exposed their private parts, full of pollen  
painted themselves  
in UV patterns that only  
bees and some birds could see.

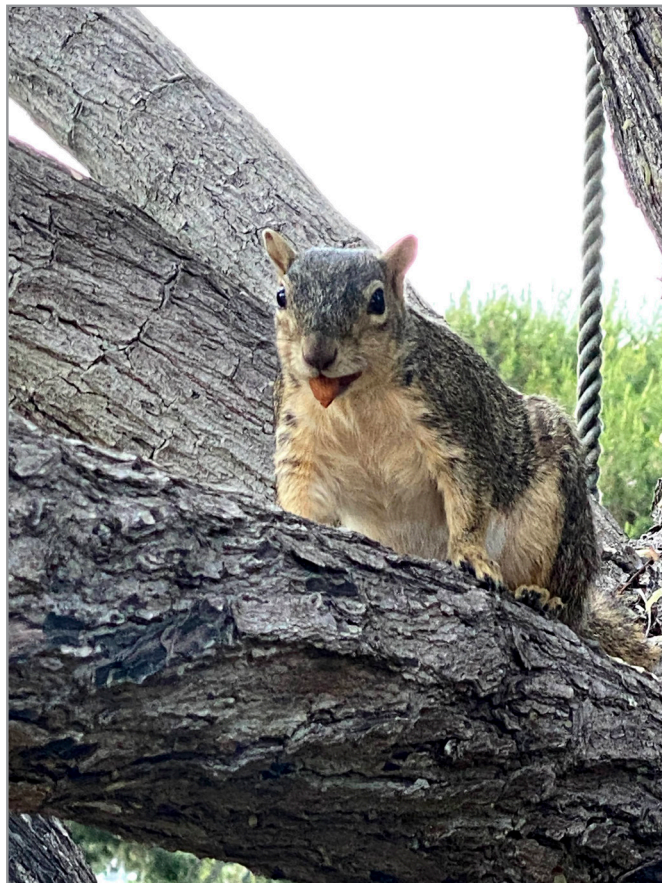
Beyond my sight, I imagine spirals  
of deep purple, circles of turquoise  
illuminated by fragrance to enthuse as humans,  
get close, inhale, blow their pollen away. And  
most of the time we fail.

I have hope, but it is wilting today.  
Is life an accident or a vision?  
I push myself, with all the goals.  
A purposeful life: finish the story,  
improve my French, walk the dog, exercise,  
query the book, and while I'm at it, have lunch

with friends. Until I have a conversation  
with myself. Listen, I say:  
Life is a journey; the only end is death.  
Yet, I have hope, but it is wilting today.  
Fatigue sets in, my arm joint hurts. The coffee

spills, the dog begs. The news is dark.  
A young girl with down syndrome  
killed by a Russian missile, dead  
on the Ukrainian concrete. A ten-year-old travels  
across state lines to abort  
the deed of a rapist. The wildfires, again.  
My body, my mind, the world like  
my rotten, mephitic tomatoes,

the single red strawberry,  
that disappears before I pull it out.  
A squirrel, again.



## How I travel by Maria Caponi

You travel light, he said,  
the passerby on my way,  
as I walked, carry-on in hand,  
the streets of Paris,  
or Firenze,  
maybe San Miguel de Allende in Mexico,  
or somewhere in Jerusalem,  
or perhaps Spain.

I forget.

I travel heavy, I said  
I carry a shadow on my arm,  
a chip on my shoulder:  
the guilt of being here,  
while others are gone.

I carry some confidence, lots of courage,  
and all the memories stored inside my head.

It's hard to lift what I carry.  
All the images, the sounds.  
The smells and tastes of other trips,  
of other walks,  
of the same places,  
or similar, now different.

While I travel, to lighten my load,  
I make up stories in my head  
and rush, bounce and prance,  
on the gray cobblestone steps

I travel with joy and anxiety  
I watch people walk,  
in couples, with dogs, alone,  
eyes fixed ahead,  
looking for a friend.  
I exhilarate — is this a verb?

Or maybe I just elate,  
rejoice, stimulate.  
I sigh with relief,  
I take pictures,  
a memory of the wooden door pattern,  
the striped red and green fabric,  
the woman on the street,  
cooking churros,  
sometimes anticuchos,  
empanadas?  
maybe crepes —  
in case I forget.  
I tear up with sadness,  
sometimes happiness.  
And all the time,  
I look ahead  
to this journey  
I have embarked upon,  
not yet at its end.



## **Nourish by Peggy Carter**

You nourish me  
like rain on a baking thirsty field  
like the smell of breakfast  
coming in waves from the kitchen.

It's a miracle.  
An everyday occurrence.  
But still . . . a miracle.

Your eyes glow when you smile.  
They warm the room,  
and then they warm  
me.

Your smile fills my hunger  
with joy.  
Ah love,  
you nourish me.

## To Yield by Peggy Carter

to become  
subsumed into  
another soul

is to become  
less yourself  
as you grow  
into another.

His head tilts  
back  
you see his stubbly  
slightly pointed chin  
You caress him  
as he reaches  
for your kiss –

It unites you  
through time.

You become one  
at the joining place

You yield  
and become the greater.

**DARLING, by Eric Grow**

Darling,

If you should ever decide to leave me,

I request that you give me two weeks notice,

So that I might have sufficient time

To find a suitable replacement



## **A NATURAL by Eric Grow**

Just as soon as I get

a steel pin in my shoulder

and my teeth straightened,

some contact lenses fitted,

and my nose fixed,

I'm going to start capitalizing

on my natural superiority.

## Walk With Me by Bettycarol Kostan

The road is long, filled with red earth ruts wagon made  
Together our memories flow like fireflies  
Walk with me  
Capture history, another's walk, another's life, creating our fields,  
our harvest, our bounty  
Your hand in mine remembers that a town grew  
They were there teaching us  
She and He were our idols, our heroes  
We remember those before us  
They gave us who we are  
Do we leave? Do we come home again?  
No, we have always been here

Tecumseh



Street Scene, Tecumseh, Oklahoma, Early 1900s

## Oklahoma Earth by Bettycarol Kostan

Oklahoma where the wind  
Comes sweeping down the  
Plains, carrying the  
Red Earth  
Winds, rains, tornadoes,  
Tossing and creating  
Treasures of incredible  
beauty!  
Rose Rocks



## **Still by Linda Marie Marten**

There is a grief we feel for the world.

There is a grief we feel for our own lives.

And the Earth still turns  
And the sun still rises

And the birds still sing  
And the flowers still bloom

And the turtles still swim  
And the tides still turn

And we still trust  
And Love endures

## **Remember by Linda Marie Marten**

I hope my kids will remember ~

My smile more than my frown

My laughter more than my tears

My courage more than my fears

And when day is done

May they remember

How much I love them

Since day one

## Grafting by Elaine Mintzer

Maybe it starts with the kiss, a pressing  
of self to self, an opening  
of one to another  
down to heartwood, open  
to the elements.

The arborist cuts a notch  
in the trunk, places the new variety  
in the wound, binds the two  
until they share every  
thing, confuse which is which,  
who is who.

Whose leaf?  
Whose limb?  
Whose sun?

## On becoming birds by Elaine Mintzer

See how thin  
our old bones are,  
long batons of ulnae,  
tibias sharp  
and delicate.  
See how the wings  
of our hips  
turn to lace,  
to release us from the gravity  
of floor and earth.  
See how the loved ones  
anchor us in beds with rails,  
tie us with threads  
of air and seawater.  
Stay, they say,  
even as we prepare  
to touch the clouds,  
to break free.

## Images by Bob Olsen

Clouds and sky above  
Lead me and my love  
Let me sing her song  
No matter for how long  
With your cotton images.

Clouds of piled up dreams  
Tell us what life means  
Our questions, answer well  
Our future, you can tell  
With your cotton images.

Clouds, give us a sign  
Show her hand in mine  
Form lips to kiss her face  
As moving by you race  
With your cotton images.

Clouds of dusty gray  
Shade the sunny day  
And cover her bright eyes  
As in the grass she lies  
With your cotton images.

Clouds and sky of blue  
Part as day is through  
And clear a patch for night  
Young love must have starlight  
With your cotton images.



## **NO PEACE by Bob Olsen**

Keepsake lie awake till day-break  
Run over thoughts on the downhill out of control  
What was it I felt long ago?  
Line them up in a row, slow  
Her hot face, ablaze against mine  
Now what's the other nine?  
Forgot to wind the clock again  
Time wipes its path downhill out of control  
No brakes on tis train of thoughts  
Back to the station, the platform  
Bridge is out, wait for word  
No quick fix, one of mind's tricks  
Her hot face, ablaze against mine  
The window down the wind in her hair  
I was there, yes I was there  
No where left to love but the memory  
It's carved in a tombstone on the hill  
I go up there to read it every night  
With just the moon and bad eyesight  
The memory lives on in eternity  
Out of my reach so far that my head aches  
From this cruel night love makes  
No room in this head for fakes, so no peace.

## Can't Be? by Kathy Olsen

Tiny moths flitting in a morning sun that were never there.

Loud cars rushing by on clean gasoline.

People running for miles, jump in their cars for a short trip to the store.

They clutch their little plastic card, to steal or to be stolen from.

Security, security, watching, watching, silent tape running, break the beam, and mechanical shrieks fill the air.

Frightened, empty people talking, smiling, and nodding in all the right places.

Can it be, can it be?

**[Untitled] by Kathy Olsen**

I lay here on the roof,  
Drowsy with softness, warmth  
Of sun and shadow, wind cool,  
Blowing flowers and curtains.  
Over the crashing, rushing  
Noises of the outside crazy  
Floats the moving beauty, and  
Emotion. A serenade created  
By a pure, sweet soul.  
I smile and feel all is beauty  
And love in this time and place.

## **Or waves. Or chickens. by Bob Perkins**

My Aunt Marie was poor. She lived beside  
a stinking chicken ranch, a dry flatland  
where smog hid any mountains. Her sky  
was ochre, but, well, she grew hollyhocks.

I live in a rich man's house with a rich man's view  
of bright blue sky, dark blue ocean  
breaking at my feet, penitent and grand.

When I visited Marie, we visited her hollyhocks,  
a narrow row her house shielded from the wind,  
up against the chain-link fence,  
next to those caged, complaining hens.  
I'd pet the dogs she had taken in, drink her buttermilk,  
and those scarlet and white ruffled hollyhocks  
shone as gloriously as this million-dollar view.

Our visits were short and rare.  
I had things to do, money to make,  
but Marie planted seeds, watched them  
break the ground, watered, weeded while they shot  
sunward, bloomed, wilted. She harvested  
their seeds. When the Santa Anas blew  
down the stalks she started over.  
Her hollyhocks made a story and a life  
sadder and more joyous than I could see.

Maybe we are the dogs, or maybe the hollyhocks  
of an impoverished God who cannot afford  
a universe overlooking the endless sea.

I imagine he, she, it just tends the hollyhocks  
and does the best they can.

## Penny by Bob Perkins

Flash in the crosswalk: the cracked asphalt nested a new penny.  
“Find a penny pick it up, all day long you’ll have good luck.”  
I looked both ways  
and went back for it.

It was radiant, so copper  
in my hand in the morning sun,  
Honest Abe beaming at me as though I  
had walked the legendary four miles  
to return four cents to its rightful owner.

I thought of when a penny bought me a hard candy,  
a ball of cinnamon or butterscotch,  
of how a dime once meant a loaf of bread  
and a dollar a day’s work,  
of 1943 when we couldn’t afford copper and made steel pennies,  
and of the penny bins in supermarkets because now  
we won’t take less than silver in our pockets.

Wealth.  
How much is luck? How much is money?  
How much do I need?

I looked around.  
The day was bright as pennies,  
bright as the playground shouts from the grammar school,  
as the primroses edging the walk.

I felt lucky. I realized nothing in that rhyme says  
you have to keep the penny.

I left it on the sidewalk where some kid  
idling home from school, studying the primroses  
and careful not to step on a crack, might  
catch the shine. I went home  
lucky.

## **SIGNS by Bonnie Hiller Schumann**

I must have read this somewhere: “Even the sun knows when to leave and honors us with its daily departure.”

As I was driving, I saw signs that told me how to fix my life.  
‘Jesus is the only hope.’ So I said, “Jesus!”

When you said, “Don’t you notice the little things I do?” I said,  
“Yes, and most of them annoy me.” Followed by a sotto voce “Jesus.”

When each deadline to leave occurred with no leaving, I said  
emphatically  
“Jesus!”

I thought of the sign in London that read “I want to come back in  
the next life as my cat.”

But I do remember the 4th of July when we walked to the park with  
margaritas in hand, watched fireworks, and said, “Jesus!”

And I remember the nights you ‘rocked me like my back ain’t  
got no bone’ and I said, “Jesus!”

But it was a bad goodbye; no goodbyes at all.

Dark water covered me for a while, but I came up rebirthed and said  
with gratitude, “Jesus!”

## **The Night Bird by Bonnie Hiller Schumann**

I put away my comic book at midnight  
Opened the window for some air  
Out of the quiet dark sky  
Came the sound of the “ruiseñor”

Sweet, sweet nightingale  
Sing me a night song  
Drift through my darkened room  
Carry me along

Call to me, my springtime mate  
Perfumed voice of lavender and cloves  
Lead the way and let me wander  
Take me with you on our journey of hope

Night gets cold, world shuts down  
Your voice breaks through the peaceful air  
Your voice is the connecting thread  
A blessing in my ear

I'll be waiting for the next midnight hour  
How I long to hear you call again  
You've got me so that I can't sleep  
And now it's 2 a.m.  
Thank you for a lovely evening  
Can we get together again?

Night bird, cast your memory in the stillness  
Keep me where it's restful and hushed  
Cover me in happy sound  
Hold me in your sacred trust





# Part Two

## Circle Award Winning Poems

These are the winners of the Seventh Annual Circle Awards,  
Given to Mira Costa High School Students for  
Excellence in Poetry Composition



## in anticipation of the scars you will leave me with by Gianna Goodman-Bhyat

these are the conditions we agree to upon entry:

love is dice,

and even soldiers

will unravel at her hands.

of course, there are the conditions we can never agree to

—those we are saddled with by nature of circumstance:

childhood,

and in particular its casualties.

i'm learning to fall in love

the same way i learned to play the piano

—young,

with fragile hands and little rhythm.

practice and time meant my fingers were able to acquire grace, speed,

skill enough to mask mistakes from an audience,

but a trained musician can always spot the flaws:

old habits that accounted for a weaker wrist.

fingertips that cave

where they should curve.

and inevitably i wonder

how much of you i will have to unlearn:

if i will ever unfetter this anxiety

from her kind parent,

or if you will see it carved into my body

—a lesson in reckless love,

a reminder of what you left

for those to come.

inevitably i think of how many ways  
you could pluck my heart from my chest  
—in pieces or

all at once.

and how regardless i would be left  
still loving you.

but in anticipation of the scars you will leave me with,  
all i ask is that you let me keep  
the pieces of you that taught me  
what music sounds like.

let me hold on to your melodies,  
leave your footsteps on my front porch.  
gift wrap the feeling that makes me want to sing loud and terribly off key,  
and put it in my mailbox.

let me love  
the same way i play the piano:

—fearless,  
with as much courage and heart,  
as when i first learned.

## Narcissism by Bella Rawitz

I am apple and cinnamon  
I am gasoline and cigarettes

I'm made of sharp popping bottles and wind slipping through leaves  
When my fingers grace seafoam  
I hope to feel my fingers dissipate  
My hair reflects coral clouds at twilight  
I am slivers of laughter and buckets of tears

Strands of time leaks through my body like gold through marble  
It spills down my skin as I cup it in my hands pushing it back into my chest

I can't escape the blood oozing through my wrists  
I can't get enough of the morning dew sprouting in the crevices of my lungs

I hope I'm made of the stars in a brilliant distant sky I've never seen  
Pieced together by shimmering silver threads  
I'd like to think that my eyes shine like light through vibrant crystals  
I pretend the gloss on my lips can polish and the liner on my eyes can slice

My voice is a blade through ice  
My touch is charcoal on a canvas  
My legs crumble under the weight of the wings on my back

I am a needle through fabric  
I am a knife through flesh

## Fish Food by Lily Boettcher

Don't touch me.  
Don't feel my skin tremble beneath your fingertips,  
Don't notice how weak I am.  
I breathe in salt like it's my last breath,  
The cold surroundings stealing all warmth from my already cold body,  
Don't disobey a woman's dying wish.  
Let me float amongst the fish,  
My body being useful for a change,  
Swathed in scales.  
I can feel their nibbles tearing my flesh,  
I am loved.  
They praise me as I am pulled apart,  
I am fought over as they vie for my liver,  
I am wanted here.  
They embrace me with teeth,  
They accept me with jaws,  
And I am spread throughout the world through the creatures that consume me.  
Drifting in the sea, there is always someone who wants me here.

## Seasons of My Universe by Violette Rice

I am a winter breeze freezing every form of matter in my path.  
I am a silver thread in the tapestry of the future.  
I am the sound of icicles chiming against each other as the wind  
weaves between the blades and its frozen freckles.  
I see the sprouts of zealous grass peeking through the snow as it  
reaches for the sun in the cruelest of mornings.

I want to live with all four seasons, but I live in California.  
I am a nomad, searching for the colors of autumn, the breath of  
spring, the chill of winter, and the steam of summer.

I pretend to be satisfied, but I want more more more and more.  
I feel unfulfilled, for I have not yet lived. I have not yet finished spring, cherry  
blossom petals left in my wake.

I touch a cool keyboard at four in the morning, planning my Summer.  
I worry about forgetting the things I want so badly, I have already  
forgotten so much.  
I cry when I am lost, isolated, and aimless.  
I am human.

I understand some winters are warmer than others and some summers  
colder than others.  
It's okay.  
I dream big and move slowly.  
I know my pace matters not- if the destination is clear.  
I know summer will come, as will fall and winter.  
I am an optimist.  
I believe the unexpected will be unexpected, but beautiful and meant to be  
nonetheless.



# MANHATTAN BEACH POETRY CIRCLE



Join us at Joslyn Community Center Every 2nd and 4th  
Tuesday at 1:30 PM

Read and talk with us about favorite poems, new,  
original poems, and the ideas and issues they suggest

For More Information Contact:  
**The Older Adults Program**  
City of Manhattan Beach (310) 802-5449



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Program**  
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