

The Muses' Gallery

Numbers, Letters, Figures, Digits - Autumn 2015

Autumn is here with the start of a new school year. This got me thinking about the three R's. Reading, writing and arithmetic and learning to decode symbols. ABCs and 123s seen through the poetic lens.

Enjoy!



James Paradiso, Photographer

untitled

By

Bekah Steimel

St. Louis, Missouri

I am the sum of my parents
my square root is blue
I am the number thirteen
born into grief and unseasonal snow
I am the shadow that stalks
laid to rest only under the moon
I am Halloween at midnight
crossing the great divide without a mask
I am the strength of a thousand termites
tearing down homes without a sound
and I will be ancient history
when today is turned into a textbook



James Paradiso, Photographer

**A Box of Twenty
Four**

By

Marjorie Rissman

Highland Park, Illinois

It always comes back to this counting
the hours and the days
watching the calendar shrink
twelve lofty pages down to four
the last movement in a symphony
the last refrain in a pop song repeated
like the sounds of birds singing in treetops
preparing us for their sudden departure
while leaves begin their paint stroke ending
a box of twenty four crayons
named autumn brightens our vision
evening starts earlier each day
temperatures lower at daybreak and dusk
but still warm on the two hands held at noon
robbed of summer sun's care freeness
children set alarm clocks once again
scheduled around English class and gym
bells shout out the time without a clock.
tick tock, tick tock, tick the year will start
or will it merely come to another end?

Chocolate Math

By

Candace Kubinec

*Greensburg,
Pennsylvania*

I started with a whole box -
twenty four
special dark Belgian chocolate
mint patties
a daily limit -
one
my willpower has been tested
only three remain
three days until they are gone
and I am desolate once again
three remain
three days
maybe not

Self Portrait With Masks

By

Mary Jo Balistrieri

Wisconsin



Miranda Dotson, Artist

Draw yourself she said. *Pick a primary color.*
What is primary I wondered as my first grade
teacher handed out manila paper.

She gave instructions in red, yellow, and blue.
I chose the yellow crayon, the yellow of buttercups,
the *gold drops* Dad called Mother's curls.

I chose it for the window shades in my bed room
when tagged by a breeze, when motes
of yellow-beige fairy dust billowed around me.

I was a yellow girl.

But the yellow disappeared on the manilla paper.
I shaded it with red to call attention to its leaving.
Red left with yellow, and turned my image orange.

The orange of sunset, the orange of signs.
What happened to the yellow of me?
I outlined myself in black, made my yellow dress blue.

My dress turned green.
How slippery it was to make a portrait.

I held my picture up for the class.
The teacher praised the bold black,
the ruddy orange of my hair,

my emerald green dress.
Enthused I made other portraits.

Added mauve, chartreuse, hot pink,
colors that were new to me.

I came to bask in the art of masks.
Later, I realized that praise had replaced
my original color.

Senryu

leaving the bank
with six figures
on the odometer

By

Charlotte Digregorio

Winnetka, Illinois



James Paradiso, Photographer

Field of Dreams

By

Caroline Johnson

Willow Springs, Illinois

They come in and want to take a class.
They come in with hope, with dreams.
No hablo Ingles. *English is hard for me.*
I will try. I like this place.
I want to be somebody—I want to be a nurse
some day. Will you help me?
My father never graduated high school,
my mother eighth grade. They work hard
at their jobs to send me to school.
No hablamos Ingles. *English is hard for us.*
This is hard for me, but I'm gonna try.
I carry the weight of the world on my back—
burdens from my fathers, grandfathers.
I hear them crying every time I go to work
and clean tables, wash dishes, prepare
food—every time I clean up after some
customer who rarely leaves a tip.
It gets busy at work.
No hablo Ingles. Lo siento.
English is hard for me.
But I'm gonna try.

Kindergarten Capers

By

Carole Croll

Kindergarten Capers
Amy builds castles deftly.
Edward fashions giant hexagons.
Iris just kicks.
Lucy mimics Norman. Oscar paints quietly.
Robert stockpiles tangrams until Violet whines.
Xavier yells, "Zowie!"



James Paradiso, Photographer

The Sunbeam

By

Jill Charles

Chicago, Illinois

In a ring of gold beads,
She sits on the classroom floor.
Children surround her
Like petals of a flower
On their rectangle mats.
Each student works:
One with number beads,
Two with sentence cards,
Three with maps and flags.
She listens.
Years ago
In this same school
She learned to read
And raced across the pool.

She could have typed out
A fortune in an office
Or weighed solutions in a lab
But determined to return
To rooms full of sunbeams
And help other minds open.

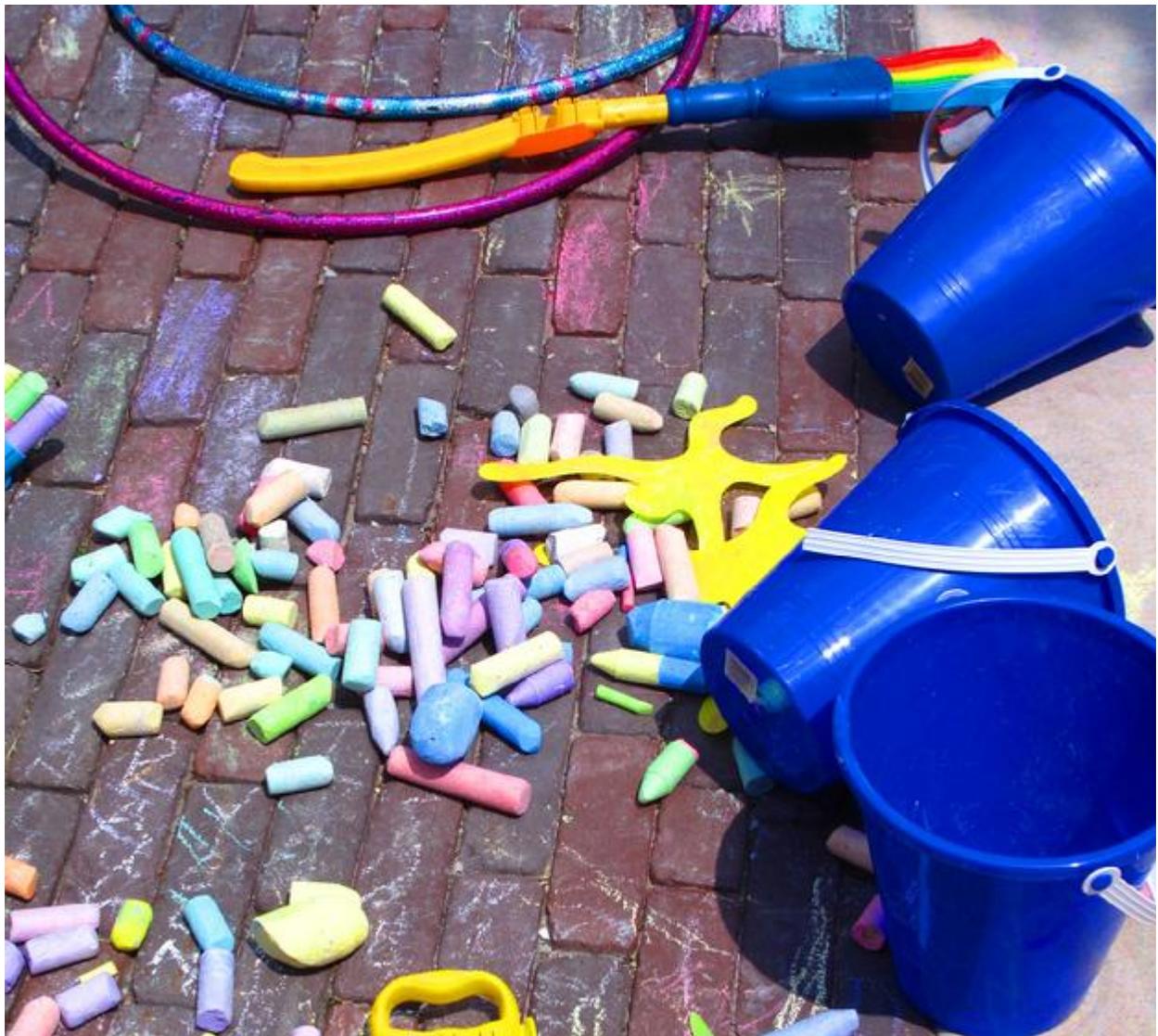
Aloof

By

Ellen Pickus

Baldwin, New York

She has all the warmth of the number 5,
the odd person out,
the self-important number 1 with the hat
who runs around the block
to skirt issues,
lifting a Victorian hem
to bustle off, unwilling
to engage in life's messes.



James Paradiso, Photographer

**Dick, Jane, and Sally
Help the Grandkids
with Homework**

By

Julie Isaacson

Highland Park, Illinois

Dick:

"Noah, you are my grandson so dear,
but I'm not going to ask you again to come here.
It's my job tonight to set you on the right path,
and I promised your mom I'd help you with your math.
I know all I had to do at your age was add,
but you must show me what to do on your iPad.
Today you have to be a very smart guy,
and now for each problem you must explain why
you arrived at the answer you did.
I'm glad I grew up when a kid was a kid!"

Jane:

"Ellie, now that you're done with your measurements cubic
it says on the blog to see the grading rubric,
that will tell you types of sentences you must supply
with all the right grammar and the analysis why
you chose themes in the novel to annotate.
This scoring grade will carry much weight
and then you must write a five paragraph essay
and it looks like it's all due this coming Wednesday."

Sally:

"Teddy, please grab your laptop and mouse
your dad is on his way from his house.
He will take you to get your robotic kit
I would take you but I'll be at the gym to stay fit.
Your mom called to say she'll be home by train or air
but she'll be home tomorrow for your Science Fair.
She won't miss your display about conserving water,
she will keep her word. She's a good mom and daughter.
I knew she would be, because when times were tough
she took excellent care of Spot and Puff!"

The Joys of School

By

Michael P. Wright

Highwood, Illinois

A catechism of learning, a marvelous feat
Deciphering numbers, figuring, analyzing, ways to go
ABC's, a blast of fun
Dodgeball, costumes, a birthday party

Friends galore manifest into lifelong pals
Reading marvelous books
The end result: critical thinking as an adult

Anointing positive discipline

Hopefully a million happy rides to adolescence
Winning a softball game, challenging the balance beam
A sensitive and aware teacher, hip to reality
The joys of straight A's

Reading, writing and arithmetic, a genteel catalyst to
children
Education such a grand pleasure
Open up those avenues of opportunity
School days, the greatest time of their lives.



James Paradiso, Photographer

Quick Summer

By

Gail Denham

Sun River, Oregon

Somewhere a factory bell clanged.
Noontime. Red bricks on the bank wall
hot to the touch. In the field, two horses
rested under a tree; their tails flicked flies.

Ma-Maw sat on her porch, shaded
by the big elm, shelled her peas;
hummed the song she always sang
to us kids when she wished us goodnight.

The day took on urgency. So much to do
before sunset: swim under the bridge,
smash termites at the wood pile, chase
barn cats, climb the oak, squish in hot tar.

Math already haunted my dreams. Numbers
paraded before my eyes, even in daylight, like
sheep jumping over word fences. Chapter
books - teachers choosing the most boring
ones they could. Long days stuck at desks.

Now summer days galloped. We wanted more.
School only 15 days away. No time to waste.
Barefoot, we skipped quick over hot cement
to the drugstore for soda floats, refreshment,
energy enough to squeeze all the good possible
from these last free days.

Ode to Letters

By

Andrena Zawinski

San Francisco, California

*"...Singing, with open
mouths, their strong
melodious songs..."--
Whitman*

I loved them, those letters, and from the very start.
The pull down slant of each side and cross bar
to make the A, first letter of the alphabet and my name.
Later the cursive swoops and sweeps across ruled paper.

Letters practiced with such force and precision
in workbooks under drawings of ant-apple-alligator-
angel,
held in a claw clasp of three fingers that calloused
gripping fat blue Ticonderogas perfecting letters.

I even came to love the alphabet's final one,
first letter of my last name, the way the Z
zigzagged across tracing guides straight over,
left to right, downward left slant, left right again.
Even if it was the letter that sentenced me

to the end of rows and lines, excluded me
from spelling bees I could have easily won
with *zero-zipper-zebra-zesty-zoo*.

In my love affair with twenty-six letters
their forty sounds, I cherished them all caught
inside the pangram we would write and rewrite
and recite: *The quick brown fox jumps over a lazy dog*.

And with a first and fickle childhood crush,
I added a heart, carved them with ballpoints into desks,
benches, and bark, dragged them by branches
through mud and wet cement, and today I still delight
in those workhorses of language, and the poet's power
to free them across the page into an ode to letters.

82 vs. 28

By

William Marr

if one can't see in these two numbers
the symmetrical beauty
of an object and its image in the mirror
then it would be difficult to comprehend
the mysterious and profound nature
of the theory of *Parity Nonconservation*

**Chen-Ning Franklin Yang is a Chinese-born American physicist who works on statistical mechanics and particle physics. He and Tsung-dao Lee received the 1957 Nobel prize in physics for their work on parity nonconservation of weak interaction. In 2004, he married a 28-year-old girl when he was 82. The event stirred up quite a storm in China. 11 years later today, it is 93 vs. 39 (he is 93 and his wife 39). What magic numbers!*

taking the result of a simple arithmetic
 $82 - 28 = 54$
as the only solution
how can one appreciate
this fuzzy, chaotic and uncertain
love affair of dusk



James Paradiso, Photographer

"Z" and Me

By

Joeseeph Kuhn Carey

Glencoe, Illinois

I don't know what the letter "Z"
would want with someone shy like me.
Would we go to the zoo?
Or zig-zag around town?
Or use a zip-line to cover more ground?

Maybe we'd be true-cool best friends
and draw with zany blue electric pens.
Would we ride zebras to school?
Or eat zwieback on stools?
Or put ziti noodles in our neighbor's big pool?

There's so much "Z" and I might do,
(maybe even make music on a zither for two!)

Coming Home

By

Michael Escoubas

Pontiac, Illinois

Gold

wheat stacks

stand tall like

sentinels on

watch, their cap-sheaves in

place as children walk past

swinging their strapped books in time

with happy steps. Soon they will bound

inside, scrape mud off boots, hang coats on

hooks, sit down to steaming cups of cocoa.



James Paradiso, Photographer

Count to 19

By

Jill Angel Langlois

Yorkville, Illinois

Water laps my ankles, buried in the sea.
I breathe with the rising and retreating;
breathing in and beating out in curious time.

Sonorous strings moan and creep toward the shore,
while rhythmic drums enhance their building groans.
The sax phones me and I answer, "I am here."

Horns connect the dots and draw their line in the sand.
The snare snaps his fingers in my quivering ears,

behind me now, pushing me to go deeper.
This magical cacophony, a retro-futuristic symphonic
breathing,

all-encompassing, singular, universal musical
conglomeration
makes sense only on the outer edge.

The edge where waves of rhythm slink toward the shore.

I count to 19 because that is how long it takes
the waves to shrink back into the sea.

In the distance, the horns become more pronounced;
their alluring tentacles draw me closer,

and I float willingly over the line drawn in the sand
toward the all-encompassing, singular sea.

Flying

By

Joe Glaser

Chicago, Illinois

It's hard to get going run, run faster!

Leap forward and push down hard
on those arms stretched into wings
Feel one foot lifting just off the ground
now pump down and jump forward and begin to rise
Higher, higher, yes, yes, yes! You're soaring like an eagle!

Uh oh, tall building ahead pump harder, faster, harder,
faster!

sail just over the tower gaining altitude!
Now glance around and down
heart skipping a beat tremor of fear
Don't give in to it keep soaring you're flying over

Chicago!

Power and fear merging together
racing towards life running from life.

Be careful too. Remember, *step on a crack, break your mother's back.*



Joe Glaser, Photographer

Charlotte Digregorio one visit
 in twenty years . . .
Winnetka, Illinois one time left to see her

Mike Schoenburg

Skokie, Illinois

mute swan
circles the pond
ripples abound...

red orange yellow
celebrate
the dying leaves



James Paradiso, Photographer

Rain and the Brains

By

Mark Hudson

Evanston, Illinois

Yesterday the rain came pouring down, mid-afternoon, as my friend Chris and I went to the Wilmette Library, a place we sometimes go to draw. It was pouring rain, so we sat in his car in the parking lot listening to rock 'n' roll, and watching people race for their cars, protecting their books under their umbrellas.

We like to go there to draw, and now that the kids are back in school it was easy to find a table.

I was looking for a photo to inspire me to draw, so I picked up a copy of the Wilmette Review. They had an article about the giant plant at Botanical Gardens that died, and a photo, so I drew a picture of that.

Then there was a square photo of a roller-coaster, and so I drew it with my square drawing pad.

I was actually writing this particular prose poem, or whatever you would call it, at Whole Foods, where I facilitate a writing group every other Wednesday.

A new young woman in the group, who was maybe four years out of college, said she happened to be at the Wilmette Library on that rainy day.

I didn't notice her because I've never met her before, and it turns out she was in a different room. It was just another one of those small worlds coincidences.

Of course, in another sense, the world is big. A book can open up a big world to you. And libraries are a place full of millions of books, millions of worlds.

Easy as Pi

By

Jennifer Dotson

Highland Park, Illinois

Numbers dance in your brain
with grace and speed.

They twirl and spin as they
switch partners from the
easy do-si-do of
addition and subtraction
to the fast tempo waltz
in three-quarter time
of multiplication and
division.



Emilio Bandiero, Photographer

Complex equations of
algebra
geometry
trigonometry and
calculus
are no match
as you nimbly
break the numbers into
smaller components
to solve.

Numbers stumble and
bumble about heavy-booted
in my brain as they
fumble for the lights.

Is that the root of my
attraction to you?
Like yin and yang?

That's a simple
Fraction, you say
- two halves
making one whole.