

CROSSING INTO THE HILL

by Helga Elisabeth Schauer-Mayrbaurl is the 2012 Judd's Hill Poetry Contest winner.

The poem's title seems to expand and retract as I first read it aloud, pacing my own leafy but tiny city garden, finding it grown from sweet meditation into a vigorous hillside vineyard stroll. Senses are gently awakened by lines such as "swallows and hawks glide on a pathway through time", drawn by newly misted Atlas Peak that anchors the Napa Valley with breezes from sister Hawaii.

Some choice inner rhyme deepens the experience: me/legacy, soul/bowl, apart/heart, time/wine. Little gems such as "water leads to wine" and "blessings from the heart of a tree" also become part of the poem's gifts when used with confidence and skill. The freshly observed landscape moves from mere romance into a mature "love of life undisturbed" and simple "joy of being".

Jane Hall

Judd's Hill Poetry Judge

Crossing into the Hill

by Helga Elisabeth Schauer-Mayrbaurl

Breezes of Aloha welcome me.

Swaying tendrils sail across a sea of green; Hula hands reaching from sky to earth.

Honey, of fragrant flower and fruit, kiss the air.

Winds bring softness and gentle caresses.

Puffs of mist fade into a depth of blue.

Music for the soul: joy of being.

Time captured in the bowl of space apart. To feel and sense.

Atlas named the rock which anchors this valley.

Swallows and hawks glide on a pathway through time.

In this place water leads to wine. Barrels add blessings from the heart of a tree.

Creation and art; punctuating romance.

Stillness and beauty bring forward a legacy. This is love of life undisturbed.

The Toast

by Sandra Branum

He stood up to give
The toast he'd been
sweating over for weeks.
As he gazed
into the faces,
both strange
and familiar,
he paused.

Snapshots of childhood memories
paraded through his mind.
He and Little Natalie
tramping through the muddy creek
squishing the goo between their toes.

How he'd taught her to catch frogs.
She was so fearless then.
And how strong she was.
He remembered how
she dragged him
through the briars
to escape those angry honey bees
that day he backed into their hive.

He was so clumsy then
and so very shy.
She: so brazen and fearless.

Then one day she found Him
and his Little Natalie was gone –
replaced by a woman in love.
And now here
on her wedding day.

He looked into
her eyes
Filled with love
and smiled as he
lifted his goblet
to begin The Toast.

CONTINUITY

by Edgar Calvelo

You talked of continuity

The lingering finish of pinot noir

An old vintage you said.

The vines grew on the hillsides

Concentrated effort, a struggle

For a deeper purple of small fruits.

You talked about *terroir*, chemistry, gravitation

Awareness of what is there

Delights of what they hold

Like the bridge you have to cross

To the temple

Concealed in the mist.

The wind chimes shivered

Crisp December night invited

A long cuddle, filled glasses,

Brie de Meaux and baguette

That would make the seasons

And what a night should be.

Napa Valley

by Terry Cox-Joseph

Nothing but a stone trough. This
is how they stomped the grapes, my father said,
imagine that! I envisioned wooden barrels, casks beneath
blue skies, colorful skirts lifted high, voices, music. My sister and I
ascended clay steps, hesitant, crouched. A hundred degrees under the sun,
cool and airless inside this cell so stout, a sixth-grader had to stoop. How to
imagine men in robes, so short they needn't duck? How to stomp round red
grapes into laughter and song? I imagined mission grapes in carts,
dusty paths, adobe walls, braying burros, the rhythm of prayer—
a hundred Our Fathers, twenty Acts of Contrition, succulent,
ripened skins all diminutive sun bursts, supernovas
preparing to ferment.

Harvest

by Maril Crabtree

You spoke in wine-breath whispers,
recalled the first days of youth, took
your listeners into the wild grass valleys
where natives and first settlers walked.

In a paper-shelled body so wrinkled
it seemed as if wrinkles alone
propped you up, your eyes sparked
with remembered life. From the old country

the first vine sprigs grew, spread,
renewed themselves in these hills. The land
adopted them as its own, nurtured them
into that first harvest, grapes bitter

as burnt sun. The next year, sweeter,
the third year sweeter yet, welter of vines
grown thicker, leaves, once pale, greener.
You marked your words with long pauses,

stared at the now-fertile vineyards that covered
the valley floor, flush with grapes and leftover
rain from a cloud-swept sky. You sighed,
knowing it's soon your turn to be replanted.

Love Rows

by Dana Beardsley Crotwell

The Napa moon hung low
lighting the valley floor
grapes glistened and
plumped out proud chests
Pick me – I'm the best
No me – I've got good legs
Over here – touch my skin
Wait – me - smell this bouquet
vines tangled like braids
leaves in the hair
bunches of beauty –
nature clusters
alive in love rows.

Scuppernong Wine

by Julia Nunnally Duncan

The scuppernongs in our backyard vinery
hang in heavy clusters this September evening
with a scent so strong that
I can smell their wine
before I pluck them from the vines.
Plump amber orbs,
their skin is firm but their flesh so ripe
that my finger and thumb make juice squirt
when I squeeze too hard.
I fill my bucket,
my hand sticky despite my gentle grasp
in separating grape from stem,
while yellow jackets find their way in
to share the nectar.
Later in our back room,
my husband mixes a mash
of crushed scuppernongs, sugar, and yeast.
At first, like a beast trapped in the crock,
the brew bubbles and hisses,
but in time it will become
a cordial as sweet
as the land that has given us
its fruit.

GLEN ELLEN SUMMERS

by Cristina Ferrari-Logan

On the kitchen table__
A huge basket
full of ripe French plums.
Two paring knives.
A scarred copper colander.
A old pyrex measuring cup
with barely legible red markings.
A sack of C&H granulated sugar.

On the vintage WOLF stove__
A great kettle full of water
and empty Mason jars
rattling to a sterile boil.

(Hint, hint.)

Sorry, Aunt Oliva.
The girls are gone,
last seen headed for the hills
with current issues
of "*O*", "*Cosmo*", "*People*"
and three diet Cokes.

Uncle Lou knows.
He smiles and tells her
we're sitting out in the field somewhere
reading between the vines.

Nature's Vintner

by Gary Fort

The grapes shine in the sunlight
Under the California sun
Soon they'll be ripe
And we'll all drink and have fun
We'll toast our glasses high
And kiss the ground
The Lord has blessed this harvest
And it's the very best
Grown in the Napa Valley
Nature just does the rest

WITH A GIFT OF MAGIC

By Diane Kendig

In vino veritas

So the Romans believed there was truth herein. Truth is, though I usually lie that my first was a pitcher of sangría in Spain in '71 that made the Gothic cathedral revolve on the Plaza Mayor, it was actually a thick tumbler of some sweet cheap brand in a college town in 1970.

For me, these years were outstanding for wine, and the years since, stupendous. I'm not so able to discuss vintages, soil, weather, luck, but I prefer what is "fruit-driven, concentrated and just simply delicious," from an ... "intimate and personal approach," like my goddaughter's step-father and uncle, the season before her wedding, one crafting a white, one a red, what we passed around as we communed.

Love, we seek the truth that's in the wine,
the family touch, what's close to home.

The Grapes are Heavy on the Vines

by Jodi McIntyre

The Grapes are heavy on the vines,
Ready for the masters to create their wines

Family, history and traditions
A great Season with perfect conditions
A combination for success
I want your secrets, I must confess

Your wine is like liquid gold
I hope the cabs are big and bold

Unnoticed Cycle

by Lee W Miller

The annual growth, from blossom to grape
Full cycle of life, spring to harvest
Tending without ceasing, to aid their maturation
Is it science or art, or a blend of both?
Most don't pause to ponder the query
Just pass by the vines in their day to day
Pop the corks with n'er a reflection
And consume the juice, oblivious of toil

SHIRAZ

by David Radavich

It is a drink
the color of blood—

divine
and life-giving.

War
that has been

ripened and plucked,
aged and tested

now swirling
around

nose
and lips

like a seduction
of soul,

last dance
of the spirits.

Gypsy

by Tony Reevy

Shuffling gait
from glasses
of Bikavér, Leanka;
playing violin
for tourists'
shillings and marks.

Behind—no money,
war's wire camps,
sickle-hammer chorus.
Today—wine, warm, three
hundred forints, bread.
Tomorrow—another sun.

Home

by Judith R. Robinson

I always kept the children's work
on the refrigerator door--
their drawings of spindly people,
little red houses with tulips
rising higher than the rooftops,
suns with smiling faces,
spelling tests and math papers
sporting gold stars and animal stickers.
That was the center
of what we had, that kitchen,
its faux-marble countertops,
the bright windows and the window screens,
the inevitable world to come just beyond---

but there, near us, the sweetgum trees,
beautiful in every season,
leaves blazing purple and orange in autumn,
heavy branches iced and white in winter.
Did I mention how smart the kids were?
Or how the memory swallows like Chianti,
the whisper of sweetness, the bite in the
throat.

Water's Wine

By Allison Whittenberg

The balance of bliss is pain
The balance of pain is enlightenment
The balance of enlightenment is more enlightenment
The balance of more enlightenment is transcendence
The balance of transcendence is alienation
The balance of alienation is bliss

Brix

by Beclée Newcomer Wilson

I search for purple sweetness on the vine,
slash leaves, tight clusters cut then toss away.
Spray off the mist the fog has left behind,
pierce fruit, at times before the hint of day.
I test for brix--select the harvest's best.
In all grapes left, sweetness is on the rise.
And now a humble task before I rest.
How quick the blade that strips away the prize.
If longing in my heart could be pierced so,
and Cupid's arrow touch a love that's true.
Then all the bleeding longing that would flow
could blend a treasured vintage shared with you.
Come! Sit with me! Taste our sweet time made strong.
This harvest like our grapes may soon be gone.

Rot

by Jake Young

There are some grapes that need to be diseased
to produce a full-bodied wine.

Rows of vines along a volcanic hillside

at High Serenity Vineyard

have been purposefully infected with *Botrytis*.

When the hot breath of night covers the white grapes,

Botrytis attacks. Grey spores

absorb moisture from the fruit. A “noble rot,”

the fungus spreads, shriveled grapes left long on the vine.

Harvested late, the wine possesses

a concentrated sweetness, the flavor

of orange blossoms, ambrosia and honeydew.

I find most Rieslings saccharine, syrupy, but the *Botrytis*

and the late harvest create a rich, complex flavor,

a sweetness closer to fresh fruit.

People often drink Rieslings
with dessert, but our tasting flight pairs
this wine with oysters or spicy Thai food.

A toast! To shared experiences,
to wine, the earliest excuse,
something to fill crystal glasses

with fragile stems, a reason
to act foolish, to say anything. Personally,
I like to pick up a box of strawberries

from Swanton Farm, three miles up the coast,
and head to the beach with a cooler
full of ice and a couple of bottles.

It doesn't matter that I hate sweet wine.
It doesn't matter that I have never been
to High Serenity.

I have sold countless cases of this Riesling.
All day I stand behind a redwood bar,
pouring through the flight at the Lost Weekend.

And, Dear Readers, a fitting finale to the
Judd's Hill 2012 Poetry Collection:

Permission Granted

by Sandra Branum

Into the night I'd sneak
To get the wine I desired.
Now the doctor says to partake
To calm my feeble nerves.

Should I be glad of this or sad?
I'll just sip and ponder this question
For a while.