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I HAVE QUESTIONS

by

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B.S. University of Texas at Austin, 1993

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in Creative Writing
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term

2019

Major Professor: Terry Ann Thaxton

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ABSTRACT

The poems in this thesis explore mid-life feminism, family, mental illness via anxiety and panic, identities of southern girlhood/womanhood, and the challenges of a social media saturated life. Mothering plays a large part in many of these poems, both embracing it and confronting gendered expectations about it. Telling the truth is explored through poems about white women's complicity in racist systems in the southern United States and how being quiet about it benefits us. Fear and the myriad ways it has manifested in my life is a common thread in this work, especially the fears that accompanied white girls growing up in the Southern U.S. during a time of shifting societal roles and cultural values. The speaker in these poems both deny and celebrate the cultural, political, and environmental influences that shaped her early years. As a feminist poet in mid-life with a teenaged daughter and a teen and pre-teen son, I have a tenuous relationship with the influence of mass media. Controlling screen-time for my children and monitoring my own intake of news, braggadocio and ex-boyfriends on social media is a constant, anxiety laden burden. I am more comfortable in a world that does not always revisit itself. I have spent years trying to erase the effects of Texas big hair, provocative clothing, alcohol, and sexually explicit music, video and advertising on my life. Other times I yearn for an escape back. Poetry challenges me to look backward with bravery. These poems reflect the forces of memory and modernism that both limit and liberate modern women. In Trump's America where women are demeaned and silenced through populist rhetoric and legislation, it is more important than ever to magnify female, truth-telling voices and this collection is intended to contribute to positive change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To husband, Ty, and my children, Bonny, Fletcher and Griffin, for their love and support of Mom and her poems. To Terry Ann Thaxton for her bravery on the page which in turn inspired me to write without fear. To my fellow University of Central Florida MFA workshop students, especially poets Stephanie Porven, Emma Reinhart, Yvonne Amey, and Malcolm Kelly, for careful critiques and inspiration from their own work.

I'm also grateful to the editors of the following publications in which these poems first appeared, in their current state or earlier drafts:

Best New Poets 2019, "Men Get Sick of Me"

The Mackinac, "I Hate I Love Orlando"

Mothers Always Write, "Eight Counts"

Redivider, "When Are The Astronauts Going To Mars?"

Rise Up Review, "My Husband Says Leonard Cohen Died"

The Shallow Ends, "Is Someone Having Her Period?"

Sinking City, "Things Have Changed"

SWIMM, "What I'm Saying Is"

Tahoma Literary Review, "My Daughter Forgets to Lock The Door"

Tinderbox, "Made In Texas"

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Part I
You Were Having Fun

Chapter One

1. In the beginning I was coarse sand. I was above the ocean sending starfish to the sky with only my eyes. Who made this?
2. I remember walking on water hauling a house full of hungry leatherbacks behind.
3. Every step I got stronger until they emptied out the windows and walked away. After that I had to go under.
4. I was blistered in a barnacled bathing suit but I sunk low and slid around the sides until He let me back in. Who knew this?
5. Every night I ached for an anchor. Something to ground me when the wet words would not stop singing.
6. All I could do was knit nets to hold my daughters down. Offer Him amens. What happened?
7. In the end it didn't matter. I swallowed the salt and softened to stone looking back at a ghost of the Gulf all around me and growing leaden legs.
8. Now I buoy the boys who drill deep in the earth. My purpose plateaued. I let their better feet bruise my back to loosen all that's left.
9. My lap is for these laymen fixed like me to something far offshore.
10. Tonight I make myself an island He can see from the heavens.
11. Like a serpent fleeing Eden, I forget it all.

Tell Us About The 80s

It smelled like Aquanet
and yellow polyester sweaters.
Sounded like a band named

Boston singing *I can't wait
another day, Amanda*. Felt
like a foot on a weighted car pedal

making kids move faster
on oak shadowed Main Streets.
A football shaped folded note

flying over blonde lacquered bangs.
Chemistry. Drama. Being dropped
off at Astroworld at an important age.

Friends felt-up on field trips behind
the Tube Shoot. The texture of grape
bubble gum passed mouth to mouth.

Looked like a long row of skinny
legs high kicking felt hats
on muddy halftime fields. Peach

wine coolers. *Class of 89* in white
shoe polish on long maroon cars
someone else paid for. Phone cords.

Calls about kids who die in collisions
on the way to college. Rolling in cold
bedsheets with boys who struggle

at bra straps. Entering a new decade.
Buzzed. Baited. Leaving all the big
things behind.

We Tried To Lift Each Other Up

You can ride your bicycle around the block but only with another girl and not out onto Link Road. You can drive on Interstate 45 but not past Alameda Mall.

Q: Girls where did you go? It's time to come home.

A: We can't tell you.

Always look over your shoulder. Don't make eye contact with weird men. Never walk to your car alone at night. Wake me up the minute you get home. Call before you leave the party.

Read this article about a girl who worked the front desk at that hotel on the Seawall. One minute she was in the lobby listening to waves lap up the jetties, the next minute she was not.

It was night or it was early in the morning.

All of a sudden her Senior picture is on one of the big billboards.

Bare shoulders and black dress. Mom's fake pearls.

30 other girls disappeared from your hometown since you were a little girl in the 1970s. Five of their bodies were found in a 25-acre field about a mile from your childhood home.

The girl who shared an overcooked Monte Cristo plate at Bennigan's with her friends. She drove home alone, high on Diet Cokes and carbohydrates. They found her red Jeep on the side of I-45 somewhere near the refineries. You wonder what song was on the radio when she pulled over. How songs sound better alone in your car with the windows rolled down and the smell of a beach over the bridge.

A journalist called it *The Texas Killing Fields* and that name stuck. Someone wrote a true crime book. Someone made a movie. It did not look like it was filmed in Texas. Police were the heroes. The unknown actors are famous now.

Your first friend Mary Jo lived beside the fields in a log cabin. Not an old one. Built from plans in the 1960s. Together you dragged plastic baby dolls in laundry baskets down a white, caliche dusted, unpaved road. Three dead girls were a pile of bones over the fence by then but you did not know it.

A: We can't tell you.

Nothing else was out there but one or two other houses and empty cow pasture. An old sand pit they used to build the interstate was filled with water and made into a mom and pop cable water ski place. You doubt anybody remembers those. You read that years later police questioned the owner.

23 miles to Galveston Beach

Five miles from NASA at Johnson Space Center

238,900 miles to the moon

4 years until graduation

½ mile to the school bus stop

Just a block from home just a short ride home

Don't drive by yourself at night. Who will walk you to your car after work? Did you lock the doors? If your car breaks down, stay there. If a man stops to help, don't even roll down the window. Wait for the Police.

Please explain: What was it like?

1. It was before cellphones.
2. It was before Google Maps.
3. It was before GPS.
4. It was before DNA tests.
5. It was before reliable cars.
6. It was before kids stayed inside all day.

Everything's bigger in Texas. Yards are bigger. Hats are bigger, shoes. In the 1980s your hair was louder than your voice. Your Senior pictures do not age well. Your Senior pictures stay in a yearbook. Your dresses were bulbous and made by moms.

A man could buy land all over the state and never see it. Pay a local to fence it in and put his cattle on the property for a tax write-off. Pay a man to mow hay once or twice a year: agriculture credit. A 25-acre field of good hay could probably make 50 bales or more. Some fields just sit empty for years with a rusty oil derrick slowly draining the earth. Some sat empty for years as an investment.

One day this will all be worth a lot of money.

At slumber parties, even in elementary school, you would stay up late, shocked at soft porn at houses that allowed HBO and sneak out in groups of girls to roam dimly lit subdivision streets.

Q: Truth or Dare?

I dare you to knock on their door.

I dare you to run to the stop sign in your nightgown.

I dare you to flash that car.

Q: How far have you gone?

Q: How far will you go?

We tried to lift each other up using words passed from big sisters and slumber party ghosts:

Light as a feather, stiff as a board.

Light as a feather, stiff as a board.

Light as feather, stiff as a board.

We tried to lift each other up.

Shaun Cassidy

I know he is happy
and has a beautiful
wife now but
when the 70s
station plays
Hey Deanie all
I can think of is
how great we were
back when we met
in my rainbowed
ranch house bedroom
cardboard kissing
learned from *Love*
Boat episodes
singing each other
to sleep every night
then
waking up as a
Morning Girl
ready to dance
into my day

Fantasy Island

Took me a
long time
to realize
mysterious
old men
on islands
or
in the sky
could not
change
my future.

HAVING FUN

it's no big deal honey let me tell you what happened to me at my first job and i turned out okay if a man did that to me why i'd show him who's boss we all know what happens when you've had one too many lone stars and you're out after midnight honey it's a man's world and it takes two to tango show me a girl who hasn't had too many peach wine coolers and regretted something the next day and i'll show you your sunday school teacher taught that boy who ran for bexar county judge didn't you go to school with him and he spoke at our rotary meeting the other day what a fine boy remember when you came home from that party and we had to pick you up off the lawn lord you kids were crazy how time flies when you were having fun, weren't you?

Poster Practice

We sleep under cold
sheets of Florida
flowers. We slip
bubble-lettered blue
notes under the door
asking for dinner.
Wake up every Wednesday
wanting a pretty
place to start
all over wondering
if we could get
our balance better
on YoYos from an Ebay
auction. What's the buzz
around purple bedrooms
these days? Do girls
still kiss posters
as practice for prom?

we hid in your hemlines

we followed you down grocery aisles / hid in your hemlines when men spoke / and dug dirty holes for pole bean seeds / behind you patting down / dark rows of cool dirt / followed you through the fabric store / feeling the correct cloth for prairie skirts / and corduroy culottes we carefully / cut straight lines on pattern paper tissue / watched all day while your / turkey baked in bright oven / we followed your lead in life / every wrong turn every dead end was yours / and ours to navigate / curse of the directionally challenged / and I got so lost I had to whack / a way out of the weeds / i needed you to be north / and to be in my living room / 2,000 miles away / i get so tired of leading other people / on the right path / wrong / i needed someone to stop me / and start over mom / when I called/ why did you come so quickly / can I follow you / again for a few days?

Made in Texas

I'm still as fragile
as a daughter
dressed up
for Olan Mills
with Dorothy Hamill
hair and highlights.
Smile as wide
as the schoolbus wearing
grandfather's green
stone set with a store
bought jewelry making
machine and mailed
across the miles.
Held by a slender
gold chain
over Fall's best turtle
neck. Tilt your chin
and grin, girl. Put
your elbows like
so across this log
while a cool
New England
autumn is draped
down your back.
Shift your shoulders.
Hold your head
high because you
were Made In Texas
no matter what
forest or fauna
they pull down
behind you.
Look at your
life through this
lens: It is hard
and far away.
Be strong. Put
some more pecans
in your pockets
when you get
home. See if
you can crush

them with white
Keds. Go to
the beach after
school today
to wash away
his whiskey
in the waves.
Drown out her
drama
in the dunes.
Girl—
there's nothing
so bitter you
can't bite back.
No place so
sad you can't
save it.

The Story That Stayed

Daughter, you can take this book
off your shelf and shake it. Find
a photo of your great grandmother
on the floor. She had thin lips and a

stern part. No one knew the good
book better. She preached when
a woman could not stand on a stage
and sound smart. Three dead husbands

and children who ran away. Lived
in a trailer beneath the Blue Ridge
Parkway. Strings of long pink beads
in the door would part my bangs when

I entered. She smelled like biscuits
and she was glad to see me. Before
she died she rode a bus one thousand
miles to Texas. Brought a wig and a white

plastic head to hold it. Mom told me
she was struck by lightning that shot
her shoes off. Felt her hair fall out after.
You can believe whatever you want to

believe. The story that stayed is when
she took up needlework to pass the hours.
Proudly showed everyone a patterned
pink swastika pillowcase. Daughter, if

you live long enough you can miss the
big things. Mountains make women
smaller than they are. You can open other
books besides The Bible. You can find
all you need outside it now.

Part II
Things Have Changed

Eight Counts

I love the way my son moves
his slender body to music.
Those stick thin arms punching
pulses in his sky, belly folded over
then bent in some strange contortion,
side & backward & those sweet feet.
The way they slide & jump. Glad for the
grin I get when I know
he received
this rhythm
behind a bedroom door &
it rises from his toes to dirty hands
that hold heavy bats & bottles of soda.
Ankles I could make small circles around
with my thumbs but now hoist his own self
across the monkey bars.

I remember eight years old.
I danced
days around
my mirror.
Summer spun in me like records
& I stored up snacks & sound for someone else.
Maybe this mom
who opens another's messy drawers just to pour out
her patience. Waits for children to fall into place
or fly away.
Now one is moonwalking down a dirty dining
room & I'm in line behind him, happy
to hear my own eight counts.
Making everything up
as I go along.

Here It Is

Here is the thought that comes to mothers at
midnight: *you will not remember this*. Here is

the endless ennui. The beer timed not to be in my
breastmilk. Up there are the ceiling fans that shush

bursting babies. And the hours shifting shadows across

a cold room. Outside is the horned owl in a long leaf
pine. Above me another blood moon. Here is the syncopated

sound of my palm on your back. The heft of eight
pounds again on a shoulder. Here are my ears that took

owl sounds and heard songs from dead grandmothers

muttering *sit down, girl*. Here is how I can fall asleep
in seconds. There is the young marsh rabbit nervously

threading needles through our palmetto bush. Where is her
mother? Here are my swollen ankles, my feet leaving

the cold tile for sunk wet earth. And the sound of the porch
door shut fast. Here is the rush of her wings just above us.

Here are the dog-eared pages in a book about babies.
Here she is sleeping beside me all night. There is the ribbon

tied to your cradle. How I reach out to rock you without
leaving the bed. This is the place below my breasts where

you once rolled over inside me and answered. There
are my hands grabbing ghost girls for months.

My Daughter The Gun

My daughter the gun.
The force of nature not the
Pretty selfie pout.

Blasted Instagram.
Blasted gun girls and blonde buns.
The feeding frenzy

Like knived piranhas
Nibbling new black barrels.
And you the bullet

Breathing American air.
Eyeing her small square
Aim to follow her growled gaze.

My caught daughter the target.
Me the splintered bone.

Move Carefully

I am saying the road to happiness is through hell
I am saying this road hurts my heels

I can see how a forest falls down
I can see a sinkhole from its source

I am trying to make a map out of muck
I am trying not to walk on the water

There is a trail that tastes like white orchids
There is a swamp sitting here with my son

You arrived at the wrong time
You arrived when he wasn't home

I am talking about taking slow wet steps
I am talking about birds that stand still

I do this so I can show you the Scrub Jay
I do this like he will die any day

House Hunting

Before I moved I heard about the holes.
How cars and people fall off the face
of the earth. Even pools can dive deep down.

I bought the house because of the pond behind
The backyard. I wanted something wild behind me.
Bigger than everything else out front.

The first year took a strange shape. Storms ran
me to neighbors' houses. I saw Black Racers stalk
dime sized turtles in the dying grass.

The Ibis out back were biding better. Going in groups
to not get lost. The curve in their beaks broke all the
hard things on top. The earth wasn't easy anymore.

Often its banks were blanketed with Softshell Turtle
trails. They went under every day to get away. But
they could not make a sound to save me.

After a while I wanted to leave Orlando but I was
lilyed like a stem sprung from the muck. The pond
was drying up. The Storks arrived to scavenge and
stay alive.

Then the news said a man in Tampa turned out
of his dream and into the earth. I went under water
once. Inside me something also must have shifted.

The hole in my ground made me happy. I can't go
that deep again. I need to stay shallow, sun-up and
ready to wrap shallow roots around my wrists.

This pond is still a place with its heart outside. Rain
pounding down on it for days now. I wonder when
we will fill back up again?

You Can't Scare Me

When I begged her she came to take care of me
And did a fine job just exactly what I thought I needed.

She sat in the kitchen and contained herself
When the wailing came. I shaped such sounds.

I warned her and apologized. She said *you can't scare me*
so I let go, sitting so sad on my blue bed while

the kids sang at school. In those hours I stopped believing
in god and started believing in my body. At 42 a woman

capable of a bone breaking call for holy help. My body
my body my sunbeat scarred skin and grey hair giving

away my grief. She confessed to a far off ear on a cellphone
how I might need more than a mother maybe

a pill a hospital a new husband or ticket home to Texas
but on that bed in that room I painted grey once and cried

about it I started to feel forgiven. *That's what is wrong*
with us! I said. *Women can't scream except in movies*

written by 24 year old men. Somebody forgot to put that book
in the Bible the book that would have told us how
the hollering
helps

I Hate I Love Orlando

I hate I love Orlando those weeks in winter
when the small house we can never leave

looks less lousy at five o'clock as the sun
is six inches from long leaf pine lines and

the kids appear as aching angels on Instagram.
I hate that stretch of Hwy 50 with its cinder block

pawn shops and coupé cars on their
weekend way to a rundown bus race in Bithlo.

I hate I give our guests directions to
skirt a city that shames me. How a registered

sex offender moves the neighbors into
knocking on doors and knowing each other.

At least the hard grey rain running all summer long
made lightening breaks for letting loose children

on red metal scooters. Find out how fast
they can fly back dodging love bugs and dogs.

I wish we could give the HOA's green space
back to god before we go because it saved me.

My blessed moments by the pond and yard otters.
Flocks of storks finishing the fish that driest winter.

And skink pileated woodpecker gopher tortoise
days for me redeemed my suburban sacrifice.

I hate I love this city made my heart as soft
as a plus Shamu souvenir asleep on the kids'

bottom bunk. It's amazing I did not become ashes
buried beneath tall purpled beauty berry some bird

gave me that year I wandered her woods after
work, marking minutes until the next Xanax would

settle the sinkhole I somehow found ribboned
around my ribcage. I had to hold an old dream

there until it died. Mom, I'm never coming home.
I hate it. I'm sunk in suburban quicksand and the kids

are coming in with me. Maybe you can pull
us out with a strong palmetto stem. We will shake

the sod off and head west back to our Texas before
the big box stores pave over the pecan shells and

all my memories. Oh well dinner's almost done and
I have a husband to take care of but no one to make

the big bed for me before I drag my old bones in
from late life grad school. It's getting so heavy to

hold on to everyone's hearts and not drop something.
Good night sleep tight and say goodbye to the sky

that sings Austin County to sleep. I know a coyote is
yodeling her yarn across the fall fields while the

windows grow dark. Over here I'm holding on to
a husband who runs away every day on a tired

treadmill. Look it's late and past time to place my
back to him in bed. I'm turning in. We'll both go

somewhere far away from all the old orange
groves. In our dreams we are waving good bye

to blue water and welcome centers. So happy
to head out together again in our heads, leaving

youth behind in Houston. Anxious about amusement
parks and proving something under summer storms

and sunshine. As bowed as two tall palms can bend.
I hate how much I love it.

Men Get Sick of Me

There's a mountain in Georgia where men carved themselves into a rock. Strange that this is called a relief. Who felt better when it was finished? My family once sent me a photo of them side-by-side in front of Mount Rushmore. Google an image of it before 1927. I'm not mad about Mount Rushmore I just don't want to stand in front of it and smile. The first time I visited the Grand Canyon was in fifth grade and my mother walked up to it and said: *they can fill the whole thing with cement as far as I am concerned*. Part of it was for comic effect. She is funny. A man next to her walked away in a huff. Mostly mom was afraid. Her daughters all the way up there and that fast, brown river churning far below. They saved the old buildings on the rim that have been there for years. You walk inside and wish it was 1935 and everyone would leave. It's odd how the buildings belong on the edge. It's also odd that someone named Mary Colter designed them. When Zaha Hadid died most of the architects at my office did not mention her. I felt heartsick at the loss. All the beautiful concert and corporate halls which would never exist. The way she threw curves, caution and cuss words to the sky. Every built thing I have ever seen would look different if women were always architects. At a staff meeting before I quit someone dropped a note in the anonymous questions box and our president read it out loud: *why are no female architects on our board of directors?* He said *we offered a woman a position on the board once but she didn't take it*. That was 20 years before the conference room question. Once I asked a man for permission to hold a fundraiser for breast cancer awareness at work. *I'm so sick of that month* he answered. What would happen if I carved myself into something soft? How long

would it last? The hardest woods to carve in Texas are water hickory,
pecan, black walnut, honey mesquite. My childhood home there

had seven tall pecan trees growing in rows. The neighborhood
used to be a large grove. Sixties suburbia arrived and people

placed pink brick ranch houses in between them. The trees
would shade every acre in the summer. Embrace across caliche

white streets to bend each other's branches. Their glossy green
leaves made large shadows in the Bermuda grass and I would lie

on it looking up at the blue sky, watching hawks fly from angry
blue jays. Wishing it was an Airshow at Ellington weekend or a boy

in 11th grade would look at me a little bit longer. If I carve my face
in a pecan tree, how long would it take for the bark to take it back?

I could try next trip to Texas. I could stay in my old yard for years
or at least until all the new houses and schools and hospitals

are made by little girls named Lorie Sue. I could wait for the pecans
to land thick enough to kick down rain slick ditches, dodging crawfish

holes and neighbor boys on fast banana seat bikes. I could raise my
roots out of the ground and burst into life like those bees my sisters

and I found, millions of them, from a hive hidden inside the oldest
tree that fell and logged the back field. All those years every lazy

bee we swatted off Coppertoned shoulders was living inside her.
Only coming out to kiss the coneflowers and pollinate mom's

pole beans. No one noticed where they disappeared to at night.
They always had a safe place to sleep. When I gave two weeks'

notice to my boss he said: *things would be different if a man worked
in your department.* The one time I visited Stone Mountain was July 4,

1997. Before the fireworks began, a spotlight lit up Stonewall, Robert
and Jefferson, 20 feet high and relieved up there in the rock. We sang

*land where my fathers died, crown thy good with brotherhood, God
shed His grace.* A man said: *stand for Dixie* and everybody did even me,

real slow, after I looked around to make sure it was happening. The song unfurled along with the stars and bars. I turned around and around

like I expected circles to save me. I felt dizzy and homesick for a place far away from monuments and memory. Men get sick of me because

I keep trying to forget what they want me to remember. This morning I turned off Twitter for good. Now Google what I looked like before

November 2016. That's when I learned I belonged on the edge. I feel better about it already.

My Daughter Forgets To Lock The Door

when she comes home from school because
she is not subscribed to the Orange County
Registered Sex Offenders By Zipcode email updates.
And she was still inside me the day the helicopters
hovered for hours until they found the graduate student's
body in the palmetto thicket beside the bike path.
She did not grow up on that stretch of Interstate 45
marked by billboards of girls gone missing
in Galveston County. And she never ate at the Bennigan's
by Baybrook Mall with me and all the other girls,
even the blonde who disappeared after dinner
but left her car unlocked on the feeder road, radio running,
a brown bomber jacket she paid off in installments
warming the passenger seat. I tell her again and again
lock the door when you get home but it was her little brother
who stood scared in the yard after we pulled up to our front
door wide open and inside askew so much was missing:
the wedding rings the Xanax the iPods and the camera with photos
of her in sheer pajamas. I tell her not to forget but I do not
tell her why. Not all at once. I have to spread it out slowly
like a controlled release drug. My daughter wears a seatbelt
when we drive across America to see her grandparents
and idle outside the house I grew up in and I tell her
here is where I hung soft sheets in the pecan branches
and ate spaghetti dinners inside a treehouse and I rode
a big bike with cats falling out of the basket when the street
was two-laned and tree lined. I don't tell her
here is where the white van pulled up and the man
tried to take Mary Beth off her bike and home with him.

I know what I have to tell her. I will. I know.
Here is how your grandmother drove all night
looking in ditches when I forgot the midnight curfew.
And later, here is where I had my first peach wine cooler
and I don't remember how I got home. I only remember
that I always locked the door behind me. How quiet I could be.
And the sound of my parents sleeping, in the same house, far away.

When Are the Astronauts Going to Mars?

I want to say soon. I want to say
how important this is to your mom now.
And not five months ago. I want to tell
him *hey* I know you are only nine but
I will let you get a social media account
if you promise to follow @Orion and @SpaceX
and @Astro_Reid and @AstroPeggy. I want
to take you outside tonight and tell you
about mom's very best summer. How I
looked just like you and wore a sky
blue bathing suit for six straight days.
The salt air smelled like sunscreen and my
steps barely held me to the sand. I want
to tell you how your aunts and I got to stay
up late and lower the backs of rusted yellow
loungers on the beach house deck. We
stretched out tan and tar-footed singing
Casey Kasem's Top 40 to the stars:
Pilot of the airwaves, here is my request.
You don't have to play it but I hope you'll
do your best. The same way you sing
your songs now. The same way you sing.
I want you to hear how your grandpa said
hush and we know he meant *look*. For
the light up there that's moving with us.
Maybe a satellite he sent last summer.
If you are willing to wait it will find you.
Follow it until it fades away. Son you are
moving, too. You are moving too fast.
I want to tell you to slow down. I want
to say you should think about studying
science in college and it is okay to stray
from the straight path I put you on. I want
to say *hey* I think we might be on Mars
right now. Do you know why we still
have not floated away? The heavy sky
is holding us down.

April 2017

Things Have Changed

Never forget that you are making the news now. With superb optimism

unfollow everyone on Facebook.
Only check Twitter twice a week.

Say you're sorry but not with sarcasm.
At first it will feel like your head

can't hold it all. There is no harm
in drawing inspiration from the fowl

that come in cold weather. They fall
from the sky and build nests in the

pond's muddy middle. Keep your head
underwater all hours. Inhale as many

insects and invertebrates as necessary.
This method is certainly one of the best

ways to broadcast your thoughts. Let
the longleaf pine send them to a satellite.

Maybe a Crane can pull the words from
her plumage. Enter all your anger on

your arms in blacks like Ravens' bills.
Which ink would look best on Instagram?

A great many books have been published
that will never see the light of day.

They are resting unread on silent shelves
in Archer City, Texas. No one needs a

narrator like you anymore.

Marriage is

nothing

more than making
too much
public.

Survival is

keeping
a
secret

Part III
Put Yourself Out There

Tankas for The Modern Working Gal

1.

The blonde boardroom bitch.
Just joking. Geez take a joke.
No one else takes notes.
Her power suit matches navy
numbers on his paycheck stub.

2.

*She loves it when I
butter her up. I'll have to
tickle her ass with
a feather. Only I know
how to make her laugh. Watch me.*

3.

So power hungry
she could eat an architect.
So dressed for success
she could sew the ceiling shut
with his black silk shoelaces.

4.

Lunch with her big boss
at a business club downtown
the waitress asked him
*Good to see you again, Sir.
Is this your beautiful wife?*

5.

Grow as a leader.
Avoid apologizing.
Dress for your next job.
You are overqualified.
You forgot to stay thirty.

6.

Can't you take a joke?

*Girl you need to lighten up,
it's happy hour*
Her boss is five years younger.
Four beers into his fun night.

7.

She can pump in here.
It's a small storage closet.
The cord snakes outside,
giving birth to her briefcase.

Thank You

To all the brave women
who kept asking
Human Resources
why
we had to wear
pantyhose
to work.

#MeToo. #MeToo.

Got a little too drunk to make the right decision.

Thought of all the good comebacks later.

Started wearing longer skirts.

Stopped getting highlights.

Answered the email from an ex.

Kept a secret dream journal .

Cleaned out the closet.

Opened a note from 1987.

Smelled it for a secret.

Sold old yearbooks on ebay.

Made some room mothers mad.

Yelled *shut up* in Sunday School.

Stood too close to a twentysomething.

Gained ten pounds from the antidepressant.

Started wearing sensible shoes.

Said the f-word out loud and with feeling.

The Gender Pay Gap Quilt

Is patterned after	the patriarchy.
Is inscribed to	our moms.
for putting up with	all that shit.
Is lofty in	its ideals.
Looks nice spread across	a single bed.
Better never be handed down to	an asshole.
Earns \$.80 each time a judge	makes a joke.
Is every inch	an enigma.
Takes up too much	public space.
Feels like something to settle around	your open legs
and sit with.	

Employee Manual

How to be quiet in a loud boardroom.
How to take up less space under the table.
How to crawl across the conference room floor placing pencils in dangerous places.
How to reduce your resume to a ruin.
How to make time off correlate to talent.
The quickest way to drive to the doctor on your lunch hour.
How to Skype into a meeting wearing last year's swimsuit.
How to (interrupt) in a feminine fashion.
How to stop shaking in a shareholders' meeting.
The smart way to stock up on Sertraline.
What not to tell Human Resources.
How to create an infographic about the emails they uncover.
Choose your benefits to better the chances of breasts remaining big.
Tell them you will only work late if they take you to lunch at The Citrus Club.
The correct way to clean

the coffeemaker
quit a committee
take notes that nobody
notices
whisper *I have* *a great idea*
wait for the out-of-office
reply.
How to blow
a bonus
on a beach vacation.
Which way to climb:
up the ladder or
down or
simply hang on
for life.
 dear

God That Was Fun

God that guarded her bed at night

God that graduated.

God that found a good job.

God that signed the bonus checks.

God of good premarital sex.

God that got her out of Texas.

God that kept the baby alive.

God of the last student loan payment

God that was great.

God that was a man

in a book.

Then a girl

In her head.

And then

gone.

God

I wish

you

were

here.

Put Yourself Out There!

Cram your lily-white ass
into a a bigger bathing suit.
Call it:
Living your best life.
Letting it all hang out.

Buy panties one size larger.
Throw all the Bibles out
in the recycling bin.
Follow it
with four heavy yearbooks.

Experience your period
like
never before.

Put an overnight pad in there.
All day.

Talk to your boss about breathing.
In through the nose.
out through the
mouth. Work on new
ways to say *I'm sorry*.

When the weight settles
around your waist
make low carb lemonade.
Memorize memes
about menopause.

Check the kids' college
savings for
a minor miracle. Really
go for broke.
Really.

The Natural Order of Things

It is in the nature of all women to be wooed and won.
It is in the nature of men to win. It is in the fabric folded

on mother's shelf to be moody and mean. It is in the cushioned
carpet of the hallway to prefer barefeet to 3 inch heels.

It is not natural to look at another girl that way.
It is not in the nature of man to act like a woman.

It is not in my nature to smile and say I'm sorry.
Always think thoughts that will not upset the natural order of
things.

That goes against my nature, which is currently floating
face up down the Little Econlockhatchee River, lounging

on broad alligator backs and screaming louder than a Limpkin.
Both nature and Woman are to be in subjection to Man.

Who am I? This feels unnatural. It is not your nature.
Act naturally. Be natural but control your nature.

The Creator should dominate over every aspect
of your moral and religious nature. It took Him six days

to create all of nature, including natural beauties, natural
goodness and, never forget, Mother Nature.

By the way, how is your walk with nature? Are you
keeping it natural?

Some men prefer the natural look. The most natural way
to write this poem is in cuttlefish ink with a Sandhill Crane

feather on long leaf pine pulped paper. It is not in my nature
to write natural poems. It was Mary Oliver's. What an unnatural

nature woman. While sitting in worship, it is in your best interest
to let the spirit naturally move you. By no means should you

ever shout "bullshit!" between the Bible readings. Know your nature.
Naturally, you will need guidance. A marriage of that nature

will flip the natural order of things. Do not be fooled.
Unnatural people want you to believe they are natural.

Know what is not real and what is natural. The happiness
of many homes is wrecked by nature. It pours down in torrents

all summer long, brings oceans into our ears and tears families
apart. This is the word of the Lord: Natural nature that is ordered

and uncomplicated. Thanks be to nature. In the end, God
will have his wrath upon us through nature. It is only fitting

that fire, a natural occurrence, will engulf the guilty. I hope
by then we are all living as nature intended.

The Lesson This Week

The lesson this week is about staying small.
Take everything you learned about lipstick.
Nobody needs that knowledge. Open your Bibles
and turn to the book of Lorie Sue
Chapter 47 Verses 1-10. Words she wrote in
the margins of a Texas History book. A long list
in chronological order of every boy who ever
closed his eyes and stuck his tongue in her mouth.
And Lee begat Brian begat Tim begat Steve begat
Doug begat Rick begat Michael begat. A good verse
to remember is this: it is muddy in the middle parts.
The beginning and the end, we all know that.
As you reflect on this week's lesson, think about
how to apply it to your own life. What does He want
from you? If you do not understand, ask an Elder.
Close the door to his office and make him real mad.
Beat him over the head with the NIV Bible.
An old book with a cow brown leather cover.
Will women be allowed to write words here one day?
Something about shopping in the boys section now.
Putting us all on a Keto diet. She will tell all
the little boys that colors belong to everyone. Cover
your children's ears. Wash their mouths out with
cold clean bathwater. And then God begat your
Highness begat his Holiness begat the Reverend
begat Pastor begat Brother begat Elder begat
Husband begat Brother begat Son. Let's begin again.

A Stop Sign A Place To Stop

A stop sign red metal pole
a place to look right then left
leaning someone stopped
too late a woman tried
to stop it did a man try
to stop look three ways
to stop a store that sells
ice outside beside the stop
sign beside the tree the beer
joint inside a red place to stop
to chat to shoot pool stop
and stay awhile the same worn
wood floors worn boots
stop remove your hat *hang your
hat here* a cold one a place
to rest a red place beside a large
oak tree in Colorado County hangs
a hat inside a store a country
store inside Texas inside a country
men and women inside sitting
stopping cars driving stop look
three ways hanging outside
the tree is outside on the highway
the place to stop and buy ice buy
cigarettes hang your hat beside
a map to the churches stop and
look inside the churches *past the
hanging tree she said that is the
hanging tree* hang your hat inside
or outside get a map go see the
famous Painted Churches *stop
at the red sign* someone saw the
tree stop sign did not see it leans
a little on the way to the famous
tree no famous Painted Churches
in Schulenburg just turn at that is
the hanging tree she said *stop*
here no don't stop the first church
hang a left it is famous we missed
it someone must know it is a man
and a woman resting not stopping
it by The Hanging Tree of Columbus

not The Hanging Tree of Clarksville
not The Hanging Tree of Coldspring
not the Hanging Tree of Goliad
not the Hanging Tree of Hallettsville
not The Hanging Tree of Kyle
not The Hanging Tree of Orange
not The Hanging Tree of Seguin
but a stop sign at the tree now hang
your hat inside the store with ice
and wood and rest *have a nice*
day nice drive nice day to stop safely
then look left do not look right *do not*
look do not look do not look do not
look then hang a left up ahead
the famous tree the famous stop
the famous Painted Churches of
Schulenburg just past the tree.

Response to *Blue Front* by Martha Collins

My Husband Says "Leonard Cohen Died"

Part of it was the way he said it.
And the time of day - sun only rising.
Dog just out the door. One child up
and shining so.

And I had just read the interview
where He compared giving Bob Dylan
the Nobel Prize to pinning a medal
on Mount Everest.

My mouth said What happened.
The body answered Everything.
And He came to carry me over the cliff.
Still holding

my cold coffee and the electoral
college. Released me like an angel
into angry air. On His way up He
gave me this:

Grieve, girl. Go where women wail.
Hold your hands in hot water. Send
a prayer there in steam. I have kids.
I had to be a rock

all week. Fucking metamorphic.
I moved the wet Ivory over a banded body.
Schist of breast. Mineraled mouth.
2016 is the year

I erupted. Every month I make a
new metal. Every week a fissure to fill.
Too much pressure can push a mother
into marble.

Make her stiff in soft places. I try so hard
to transform. Where does everybody good go?
I think deep inside the earth. Making
more magma.

Forming more light. I don't know
how the sculptor found David in the rock.

But I can fill a soapstone sink with water
that weighs

heavy as hope in my hands. There are
too many babies left to bathe. Children
to chisel free. A new day to shout
Hallelujah.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Makes The News Again

I go to Twitter after
Another
School shooting. Scrolling.
Retweeting.
Looking for my own words
But they are gone.

Instead: #this

And

This.

This.

My mouth might
crack open again
by Monday.
My children are all home.

Tomorrow morning my sister
Will unlock the door
To her gun shop
After she takes the kids
To school.
She will turn on the lights.
Turn off
the alarm.

We used to be so small
Dad could lift us UP
With his two hands
Place us airplane style
On the worn soles
of turned up tennis shoes
One girl on the left

Another on the right

And we both could be far above him.

Mom told us this story:
When your dad
Lost his job
He got offered another
With Lockheed
In Virginia
For a lot of money.
He turned it down

Because
He did not want
To make
Missiles.

Instead
He planned places for satellites
And science projects
Inside space shuttles
For twenty years.
At his retirement lunch
I watched
An old man cry
Talking about
How they did it.
What they did.

When my sister's store
Was broken into
She sat up all night
In her south Florida living room
With a good gun
In her lap.
She listened for
An outside sound
Softer than the frog calls
And *Chuck-Wills-Widow*
Chuck-Wills-Widow
Those were the years
We were up already
With babies.

I have never held a gun
But I think it feels like
Heavy words
Falling from my mouth.
Looks like a baby
spitting bullets #no
No.

NO.

I think a bullet sounds like
a stuck lock being turned.
A gasp that finally gets out.
A long range roar.

White Men and Guns.

White men and violence.
White men and bullets.
White men and domestic abuse.
White men and sexual abuse.
White men and rape.
White men and the boardroom.
White men and the Sheriff's badge.
White men and the White House.
White men and Hollywood.
White men and patriotism.
White men and museums.
White men and Call of Duty
White men and hunting.
White men and respect.
White men and superheroes.
White men and whiskey.
White men and beautiful women.
White men and Wall Street.
White men and buildings.
White men and the pulpit.
White men and football.
White men and the corner office.
White men and the penthouse.
White men and the flag
White men and White Jesus.
White men and the military.
White men and gated communities.
White men and private schools.
White men and war.
White men and monuments.
White men and the Pentagon.
White men and the Senate.
White men and the state capitol.
White men and history books.
White men and the courthouse.
White men and
White men and
White men and
White men and
guns

guns
guns
guns
guns

How To Answer The Atlantic Ocean

Ignore the question entirely. Ask the Gulf of Mexico instead. Take twenty years to think about things. Shout bad words into big sea shells. Lay your head against an elephant's ear in the backyard: *there's your answer*. Grab a ghost crab in a shallow hole. It is written in disappearing ink on his back. Run in bravely and plead with porpoises for a clue. Google it (Google has all the answers). Walk barefoot over sunburned seaweed. Lie down on brown sand; you will be less loud and blend in better. Eliminate all answers except the obvious. That won't be it. *There are no wrong answers!* Maybe don't answer? Inquire agreeably about another chance. Wait for the waves to stir up next summer and save you. Learn from the pregnant woman in Daytona with four kids in a minivan driving too fast through the dunes. She entered the ocean and answered - loud and clear. I think she was turning into a tide. Becoming a force more predictable. Consider that this ocean may have asked too much of you. Forgive her, she has already forgotten the question.

Is Someone Having Her Period?

Is someone feeling a little emotional today? Has someone been on a difficult news diet since November? Did someone delete the Facebook app from her phone again? Did someone get her panties in a wad over his promotion? Will someone ever get elected? Has someone's blood stained the sheets this week? Did someone die or did she just turn 46? Is someone a little upset about the meeting? Will someone cry in her car in the parking garage? Should someone get her girl parts pulled out so she can get a raise? Can someone stop saying *I'm sorry* in her emails? Will someone's prescription drug plan pay for the anxiety meds? Should someone look into a larger dose? Did someone forget it was her turn to pick up the kids? Will someone ever be satisfied? Should someone see a doctor about this? Could someone take notes during the board meeting? Is someone having her period? Does someone need some time alone?

I Have Questions

If a mom falls out of bed at 4 a.m.
who will hear it?
If she chokes
will her children turn away
from Youtubers for 2 seconds?

Will her husband help?

If she screams
there's an alligator in the house
will someone shake her
awake?
If she asks for a raise
and comes home angry who
will hush her howling? What
will happen if she stops
showing up to teach
Sunday School? Will the teen center survive
without her
tithe?

What if a man wants to walk around
our WalMart
wearing a little
black dress? What if she pays
for his pregnancy
test?

What if A mom wants to put out

the campfire
by pissing on it,
too?
Would her sons just stand by
and watch? What if
the missing nativity scene
from the Austin County Courthouse
appears
in her attic? Who cares
about Confederate Heroes
Day?

Does Beth Mooretm have a Bible
study on blasphemy? How
do you get rid
of a hundred-year-old
headache?
When He calls us

Home,
why can't our dogs come with us?
What happens to women
who only
embroider
bad
words?
Do sins ever show up
in your sewing basket? Would
Bitch
look better
in blue
satin stitch?

I Am Trying to Leave #America

I am flip flopping
the Florida Trail
baiting alligators with
absentee ballots.
#WhatsUp

I am riding bareback
on buffalos into bars
all over Texas but
I guess
folks are home
Watching the game.
How them Ags?
I am trying to leave
#America.

I am sitting smack
dab in the center
of Indianapolis
on a Civil War statue
with pigeons plaiting
my pretty grey hair
when a bride crosses
the street and asks
to borrow a braid
for the bouquet. I am
trying to leave
#America

I am hiding
in Hemingway's house
covered in catnip
herding the thumbbed cats
#Hard
hoping they will jump
off the big brown bed
and pour me
into an Arnold Palmer.
Almost out.
#SouthernmostPoint
#32Miles

I am knocking on Denver's
doors with a basket
of Bibles balanced
between my knees but
nobody
is answering.
#WhosWithMe
#ImWithHer

I am trying to leave
#America
by rowing
a boat to Boquillas
around a soft wall
of women, skirts
up and wading
the red Rio Grande.
#Resist

I am not selling anything.
I want to barter.
I will trade you this
#Hope
for that headache.
Here have a crack
at making me better.
Try to diagnose
what is dead already.

I am trying to leave
#America.
Why won't you
let me?
I am trying to find
an easy way
out.

And I Was All

He was all "The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun"
And I was all "Whaaaaaat?"

And she was all "The constitution laws amendments rights"
And I was all "I can't anymore. I can't."

And I was all "What does the constitution say about moms?"
And "Back then a bunch of young men in white wigs and Betsy in a cold room
with yards of bright fabric on the floor"

And she was all "My fundamental rights"

And I was all "Yeah I heard you the one millionth time you said that"

And I was all "Kids today are homeschooled with textbooks written by Bill
O'Reilly."
"oh really?"
"oh yes. oh yes."

And he was all, "when I was in school"
And I was all "a poster of the Presidents hung on the wall behind the teacher's
desk"
And then I continued "None of them looked like her."

And I was all "Kids today have to say the pledge of allegiance to Texas"
And he was all "and I'll gladly staaaaand up, next to youuuuuuu"
And I was all "I'd like to forget the Alamo"
And also "I'd like to remember Santa Anna sitting under that shade tree in the
painting instead"

And they were all "Bad Ag" and "Two-percenter"

And I was all "Hullabaloo Caneck Caneck*. Hullabaloo. Caneck."
And he was all "what's wrong with you?"

And she was all "this is a part of His plan"

And I was all "who told you that? who *told* you that?"

And then "the ex-Christian subReddit is my safe space"
And also "trigger warning is an ironic phrase, isn't it?"

**Hullabaloo Caneck Caneck is a phrase from Texas A&M University's Aggie War Hymn. Bad Ag and Two-percenters are Aggie lexicon for students who do choose not to participate in Aggie traditions.*

Texas Hates Hillaries

The way she smiles. Her eyes, always open. Standing by her man. Not baking cookies. Going to work going to work going to work. A lady lawyer. A lady looking at laws. Reading about them. Standing up in court. Not sitting down. Laughing. Laughing. Laughing. One daughter and done. One word: Nannies. All that money. Money in the bank. Pant suits. Going to work. Working. Coming home late. Going back to Work. Telling us what to do. Telling us how to do it. Bringing home the bacon. Disrespecting our country. Sending emails. Planning baby showers. Planning to run for President. Real proud of herself. Real proud.

Hillaries Hate Texas

And they know better than to tell anyone about it. Except husbands in the evenings when they're in bed. Reading books. His biographies. Their bible studies. *At least I don't have to go back to Texas*, they sigh. And turn the page. *You and me, both*, he replies. And they reach over and pats his bony hands.

Daughters of the Confederacy Decide To Put Up A Monument

To honor distinguished service. To further a cause. To be elected Historian next year. To provide a perch for pigeons. To support local business. To buy a new dress, hat and gloves. To give us something to do for the next 365 days. To spark polite conversation. To make mother and daddy proud. To host the next Sunday School picnic. To create a place for politicians to pontificate. To make a Yankee man mad. For civic beautification. To prove we are more than our place settings. To the memory of Robert Lee Ross Benjamin Elijah Abner Silas John Amos Willie Henry Samuel James Augustus Edward Buckner. For the good of the community. For Our Savior. For our safety. For our survival. To see a man not moving. To see a man with his mouth silvered shut. To put him where we want him. To know he will never leave.

Daughters of the Confederacy Are Told To Take It Down

To keep the peace. To avoid a scene. For national security. For political correctness. For the common good. To set an example. To save our South. To soak it in bourbon and blood oranges. To walk away with something. To placate a snowflake. To prevent a riot. Because things have changed. Because it's prettier under the oaks anyway. Because what choice do we have? Because you've got it easy now. Because we come from strong stock. To get it off the news. To stuff our mouths with Spanish moss. To accommodate our ancestors. Because a lady never shows her anger. Because chivalry is in short supply. To remember what all y'all want to forget. To settle rusted boots in sandy soil. To make a man move. To follow him to the far corners of the graveyard. Because our ears are covered with cotton bolls. Because new members want to wear white all winter. Because we know the Bible better than any man. To remember what all y'all want us to forget.

The Confederate Corners Me

in the coffeeshop (looking tired). The Confederate can't stand the fucking playlist here. It's too Yankee Doodle dandy. The Confederate shakes his head and Spanish moss carpets the polished concrete floors. He sneezes sand and junebugs. *Things have changed*, he musters. I disagree. Same. Same. Your marbled boots got you out of the grave. Oh Confederate, My Confederate. Our grandmothers carved crosses for you in flannel grey soapstone. Now we delicately press decals on polished bumpers. Flags with your face flex next to me at 24 Hour Fitness. *Fuck that*, shouts the Confederate! *Charge!* My Confederate, I challenge you to hate that flourless blondie. He buries his face in blue wool, pulls an iPod out of a carpet bagged over bumpy roads. *Nirvana! That's more like it, gal.* I'm on his good side. Smells like Appomattox. The Confederate shall rise again. Or back to a museum basement. I don't know. Ask your congresswoman where he belongs. I'm out of the corner now, moving fast to fool the ancestry.com crowd. Outrunning all the aunts and uncles I've erased.

You

Are

Not

A

Feminist

Until

You

Are

Forty.

What I Am Not Seeing

The gas gauge on empty.
The way my son fell
from the climbing tree -
how he landed and
how long it took until -
astonished, he stood up.
The next sinkhole
spot. Who watches her
when she walks
home from the bus stop
with headphones on.
Where he goes
on his lunch break.
The faces she makes
in the full-length mirror
behind the door.
What the dog is dreaming.
The best lockdown
drill location
in Ms. DeVaca's room.
How far the cat traveled
before she died. What the Barred
Owl is watching. When
The Scrub Jays will all go away.
Who wrote these headlines.
In which part of the locker room
the talk takes place.
The shape of my old ovaries.
The color of the lining before
it is shed. The amount of the check
he sent to hush. How dark
my lungs are from
the smoking days. Where
Bible verses are stored in the brain.
What's going to happen tomorrow,
tonight, in two seconds. Who
stopped counting. What else.

Saint Suburbia

The only born again you will ever be
is standing at the southernmost tip

of the United States of America sweating
out rivers of regret between your mom's

boobs which kept three pinked beings alive
for three years of our lives looking

like a hot mess of holy shit. She does not
go to church anymore. Do angels drag dresses

to be shook out in the saltwater? You think
a saint would be covered in seaweed

and shine like the inside of a mollusked
mouth. Instead you are weeks late letting

roots go gray. Rolling your eyes back at
young men who yell about marketing in

meetings. You should learn how to juggle
a dozen key limes standing naked in a sunset

drum circle with nothing but scallop shells
eyed around your waist. All you need to reach

Nirvana is a blue canoe and a map that follows
the Little Econlockhatchee to its mother

near a gated Everglades. You should float
beside it on your back blowing bubbles at long

beaked birds making arrow shapes with their
ankles. Pointing the south route to sanity.

I'm Out Here

Scaring the Soft Shell turtles. Coughing up pine cones that catch in my throat. I'm out here thrusting arms through Gopher Tortoise holes. Grabbing any water fowl that greet me. I'm climbing all the cell towers and replacing flags with quilts. Taking all the granite they barged to Stewart Beach and making a jetty that is just for little girls named Jennifer, Kelly and Pam. I'm out here putting them in terry cloth shorts and tank tops with big white beads holding their hair horse-styled on fragile heads. Showing how to swallow air from distant oil derricks. Letting it sieve out my middle - the part that's growing large again. I'm out here making a mental list: almond milk, Xrays, IRAs, college essays, Blue Crab, Coquina. I'm out here listening to a man shout muffled Bible verses from inside a big building. I'm out here with all the new information. What I find might still save me.

I've Changed My Mind MadLibs

I want you to roll your eyes at me. It's okay to tell a person to fuck off. You can quit your job before you have another one. Who cares if it's not done right the first time. Do not respect your elders. You can come home again. Perfection is for other people. Question everything. Especially men standing on stages telling stories. It is a good idea to sleep with a few people before you get married. Maybe do not get married. Bibles make good bedpans. Things are not all better in the country. Never buy a house. Mess with Texas. Really do a number on it. Be rude. College is not for everyone. Anger can be an answer. The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is to birth a good guy.

32 Things People Say About Me Going Back To College at 46 To Write Poetry

1. What kind of poems do you write?
2. What are you going to do with that degree when you graduate?
3. You're not going to write poems about me, are you?
4. Just kidding.
5. I don't understand them.
6. So how's work?
7. How are the kids?
8. I showed your poems to a friend who's a writer.
9. Have you written any poems lately?
10. Are you going to teach?
11. Send me what you've written.
12. It's not my thing.
13. What are you writing about?
14. Oh.
15. When will you graduate?
16. Your great grandfather was a poet.
17. I'm a poet, too.
18. I could never write poetry.
19. I could never do this.
20. She says they're good.
21. What does one do with a poetry degree?
22. That was interesting.
23. I'm not used to this type of poetry.
24. I don't know how you do it.
25. Hmmmmm.
26. Who are you?
27. I wish you would share your writing more often.
28. Write a poem about _____.
29. Will you get a raise at work when you're finished?
30. You never send me your poems.
31. We've always known you were talented
32. Girl, that was amazing.

It Was All Suddenly So Clear.

Nobody could tell me otherwise.
How could they? I was all by myself again.
So I sat still and sorted seashells:
Pear Whelks, Pointed Venus,
Zunonia, Ponderous Ark.
Piles of wet pinked houses falling
through my fingers. It felt great.
I amounted to small things
again. So did my big words.
Pages and pages of perjury.
I swelled us up on a tarred shore -
the place between eleven and early retirement planning.
A woman listening to the Lightning Whelks.
Sunshine burning my back.

Middle Age Blessing

May your next 47 years be bereft of Bible study.
May you dig 1000 days in wormed, black earth.
Sit with old children and cuss the same candidates.
May you map the Florida Trail via panther scat.
Blaze corridors for Black Bears.
Scatter fast as Ghost Crabs in flashlight beams.
Forget about Facebook.
May you always smell like bonfires
and empty beaches

APPENDIX READING LIST

1. Kim Addinizio, *Ordinary Genius*
2. Kaveh Akbar, *Calling A Wolf A Wolf*
3. Kelli Russell Agodon, *Hourglass Museum*
4. Ellen Bass, *Like A Beggar*
5. Gwendolyn Brooks, *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks*
6. Nickole Brown, *Fanny Says*
7. Victoria Chang, *Barbie Chang*
8. Lucille Clifton, *Voices*
9. Martha Collins, *Blue Front*
10. Natalie Diaz, *When My Brother Was An Aztec*
11. Carol Ann Duffy, *The World's Wife*
12. Stuart Dybek, *Streets In Their Own Ink*
13. Nancy Eimers, *No Moon*
14. Nick Flynn, *My Feelings*
15. Ross Gay, *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*
16. Alan Ginsburg, *Howl & Other Poems*
17. Rigoberto Gonzalez, *Autobiography of My Hungers*
18. Kelle Groom, *Spill*
19. Yona Harvey, *Hemming The Water*
20. Terrance Hayes, *How To Be Drawn*
21. Edward Hirsch, *Gabriel*
22. Marie Howe, *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*
23. Jessica Jacobs, *Pelvis With Distance*
24. Stephen Graham Jones, *Growing Up Dead In Texas*
25. Dana Levin, *Banana Palace*
26. Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir*
27. Laura Kasischke, *Housekeeping and A Dream*
28. Robin Coste Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*
29. Adrien Majewska, *The Big Smoke*
30. Lynn Melnick, *Landscape With Sex And Violence*
31. Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice*
32. Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*
33. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*
34. Naomi Shihab Nye, *19 Varieties of Gazelle*
35. Sharon Olds, *Stags Leap*
36. Sasha Pimental, *For Want of Water*
37. Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath*
38. Adrienne Rich, *Diving Into The Wreck*
39. Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems*
40. Tara Skurtu, *The Amoeba Game*
41. Maggie Smith, *Good Bones*
42. Patti Smith, *Early Work 1970-1979*
43. Tracy K. Smith, *Life On Mars*
44. Terry Thaxton, *Mud Song*

45. Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard*
46. Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*
47. Alice Walker, *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*
48. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*
49. Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*
50. C.D. Wright, *Rising Falling Hovering*