

Common Wages



Poems by Don Winter & Rebecca Schumejda

Common Wages

Don Winter

Rebecca Schumejda

Common Wages

Copyright © 2017 by Working Stiff Press

Contact Dan Sheridan at dansheridanwsp@yahoo.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the authors.

Printed in U.S.A. by Working Stiff Press.

Acknowledgements (Don Winter)

Tears in the Fence (U.K.), *5 AM*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Pearl*, *Plainsongs*, *Chiron Review*, *Lilliput*. Some of these poems also appeared in three chapbooks, *Even the Dead are Growing Old*, *Don't Kid Yourself*, and *Hard Labor*, Working Stiff Press. *Hard Labor* included poems by Fred Voss.

Acknowledgements (Rebecca Schumejda)

Hobo Camp Review, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*. Some of these poems also appeared in two full-length collections, *Waiting at the Dead End Diner*, Bottom Dog Press, and *Cadillac Men*, New York Quarterly Books. "How to Paint in the Dark" is forthcoming in *Our One-Way Street*, New York Quarterly Books.

Cover photo by David J. Thompson previously appeared in *Midwestern Gothic*.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Don Winter's Poems--The Deaths at Hamtramck	6
My Uncle had Two Sayings.....	7
Dad's Silence	8
One Life to Another	9
Great Grandpa was a Matewan Miner	10
Thins About to Disappear.....	11
Cold Fact.....	12
A Toast	14
Grandpa's Liver.....	15
Pest Control.....	16
Garbage Man	17
Even the Dead are Growing Old	18
Breaking Down	19
The One Out by the Truckstop	20
No Visitation.....	21
Trucking.....	22
Unions.....	23
past time	24
Grandpa's Field in November	25
Rebecca Schumejda's Poems--Union Dues.....	26
Dead Ends.....	27
Plane Parts.....	28
On Unions	29
Steel Toe Boots.....	30
Sling Back Heels	31
Bare Feet	32

Wings33
And Somehow.....34
Where We're From35
Rolling Silverware36
Parting Words37
The Witness38
Sober on a Snowy Day.....39
On Meditation41
No Matter How Hard You Work42
How to Paint in the Dark.....43
When You Can't Catch All of the Rain.....44
Luck and Lightning45
On with This Sad Day46
Don't Spill That!.....48

Introduction

Roofing

**for Rebecca Schumejda, a great writer of
working-class poetry**

Mornings we ripped
shingles. When air temp topped
body temp we got buzzed.
We sat and smoked.

“I’d get monkeys
to do your jobs
if I could teach them not to shit
on the roof,” boss yelled.

We laughed like struck
match sticks. Down in the street
sheets just hung there on the line
like movie screens.

Don Winter

“And still the impulse is to create an art that denies the existence not only of an underclass, but the human experience of living a life entrapped in it.”

—Linda McCarriston

“The theme of work has been indispensable to the nation’s sense of self, but in our poetry, it has seldom appeared.” —Terrence Des Pres

I
The Deaths at Hamtramck

My Uncle Had Two Sayings

“When I stop bird eyeing chicks
kick the dirt on me,” &
“If it can’t be fixed with duct tape
it can’t be fixed.”

When he died
they said the usual bullshit:
he was old,
had lived a long & useful life, &
wasn’t it wonderful
he didn’t have to suffer, &
we all want to go like that, &
it was commendable of him
to be so little bother.

& uncle was dead, all right,
because that was the only way
he could have stayed still through their crap,
& because when his big-titted
nieces paraded past the coffin
his eyes didn’t move,
a sure sign he’d passed
the duct tape stage

Dad's Silence

When dad died he'd hardly spoken
to mom for weeks. I heard
the muffled spatters of his need.
He'd start to touch her arm, grunt,
move off to arrange whatnots
on the metal shelf, like jigsaw pieces
of a life he could no longer fit together.
It had been his silence that had hooked her,
so like her father's, though some mornings
she had trouble reading in this new version,
laid down her book & went to check
the macaroni, or stir the sauce.
Those final weeks she served him
dinner religiously at noon, ironed
even his underwear,
& when he tilted through the night,
her voice steadied him like a cane. Since he died
the bird feeder has sat empty.
She can't bring herself to fill it
like he used to,
to let the birdsong he created back in.

One Life to Another

“Stick the hook there,”
dad says, rolling
the worm like a booger
in his gun-shell
fingers. I stab it
in the wrong places.
I catch one

fish all day, a bass too
stupid to fight.
Dad drives it home,
a wet sock
in a basket.
It puckers & spits

in the frying pan.
Snagged on rusted
nails, bass heads
yawn, mouths big enough
to swallow a thermos
of whiskey
in one gulp.

Great Grandpa was a Matewan Miner

They sit stiff, try to hold
their breath for the shutter. Shadows blend
into their clothes
where hardly a button shows, they are so black.
Coal's turned their faces
into dim candles. Their teeth gone at 30.
With each cough, they still mine
the coal in the dark
of their lungs.
They stare down the future.
Dust will frame their dreams.

Things About to Disappear

For years the land worked us, planned
our cities like shotgun blasts.
Now it gives up, sinks
between hills. Boarded up factories
litter our rivers. It will do no good
to knit your brow. There's not enough left
in those hills to buy a meal.
What's left are wallets
of lost years, lapels tugged wide
by advice. We're old enough to be
our own fathers. We need a place
to be what we have become.

Cold Fact

When owners chain the factories for good
& leave for China with a shrug,
towns fall like dominoes, one by one.
Alleys turn to drugstores, churches to missions.
Houses go to various degrees of disrepair. Those who can

work sixteen hours a day,
seven days a week,
fifty-two weeks a year
for Wal Marts, Burger Chefs, open shops, temps.
What workers bargained, often died, for lost. Lao-tzu said

you can find in evil good
if you are good enough.
But where's the good in
"Ideally you'd have every factory
you own on a barge, tow it to where

labor costs were lowest"? Still,
small towns withhold
their terminal truth, too afraid
or indolent or drugged to ask
who is fucking them,

I mean really. To go beyond
the bosses and politicians
who rule the world with a billion karats,
a billion sticks, to question
the capitalist political economy itself.

5 a.m., in Hamtramck, the Pit Stop
is open, where workers will soon
have their breakfast. The flag hangs
out front like a wrinkled tie. Conversations rattle
like so much loose change:

how Peterson split open his wife's head
like a junked window,
how Earl stole Itaana's six month late
welfare check, how Eugene splashed gasoline
on the boss's Cadillac. How it's no long a factory:

weather decides what to keep,
what to throw out.

A Toast

After they chained the factory gates,
dad drove truck for non-union
restaurants, 6:30 to 6:30,
no overtime pay, no pension.
Days off he watched my sister & me
while mom cleaned up
at sleep cheap. Mortgage kicking their asses.
Car held together

with duct tape & mirrors.
He busted two ribs
getting out of the rig.
A week on the couch
feeling like a truck backed
onto his chest.
One night, having sent us
to Grandma's, they beat down

the Xeroxed days
with wine & a motel bed.
Watched late, late shows. Drank.
Puked in the toilet.
Before they checked out
they toasted each other
& touched
empty glasses to their lips.

Grandpa's Liver

outlived doctor's expectations
by fifteen years. Dying in the hospital,
he had me smuggle in
some beer & pour it
into a beaker
left for a urine sample.
Then he waited
for the nurse to walk in
before he drank it.

Pest Control

It's cousin Jimmy's fault.
He left the grease pit
open. Back line crawls

with them. Hit with raid, they back-
flip, scratch the air,
or try to burrow

under bun racks, hide in mops.
"Son of a bitch," Jimmy spits,
bugged out on spray. Jimmy makes

a buck sixty an hour, & shuffled
in line with the rest
for months at the unemployment office

before he landed here.
Months of being angry
at fuck knows who or what. He sweeps

many as he can,
living & dead, out the back
door & lets it

slam. More crawl out.
Later, drunk at the creek,
Jimmy catches catfish

& leaves them
in the rowboat
to swim in the rain.

Garbage Man

Well, that's what I'd call it,
but I heard him telling this blonde
he was a sanitation engineer.
He wore this shitty 7-Eleven cologne
& swirled his hair around his bald patch.
His mother had been
a barmaid at the VFW by our house.
I remember we'd see her
half-crocked, waiting at the bus stop
after her shift.
She'd doze off with a cigarette dangling,
clutching a big beige purse.
I didn't tell him that I remembered his mom.
I just listened to him carp on about
some baseball card collection that was
going to make him a lot of money.
He just had to get back out to St. Louis
before the pawn ticket expired.

Even the Dead are Growing Old

She's batfuck for him. The Chevy
crushed him against its forehead
like a can. I know because
she's explaining it to me: how he got a job
shoveling eight hours a day worth of mud,
came home head to toe dirt. How at the Empty Bottle
he promised things would be better this time.
No more pulling his fist out of walls.
How they went for a screw

in his El Camino. I can see
by her eyes she won't let him go.
I don't tell her I knew the guy.
I worked misery whips in Washington
with him on the other end.
Woman he was screwing then
used Maybelline greens, foundation, grape lipstick—
nothing hid the welts, things he'd done to her.
Once she wrote FUCK YOU in empty beer cans

across his lawn. Then he flicked his knife
like a match before her eyes.
I'd ask, but I might as well be asking
where the ducks in the park
go in winter. She's one stiff drink.
No time for a mad
backward two-step
into a new game of feisty.

Breaking Down

I bought that car for \$50.

To open the door
you had to pound
just below the handle.

When you turned a corner
the dash lights flickered
like a busted marquee.

The rolling noise
that charmed Vera
was a can of Budweiser
under her seat.

Night we split up,
she held my erection
& looked out the window
like someone
with a hand on a doorknob
stopping to say one last thing
before goodbye.

The One Out by the Truck Stop

The goddamn of music
was going on.
The dancer came out
dangling money carelessly.
She looked at our faces
as if they were small tips.
God, she was good
when she danced out of her clothes.
Sweetheart, the others called her.
Shorty. Baby. For each of them
she smiled. I envied how
she let the backs of their hands linger
at the very top of her thigh.
When she finally got to me
I stuck a dollar bill
where my eyes had been.
Her face had the alert sleepiness
of a cat's. She smiled
vacantly, moved on to the next dollar.
I drifted into the night air.
The lights on my rig pushed
the dark aside, moved me
towards no house, towards no one waiting.

No Visitation

The train twists through Michigan:
the yellow blur of farmhouses,
ribbon glimpse of rivers.
All night I keep arriving
in someone else's childhood.
And once a year you send
a postcard of his happiness.

Trucking

Big-assed, barrel-chested sons-of-bitches
carry out burger bags to their trucks,
eat double-fisted, steer with their knees.
Are happy when they shit

& aren't afraid to let you know,
sighing & singing in the stalls.
Southbound, escaping the law, wives & the boss,
past construction that never ends,

accidents that took men.

Interstates memorized, every truck stop, rest area
& factory from Detroit to San Antonio. Seeing so much
of so little of life through a windshield.

Unions

2 a.m. The moon rises
above Birmingham Steel.
At 20th & Tuscaloosa
men keep warm by a fire
made from fence posts
& garage doors, toss
their empties into the street
where they shatter
like hunks of ice. The men's
faces rearrange themselves
with each look, each thought.
At the plant,
men finish the night's work
schedule before last break,
go downstairs to the storage room
where they can sit in the cool
darkness & wonder how they
managed to screw up their lives
this bad, sip a cold beer
from the cooler Mark slips in
after lunch, hold the bottle
long after it's empty, peeling
the label where it says
GENUINE UNION MADE IN THE USA.

past time

in the last pocket
of a sunday afternoon
we found a park
some boys five on one side
seven on the other
were playing baseball
home plate a damp pile
of maple leaves
first base an imaginary place
everyone knew where
& out beyond
a real pond ducks sailed on

the sides called
come on & play ump
& catcher for both sides
so we came on & played
until nobody remembered the score
until we were three against two
five shadows tilting under one evening star

Grandpa's Field in November

Needles drift in
a clatter & dry hiss.
Crows fly

among the shrunken
cones. The onion skin
wings of cicadas

razor the air.
A blizzard,
two states away, snowdrifts

in grandpa's voice.
The horizon shrivels
to a thin stick, breaks.

II
UNION DUES

DEAD ENDS

The sign outside offers \$10 unisex haircuts on Wednesdays. Vanessa sits in the chair she rents at a strip mall salon, watching rain fall like split ends from the dismal sky. She's had two customers in six hours, four children in three years. She wants to divide what is from what isn't, but can't even give change without the register's help. The first customer, who came in, said she thought it was Wednesday, not Thursday, so she didn't tip even though she stayed for a half hour after to tell Vanessa about all the ways the world has wronged her. Vanessa's boyfriend, Jason, is watching the kids because his Union's locked out by a company that makes braking systems and wheels for commercial and military planes. *It's a good thing, we don't have money to fly anywhere for vacation, he told her, the greedy bastards are using unskilled scabs to do our jobs.* The second customer, an old man, kept telling Vanessa to *Take a little more off the top, Gloria.* She listened to his stories about a war that took place before she was born and did what he asked, her scissors circling above his head like a plane waiting to land.

PLANE PARTS

Since it's getting too long, Vanessa cuts Jason's hair while he bounces their daughter on his knee.

What were we thinking, she asks, *four kids in three years and now you can't even work? I don't understand how they can lock you out if you're Union.*

He stopped reassuring her that everything would be alright months ago.

He has been bar backing at a dive called Hurricanes off the books and he's late. She wants to know when he'll be home, but he isn't listening;

he is thinking about the beautiful blonde who comes in and stays until close, she knows he's taken, but doesn't care. Last night, she told him she likes men who know how to land big machines,

and he said, *I don't fly planes, I work on their parts.* Then without hesitation, she asked, *Why don't you come over here and work on my private parts?*

His girlfriend has the scissors in her hand; he's got the baby on his knee; she wants to know where the hell all his Union dues went to anyhow.

ON UNIONS

I rattle on about how right to work will
undermine years of progress as you heat
the joint of a pipe under the sink,
so the solder will flow into it.

Our youngest daughter takes
the wrenches from your toolbox,
lines them up on the kitchen table
and tucks them in with dishcloths
and oven mitts. You don't appreciate
the value of organized labor, collective
bargaining, the grievance process. You grunt:
Can you get out of my way, so I can get this done?
I think about how fourteen-year-old girls
died in Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire
as our daughter cradles your vise grip,
rocking its locking jaw, its sharp teeth.

*Published online at Hobo Camp Review

STEEL TOE BOOTS

The blonde girl who ogles Jason
owns 121 pairs of shoes and none
are functional in the real world.
Her father owns a company
that's being sued for
dumping waste into the river,
but she doesn't understand
what the big deal is.
She has a swimming
pool, drinks bottled water and
doesn't understand that rivers
flow into larger bodies of water.
When he asks why she is
studying astronomy,
she says she likes bling and
staying up all night.
When he comes around the bar
to check the bathrooms,
she looks down at his feet and asks,
Aren't those boots hard to walk in?

SLING BACK HEELS

Jason's got two pair of shoes,
his steel toe work boots
and his good shoes,
which he calls his funeral shoes.
He works for a company
that wants to cut his benefits
and salary after seven years of service.
He was his high school's
varsity track star, but
he went swimming in the river
in his last pair of running sneakers,
the night his oldest child
was conceived and he could never
wash the stink out, so he tossed them.
When the blonde asks
why he doesn't wear sneakers,
he looks down
at her bright red heels and asks,
How the hell do you walk in those?

BARE FEET

Vanessa owns eleven pairs of shoes,
all bought from thrift shops,
the total cost under fifty dollars.
Vanessa met her father once at a roadside diner,
he ordered a hamburger
from an upside-down menu and told her
he was sorry he was never around.
He was never good at staying for long.
She was already pregnant with her oldest
and looking for someone to tell her
everything would be alright.
When she went to the bathroom,
he snuck out without paying the check.
The shoes she likes most are leopard skin print,
but she has to wear band aids, so they don't
rub raw her heels. Sometimes at work,
she slips out of them while she's cutting
a client's hair. She spent her youth barefoot
on the riverbed fishing for striped bass
that her mom would cook despite warnings.
Now her boyfriend gets mad at her when she
comes home with more shoes, he says,
If you can't feed them to the kids, don't buy them!

WINGS

When my oldest daughter climbs into Vanessa's chair, she asks,

What do you do with all the hair you cut?

Vanessa places the drape over her shoulders, runs her fingers through my daughter's fine, tawny hair and responds,

*After we close, fairies come and take the hair
to make nests for broken winged birds.*

AND SOMEHOW

While Vanessa cuts my daughter's hair,
we get on the subject of cats and Vanessa
scowls. *Cats are dirty little beasts*, she says,
my mom took in every stray she came across,
had hundreds of them. She cups my daughter's
chin in her hands and examines her work.
She was so obsessed she got the nickname Kitty,
she says as she trims. I make the connection,
how her mother used to be a regular at the
dead end diner where I waited tables.
Vanessa is the daughter who left and never
came back, the one who was pushed out by
Kitty's mewling grief. *I know her*, I say,
then change directions, *hair needs a good*
conditioner, can you recommend one

WHERE WE'RE FROM

Kitty comes in Monday through Friday,
three times a day for breakfast, lunch
and dinner. She sits at table five
and reads a newspaper she never buys.
Since she always eats the same meals,
Maggie just puts up a slip that says
Kitty breakfast, lunch or dinner.

If Maggie or Edna aren't working,
Jolene waits on her. If Jolene's out,
I wait on her. If none of us are working,
Kitty walks into the kitchen
to place her own order. Then whoever
is cooking brings it out to her.
It took a year before she said hi to me;
since then she has added a few words.
She always wears shirts adorned with cats
and white laceless tennis shoes with
handmade Puff Paint kittens on the front.

Rumor is she lives up the mountain
in a dilapidated house with hundreds of
strays. One of the townies, who lasted
as a busboy for about a month, told me
she has a daughter who left when she
turned eighteen and never comes back.
Today, as I place down her tomato soup,
she asks where I'm from. When I shrug
and reply *Far, far away*, she smiles
lifts her spoon to her lips and
whispers, *Me too, me too*.

From: *Waiting at the Dead End Diner*, Bottom Dog Press, 2014

ROLLING SLIVERWARE

While rolling silverware,
I ask Maggie which came first
Kitty's name or her obsession with cats.
Without looking up, Maggie tells me
how Kitty's father, a farmer,
forced Kitty and her little sister
to watch him kill barn kittens.
Sometimes he'd drown them in buckets.
Other times he used them as target practice
or ran them over with a tractor.
Once he tried to make Kitty smash
their tiny skulls with a shovel
by holding his big hands
tight over her hands and the shovel,
then striking down at them as they mewed
blindly in search of their mother.
Figuring the anecdote is my answer,
I place a spoon over a fork over a knife over
the center of a napkin— positioned like a diamond—
fold the bottom flap up, the left flap inward,
then roll, over and over again until
we run out of knives.

From: *Waiting at the Dead End Diner*, Bottom Dog Press, 2014

PARTING WORDS

After Vanessa finishes cutting my daughter's hair, she opens a drawer filled with lollipops and tells her to pick one. My daughter asks her to tell the hair fairies that she says hello and Vanessa says *of course* and tells us to enjoy the day. The last time I saw her mother, I had just found out I was pregnant with my oldest. When I told her, she looked away and said, *You know it's a pity babies can't be trained to use a litterbox.*

THE WITNESS

There ain't no pussy worth losing your family over, Saul, the bartender, says to Jason when he catches him looking at her again, *it doesn't matter how much money she has, it's not worth it.* Saul walks around the bar to take a shot on the table. *I'm banking the six, right back here,* he says slapping the butt of his stick near the pocket. He's been playing straight pool against Aristotle, one of the regulars, for hours. *What I wouldn't do for a real table,* Saul says and Aristotle nods and slinks into the bathroom. *Hey Jason, watch this,* Saul says, so he has a witness. When the bar gets busy, he stops and places the stick on the table. Jason gets beer for a few of the regulars and watches the blonde watching him through the bar mirror behind the register. She has been begging him to go home with her all week and he can't stop thinking about the possibilities. *Hey Romeo, go check on Aristotle, I don't want him ODing in there again,* Saul says and after Jason is halfway across the bar, he yells, *your son's getting tall just like his beautiful mother,* then shoots a glance at the blonde to see if she heard him.

SOBER ON A SNOWY DAY

Outside, cars tiptoe
through snow.
Aristotle's on table four
and his soapbox again,
talking about how he
see things, you know.
He says that prison
goes that to a person,
makes them sober
on a snowy day.

He stirs air,
thick like old coffee,
with the tip of his cue
and launches off
into a dramatic monologue
about social injustices.

The men playing
on the next table
listen with their eyes.
Outside a truck
throws salt onto icy streets
and men wrapped up
in financial depression
walk past on their way
to the closest bar.

On the radio, Thelonious Monk
attacks piano keys, backs off,
then returns; his silences
are silly little tricks
that make Aristotle nervous.

Even though he's on step four,
Aristotle sneaks out to his car

to shotgun a beer
and smoke a cigarette.
Back inside,
he uses the shadow
of his stick to line up shots.
When he misses,
he leans into the table
and whispers inaudibly
to his ghost opponent.

Once he likened his life
to a snow globe that
some stupid motherfucker
keeps picking up and shaking.
I like that metaphor, I really do
like that metaphor.

From *Cadillac Men*, New York Quarterly Books, 2012

ON MEDITATION

And if you thought you had it hard,
is how Saul starts most stories.
He's been bartending at this dive
for over twenty-five years,
sinking his balls into bottomless holes,
trying to perfect loss. He had
three wives, and seven children,
and doesn't have a relationship with
any of them. He just started studying
meditation with a Buddhist monk.
He tells all of his regulars that he is
going to find the fucking happiness
within and then after that he will look
for that fucking happiness on the outside.

NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU WORK

Growling stomachs grow impatient
for dinner warming on the stove top.
My husband spent eight hours
tinkering with machines
and five hanging sheetrock.
Now he holds our baby,
smiles when she pats dust from his hair,
pacifies her with blood blistered fingertip,
soothes teething woes as I set the table.
Once he asked me why
I don't write more love poems;
I still don't understand what he meant.

*Published online at Hobo Camp Review

HOW TO PAINT IN THE DARK

After the hurricane took away our electricity
we open the curtains, sit at the kitchen table
pull out acrylic paint, brushes and canvas.

There are crickets chirping and it is daytime.
I overhear the neighbors to the right of us
discussing the possibility of meat going bad,

pounds and pounds of venison and pork chops.
They will grill it all and invite family over.
Our neighbor, to the left, talks about losing

a bid for a job; this is the third consecutive time;
he just can't charge any less. He has to pay for
insurance. Now this, the high winds blowing off

shingles, flood waters engulfing cars, seeping
through foundations, collecting and sitting
stagnant, growing foul. Our neighbor behind us

is beating his dog because his wife left him.
My daughter looks out windows; she wants
to see thunder. As soon as I tell her that you can

only hear it, she looks defeated. I wonder why
humans steal each others' faith. The dog cowers
in the bushes that separate our yards and I know

even if our phone worked, I wouldn't call the police.

Originally published in *Up The Stair Case Quarterly* and included in *Our One-Way Street*, NYQ Books, forthcoming

WHEN YOU CAN'T CATCH ALL OF THE RAIN

During a storm, Jason and Vanessa sit on their dilapidated porch counting the seconds between thunder and lightning, between one bill and the next. What you have in common doesn't matter to the people who answer the phone at the Electric Corporation.

When do you think the (thunder pause) lockout will be (lightning pause) over? Jason catches the rain, leaking through the roof, in his hand, he is thinking about the blonde girl at the bar, about how her high heels accentuate her curvy legs. *Why don't you ever*

wear heels? Jason asks Vanessa. Inside their children sleep. None of them are aware of how the basement is flooding. All questions asked, go unanswered. When his cupped hand is full, Jason turns it over on Vanessa's bare feet and she smiles.

LUCK AND LIGHTNING

We used to sit on our front porch and watch storms pass by like opportunities. Now we live in a house without a porch, so my husband opens the garage door and we sit on lawn chairs with our daughters between the mower and a stack of dusty pool table slates. My husband sticks his hand outside and collects rain like debts. When we owned a pool hall, we knew a guy, Lucky Louie, who almost never won a money game, but said he was struck by lightning, not once, but twice.

ON WITH THIS SAD DAY

When Unlucky Louie walks into the pool hall,
he always greets me with,
“Hey honey, I’m home.”
If he’s got work on the horizon,
he’s relatively happy and if not
he usually talks about moving out of town.
Most of the time, he’s mentally packing.

Today, Unlucky Louie’s pool stick betrays him,
the way my body has done to me lately.
After cursing the balls for ten minutes,
he packs up, but pays for the full hour,
bringing me up to date on his world.

His neighbors kept him up all night
and their cats sprayed his welcome mat.
His landlord won’t fix the leaky roof,
so he lets rainwater collect
in empty paint cans
that stain circles onto his carpet.

His boys play video games day and night,
eat all his food and drink his whiskey;
they don’t work and won’t shovel the walkway;
and he’s tired, so tired of this damn town.

And he can’t shoot for shit and he’s gonna retire,
and the women at the bars aren’t the same anymore;
no one wants to have good clean fun;
no one wants to go out dancing;
no one wants to listen to anyone anymore.
So he stays home to watch the boob tube.

When he’s done with his tirade,
he leans into the counter and asks,
“How are you doll? And the little one?”

He's the only one who asks sincerely.
For this, I want to tell him the truth
about how my body has turned against me
since the birth of my daughter and how I love
her so much, but at the same time long
for my old-self, before the tearing and scarring
of motherhood and the surgeries that have
only made it worse, but no man wants to hear
about these kinds of grievances;
these bodily sacrifices women make;

and men don't want to share their honest heartaches;
the loneliness that settles down next to them in bed
where their wives are or were
because then we would all know
each other intimately and we wouldn't be able to
escape into our own private, sad days.

From *Cadillac Men*, NYQ Books, 2012

DON'T SPILL THAT!

After telling Vanessa he is staying late to clean up the bar for extra cash, Jason lets the blonde bring him to her apartment. She hands him a beer from the refrigerator then leads him into the bedroom. She unbuttons his jeans, pulls them down. His hands move up her shirt and he takes one of her breasts from her blue lace bra and puts her nipple in his mouth. *Don't spill that*, she says, pushing him back. She takes off her clothes, throws them into the hamper beside her nightstand, then walks into the bathroom. *Just give me a minute*. He hears the shower turn on, and he thinks about how Vanessa never takes a shower before they make love, how she smells like sweat and earth and honeysuckle and that moment before a storm. She is flawless, this rich girl, soft and neatly kept. He spills his beer on her bedspread, pulls up his pants and heads for the door. Before he pushes into Vanessa, she runs her sandpaper fingers along all his imperfections. He is outside and he is running. He gets one block before he realizes it is raining and a few more before he realizes he isn't wearing any shoes. He doesn't stop, he pushes on, his socked feet slapping against the wet pavement, his heart traveling back home where he belongs.

About the Authors

From 1999-2006, Don Winter's poems appeared in most small press (and many "academic press") journals. His work was nominated for fifteen Pushcarts. Since 2006, Winter has taught Technical Writing, Labor History, Workplace Cooperation, and Reading/Composition for Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana University, and unions.
www.donwinterpoetry.com

Rebecca Schumejda is the author of several full-length collections including: *Falling Forward*, sunny outside press 2009, *Cadillac Men*, NYQ Books 2012, *Waiting at the Dead End Diner*, Bottom Dog Press, 2014, and several chapbooks. Her new collection, *Our One-Way Street*, is forthcoming from NYQ Books. She lives in New York's Hudson Valley with her family.
www.rebeccaschumejda.com



Don Winter is one of the best poets in the small press. —Small Press Review

In his superb poems, Don Winter writes of the lives most of us really live, lives ignored by the academic poets doing their verbal tricks, lives invisible in our gilded age. Don's poems are the real America, on the ground and in the bars and cafes and burger joints and factories where the people laugh and sing and struggle. The people deserve a great poet to sing of them, and in Don Winter they have found him. —Fred Voss



She is the rare American poet these days: a writer who creates a world that we recognize but has never been illuminated before. I've read all her books. I'll read them all again. —Dave Newman

With a spot-on ear for dialogue and a solid feel for gestural nuance, Rebecca Schumejda sweeps us swiftly into the late-night chatter and dish clanking of the Dead End Diner. If I could purchase one meal at any hour, it would undoubtedly be Rebecca Schumejda's latest."—Manuel Paul López

Working Stiff Press, 741 Broadway Street #1265, Niles, Michigan 49120