

## Atchafalaya Moonrise

Full moons always rise at sunset.  
Not you, peering through my front window  
as I steal rearview-mirror glances at a sun  
lolly-gagging its way into the horizon.  
You're missing a sliver of platinum clockface  
and rising to the northeast.  
Tomorrow you'll be in perfect position,  
but I won't be driving through  
the Atchafalaya Basin, somewhere  
between Grosse Tete and Henderson,  
surrounded by tupelo trees.

The sun dances away,  
I ride the bridge into darkness.  
All the while, your smile lights my road.  
Moonbeam magic shimmers  
on swamp water, transforming coastal forest  
into a grove of silhouettes. Willows weep  
for Evangeline, conjured pirogue creeps  
from imagination into the shadows.  
You're climbing higher, above my sight  
unless I hunch over the steering wheel,  
seeking heaven. Dreams don't last,

my eighteen-mile reverie recedes  
into everyday speed of passing cars,  
but I know the river still splits into old and new,  
like time or my life. Whiskey Bay Pilot Channel  
marks levee's end, opens as a bud blossoming,  
welcomes most of the flow. It runs a faster,  
wilder way to the Gulf. Give me Old Channel  
through Butte La Rose where nature gets intimate,  
where sense of place hangs holy,  
like mossy vestments on cypress alters  
bathed in flickers of lunar candlelight.

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Delta Poetry Review, Volume 6, Issue 16, Winter 2024*

## Shotgun House

20<sup>th</sup> century icon, three or four rooms in line  
like the linear progression of time, a room to live,  
one or two to sleep, the kitchen to cook and eat,  
two doors aligned, beginning to end.

No maze with multiple in's and out's. No labyrinth  
where a solitary portal dares me on a journey  
to the center and back. Do I trust the path?

Night need not search for its first star,  
they are everywhere. Outside the window an orb weaver  
sways in silk strands falling from an oak limb,  
keeping time to rhythm of the wind, catching moon glitter,

pulling my eyes upward — and there you are.  
What lens can magnify our thoughts as we dance  
out of shadow, into the mystery of flame?

I slip under heavy quilts in the unheated room,  
feel hands that stitched them warm me,  
hear their abiding voices reverberate within  
this narrow house as I crawl into fragile memories,

like I crawl under your skin when I lie  
beneath you, entwined in the eternal dimension,  
forged in our exploding furnace of embrace.

You love me in quiet ways while the air  
between us buzzes with familiar routine,  
tiny tokens, remembrance in the making.

You gentle me when I am a wild dog raging,  
help me off my soap box before I fall, teach me  
the power of patience and laughter.

You touch me like a new communicant  
handles bread because it's holy,  
bearing earth and rain, sun and sacrament.

I didn't start out to write you, but the brush came alive —  
rapscallion running me hard, on a passage  
through woods of yesterday to a shelter of sturdy stone,  
its hearth bright with anticipation.

Flowers dead, fruit borne away in harvest,  
you caress my winter roots and bring me  
into a tomorrow with more than four rooms.

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Deep South Magazine, 22 April 2021*

High  
Tide  
Line

A hermit crab joins me for sunrise.

Coffee cup warming hands, I consider  
his patterned tracks along the shore,  
a fleeting legacy left as he scuttles  
toward the morning's rising tide.

Soon the moon-pulled water will blur,  
then smooth, this coastal carpet,  
push me toward the dunes -- I will be  
above desiccated foam and detritus, safe  
from the sea's farthest reach this day.

*Maryella Desak Sirmon  
Oracle Fine Arts Review, October 2019*

## Labyrinth Lines

Monks laid out the approach with care,  
part of their labor between  
fixed hours of prayer.

### Matins

Compline

Lauds

Vespers

Prime

None

Terce

### Sext

Wild grasses tickle my ankles  
on an ancient sand passageway leading  
to the waiting portal, to seven circuits  
enclosed in eight boxwood walls.  
No string or bread crumbs needed,  
no dead-ends within this thin place.

Worn gray stones line the narrow way,  
each pewter arc and coil shimmering  
with sun-reflected dew — convolutions  
twisting and turning on a journey,  
folding back and forth on each other  
like time, past and future swirling  
into one, A and  $\Omega$ . Only now exists  
on this transcendent trail, created  
for the slow pace of pilgrim feet,  
releasing my mind to run free,  
to pray with sure and certain liberty,  
to apprehend unbreakable blessing.

Sandals discarded, bare soles tread  
this unbranching path to the center,  
holy ground where no bush burns  
lighting my blindness, where grains  
of illumination stick to my skin  
to be carried back to the world.

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Ekstasis Magazine, June 2024*

## Distancing

Virus Log: Day 4.7.2020

Contagion came, I locked my door

not wanting to make this acquaintance.

Inside – I am restless, annoyed. A pestilence

of fear writhes like earthworms seeking soil.

Night around me sleeps, but I cannot,

so I rise from fretful dreams. Bare feet pad

across wide wood planks of my bedroom floor,

searching for pen and paper and reassurance.

Uncertainty an old friend, this a different doubt.

Grief binding days in an unnamed procession,

dark anticipation of what will be across the world,

lamenting what is and what is no longer.

Maryella Sirmon  
*Annals of Internal Medicine, Vol 172, No 12, June 2020*

## Waiting for the Ambulance

Will silence shatter  
into razor shards  
when it's dropped,  
like the Roseville Water Lily vase  
slipping from your hands  
as you fell?

Will silence cringe  
bereft and arid until  
it absorbs my tear-sodden cries,  
like the blue moth-scarred carpet  
soaks in spreading water  
along its frayed edge?

Will silence kneel  
with me beside you,  
hold you while we wait,  
like truth and beauty —  
lips muted, disappearing  
into the moss of time?

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Annals of Internal Medicine, Vol 176, No 5, May 2023*

## Cause of Death

Years ago, nurse and transport waited with patience  
or impatience, depending on time of day or night,  
for completion of a paper form,  
weighted with ink and care, an obol  
Charon needed to ferry a corpse to the morgue.

Not just another form like so many,  
this required a particular pen with indelible ink,  
imparting solemnity amid hospital hustle.

Not just the silver coin of passage,  
my pen strokes were permission  
to enter eternity, restful or not.  
Powerful words allowing transfer of money,  
of belongings or properties, if any be had.

Electronic now – keys to tap, boxes to fill,  
guidelines and codes, no blanks permitted.  
In past times people died much the same but ...

we who wrote their final telling had greater leniency.  
*Blood poisoning* due to *Wounded, kicked by mule*  
as a consequence of *Mistreatment of mule*  
becomes *Sepsis* due to *Internal injury*  
as a consequence of *Blunt force trauma*.

*Visitation of God* becomes *Sudden cardiac death*  
due to *Acute myocardial infarction* as a consequence  
of *Coronary artery disease* with contributing factors  
of *Diabetes, insulin-treated* and *Tobacco dependence*.  
No more *Heart failed* and simply ceased to beat.

I miss the careful ritual of my special pen and ink,  
dark words scratched on crisp white paper,  
my final offering to a life, well-lived or not.  
I wonder, can cause of death be coded *Lack of care*  
due to *No insurance* or *Unable to afford medication*?

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Annals of Internal Medicine, Vol 177, No 3, March 2024*

## Leaving Yellowstone

*Established in 1872, Yellowstone National is home to hundreds of animal species, including bears.*

On a deserted road meandering through the backcountry, three dark shapes emerge from the dawn mist. Imagination challenges reality as eyes strain to focus. Pausing on the verge, we watch the attentive ursine mother shepherd her rambunctious young ones – not hovering, but never far away. We sit motionless as time loses itself in creation.

Mama bear, two cubs  
forage, feast on chokecherry  
breakfast unhurried

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Anomaly Poetry, Rituals, Summer 2024*



## READING BILLY COLLINS AT 3 A.M.

I should not be awake but time's on standby,  
sleep and dreams out on a date  
cruising around the nighttime sky,  
commenting on nearby stars as they speed  
past the moon's dark globe showing  
me a nail-clipping sliver of silver light.

I could hope they hurry back,  
but if they do, I might not finish  
feeling *The Rain in Portugal*  
as it dampens my hair, seeps into my chest  
during this second nocturnal reading.  
So, I listen to an owl's ethereal 'Who-whos'

leaking from the old live oak shadowing  
my window. This roosting picket warns  
of traffic on the glide-path of a breeze,  
signaling return of galaxy-trekking mates,  
who shred a few clouds on their hasty descent.  
Bluebird has not spoken, but morning

has broken the somber stillness of my warm  
word-cocoon. I rest my book and tuck the tired  
wanderers beneath a pillow, where they will wait  
for earth to rotate me into darkness again,  
before they crawl out and settle in my bed,  
perhaps staying a while tonight.

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Open Door Magazine, Spring 2024*

## Timing is Only a Part

*“I didn’t go to the moon, I went much further — for time is the longest distance between two places.”*  
Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*

Sperm are variable swimmers, taking 15 to 45 minutes to reach the womb and tube, but they’re patient, waiting up to five days for an egg if none is handy. Since eggs only last 12 to 24 hours, timing is crucial. A zygote has 6 to 10 days to swim into the uterus.

If s/he is slow or lazy or hits a roadblock, making a home in this tiny tunnel, disaster lurks for everyone involved. Successful journey means blastocyst to baby to labor. Contractions start crampy and slow, maybe 30 minutes between each one. Ramping steadily in pain and pace

to that 5-1-1 rule: every 5 minutes, lasting a minute, for an hour, until to birth begins a life. An existence branching out before each child like a great oak with limbs of many choices — some stronger and surer, a refuge for squirrel holes, towhee nests, and resurrection fern,

other branches shaky, inclined to brake in heavy winds. Every divide requires a decision, at best a journey forward, unless fears or forces beyond command or control imprison body and spirit in some crotch of life’s tree, or the path back from bad choices is too hard for strength possessed, too long

for years remaining. Then it’s 100 to 120 compressions a minute to the tune of *Stayin’ Alive* by the Bee Gees, *Walk the Line* by Johnny Cash, or *Crazy in Love* by Beyoncé and Jay-Z, depending on your generation or taste in music. Two breaths every 30 pushes, position electrode pads, hands off for the AED!

Birth to death, life in between is measured in more than time, though these dates seem to be carved in every grave marker, written in every obituary. What about that little dash separating the two? Whether an allotment of days or years, what stories hide there, waiting to be uncovered, in this zip file of a life?

Maryella Desak Sirmon  
*Annals of Internal Medicine, Vol 177, No 3, March 2024*