



**California State Poetry Society**

Post Office Box 7126, Orange, California 92863

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## ***CSPS Poetry Letter***

Dear Poets, CSPS Members, contributors, and Friends of the *Poetry Letter*!

VIVA! I briefly note here that this *Poetry Letter* accompanies **CQ** Volume 42 Number 2, which is the first issue of the CQ published with an ISSN. This is explained a bit in the current CSPS *Newsbriefs*.

We thank all those on the CSPS Board who have suggested this step, especially Nancy Dougherty, and most of all John Harrell, who has carried it out and made it work. It is fitting that the CQ ISSN would commence with the issue he has edited.

Here I'm in Munich, on the 19th day, minus one, of rain in Europe: Italy, Switzerland, four km of Austria twice (on the train both ways from Munich to Zurich), and Germany. I am most thankful that computers and the Internet permit me to edit the *Poetry Letter*—again—from my digital archives. Times have changed since the mimeo machine and the typewriter key cleaner, which was almost like chewing gum!

**Please send us your deceased relatives' old *California Quarterly* issues, especially from the period 1972-1992! Send them to me at:**

**327 N Fern St, Orange, CA 92867. ☺**

Greetings to all, and wishing you a happy and creative summer,

Margaret Saine  
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This first poem was nominated for a Pushcart Prize when it was first published:

### **MR. AVOCADO MAN**

An older man in khakis and a Giants cap sits on a bench  
in late afternoon sun  
outside Whole Foods on Telegraph Avenue  
meticulously stacking  
slices of whole wheat bread  
then placing one on a napkin

he cuts and positions slivers with his plastic knife  
from a luscious avocado  
perfectly split, pit left in  
setting the pieces like a precious mosaic  
then scooping the sandwich with the napkin  
pressing the two halves together

over and over he does this  
absorbed and content with his handiwork  
on his whole wheat canvas  
then swallows each in a few voracious bites  
taking up the next slice  
to begin his avocado dance again

I am mesmerized, envious  
picking at my tuna on a hard French roll  
having just come from the hospital up the street  
refusing to eat in their cafeteria  
though there's nothing really wrong with the food  
except for me wanting out of the building

my newly-discovered lump gnaws  
an unwelcome foreign invader  
how did it worm its way  
into my soft and sexy right breast

I throw away my half eaten sandwich  
closing my eyes as tears pool  
sweet memories tingle of fevered nighttime groping  
and morning caresses under tangled sheets  
I cling to my husband of forty three years

Tell me Mr. Avocado Man  
do you come here every day  
with your stack of bread and perfect avocado



show me how you make your sandwiches  
help me to forget today  
and what I must face tomorrow

*Joanne Jagoda, Oakland, California*  
First appeared in *Gemini*, Winter 2015

Here is one in our series of *GREAT* old American poets:

### YOUNG SYCAMORE

I must tell you  
this young tree  
whose round and firm trunk  
between the wet

pavement and the gutter  
(where water  
is trickling) rises  
bodily

into the air with  
one undulant  
thrust half its height—  
and then

dividing and waning  
sending out  
young branches on  
all sides—

hung with cocoons  
it thins  
till nothing is left of it  
but two

eccentric knotted  
twigs  
bending forward  
hornlike at the top

*William Carlos Williams, 1883-1963*



I adore this poem by Greg Gregory, beautifully balanced between memory and actuality:

### DIALOGUE WITH A HOUSE

I pull into the old driveway.  
The tune, Keep Bleeding Love, plays on the radio.  
My tires crush wild oat and star thistle  
that have finally grown through the concrete,  
now too broken to stop them.  
I have no business being here.

Most life occurs invisibly  
and stays invisible  
hidden by weeds that grow feral  
and shadows thrown by an abandoned house.  
When your house forgets  
so do you.

But doors and windows are all openings -  
ways in and ways out of fairy tales,  
or nightmares that escape like shapes  
from Pandora's Box when your memory finally  
turns into a pool evaporated after too many summers.  
The house whispers, "Remember me, remember you."

The house listens and sees like a child.  
Old voices behind doors, images in mirrors  
come out like small nameless birds bolting from the eaves,  
an illusion, like heat shimmering from asphalt,  
an unraveling of precious, ordinary things  
as easy as breath.

The stories we tell ourselves are light things  
that can be changed by will or desire.  
Houses are more difficult. I back out and turn around.  
The house continues to mime its tales.  
Mine recede in a shimmer of ripple glass,  
driving down a newly strange road.

*Greg Gregory, Antelope, California*

First published in *Song of the San Joaquin*, Summer 2012

