

From the Executive Editor:

Like so many arts nonprofits across this land, it seems that even those once protected inside the walls of academia are falling due to the economic fissures that come from years of financial mismanagement and a pandemic. Paired with the political unease and distrust of the liberal arts mindset in our nation, universities are now seeping money. These once protected places, sacred cathedrals to free thought and encouraged expression, are cutting their theatre programs, their visual arts, their creative writing, even their English, literature, and history departments. Soon our children will never know that we are repeating ourselves into this too familiar dark.

This past spring, the life of *Water~Stone Review* suddenly became an unexpected (and unintentional) microcosm of the political whims and direction of the country. My position, the journal, and the continuation of the MFA program itself was all slated for termination and closure. The fight of these past eight months has both lifted and flattened our students and my colleagues. After holding so much, for so long, I feel like a body on the ropes.

I am a shape, still warm.

Water~Stone Review, too, is a shape still warm.

I take solace in this work. These stories, these voices remind me of my humanness. I am still a part of that collective—that clan of alive bodies, still roaming, still wanting. Still warm.

That is what good writing does—reminds us of ourselves.

This is its impact, and we need this work to continue. To combat the onslaught of inhumanity, we need the reminders of ourselves and our connectivity. We need good art, artifacts of collective energy and hope—and we need a community to receive it.

All summer, we worked with new leadership at Hamline and our partners in the English/Communications department, to expand on the work we do in the Creative Writing Programs. I can enthusiastically report that we have a new university president (Mayme Hostetter) and provost (Wes Kisting) who listen and want to make thoughtful decisions. They are giving us an opportunity to build on what we do best, and they hold *Water~Stone Review* in that light.

Let me state this again: The university is excited to help strengthen and build on community-engaged programming in media and publishing like *Water~Stone Review*.

We are anticipating a brief submissions hiatus this fall to reevaluate our structure and strategy, and to mobilize. Like all the presses, journals, writing centers, theatres, and public media I know, we will ask you, our community of readers, contributors, editors, and alumni family, to sustain its future, to celebrate its legacy, extend its reach, and help us to expand our community programming initiatives. We hope to be fully funded and calling for submissions to Volume 29 by the fall of 2026.

I am so grateful for the life this journal has lived. I am grateful that it exists as a beautiful printed artifact that will forever live on as just that: evidence. Evidence of the work of so many for so many years; evidence of the light within.

I am grateful to its founders, the journal's first editors and student boards that dreamed this project, fought for its funding and support, and breathed life into its form years before my arrival and that have championed it ever since. There has been a cadre of approximately thirty to forty MFA students and alumni volunteers who serve as screeners and assistant editors every year. Literally hundreds of graduate students have served as readers for the journal, some year after year, volunteering their time well after they graduate from our program.

I hear from so many alumni about the light that *Water~Stone Review* was during their time in the MFA program. Their steadfast loyalty to this journal is a remarkable legacy in and of itself.

I am grateful for our partners and collaborators in the creative endeavor that *Water~Stone Review* has become; namely Minneapolis College of Art and Design's DesignWorks directors, students, and alumni, most notably Pam Arnold and Dylan Cole, and most recently, Parker Sprout and Logan Myers, whose care and dedication for the journal has sustained its beauty.

I am forever thankful for the production team members like copy editor and proofreader Anne Kelley Conklin, who has been my first set of eyes on

everything for fifteen years, and Margaret Todd Maitland, who did the job before her. And graduate student managing editors like Jenn Sisko and the strong line of incomparable women behind her, who have made the lonely and insurmountable task of building this publication a labor of love and unrequited devotion.

It goes without saying that this journal is deeply indebted to its contributors. Incredibly generous annual essays from the likes of Judith Kitchen, Stan Sanvel Rubin, Larry Sutin, Mary Cappello, Robin Hemley, Dinah Lenney, Barrie Jean Borich, Robyn Earhart, and Halee Kirkwood have put the “review” in the *Water~Stone Review* for nearly three decades. Emerging writers, trusting us with their first works, established writers, six books in and no need for more credit, and everyone in between have graced our pages. We are honored that *Water~Stone Review* remains a soft place for your work to land regardless of your station in this pantheon. This journal does not exist without the content between its covers, and for that we have so many (over a thousand) good writers to thank—another remarkable legacy.

A very special thank-you goes to this issue’s extraordinary contributing editors, Joni Tevis, Jose Hernandez Diaz, and Mike Alberti, who enthusiastically worked to bring us the best new voices on their radar. Their assistant editors, Elizabeth Carls, Kayla Knoll, and Evie Zeruhn, worked tirelessly to manage and screen hundreds of submissions all while preparing their own creative work and campaigning to save their MFA program. Their dedication is simply unmatched. This year’s collection is a beautiful reminder of what hope can feel like in the body, how it lifts us off the ropes and back into the ring. We are never done.

Dear readers, this is all proud evidence. Twenty-eight years of our life-blood, our beating heart, our body still warm, in your hands now and on your shelves forever.

Meghan Maloney-Vinz

Notes:

shape still warm, our subtitle for this issue, and the line repeated throughout this letter, is taken from the poem “POCHA” by Marisa Tirado, featured in this issue. The poem is a dreamscape of losing language and the fragments of memory that language contains. This poem, and this line specifically, speaks to the state we find ourselves in here at *Water~Stone Review*.

The cover image, by Sergiy Barchuk, of two floating garlic skins also seems to embody the sense of a shape still warm. Divorced of its body, the skins seem alive in this photo like dancers on a dark stage, performing the perfect pas de deux or taking one last curtain call.