t.s. poetry press

# CASUAL



a little book of jeans poems & photos

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Edited by L.L. Barkat

Cover image by Susan Etole

## To our dear readers who enjoy poetry, casually or otherwise

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#### Introduction

Reading and writing poetry is a profound way to express the heart, discover truth, and build a thinking and compassionate community. That's why we promote what we call the 5 Vital Approaches to Poetry for Life.

#### The 5 Vital Approaches

- teach it like it's alive
- bring it home
- transport it
- paint it in the public square
- take it to work

This little book begins in a rather personal place: the very clothes we wear at home, while we we learn, when we travel or make our way into the public squares of the communities we visit or live in, and maybe even at work. As such, this collection is its own contribution to Poetry for Life.

So come. Live! Take a stroll in our jeans (and perhaps in yours).



#### Chambray

You can't know all these rivets hold my starry eyes and bagpipe notes the doors we called, "Welcome home."

Our indigo pockets always gave but never gave way;

still, we lost in the cull on double-seamed highways with room for me to love you.

—Terri Conlin

#### Liturgy

Outside, she's in jeans. Filling pockets with rocks from the earth.

—Jeniffer Smith

#### Perhaps I should have told you long ago-

cornflower, cobalt, Caribbean, Carolina, cerulean winking at me with that one brass eye; secrets tucked in all four pockets.

-Elizabeth Marshall

#### Oh, blue,

there's an ease in your step an art to your fray comfort in your curve

my perfect fit—just right—in the afternoon light.

-Michelle Rummel

#### saturday

heat rises on the city street i slip one finger through the belt loop of his jeans.

-Michelle Ortega

#### **New Life**

One August, my grandmother wears blue jeans and thumbs a ride from the Caney Mountain foothills fifty miles north to the crest of Cedar Gap and the snaking Frisco line. On as much steam as her own, the locomotive crawls into old Las Vegas, where she baptizes her legs in the El Rancho swimming pool just long enough to be snatched up by a flashy suit. By sundown, she wears the new life of a showgirl who never returns home. Gambler's dotted die latches at temple and wrist. The only black and white she's known before local newsprint yielding stories of falling hog prices, bumper crops of peaches.

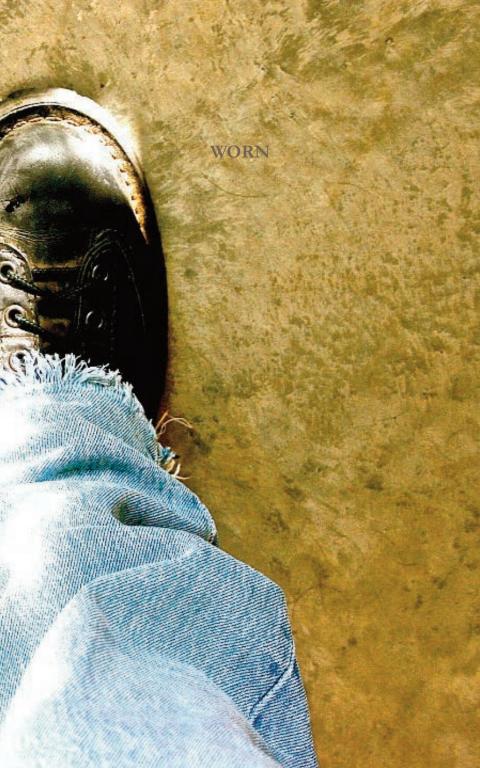
—Dave Malone

#### When he pulled through with a new Chevy in red

we fell into the night we fell into time

tugging at denim as he pushed towards the hood, those jeans never looked so good.

— Taylor Burgin



#### Ode to Jeans

Wrapped in a plastic bag scent of artificial air seeping, you were soft yet firm in my hands

like a ripe mango plucked on the cusp of June.

— Naomi Jeanpierre

#### A straight soft indigo is mid-rise,

once well worn, but now folded and forgotten.

Train tracks laid down the outseams ran parallel to the legs and the relationship formed, spurring the process of molding and remolding a cast of denim.

A life imprinted in fabric, dusted—just above the ankle.

—Jessie Stewart

### Poem on a Line by Anne Sexton, "We Are All Writing God's Poem."

Today, the sky's the soft blue of a work shirt washed a thousand times.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. On the interstate listening to NPR, I heard a Hubble scientist say, "The universe is not only stranger than we think, it's stranger than we *can* think."

I think I've driven into spring, as the woods revive with a loud shout, redbud trees, their gaudy scarves flung over bark's bare limbs.

Barely doing sixty, I pass a tractor trailer called Glory Bound, and aren't we just?

Just yesterday, I read Li Po: "There is no end of things in the heart,"

but it seems like things are always ending—vacation or childhood, relationships, stores going out of business, like the one that sold jeans that really fit—
And where do we fit in? How can we get up in the morning, knowing what we do?
But we do, put one foot after the other, open the window

But we do, put one foot after the other, open the window, make coffee, watch the steam curl up and disappear.

At night, the scent of phlox curls in the open window, while the sky turns red violet, lavender, thistle, a box of spilled crayons. The moon spills its milk on the black tabletop for the thousandth time.

-Barbara Crooker

#### Weather

Inky clouds cling to sky like jeans

I heave past thighs.

Deep down I know nothing

changes a thing—he's leaving.

I fumble with buttons

of the 501s, cursing

Levi for such shrinkage.

Beyond my window a willow tree shivers

before the deluge.

-Laurie Kolp

#### Some Things Don't Mend

"Do you mind if we cut off your jeans," they said.

"They're my favorite scrub denims," I said.

I haven't walked since.

-Susan Etole

#### Cooking Class, Illinois, Mid 70s

Along her immaculate counter: silo of red-handled sifter, bright order of silver spoons, lemon bales of butter

softening in late winter light. In cupboards her husband the carpenter built, bars of Baker's Chocolate, dried figs, quartered

apricots and Mason Jars of brined harvest. A good cook puts up her hair, wears apron, stores flour in freezer to keep

Boll Weevils out, uses shells of her egg as a tool to separate yolk from white. She also wears dresses, I learned

when, for donning jeans, she informed me she no longer wished me to babysit. She cited, over the phone to my mother, the effect

it might have on her son, the kind of wife he might choose, the man he'd become as I chased him on my hands and knees round the living room's glass table she refused to move when he was born. He'd learn, she'd said, he'd learn soon enough, where he stopped and she began.

— Tania Pryputniewicz

#### My baby boy's jeans

grow fast as the moon. Midnight! Please don't run away.

—Amy Billone

After all you've done for me in love, stitched to ensure a long life—my jeans don't fit, longways on the bias.

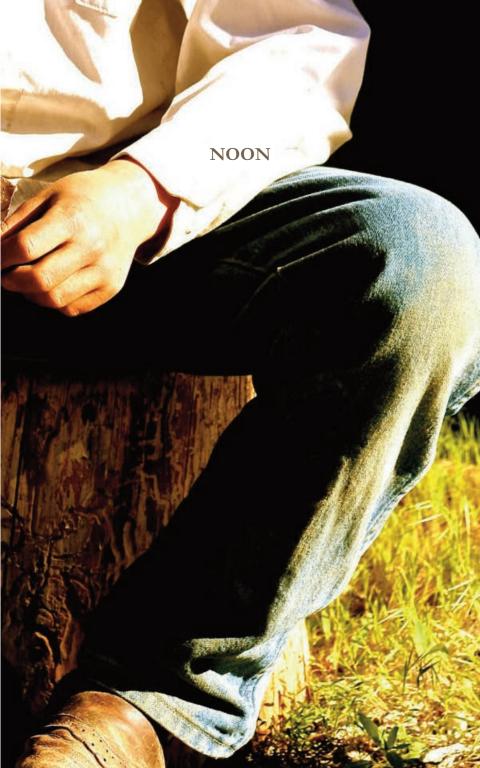
—A cento from the words of Elizabeth Marshall, Michael Garcia, Ceil, Donna Z. Falcone holes. tears. dyed akimbo on the floor; i must be getting old.

— A cento from the words of Michael Garcia, Donna Z. Falcone, Ceil

#### In the fields

where my grandfather kept his bees on Mr. Granjeans farm, cornflowers winked a welcome and relinquished their sweetness.

—Lexanne Leonard



#### Denim Enfolds Me

Periwinkle petals zaffer glazed eyes Dodger blue home runs

an indigo sigh shaped to my curves — soft, well-worn.

—Lexanne Leonard

#### Blues

Lazy noon by river's edge I'm skipping letters

submerged in shades of washed-up indigo words:

my cotton defense.

—Irish Grace

#### jeans jeans

everywhere the
jeans – city, country
especially there – rural
folk wear 'em Friday and
don't call it *casual* – because
it's the same as every other day
where they work. ride. live. breathe.

—Darlene



#### Trip

We met for family time at an indoor waterpark.

After pizza in our hotel room—cheese, veggie, meat supreme—

we cut shoe patterns out of old jeans to give some soles some hope.

My grandgirl grimaced at the video of skinny Ugandan children with jiggers.

Next day, she bought a pair of Nikes

82 dollars and new jeans

in a skinny cut.

-Sandra Heska King

#### Identity

The most popular brand

is just a question mark at the bottom of an inverted triangle.

Status attached

to a symbol sewn by one thin thread onto back-pocket denim.

A single breath

of next week's gossip would break a bond that weak.

Don't second-guess. Wear the jeans that fit.

Lie down at the top of the green hill and let yourself roll. Go home laughing.

--Monica Sharman

#### **American Lines**

Driving south on Highway 17 I see them hanging stiff-legged, board-straight in the quarter-acre backyard, rusted old fence line hemming in half-naked children and the flock of laying hens.

In three days they'll still be cold-wet unwearable unable to clothe a working man.

I blink.

Neiman Marcus email slips into my inbox: on back order, size 2 Lucky Jeans.

-Elizabeth Marshall



#### Jean-ealogy

is about the origin of blue jeans, vintage cloth made to wrinkle and shrink. What the small French village called Nimes knit, Levi Strauss starched and sold . . . made to fit!

From zippers to bell-bottoms and rivets, like Texas cowboys, the jeans finally fade. Same's the history for hippies in Frisco who grew up to make a billion and are aging in the one pair, still blue, they are wearing.

#### -Maureen Doallas

A remix of words with some grammatical changes from Chandrakant Shah's "Jeans 101 – An Historical Poem," translated by Naushil Mehta and Arundhathi Subramaniam. Poetry International, India section.

#### Fibonacci Jeans

These are the ones

everyone wants

Bring a friend so the two of you can take advantage

of the sale, only three days left to get a pair of Fibonacci Jeans at this amazing price—

only five dollars each, and if you act now, the first eight people to purchase any quantity before the thirteenth of April, will get a gift certificate

to Forever 21, our partner for this offer. Come to our store at the corner of Thirty-forth Street and Fifty-fifth Avenue. Reviews for Fibonacci Jeans have been off the charts. More than eighty-nine reviews have given the highest rating possible.

Yesterday one-hundred and forty-four pair of Fibonacci Jeans were sold in one store alone to only sixteen people.

That's nine pair of jeans for each person. There are only two-hundred-thirty-three pair remaining. So, Hurray!

We have all sizes for your waist and inseam.

We have the most popular colors, light blue, black, grey and white.

Prices like these are as good as gold.

This sale may be extended if more people continue to buy in quantities like these, but I wouldn't count on it.

-Richard Maxson

#### Set

After raspberry pancakes Mom declared in our olive-green kitchen: today, I'll teach you to swing.

She hoisted her own thick hips into the black smile next to me

pumped sky in her stone washed jeans.

Just gotta lean into it.

Then below that bar of rust, her seat suddenly

snapped.

She gripped the old chains—stuck the landing. Remember our laugh?

Lung-crush of hilarity

while everyone else held their breath.

-Bethany Rohde

#### Life on the London Underground

I wore my jeans on the tube and discovered free advertising at every stop when the disembodied voice proclaimed Mind the Gap.

-Glynn Young

#### Will my beloved jeans feel slighted

when I'm too big for my britches yet again?

—Donna Z. Falcone