Place shapes us as much as gender, or race, or class. Who I am has much to do with where I have stood. Perhaps because I have passed through so many places as a military dependent and never stayed long in any one place, I pay attention to the details, knowing the particulars of a place are what define it, what make it precious. In terms of craft, I like the way the details of a scene create the tenor of a piece and how a writer can use the details of a scene as a way to replicate or undergird their deeper subject.

— Jennifer Sinor
Inspiration is not something that happens, it is something you work your way toward, so that you have to continue putting those words down on paper in order to get to the point where those words means something. And when that happens, as my old teacher Richard Hugo used to say, then my Buick finds a more forward gear and then I can make a poem happen pretty quick. There are some that I’ve worked months and months on, and then there are some...that I just can’t figure out how to get out of, I can’t figure out that last step. But there are a lot of others that, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, there’s a poem. And those are miracles.

—Robert Wrigley
In my creative writing workshop, when we’re workshopping a piece, the writer is not allowed to speak. Because, if the writer has to explain or defend, it means that there is something missing. If it’s written right, there should be no explanation necessary, or no defense necessary. It’s just, this is the way it is. And as a reader I can read it and make sense of it.
— Chris Crowe
A gun to my head. This puts me in the mode of writing. I used to believe in inspiration. I sort of don’t anymore. I believe in time and space, which we have so little these days . . . You know you don’t have to wait for it, for lightning to strike. Virginia Woolf is right. A room of one’s own and the time to be in it and one can write.

—Idris Anderson
I like poems because they’re bite-sized; you can carry a poem around in your head far better than an entire story. I like stories, too, I think they’re maybe more fun, but poems are tight little glimpses at the world—very satisfying, very compact. Every creative piece is a million creative choices—every word, every comma is a choice. If you and I were to both write poems about, say, penguins, they could be radically different.

—Mary Hedengren
I write by way of a sort of binary process: I like this, I don't like that. So I go to what I like, and in the place that I like, and see what I like more. I see that I may like one part of it more than I like another part. It's maybe like the way a salmon finds the scent of the river that he came from. When the salmon is in the ocean it can key in on a river, the river that it was spawned in, and return to that river to spawn. How does it find one particle per trillion of this river in the ocean, I don't know. But it is something that you, as you are getting closer to it, do by means of honesty with yourself.

— Ian Frazier
My advice is to take advantage of contests and these campus magazines and other opportunities to feel like a writer. Because even getting rejected—once I started writing, or trying to write—getting rejected was, in some ways, reinforcement because it meant that I was doing what authors do.

—Chris Crowe
Sometimes there is an idea that just gets under your skin and you like to think about it. The idea and its implications are just fun to think about and you think about the plot that might result from the idea as well. The same is true for a humor idea, sometimes you’ll have a title of a piece that’s just funny, and you can’t help thinking about it. You’ll say it to people and the jokes that might be spun out of it. So in that regard both fiction and nonfiction are a pursuit. You think of something you like to roll around in your mind and then you make a piece out of it.

— Ian Frazier
I am drawn to the genre of poetry because of its ability to distill an emotion and pack a large amount of impact into a few lines, making the emotion often more potent. It also has a power to say something to a reader at the core level. I make sure that I am feeling something powerful when I am writing. I can’t write dispassionately, that doesn’t work for me.

— Robin Johnson
I think all my work, I can honestly say, is written for my children and grandchildren. They’re my audience, so I’m preoccupied with their faith and what they want. I don’t think I’ve written anything to discourage them. In fact, I hope it encourages them.

—Douglas Thayer
Reading and writing feels like the systole and diastole of your heart—they feel reciprocal to me. They are interactive, going both directions. I think we tend to write the way we read ... I think the best writers I know are really well-read people and I know that I owe much of the best in my writing to other people—to things that I’ve borrowed.

— Steven Walker
The cultural skepticism that is a hallmark of our media age manifests itself particularly in a distrust of language. I certainly think of language as a patently flawed system, one that we sort of agree to adopt for convenience’s sake, but which fails at every turn to communicate accurately. Certainly human life is populated by experiences that exceed language. The challenge is, how to record these moments of . . . for lack of a better word, sublimity without doing them violence.

—Kimberly Johnson
I write about loss because it is a constant, in my life and in everyone’s. Loss is democratic. We have all experienced it. And when I look back at my childhood, it is defined by loss. What I have found, though, is that writing about loss is actually writing about wholeness, that what you think is empty or abandoned is actually the very stuff that makes you whole. In my losses I am connected to all the losses in the world around me. So I cannot actually be empty or alone.

—Jennifer Sinor
This past summer I sublet an artist’s studio in San Francisco for about six weeks. Some of the best parts of that summer were the train rides [to San Francisco] and back because my mind was loose. And some of the new poems I have in draft... I call them train poems. They are not about trains, but it was something about the motion of the train and maybe because my father was a railroad man, but I’m cut away from the rest of the world and that loosens up things.

—Idris Anderson
I used to write line by line. I’d write a brilliant line and then I’d think for three hours and then write another brilliant line. Now, I try to slap it down on the page as fast as possible and then I put that away and re-write it again. When I do that, it’s very interesting to me that very often I will start with the last paragraph. So I work my way to that conclusion, and then . . . go from there. That last paragraph, the conclusion was the essence of what I had to say.

—Steven Walker
I used to only write poems when I saw something that really impressed me, but now I’ve learned that it’s much more productive to sit down and start writing, even if I have nothing on my mind—I just start writing about anything and I always come across something of value if I do that for long enough. Then I just cut it down, whatever it is I’ve written, and hopefully get a poem out of it.

—Claire Åkebrand
Sometimes you’ll have a title of a piece that’s just funny, and you can’t help thinking about it. You’ll say it to people, and then you think about it and think: what are the implications of plot, what are the jokes that might be spun of this? So in that regard, in both fiction and nonfiction, it’s a pursuit. You think of something you like to roll around in your mind, and then you make a piece out of it.

— Ian Frazier
I’m not actually all that interested in nature *per se*; rather, nature becomes in my work a figure for expressing certain kinds of conflict that interest me. If my poems include what seem to be the less lovely parts of nature, the less “poetic,” it’s not because I am drawn to the ugly, but rather because the tension between beauty and ugliness is a productive conflict, one that mirrors other kinds of conflict.

— Kimberly Johnson
I always ask myself what is at stake for me in telling any story. I believe that you must risk yourself on the page, reveal your humanity, your vulnerability, especially when the story you are telling puts other people at risk. That the more you write, the more you see the world through the eyes of a writer.

—Jennifer Sinor