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Science by Accident: Poems Inspired by Science

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Science by Accident:
poems inspired by science

By Amber Stover
for her Honors Senior Project

Overseen by Dr. Bruce Beasley

First presented Friday, May 28, 2004



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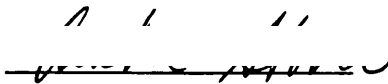
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Preface

I have had so many biology and other science classes that I automatically think about the world in scientific terms. Once I found a slug while I was building a trail and gleefully announced to my trail-building companion that terrestrial gastropods were hermaphroditic. To me it meant that the slug I had found was simultaneously both male and female. To my friend, however, it was utter gibberish. This is what I call “science by accident.” Not that it’s a bad thing—penicillin was discovered by accident! But I do have to be mindful of who I am talking with and which terms they are going to understand. There may be terms or concepts in this collection of poems that you will not be familiar with, but I encourage you to look into them. The world is truly a fascinating place, and there is always more to discover. Who knows, perhaps science will become so engrained in you that it even comes out in your poetry the same way it does in mine! I hope you enjoy discovering “Science by Accident”!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amber Stover". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a flourish at the end.

~Amber Stover

Lovesong of the Dungeness
by Amber Stover

I am but ragged claws beneath the sea
an open-broken-hearted dungeness
since crabbers took and ate the sweet princess
who shared the name of *magister* with me.
I held her to my ventral carapace
and rocked her in my 10 arms soothingly.
She nibbled on my eyestalk tenderly
and let me help her ecdyse, that is, undress...
She brooded our 3 million faithfully
as mothers such as *Cancer* always do—
a noble crab whose blood was truly blue,
though she will never see her progeny.
You'd give up seafood if you only knew
that crabs could be romantic lovers too!

Televised Radiation
by Amber Stover

Between 4 and 5 and 13
Is a noise
An explosion of black and white non-clarity
That screams of atoms and planets and galaxies
Whirling around and through each other
In an ever-expanding cosmos
A universe that houses black holes
And rabbit tunnels
Curved space and Western saddles
Colonies of stars and bacteria—
100 quadrillion per person
and more centimeters than that to reach the other end.
This bath of radiation,
1% of which reaches fuzzy fingers into my television,
contains all things
and all things conceivable.

So I find it inconceivable
that as I turn from one discrete thing—
a 4 or a 5 or a 13—
through *everything*
I still find *nothing* on TV!

Antimatter blows my mind!
by Amber Stover

Antimatter blows my mind
and woe to me if I should find
what they would call an "anti-mind"
and the two of them should be combined
and self-annihilate!

I wouldn't be to hesitate
I'd zoom off at lightning rate
exist purely in a 3-D state
but have no mass and have no weight
and have no time to die!

It's odd for me to think that I,
though hard and long as I may try
to catch up with light and with light fly
and so live on, I must comply
with the age old Jesus verse:
for eternal life, you must die first!

Fading

By Amber Stover

When the Western hemisphere
Of the planet known as Earth
Is faced in its space-time warping orbit
Toward the sun
Careening 30 kilometers a second
I pass my time
reading about how I can
S l o w i t d o w n
(relatively speaking)

And when I finally do slow down,
When the western hemisphere
Of this drizzly little planet
turns its Eastern back to the sun,
I lie down and gaze out at the stars
put there by someone else
And I try to think of them as
Space-time warpers
Sun-quakers
flaming hydrogen
Carbon forges and
Billions of miles away.

But Orion and Cassiopeia are too personal
and we have shared too many campfires and conversations
about night walks on New Year's Eve
and we promised the stars that next year, this year, will be radiant.

Promise is one's insurance for the future,
just as memory is one's assurance of the past.
And if the past was a bang of supernova firecrackers screaming themselves to a
whisper

What will the future be?

Camouflage

Originally for the Bellingham Marine Life Center

by Amber Stover

Open your eyes and look carefully
we hide to live and are hard to see
But answer these riddles and you will find
that you see us clearly in your mind!

We have pink tips that grab like glue
to whatever touches us; fish or you
We look like flowers growing in the seas
but we're not really plants, we're _____!

What am I really? It's hard to tell
because I live in a sea snail's shell!
Unlike a snail I have pincers that grab
because I'm no snail, I'm a hermit ____!

I have eight arms without any bones
I live underwater in subtidal zones
I inject toxins from my beak with a stab
but I usually save them for my favorite food: crab!

I have both eyes on one side of my head
I lie on the bottom, but I'm not dead.
I wait for my food to come to me
while I hide in the sand beneath the sea!

Bioluminescent Origin

by Amber Stover

What if the lifeblood in our veins really is seawater
dyed red in hemoglobin instead of phaeopigments?
A tangled mass of DNA squirmed triumphantly to shore
declared itself fit
then grew into it
But never really left the tide?

Once we swam in the ocean, now it swims in us
as we wade through life on land
6 billion (and counting!) point particles
weaving in and out of each other
from one wave function to the next
running into one another
and not being uninfluenced.

Are we not both particle and wave?
Are we not made up of the dust of the universe?
And that dust made from stars?

We cannot escape our selves, our substance,
any more than an agitated dinoflagellate in my wake
can deny its photopigments or its luminescence.
We cannot choose the platform from which we plunge,
but simply if
and how high
and how far!
and whether or not to return after.

And if we are made of stars, shouldn't we also shine?

From the Street

By Amber Stover (February 18, 2004)

Author's note: This poem is from two perspectives. First from mine and second from the perspective of a student who was indeed my lab partner until his file was reviewed and he was reclassified from a level 1 to a level 3 sex offender. After the news came out he was no longer a student, though reports conflicted as to whether he had left voluntarily or under university obligation. All of the information presented regarding Tucker is open to the public and can be found in January issues of the Western Front or at the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office.

From the street

I hate the way puddles linger at the edges of the sidewalk

and gradually creep up on you when you're not looking.

The way my lab partner hangs back after lab to walk me ---?

wherever it is I'm going.

They don't seem dangerous at first, because they're patient

gradually extending amoeboid arms—pseudopods

to surround you, engulf you and digest you

slowly

in a soothing, grooming, lapping rhythm,

desensitizing you stroke

by stroke

by stroke

by stroke

for 8 years...it makes me shudder

walking half a step behind

and being overly interested in the girl in physics

who doesn't know when or how to say no.

I could feel the pseudopedophilopods reaching

for any way to get to me,

“Where do you live? Do you live on campus?

What's your phone number?

Can we get together after lab to work on the write up?”

looking to capture and consecrate from behind

So I swept the puddle off the sidewalk with the side of my shoe.

Sometimes you have to put your foot down to keep from being
phagocytized.

◇ ◇ ◇

From the cracks

Not everyone slips through the cracks

Some of us slip to them

as a place of refuge

hiding on the fringes

where weeds grow

and water gets re-channeled

taking the filth with it

off the streets.

The streets don't care what happens to their muck

or where it goes

so long it's not out in the open.

They're the only safe place left—the cracks—
for muckers like me.

I tried once, like the amoeboid puddle
to overcome the cracks
and stretch out onto smooth broad pavement
to be “mainstream”
a biologist, marine.

I couldn't take another desk job—
I know all too well what it's like to be cooped up,
And I've served my time...

I felt trapped again today
Squashed under an invisible cover slip that dropped down outta nowhere
BAM!
And then 12,000 pairs of eyes scrutinized me
Like an amoeba in a microscope they had to sketch into a lab notebook
and *turn in*
“Properly identified” from a Level 1 to a Level 3 Sex Offender
and freshly relabeled as Most Dangerous, Most Likely to Re-offend.

Most likely to earn your trust as a babysitter or family member
Most likely to target young girls from troubled homes

Most likely to desensitize victims using grooming techniques

Most likely to prey on neglected little girls craving attention

Most likely to molest a physically disabled female child

Most likely to perform oral sex on an infant

Most likely to force himself on your defenseless daughter for years on end

Sure, I did all that

and more

But they *liked* it.

They *needed* it.

They needed my attention! They craved my affection!

I gave them what they didn't get at home,

what I didn't get.

See, we understand each other

We know what it's like to be utterly unloved.

The students are all too busy "identifying" me to identify *with* me

"That older guy in our physics class..."

"the one who sits next to the girl who always asks stupid questions..."

"and he hides his bald spot with a Greek sailor's cap..."

"No kidding! He's my lab partner! His name's Tom, Tom Tucker."

"Yeah, him. It's easy to remember his name too, 'cause it rhymes with

BABY FUCKER."

The university rinsed me down the drain

cover slip and all

and told me never to come back again.

So I pulled the Greek Sailor down over my eyes

and slunk back to the cracks

like the amoeboid puddle she put her foot down on.

Scientific Breakthroughs?

by Amber Stover

If 1,000 bacteria fit on a pin,
would they displace all the angels, then?
And if we found the gene for sin
would we ever ask them aback again?

If indeed the brain secretes the mind
the way liver makes an enzyme,
wouldn't freedom be hard to find
with our choices programmed every time?

If I have 100 billion neurons in my brain
sown in a trillion connections like seams,
where then is the place marked "pain"
and the place I store my dreams?

If we found memory in the space between
would we be surprised at the lack of "thing"
and try to write wisdom into a gene
because DNA is longer lasting?

If 30,000 neurons fit on the head of a pin,
would they disprove the angels, then?
And if we found out that we could sin,
wouldn't we want them back again?

Physical Attraction

By Amber Stover

Author's note: Dr. Brad Johnson, the head of the Physics Department at Western came to one of the honors seminars I was enrolled in to explain some physics basics to us. Asserting that bodies attract one another gravitationally because they have mass, he stared down at a rather timid young lady in our class and bellowed, "Do you *feel* me attracting you??" She shrank back in her seat and said "No, actually, I'm rather repulsed!" This poem was born out of some of the concepts he discussed with us that day.

My love, the photon pattern deflected
off you into my retina instigates
a cascade reaction which stimulates
my visual cortex. Once affected
my hypothalamus (they're connected)
is drawn to you as if by gravitons,
attracted like electrons to protons—
particle physics and love directed!
These photons which your face has perfected,
deny all rates of acceleration,
yet cause me intense infatuation
so the old adage must be corrected:
physical beauty's not even skin deep
yet this image of you is one I'll keep!

The itsy bitsy arachnid

By Amber Stover

Author's note: This poem is a testament to the fact that if something can be complicated, I will make it complicated. Feel free to sing it aloud to its familiar tune!

The three-millimeter arachnid ascended the water source

Downward precipitation removed the arachnid by force

Solar radiation evaporated the rain

And the three-millimeter arachnid ascended the source again!

Mariah

by Amber Stover

Author's note: This poem is dedicated to Dr. Ann Knowlton who was the first to teach me that "they call the wind Maria..."

Her father is the sunshine,
Her mother is the sky
She calls the moon her uncle
and she's cousin to the tides.

If Helen launched a thousand ships
they were as sea foam on the wake
of fleets cast off to fetch this lass
and win her windsome face.

No courting sailor's won her yet
she pays to them no heed.
She blusters galey 'round the world;
she's nothing if not free.

She was once wed, but not for love
the marriage was arranged
Her husband was the Sea himself
but on that day it rained.

And though he was a mighty prince
with dignity and class
She had her head up in the clouds
and the marriage didn't last.

She did have children, they're the waves
And they're as swell as she
They'll go meandering for miles
just to surf upon the beach.

Her father is the sunshine,
Her mother is the sky
She calls the moon her uncle
and she's cousin to the tides.

No one knows just where she's going
only where she's coming from;
So if you want a steady girl
Don't chase the daughter of the sun.

Cestodes give me the willies

by Amber Stover

Author's note: This poem is dedicated to my roommate who is going to Haiti this summer. The day she got her vaccinations she came home, flopped down on the floor and announced: "I had 5 fatal diseases injected into me today. I feel like poop in a can!" I had just finished writing this poem. It was perfect.

Cestodes give me the willies
and the shakes and the shivers and the runs!
My stomach's doing flip-flops and it wriggles and it squirms
I'm weak in the knees and I think I'm gonna faint.
And I don't even *have* tapeworms!