

Inaugural Race

Just before her first Indy,
we took my child to a Penske driver appearance
because my daughter age six not quite seven
wanted to see Helio

With absolutely no awe of celebrity
she bounced right up to him and proudly announced,
“I’m going to the RACE!”
He laughed and said, “Is that right?”
“Yes!” she exclaimed, as he scrawled his name on a card
and we all grinned into a camera flash

On race morning
my daughter with her grandpa
began their tradition of lunching over grandma’s tuna sandwiches
on the mounds near the infield museum
before joining the family veterans in the bleachers
where we have watched leaders dart first out of Turn One
for the past thirty years

My daughter’s wide open eyes absorbed technicolor balloons overhead
and a blurry rainbow of speeding chassis on track
Her Helio flying through the short chute
an orange and white sponsored streak
and her ears through protectively plugged
still pulsed at unmistakable high pitched bellow of Indy engines

My daughter age six not quite seven
did not grow bored as laps increased
She wandered the infield with hand firmly curled around her mom’s
two generations inhaling traces of burgers, stinky beer and coconut sunscreen
while cheering on race cars

As Mr. Davidson’s history will tell you
Helio won his third checkered flag that May
And to this day my daughter claims
that neither Penske’s engines nor his oil stained, fuel thrusting crew members
were Helio’s charms to victory
He won, she says
because she was there

—Melissa Aughe, Speedway, IN

From the author: *I wrote this because my family has gone to every race since 1986, but some of my best memories are from when my daughter started going with us. It has been a joy to pass on the traditions to her.*

When the Checkered Flag Comes Down

Three by three...eleven deep...
A rhythmic roar their engines keep.
Led by pace car through the turns,
Anxiety within them burns.

The massive crowd...a mighty throng...
More than a quarter million strong,
Are on their feet with watchful eyes
As thunder fills the blue May skies.

Down the backstretch, through turn three,
Come the flying thirty-three;
Then quickly out of number four,
The green flag drops, and off they roar.

Into the first turn, swinging low,
Five hundred grueling miles to go;
These men of steel, a special breed,
Each one contesting for the lead.

Around and 'round the track they roar,
Their engines winding more and more.
A grueling test for car and man,
Each one performing best he can.

Two hundred laps of Hell on wheels,
The hand of Death each driver feels.
One simple error, slip of hand,
Could send him to the Promised Land.

With speeds of lightning, on they press,
Each one desirous of success.
With racing blood inside their veins,
And thoughts of Vict'ry in their brains.

Ninety-nine times, in the past,
We've heard those mighty engines blast;
For the hundredth time men will compete
In this grueling, grinding, racing feat.

But it should be made understood,
These men comprise a Brotherhood;
For on the track they seem like foes,
Each one contending for the Rose.

(continued on next page)

But when the final lap is run,
They all befriend the man who won;
For when the checkered flag comes down,
They know just one can win the crown.

—Richard Carpenter, Chesterfield, IN

From the author: *I was born on the Southwest side of Indianapolis. The 500 was the biggest event around during my growing years. And it is still “The Greatest Spectacle in Racing”.*

Moving Towards Orbit

Before I think of the specks of earthy dust
torn from the seam of the ground
at the sound of the inaugural starting gun,
I think of Ray Harroun—the first champion—
squinting beneath the brim of his goggles
still plastered to this sweat-logged temples
while he contemplates movement—
when to slow the yellow Marmon,
when to rev and make the pistons grieve
their lot as middle managers.
Like all champions who came before
or since, Ray must have understood
the debt owed to Copernicus
and ancient Hominids alike:
humans who, as they watched the stars
cartwheel hand-over-toe across the sky,
slumped a little more each successive time
they glanced down to find their own feet tethered,
firm as spokes, to the wheel of the earth.
Ray must have sensed it, then,
his own toes aligning with the precipice
of that yet-unstirred ellipse, that this was more
than a playground for the instincts growling
'win! win!' at him from the depths of his gut.
What he must have seen, instead,
was an axis—a thin one, and delicate
as the glass neck of an asteroid belt,
at least by the standards of the universe.
But still, a guiding line of revolution
from which mortals, helped only
by the gift of well-made goggles,
could hitch our finite selves to time and space
and merge with the centripetal beating heart
lying at the center of the track—
at the center, too, of all other things.

—Marissa Coon Rose, Muncie, IN

From the author: *In fifth grade, my class took a field trip to the track to explore the physics of racing. Since then, I've been caught up with the idea that the natural laws of the universe that make the race possible also make all other things in the universe possible. The poem was my way of expressing this.*

Yard Of Bricks

You're but a fraction of, a long ago paved past
All from local kilns, where hallowed stones were cast
Reddish grey, three feet of bricks, denoting start and finish
Destination for the world, whose lore will not diminish

Overhead, twenty feet, the flags wave evermore
Four hundred thousand cheering, above the Doppler roar

Bearing witness to, automotive innovation
Resounding spectacle, at the crossroads of our nation
Indy fans, we celebrate, this milestone event
Consider what these bricks have seen, and what they represent
Kneeling kiss and glass of milk, traditions of today
Steadily racing toward, another hundred months of May

—Michael Courtney, Brighthurst, IN

From the author: As an Indianapolis native and life-long Hoosier, some of my fondest childhood memories were of going to the track with my Dad and weekends spent with the family, listening to qualifications on the radio. Even today, when I fly, I try to sit on the right side of the plane to catch the awesome view of the Speedway as we pass west of downtown Indy on final approach for landing. Inspired by the rich history and legends of the Indianapolis 500, I've often marveled at what the "Yard of Bricks" has witnessed in its lifetime.

Michael Courtney is a life-long Hoosier and Purdue University grad. He lives in Carroll County and works for Accenture, a global technology and professional services company. His poem, "Yard of Bricks", has a symbolic one hundred words and is his first poetry submission.

Your Start

start
your
engines
it's hypnotic, the infrasonic
bellow of your fellow
racers
you're the thunder in spring
you bring
a rain of applause
the awe in their
faces
and you were here
for years
when the wind would bite
and you thought it might
storm
or when it was warm
and you could taste the win
the car was your skin
no gender, no face
no labels of love or faith
the only race, this race
your only home, the bricks
the timer ticks
in this town
where you got the fire in your heart
and among the
engines
your
start

—Abi Douglas, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: *In the past year, Indiana took legislative steps that I feared I wouldn't see in my lifetime by legalizing same-sex marriage. I'm in love with the history and culture of my home state, and can finally say, free of uncertainty, that Indiana truly is full of the Hoosier hospitality that my family raised me to believe in. The Indy 500 is a place where that warm and welcoming nature shines through as an incredibly diverse array of people comes together in celebration of the greatest spectacle in racing, and I'm so glad I can call Indianapolis home because of that.*

Abi Douglas is a Hoosier novelist, poet, and lifelong fan of all things Indiana.

Indy 500: The Race to a Dream

Back Home Again in Indiana, hundreds of thousands gather,
starting at sunrise when the glowing sky outlines the pagoda
and winged-wheel flags wave in the wind, welcome all who enter.
A hush falls over the Speedway.
Taps echoes our sadness as we pray and honor fallen soldiers.
Hands over hearts, we sing the *Star Spangled Banner* before
military jets fly by and a flock of balloons gives chase.
“Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines!”
The rumble of the revving cars competes with the roar of the fans in the stands.
This. Is. It.
The green flag signals the start and wheels spin round and round the oval track
as drivers draft and jockey for a sweet spot among the pack of 33.
Cameras give glimpses behind the wheel down the straightaway and into Turn 1,
dreaded even by seasoned drivers, going in blind while reining 700 horses.
Senses come alive in the humid, Hoosier heat
as ears tingle from the vibrating, buzzing hum of tires on asphalt when cars blur by.
Eeeyoooooom! Eeeyoooooom!
A driver breaks away.
Pit stop. Jack. Tires. Fuel. Push. Seconds matter.
Fast-fast-fast.
Friends and family talk of the legends and lore and cheer on the men and women
who dare to dream of their faces and names on the trophy,
especially today, the 100th running of the Indy 500.
The Greatest Spectacle in Racing is all about dreams.
Dreams built the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, dreams of testing automobiles.
A century later, it’s still a proving ground.
And each race day, the drivers dream of
kissing the brickyard, drinking the milk, and wearing the wreath.
Now the final few laps.
In the stands and around the world, millions sit on the edge of their seats,
hearts racing right along with the cars.
Who’s going to cross the finish line first?
The checkered flag waves. Cameras flash.
And the winner is ...

—Lisa Fipps, Kokomo, IN

From the author: *We all have dreams that lead us to take chances, to work hard, and to not give up. When I watch the race, I see dreams in drivers’ eyes, and at the finish line, everyone witnesses the celebration of a dream come true. The dreams, traditions, and sights and sounds of the Indy 500 inspired me to write “Indy 500: The Race to a Dream.”*

Lisa Fipps has won 27 awards for writing and editing.

500 Legacy

Four drowsy siblings tangled up together
in backseat blankets, seatbelt free, we slept
Dad turned the car toward Indy in the dark
Sped south on 31 past greening fields and silent barns
And answered “how much longer?” by promising a day we’d all remember
He told us tales of Unser, Foyt, Andretti . . .
Dynasties of racing royalty real to him as brothers
and cars like works of art pushing all limits of imagination
Time trials never meant to me as much as him
Eagerly watching his favorites hit their speed, marveling at possibilities
He loved the pits, smell of hot tires and oil,
Honored men who tinkered tirelessly toward success
Watching him love loud cars that flew around this track too fast to see,
I found that love myself because of him.

Much later, listening to that deep rich rolling voice
Sing to me of moonlit sycamores, “new mown hay,” and “fields I used to know,”
I realized with surprising chills this race is in my Indiana blood
That “Gentlemen, start your engines” and eerie sounds of speed
approaching and retreating
Will always make my heart race in anticipation, send me spinning back home
To summer-pajama nights watching the race we only heard by day,
to hold our breath collectively in agony with families
of courageous drivers pulled from fire
And pray they’d race again,
Scan stands packed full of sunburned faces as the checkered flag waved,
Thrill to the photo finish.

Our Brickyard and pagoda proudly stand the test of time
And race fans gather here in every May to worship speed and daring
For a century now, they remind us
of the hopeful energy of a nation
tired of war and ready to celebrate bold new designs,
Machines flying around these curves at speeds unknown
in thrall to the heroes who drive them,
Dreaming they might yet send us spinning into the future together
in one bright brilliant blur.

—Jenny Froehle, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: *The Indy 500 is part of my dad’s legacy to my siblings and me. Race season never comes without memories of Dad’s excitement about time trials beginning each spring and the fervent enthusiasm with which he has always engaged with the race. The bundling of all of us in the car in the dark before dawn to go from South Bend down to Indy to see time trials is a memory from my childhood I cannot forget—along with the excitement every year on race weekend of choosing drivers and listening to the start of the race on the radio together. Recently I was watching footage from early days of auto racing, and I realized how the innovative design of these cars and new speeds they were able to hit excited people about human innovation and the future—something we all still need to keep us hopeful. It inspired me to bring together in the poem my personal memories and what the race symbolizes in so many different ways.*

Decoration Day — 1964

Race Day was a day crowded with more rituals than Christmas.

Out early to Grandma's, we'd walk
her long aisle of scarlet and pink peonies,
cut great armfuls of the heavy blossoms.

Then, up the Jackson Pike to the New Lisbon Cemetery
with its white church and headstones spreading across the tree-splattered knoll —
not high, but high enough to see all around the yellow-green fields
of new corn and soy beans and the blue squares of oats.

Carefully, we'd set the quart jars, exploding with their flowers, upon the old stones.

But already we were rushing towards the green flag.

Dad would click the radio and the rituals would crackle over the airwaves:
a band playing the national anthem, the crowd singing "Back Home Again
in Indiana," the eerie trumpet summoning silence around the playing of taps.

We always made home in time to hear Tony Hulman pronounce "Gentleman,
start your engines" and the piercing ebb and flow whining roar
would fill the car's small transistor.

Mother's ritual to prepare the day's picnic — potato salad and pies, sugar cream,
and butterscotch, hamburgers, hot dogs — moved forward unseen.

Mostly, though, the air filled with the race, conjectures about what we'd read
in the thick *Race* section of the paper, whether
the Lotus Novi's would take down the front-end Fords,
and those Europeans, Clark and Hill, and the Aussie Brabham, whether they had
the stuff to tackle red-blooded Americans like Parnelli Jones and A.J. Foyt.

Myself, I liked the idea of the rebel Scot, his sleek, green Lotus, but perversely,
I liked more, and chose as my favorite, old-timer Eddie Sachs,
at the far end of field, thirtieth position, next to last row.

I liked the colors of his Red Ball Special,
and the fact that he was the jovial old man of the race,
and I'd always liked long shots, old men, and the color red.

Little did I know the seconds were ticking on luck, that the red today was blood,
and that old men only ever get older
or race out of flames into eternity.

—Marc Harshman, Wheeling, WV

From the author: I was inspired to write this piece for more reasons than I can easily state here. However, that said, I was born and raised in Randolph County, Indiana and "race day" activities were true rituals as partially described in the poem. It was one of those days from my youth that always comes back clearly, beginning with the peonies and ending with the picnic that always followed the race. That I should write a poem about the event seems only natural when I reflect that after I left Indiana for college, I also went on to become a writer and am now the Poet Laureate of West Virginia.

Apprentice to the Spectacle

in honor of the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500

He took me to a dirt track first. We sipped beer,
smelled ethanol, felt the grit of the mud in our mouths,
watched the open wheels spin, the sprint cars' rear-
ends swing out, straighten, swing out again. *Here is how*

it began, he said. Next, we took in time trials—happy hour,
a couple days of fried chicken, more beer, the museum
inside the oval: names like Rickenbacker, Meyer,
Shaw, Chevrolet, Rose, and the first winner, Haroun,

in his Marmon Wasp, Vukovich over the backstretch wall
in '55, and the ones I already knew: Foyt, Unser,
Andretti, Rutherford, Mears, Fittipaldi, Castroneves, all
those faces in bas-relief on the Borg-Warner.

That day of trials we perched in the first turn grandstand
and listened to each car sail across the strip of brick,
I learned the nuances of the word *fast*, the sound
of speed, how tenuous the line each driver takes

around the track to shave a second's fraction off the clock.
The cars sped by like shooting stars, blinks of color
blurred across the track's gray pavement. Finally, back
for my first race, this is what I most remember:

not the cars, the din, the winner, but the silence
of two hundred thousand plus before the race began,
stray wax paper twirling across the track against the fence,
while Jim Nabors sang *Back Home Again*.

—Joseph Heithuas, Greencastle, IN

From the author: *The Indy 500 is embraced by Indiana and Indianapolis in so many ways, but I can't say I've ever read or written a poem about it. I was born in Indiana, moved away as a child, and found my way back almost thirty years ago. As a child, I loved the race, and as an adult, I've now been to many 500's, run the Mini-marathon a few times, and generally soaked in, when I've been able, the way Indianapolis embraces the race in May. After many attempts, I realized my first experience of going to the Speedway was what I wanted to capture. I was an apprentice to a seasoned veteran who'd been to almost every race since he was a kid; that was my truth about the race. As I revised the poem, it went from a somewhat unruly remembrance into a compact set of loosely rhymed quatrains—four lines, four turns, four wheels.*

For Those Who Love Fast, Loud Things

This poem is for the track folk who just love the smell of Ethanol.

For the Carb Day cut sleeve sporters, the Snake Pit dancers,
and Coke Lot campers with bald eagle bandanas.

This is an anthem for the hearts that've surged at the scope of the Pagoda.
For the hands that know the feeling of slapping the North Vista tunnel ceiling.
For the lips that whisper along with Florence Henderson when she sings,
yes. This poem is for the 500 fans who love fast, loud things.

The hot dog chompers and buttermilk sippers, and
granddads with ledger pads in suede cases and locked zippers.

This is for every kid that's stood along the stretch—with toes
on top of a cooler and their fingers gripping the fence.

For the open-wheel gear heads, parade wavers, and Legends Day fans.
For the moms smeared with baby sunscreen changing diapers in the stands.

This poem is for the Brickyard pickers, marching band
clappers, the bucket drummers and gasoline alley cats.
This is for the pit crews, the announcers, the flyby pilots in the sky.
For the girl who'd never seen her dad cry until the day Dan Wheldon died.

This poem is for the *Andy Griffith* neighbors, the binocular
watchers, and the concession yellers hawking cold brews.
This poem is for every shoulder with a Memorial Day tattoo.

This is for the drivers willing to go bumper to bumper, for the flag
flappers, and the earbud-in-clutched palm fist pumpers.

This is your poem Indianapolis, taking the turn with direct injection. Race fans,
thank you for being the sparks that start the engines.

Dedicated to Evan, and all IndyCar fans, 2016

—Adam Henze, Bloomington, IN

From the author: *My goal was to write an engaging poem that race fans could really relate to, while employing vivid images and sound devices the arts community could appreciate as well. I believe an energetic performance of this poem has the potential to capture the attention of thousands of audience members who might not know how much poetry can relate to them. Ultimately, the goal of my submission was to create a 500 anthem that all Indy Car fans would be proud to identify with.*

Adam Henze is an educator and Ph.D. student living in Bloomington. He is an internationally-touring performance poet, and is the director of an academic summer camp for high school writers.

Peonies and checkered flags

Peonies and checkered flags,
radio voices through fluttering
blades of grass:
gone racing, the neighbors say.
Eternal combustion,
heart across town —
land rockets' liquid flame
kissing bricks.
Children cover their ears
as colors streak by
their open eyes: blink,
you miss it.
For 100 years
the world has come here,
crowded round this oval,
sun-blasted and alive.
Amazed at how fast
the time goes, how fast
again, and yet again,
like spring itself, like peonies.

—David Hoppe, Long Beach, IN

From the author: I remember hearing the Indy 500 being broadcast across my backyard the year Graham Hill won the race — yet another branch of the '60s British Invasion. From that time til this, the race has been part dream, part neighborhood block party for me.

Before the Stands are Full

Before the stands are full,
warm coffee in my hands,
I sit upon the cool bench.

And imagine history before me
a century ago...

From miles of traveling,
the incense of motor cars
hangs in the air;
The crowd converges.

A sea of brimmed hats
block the waves of the sun.
A checkered flag at ease.

The brass sings over the crowd.
Cheers and fanfare;
A cacophonous sound.

Suddenly--a rumble in my chest!
The roar of engines,
a humming of wasps
chasing their provoker;
The danger inherent.

Kicking up into the stands
grit of sand, smoke and tar.
Cigars, sweet and earthy.

My senses awake to the present...

The stands are filling;
my coffee has cooled.
I savor a Long's glazed,
its delicate flakes melting.

Someone may imagine me
100 years from now.
But for today
excitement penetrates the air.

This is Indy.
This is Speedway.
Welcoming the world.

(continued on next page)

—Lisa Johnson, Brownsburg, IN

From the author: I was inspired to write this poem because I am fascinated by history--how things once were, how society has evolved and the traditions we carry with us. As I began planning for the poem, I imagined the experience of the Indy 500 with all of my senses. My writing was guided by how would it look, feel, smell, taste, and sound to be sitting in the stands a century ago.

Lisa Johnson is a school library media specialist for the Brownsburg Community School Corporation.

The Legends and Times of 500 Miles

From backyards and porches,
in seats and in stands,
hundreds of thousands of racing fans
look up to the skies to chant a refrain :
 hold off the rain,
 just hold off the rain.

Back home again in Indiana...

From legends and lore of past races won,
to gut and grit, to story and sun;
where hopes have been shattered
and dreams have come true --
where race cars rumble into view.

The formation of jets take to the skies;
bouquets of balloons billow and rise.
Cars take their places, row by row
a whine of engines, and there they go...

a scramble of colors as tire meets track;
in the blink of an eye they zoom right back.
Over the fabled Yard of Bricks they fly,
to crowds roaring cheers beneath a May sky.

The checkered flag falls! A driver has won.
Rolling into Victory Lane, his race has been run,
where legend and luck; magic and mirth
came together to see the greatest racing on Earth.

Now quiet the engine, now silence the throttle,
with a gulp of cold milk
 straight from the bottle...

The 100th running will be ringing in ears
and reverberating for years upon years upon years;
as famed stories and stats forever echo and roam...

Then I long for my Indiana home.

—Rebecca Kai Dotlich, Carmel, IN

From the author: I grew up in the 1950s in a house very close to the Indianapolis 500 race track. The roar of the cars practicing echoed in our neighborhood while we rode bikes, and through our classroom windows the month of May. From our backyard we used binoculars to catch glimpses of the stands, the flags, the people and the cars. I am now an author of children's books and very recently wrote a picture book called Race Car Count. I still go to the race as often as I can, or have the radio blaring at home while cooking out. I will be attending the 100th running this year!

The Heart of the Indianapolis 500

We've hoped for clear blue skies
For a hundred years
Waving from the stands
Our world awash in cheers
Searching for familiar faces
This is our beloved race, this is
The Indianapolis 500

As Back Home Again in Indiana
Is sung straight into our hearts
I know there's nowhere else I'd rather be.
Revvng motors in taut lines
Ache to see that green flag fly
At the Indianapolis 500

And they're *off!* around the track
We pray our favorite leads the pack
Whizzing past us fast and faster than we can see.
A blur of colors take maneuvers
Past the stallers and slow-movers
At the Indianapolis 500

Oh, the joy at the finish line!
The checkered flag drops and it's over
A victory lap or two as the crowd goes wild.
A quart of milk is drunk and spilled
No greater feeling than that chill
At the end of the Indianapolis 500

We'll be back again next year
For the tailgating and cheers
To see our favorites—those heroes we adore
Great ghosts of winners long ago
Watch over race fans, for they know
They're the heart of the Indianapolis 500

—Jenny Kalahar, Elwood, IN

From the author: *The people who support the racers, from the folks at home listening to their radio with a keen ear to every lane change and zoom, to the tailgaters and folks cheering in the stands -- these are the heart of this Hoosier tradition, and they were my inspiration.*

Jenny Kalahar is a used & rare bookseller in Elwood with her husband, Patrick. She is the treasurer of the Indiana State Federation of Poetry Clubs, a board member of Brick Street Poetry, and she helms Last Stanza Poetry Association in Elwood. She is the humor columnist for Tails Magazine. Jenny has published two novels set in a used bookshop that fosters cats, and has a collection of poetry titled One Mile North of Normal and Other Poems. Her new novel, This Peculiar Magic, is a fantasy set in central Indiana.

Back Home

The month of May in Indiana comes after
a long cold winter - school's finally out, the pools
are almost open and the party cups prevail.
Georgetown camping, Coke Lot, Pagoda,
the checkered flag, "Back Home Again in Indiana,"
the trumpets salute and of course Jim Nabors -
this will always be our home sweet home.

Start your engines with the fly over
earplugs in the stands, maybe a beer or two
in your hands - the month of May! Welcome Race Fans!
always a heart-felt tradition.

Parties everywhere - asphalt driveways painted black and white.
500 miles around the oval, turn four seats see the best
with the finish line in sight...

and down the stretch they go! With Indy cars blurring past your
eyes, the checkered flag waves high
above the brick finish line.

Crowned winner with his glass of milk so
fresh it tastes as the new Indy 500 winner.

Indiana home sweet Indiana - the flowering dogwoods
and blooming peonies - the perfect time of year - so turn on
your radio, listen from the porch or wake up at the break
of dawn and pack your car lunch and wait in line on 16th street.

Look around and watch the people for this great month
comes only once a year, the magic of May the beauty
of spring and the checkered flag make Indiana the place to be.

Rest in peace all the drivers we've lost in the last 100 years. Cheers
to the spectators that have sung with us every year. Let us forever dream
of the Wabash and always long for this Indiana home.

—Sarah K. Ginter, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: I wrote this poem for anyone and everyone who loves the Indianapolis 500 - whether they are 3 or 103 - I tried to write this piece as something that a person of any age could relate to. Indiana has been my home for a long time, and the Indianapolis 500 always proves as a sweet spring reminder of why I've loved it here so much. The checkered flags and parties - everything about May in Indiana is the 500, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world but here in May!

Sarah K. Ginter is a writer and photographer working on a middle grade novel and a book of poetry. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Butler University and her BA in English from Indiana University. She is currently teaching writing at a private school in Indianapolis.

You're at the Bricks, Janet Guthrie

Upon learning to ride a bike at 5-years-old
you journeyed 15 miles from home. As a teenager,
you took up parachuting. You saw a lot.

The first coupe was what the villains drove: it cast shadows
in moonlight like knives, drawn. In a barn
near the water, you worked engines and bodies—you got dirty.

The long nose of the Jag got Atlantic Blue, like your nails
and lashes. When you hit 185 at Indy, the roundy-round boys
told you women didn't belong on their track.

You programmed your watch to run counterclockwise. You readied
your wrists for the cheer that was coming.

—Micah Ling, New York, NY

From the author: *Janet Guthrie is a reminder that while the Indy 500 is steeped in tradition, it's also constantly changing, and adapting, to include all people.*

A Poem for the Track

My grandparents used someone's rain checks in '73.
For my dad's first race, my mom found tickets on Pit Road,
knowing the action would bring him back. In '89
when we finally landed three renewable seats in Northeast Vista,
I scoped the infield with binoculars and also Emerson Fittipaldi
as he waved from the convertible. Fittipaldi won again
when my sister first came. I always marveled at the symmetry
of the repeat winners, of the Unsers, Bettenhausens, Rahals, Foyts,
of the track's curved rectangle, of parking along Lafayette Road
or in the same yard since Mario Andretti won in '69 in a ritual
to break the curse, of walking to the same seats next to
the same people who always brought box lunches or only beer
or lunchmeat sandwiches packed back in to Wonder Bread bags.
When Nabors sang "Back Home Again," everyone's tears
could have filled the Wabash. Engines started up like a choir.
Cars paraded by in a low thrall, three abreast in the grid
I memorized in May. Cars weaved tight waves to warm the tires.
Tom Carnegie announced the green flag dropped
and all we could see from Turn 3 was a quarter million people
looking at Turn 2 awaiting cars to catapult onto the backstretch
and fan three or four wide for 5/8 of a mile
before diving the Turn 3 line to old apron or new rumble strip,
the cars pulsing like blood from the heart.
Over 200 laps, I played games, let cars blur across my still eyes,
swung my neck to sight cars through the apex.
I marveled at physics, downforce, aerodynamics, momentum,
at keeping the pedal down. I stared at the short chute to glimpse
a rare pass, regretted my hopes that a driver would overcook
the entrance to 3 like they did coming out of 2.
On the white-flag lap, I squinted at the glimmer of Turn 4
we could see from our seats and closed my eyes,
imagined winning and waving the checkered flag over the winner,
the yard of bricks we all would kneel down to kiss.

—Kevin McKelvey, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: I was full-on obsessed with the Indy 500 all through my childhood and teenage years. Attending the race and later the Brickyard 400 was something my family, especially my mother, loved to do. I'm excited to see the renewed tradition of a poem published in the program.

Pole Position

I.
Mom packs fried chicken and cold beer
in the cooler for Dad and Mr. Riggs to take
to the race. I beg to go next year.

Engines scream on the radio. I hear
A.J. Foyt win his fourth drink of milk.
Gordon Johncock jumps in the creek.

It's a good time to be a girl. I can be
Janet Guthrie, blazing the straightaway,
grinning full throttle. I can be anything.

II.
I could have been born in a car on Race Day.
My parents were new to Speedway, thought
it was a good day for a drive.

Forty weeks pregnant, my mother watched
my father maneuver the Studebaker
around the block. It took three hours.

III.
Back home again in Indiana, I marry
a race fan, learn the names of drivers born
since I moved away. Where is Tom Sneva?

On Community Day, John Andretti
chats with us, signs the album filled
with photographs. Lyn St. James is smiling.

Rick Mears has a Facebook page. Janet Guthrie
is the same age as my mom. Jim Nabors still
belts out the sycamores and new-mown hay.

We spend Carb Day getting sunburned
in the bleachers, eating chips and queso.
Team Helio wins the Pit Stop Challenge.

IV.
The 100th running is the year I turn 50—
older than Al Unser, who took the checkered
flag at 47. Foyt's grandson has retired.

Ladies and gentlemen have started more than
three thousand engines. The bricks look good
for their age. And I feel young. I feel like racing.

—Tracy Mishkin, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: *My childhood memories of listening to the Indy 500 on the radio, as well as more recent memories of my husband's race day enthusiasm, inspired this poem. I enjoyed talking to my mother about her memories of Race Day 1966.*

A City Without Horses

Show me the ones who can imagine
a hundred-thousand moons from now
a city on this prairie of Big Bluestem grass
purple coneflower, bird and wasp
forged between these two rivers
built of crushed rock and black tar
soft clay fired to a million red bricks
buttermilk churned to white cream.

Show me the ones who can see
factories filled with steel horses
thirty-three machines in rows
pulsing with rod and piston
filled with wingless men and women
breaking hard against earth's bounds
of wind
gravity
torque.

Show me the ones who can hear
the scream of engine and crowd
the smell of rubber and gasoline
chequered flags
ones who ride faster than the fastest braves
of the Miami and the Lenape
striving to become more than mortal
striving to live forever
in this fabled city without horses

and I shall call them victors.

—Mike Murphy, Baltimore, MD

From the author: *The Indianapolis 500 is an American icon, both the race itself and the place, and symbolizes the striving and friendly competition of men and women to go farther and faster, something that, along with concepts of 'victory', while universal and unchanged since ancient times, can also be viewed differently depending on one's perspective. The title comes from the original Speedway developer's vision of '...a city without horses.'*

Mike Murphy is a writer and poet who once raced a canary yellow 1970 Volvo 1800 through the streets of small Appalachian towns, dreaming he was Mario Andretti. He now lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife Stacie and two cats named Daisy and Zelda.

The Oval

Under the same Indiana sun
that brought up the crops

The glittering cars shoot by
like that first Model T assembly line

And the roar of noise
like the steel works
forging the parts

And the haze wavering above the track
like the wind trailing the steam engine
as it rushed the raw materials
to the factories

And the hearts and minds in the grandstand
like the hearts and minds
of the men and the women
who cleared the stumps,
and planted the crops,

Under the same Indiana sun.
—Adam Phillips, Boise, ID

From the author: I've always been fascinated by the huge spectacle, whatever the genre. And the Indy 500 definitely matches that description!

1969

Paul Newman, Indy 500 champ,
(Hollywood edition)
Feasts on a thousand eyes
While Underwood and Sharp
Pace the Brickyards' racecar.

Their all-American prototype
Runs shunt to shunt with surgical
Precision, each bite of fame
Crisp as kale. Drafting like the devil's
In his carbon fiber body,

And dressed in a kinetic smile,
Their driver bends the track
Into a sublime palindrome
Secure in the knowledge that distances
—like legends—are measured by speed.

—Anna Saikin, Missouri City, TX

From the author: *I was inspired to write this poem for my father, who has been a fan of racing since the 1960s. I grew up with movies such as Steve McQueen "Le Mans" and Paul Newman's "Winning" playing in the background. The domestic imagery is in part an homage to my mom, a Hoosier, who always kept a bottle of Newman's Own dressing in the fridge.*

We Are Indy

We are Indy: We are Harroun and Dawson
And Thomas and Goux. We are history!
We are Indy: We are Hunter-Reay and Franchitti
And Kanaan and Montoya. We are now!
We master going faster! We are Indy!
We are Indy: In sync in a blink and burn
Is our only energy drink! Pure motorsport spirit!
We are the greatest spectacle in racing,
The triple crown of motorsport, 300,000 strong!
We are Indy: Dialed in, tuned in; locked,
Ready to begin; on the limit in a New York minute!
We master going faster! We are Indy!
We are Indy: In a single-seat, open cockpit car,
With a 2.2 liter, twin-turbocharged,
Direct-injected V-6 engine, optimized to run
500 to 700 horsepower, 235 miles per hour.
We master going faster! We are Indy!
We are Indy: Stoked and ready; rocking steady,
One breath; burning rubber without spinning wheels;
Running the fastest lap; we are pole position.
We are Indy: We come, sporting colors, backing teams;
Then suddenly, we all forget; our favored car,
Each vain regret; as we are Indy, as we master
Going faster; we all win when the checkered
Flag is waved! We all reach for a bottle of milk!
And we will always master going faster! We are Indy!

—G.E. Schwartz, West Henrietta, NY

From the author: *There are many thrills to fill the senses when you experience an Indy 500 race-- even if you can only watch it on TV! After all, it's incredible: And even if you don't know who you're pulling for, the last 100 laps are nerve-wracking! But the biggest thrill of an Indy 500 race is the crowd, and how for a while during the race, we are all one.*

Urgency

Here are the tires with one purpose: to spin until
Their quick end, swapped out in seconds. Here is
The Parade of Bands, the RVs, propped tents,
Food vendors hawking tenderloins large
As your father's open hand. Here are fly-bys
Screaming welcome overhead. Here is Gasoline Alley,
The Snake Pit, the Coke lot. No one can deny
We are sovereign in this land. Eternity waits
Beyond the next turn, and the next. Here is where
The engines start. Who is in the last row?
Hear the starting command, spring's furious last rite.
The first turn is the hardest. Don't be fooled by TV.
Try it at 225 m.p.h., with downforce more than double
That of gravity. Anticipation is a driver's hallmark.
Why radio exists: To hear the call that, wherever
You are, brings you back home again to Indiana,
To the Indianapolis of your heart. 500 miles
With no destination except the world.
Your favorite driver is here. And the rookie
Who will become your favorite next year.

—Andrew Scott, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: *I wanted to capture a fan's experience not from the infield, but from afar. Growing up in central Indiana, I almost never watched the race on TV, but my family always listened to the radio—which, of course, is far more poetic.*

The Beauty of Uncertainty

Stay tuned for the greatest spectacle in racing!
Always expect the unexpected:
dazzling comets of metal-crushing contacts,
half-shafts breaking like dry twigs in deep woods,
the quiet sigh of a piston failing,
the simple slowing, ever-slowing yet somehow still
shocking Stop! when gas burns too swiftly,
refueling mechanisms detaching as birds taking flight,
turbines that have always provided power failing into hush,
brakes beginning to fade like the brightness
of autumn leaves just before they fall
the roundness of tires instantly flat as the earth.

The perils are many, the rewards great
for driver and spectator alike.
Control is momentarily lost and we all wait to exhale,
a universal prayer of deliverance for those
who only want to fly on this solid ground we share.
This verge is where we congregate.

The beauty of uncertainty powers us on.
Someone gets the jump, blistering through the opening laps
while others wait, save it all for later
to fly down the backstretch, chasing our mutual reveries.
Winning the pole satisfies in the moment, yet guarantees nothing.
Leaders barely hold off slingshot challenges, advantages
swapped like so many whispers between friends.
Yellows flash to hinder the chase,
reds to cease all haste, care for those in need.

How many of us have frantically tried to catch
what always remains just out of reach?
Then one comes out of nowhere, the nowhere of infinite hope,
the possibility present in every instant,
to snatch the win, take the checkered one for the storybook finish
fueling everyone's dreams until next we gather in Circle City
to celebrate the majesty of man and machine.

—Joanna Oltman Smith, Brooklyn, NY

From the author: *I was inspired to write the poem because I want to better understand the mystery of what draws so many of us to racing and the Indy500 in particular. There must be something universal, foundational, natural in our fascination with this sport, and I hope I have touched on some of those things in my poem, "The Beauty of Uncertainty."*

The Brickyard

In 1909, on three hundred acres of Indiana farmland, Carl Fisher built a two-and-a-half mile banked oval using thirty-two million pounds of bricks--a worldwide challenge for cars and drivers to come to Indianapolis and prove themselves, at the Brickyard.

Five minutes before 10 o'clock on Memorial Day in 1911, a series of aerial bombs announced the beginning of the first Indianapolis 500, a grueling 500-mile race won by Ray Harroun in a sleek six-cylinder Wasp, at the Brickyard.

For fifty years, cars in rows of three kept pace, awaiting the wave of the green flag. Unmatched in their eras: Duesenberg, Miller, Gilmore, Maserati, Offenhauser, Cooper--accelerated into history by the wave of the checkered flag at the Brickyard.

In 1965, the Lotus 38 revolutionized racing, followed by Pratt & Whitney, Offenhauser, Cosworth, Penske, Reynard-Ford--elegant engineering feats, reaching speeds of almost 240 per hour, at the Brickyard.

Lap by lap, win by win, drivers kissed the bricks and became legends; drivers like Harroun, Shaw, Foyt, Mears, Unser, Franchitti, Castroneves. Yet, the ones who lost everything are not forgotten. Stories of fallen heroes are told in houses, barrooms, newspapers, film, and at the Brickyard.

This year, when the grenade sounds and the Purdue band plays, fans in the Snake Pit, at parties, in the grandstands, or watching television back home again in Indiana will check their rearview mirrors and remember 100 years at the Brickyard.

—Nanette South Clark, Italy, TX

From the author: Having been a space shuttle rocket motor engineer and a designer on the 5-segment rocket motor team for the ARES project, I am always interested in the sleek, fast cars of the Indy 500. I would love to see the race in person someday.

Home Again

It's the Indy Five Hundred, we're back home again
At the one single race, each driver must win
For the one hundredth time, we meet in the spring
Ghosts roam the Brickyard, tradition is king.

In a voice near immortal, we might hear Heeezonit!
"It's a newww traaack record," somebody's done it
Carburation Day, for parts now long gone
Gasoline Alley? Not what they run on

Pulled from an old song, Andretti's sure proud
Should have asked why, but he's way past the crowd
Too many to mention, have ruled through the years
Like Foyt and Petillo and Unser and Mears

Victory's cup, with milk waiting in her
An uncommon toast, awaiting a winner
Line-ups have varied, but one's passed the test
Thirty-three drivers, aligned three abreast

Memories plague them, of races near won
Blocked out, bumped out, sometimes outgunned
Thirty-three poised, to get their revenge in
Launched by "Gentlemen, start your engines"

Thirty-three drivers, impatient racers
Held back for one lap, by much slower pacers
For the one hundredth time, two hundred times round
Those two point five miles of fury and sound

It's the one single race,
Each driver must win
It's the Indy Five Hundred
We're back home again

—Paul Spite, Valparaiso, IN

From the author: Though I have been to time trials a couple times, I have never been to the race itself. And your event is by far my wife's favorite sporting event. It would be nice to be able to take her at least once. Especially since we have just moved back to Indiana after spending fourteen years in Tennessee. It's good to be back home.

Racing Thoughts

The race has long since ceased to be
What in its early years it must have been –
The question of identity blurred in continuation.

All our advances in technology
Erase the aspect of physical labor,
Give the race an abstract flavor.

The cars drive for hours round in circles
Performing in truth their own little version
Of the formerly hypothetical eternal recurrence.

What time made thusly visible, we contemplate
The continuum and its subsequent division
Into two hundred quanta of two point five.

How is it on the racetrack we can say,
“We’ve been here before,” and be precise?
I’d suppose you could not run the same lap twice.

The real question, though, comes at the end:
Having no room for eternity on the Westside
We must ask what it means to win,

And what to do with that absurdity
The checkered flag? It must be true like poetry:
A race is never finished, only abandoned.

—Andrew Stautz, Indianapolis, IN

From the author: *I enjoy writing poetry and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on the Indianapolis 500 and its influence on me personally. Whenever people learn that Indianapolis is my hometown, they immediately start talking about the race.*

The Greatest Spectacle

“Stay tuned for the greatest spectacle in racing...”

The All-American Marching Band echoes Far
Away and Forever, the car begins pacing
Around and through where the wonderful masses are.

The All-American Marching Band echoes far
God Bless, the Beautiful and Anthem, the voice soars
Around and through where the wonderful masses are.
All goes still as the trumpet weeps with gaps of wars.

God bless the beautiful and anthem—the voice soars
Back Home Again; red, white, and blue fills the May sky.
All goes still as the trumpet weeps with gaps of wars—
Families’ Soldiers and the day—then jets fly by.

Back home again—Red White and Blue fills the May sky.
“Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines!” ignites
Families, Soldiers, and the Day, then jets fly by
In spellbinding fits of speed at once untouched heights.

“Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines!” ignites
The Eleven Rows of Three, gearing up to rage
In spellbinding fits of speed at once untouched heights.
The flag goes green with a mighty gust to the page.

The Eleven Rows of Three, gearing up to rage
Away and forever...the car beings pacing.
The flag goes green with a mighty gust to the page;
Stay tuned for the Greatest Spectacle in Racing...

—Matt Tapp, Westfield, IN

From the author: *Matt Tapp lives in Westfield with his wife and two daughters. One of Matt’s favorite traditions is Race Day at the Track with his two older brothers. His favorite part of the 500 is the incredible build-up and anticipation leading up to the Green Flag, which Matt tries to capture in this poem.*

Victory Lane

Upon the 100th Running of the Indy 500

The green flag waves and they're off in a blur—
a spectrum of light darting past us. They almost break
the barrier of sound, whipping round in the high whir
hummingbirds make magnified a million times. So much
rides on the rim, the cusp they cling to each treacherous
turn. Like charioteers circling the sun, they hold
steady their nerve to test how close they can edge
to snatch the spark that sets their name aflame.
For a hundred years it's been the same, but faster
and faster they course through the ether, passing us
like the flow of the years, and now we're drafting
Meyer, Rose, Foyt, Unser, Mears, Castroneves, legends
that surpass the speed of their shadow and bring us
to the finish line—to swig the milk and kiss the bricks.

—Shari Wagner, Westfield, IN

From the author: I was inspired to write this poem after watching a video of last year's Indy 500 drivers talking about why they race and listening to a podcast on Nelson Price's Indiana History Live radio show. I realized I had written poems about historical sites all over Indiana but not about one of the state's most famous places.

The Hundredth Checkered Flag

You chase the checkered flag, as we observe you pass.
Adrenaline pumping fuel... the crowd comes to their feet.
The hundredth time around, on bricks, on oil, on gas.

Men who chase their dreams, as bold as polished brass,
Ride thunder on the wind, while strapped into their seats.
You chase the checkered flag, as we observe you pass.

Acceleration force is moving balanced mass.
Ball bearings... grease... rods and crank shaft meet.
The hundredth time around, on bricks, on oil, on gas.

We pause to bow our heads, for racing's ruling class,
A hundred times we've come to watch the speed elite,
You chase the checkered flag, as we observe you pass.

We cheer our favorite sons, and toast you with a glass.
"God's speed" to you all, who give this special treat.
You chase the checkered flag, as we observe you pass.
The hundredth time around, on bricks, on oil, on gas.

—S. Evan Walters, Lebanon, IN

From the author: I wrote this poem in memory of Bob Harkey, who recently passed away. He was so looking forward to the 100th running of the race. I will long treasure the day he and I spent at the track together.

No Mean City

Today, a dusty cooler from the attic, a mile walk from a yard-turned parking lot, thick streak of sunscreen down the nose, crisp cut of a summer burn along the neck—Bookwalter's *no mean city* is our shared story. We forget that yesterday we might've quarreled. Even might've mocked the neighbor now sharing her bottled water as we've neglected to pack our own. Together we watch the future flash and roar before us. Are we not at the mercy of what's next? Do we not all imagine ourselves slung low in the driver's seat? Taking that third turn a bit tighter, holding one more lap before the pit, crossing the bricks. After today, tomorrow may not recognize you. A warmer face, the scent of wonder trailing behind.

—Jennifer Walton

From the author: Of course, there's the history and technological innovation, the excitement and adrenaline, but I think it's the community that emerges that's the most remarkable about this race. I imagine it's what holidays used to be like when the entire towns actually celebrated together. Everyone sits at the same table. I don't think we have much of that anymore.

Brickyard Baptism

His backyard is his Brickyard.
He kneels in the garden's soil and
With small hands, clears an oval,
Tamps the straights.
He leans above the track, a blimp's-eye view,
One hand in the infield, and
Lines up a starting grid of die-cast racers.
Drivers to your cars! he shouts.
Dust flies; the race is on.
Here, he is announcer, driver, fan,
Guiding favorites over Finish:
A tiny band of stones pressed into dirt.
He calls out drivers' names
As he pushes cars through Turn Four and across:
A.J.! Mario! Parnelli! Bobby!
The red car spins; he calls *Danny Sullivan!*
Cheering as he gives the car the win.
Wheels touch, drivers battle,
Noisy replays full of spirit and spit fill the air
Of every sunny backyard afternoon.

Until this late-May early morning
When this race, this place, turns real.
He watches out the window for a sign,
Thrill in every muscle and a ticket in his hand.
Finally, his heart races as he reads:
Indianapolis. Motor. Speedway.
The car dips into the shadows of the tunnel,
Rises inside into sunlight, sight and sound.
The boy falls silent, baptized,
And knows that he will never be the same.

—Brandy Wilkinson, Fishers, IN

From the author: *My husband grew up playing with Hot Wheels in his mother's flowerbed, often imitating memorable Indy 500 races. He has often described the feeling of entering the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and how, even after many years, it's still an emotional experience. I wanted to capture this spirit in a poem.*