

Michele Mekel

Childhood's Summer

At dusk, we raced gleefully
along tar-and-chip lanes
shadowed by stolid oak and elm.

Enveloped in fog
trailing from mosquito trucks,
we popped wheelies,
rode on handlebars,
stood on seats—
before recklessly wiping out.

We knew nothing
of helmets or protective pads—
aware only of the rough-and-tumble ways
of our feral child tribe.

Already scarred knees, palms, elbows
became pitted with loose gravel
once more.

Pebbles, dirt, tears
washed down the drain
by fizzing hydrogen peroxide rivulets.

Injuries wrapped in gauze
and stripes of surgical tape
served as bright white medals
won in the evening's fray.

Sent out again,
we collected bikes,
splayed on pavement
where they—we—had fallen.

Hobbling home in twilight,
a cricket chorus
was our dirge.

Living in Happy Valley, **Michele Mekel** wears many hats of her choosing: writer and editor; educator and bioethicist, poetess and creatrix, cat herder and chief can opener, witch and woman and, above all, human. With more than 125 poems published, her work has appeared in various academic and creative publications, including being featured on

Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac* and nominated for Best of the Net. Her poetry has also been translated into Cherokee. She is co-principal investigator for the *Viral Imaginations: COVID-19* project (viralimagination.psu.edu).