

Sandcutters

2024



Arizona State Poetry Society

Vin. Gosin



SANDCUTTERS

2024

Digital Edition

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Front Cover: Swallowtail Butterfly
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SANDCUTTERS 2024 ANTHOLOGY

The Arizona State Poetry Society (ASPS) is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization founded in 1966 dedicated to the art of poetry and to the appreciation, writing, reading, and speaking of poetry. We promote poetry at the state and local levels and serve to unite poets in fellowship and understanding, while embracing diversity in skin color, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, religion, socio-economics, language, different abilities, age, and neurodiversity. ASPS is a member of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS).

The Arizona State Poetry Society offers an annual journal *Sandcutters*, published and copyrighted by ASPS. We accept manuscripts from members *only* for the Member Contests, while the Annual Contest and Youth Contest are open to all poets, members and non-members, of ASPS. Information on all contests can be found on our website at <https://azpoetry.net>.

In the 1960s, the founding members of the Arizona State Poetry Society chose the title *Sandcutters* for this anthology to honor and poetically reflect Arizona's pioneer spirit. The early settlers were called "Sandcutters" because the wheels of their wagons and stagecoaches cut through the territory's desert sands with the objective to reach their promised land. Today, the membership of ASPS stands firmly upon a legacy of poets who perpetuated that unique spirit. They strive to continue the founders' poetic tradition as they make their own distinct marks in the sand, trusting those who come after will carry on the society's longstanding commitment to poetry and community.

Thank you to ALL who submitted poems to our contests and congratulations to all the winners. We look forward to another great year of writing and reading poetry in 2025!

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Mariana Warner
Datura

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ASPS continues to be one of most active state poetry organizations in the nation. I never tire of proudly telling this to anyone I meet.

My thanks go out to the Executive Board and our associates in appointed positions who have graciously given their time and expertise to ASPS this year. A diverse membership, including the incarcerated and neuro-diverse, grew to 235 in 2024. How wonderful it feels to say, through ASPS, poetry has touched the lives of so many people in Arizona.

One way we've expanded is the offering of workshops nearly every month. Eight hybrid and online workshops, facilitated by renowned instructors from around the country, were held this year. The topics ranged from the role of mindfulness and self-reflection in the creative process, to writing about forgiveness and compassion, to language, landscapes, haiku, revision, and music. Seven more workshops are offered in 2025.

The 2025 Annual Conference will be held on Saturday, January 11 at Pima Community College in Tucson. Joni Wallace, the featured poet of this year's *Sandcutters* and winner of the 2023 NM-AZ Book Award, is a guest speaker. Ben Gardea—fondly known by his stage name BJam—will introduce the 2024 Arizona State SLAM Champ, Joshua Wiss, as well as the Arizona High School Spoken Word Champion, Isabel Tehran. Both will perform their poetry. Lisa Jordan, an ASPS member, and someone whose enthusiasm is not curbed by a wheelchair, will also perform.

Sandcutters—what beautiful cover art this year! Thanks to Jon Sebba and Kim Sosin for sharing their gift of photography. Blessings to our many judges for their time and to all the poets from around the country who supported the contests. You have all made it possible for *Sandcutters* to grow into a widely-known, quality publication.

In closing, I wish to again thank all the Board members for their time and commitment to ASPS.

We are a family and we invite you to join us.

Katie Sarah Zale
ASPS President

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Tina Quinn Durham
Horse Sculpture

FEATURED POET

Joni Wallace



Joni Wallace is the author of four poetry collections including *Blinking Ephemeral Valentine*, winner of Four Way Books' Levis Prize (selected by Mary Jo Bang) and *Kingdom Come Radio Show* (Barrow Street, 2017) documentary poetry about the Manhattan Project. Her most recent collection, *Landscape with Missing River* (Barrow Street, 2023), received the 2023 Arizona-New Mexico Book Award and the 2024 WILLA (*Women Writing the West*) Award. Joni grew up in Los Alamos, New Mexico and earned her MFA at the University of Montana.

Landscape Flocked in Snow

When I get the details right, the exact placement
of the shadows, he rises, we talk late in the kitchen
about fishing, his last trip to Alaska, how my dog,
a Standard, would fight any bear

*they're bred for it
you should read that book*

When he taught me how to drive, he'd get
in the stick-shift with a full cup of coffee, say

don't spill my coffee

It is snowing and I have seen two dirty eagles
perched in the rotting oak down the road

you can borrow my binoculars

he'd say, he means everyone has awakened
alone, has felt their own obsolescence

in a landscape. He means the way loneliness
expands, a breeze blowing through leafless,

the way snow made up of ice crystals reflecting
dissolves over any configuration of water.

I look out over swaths of white. Fenceposts,
the fissures between. Oblivion acres.

Leaves fill the absence where the river had been.
On either side, the banks are wrapped in snow.

*First published in *Landscape with Missing River* -
Barrow Street Press, 2023

JANUARY MEMBER CONTEST

Judged By

Nancy Cook



Nancy Cook runs “The Witness Project,” a program of community writing workshops in Minneapolis designed to enable creative work by under-represented voices and serves as a regional vice president for the League of Minnesota Poets. A social practice artist, she is particularly focused on intersections of geography, history, and cultural heritage in her work, which has appeared in a broad spectrum of publications, including *The Michigan Quarterly*, *The McNeese Review*, and *Cutbank*.

Come into My Parlor

“Come into my parlor,” said the spider
to the fly, “don’t you be an outsider.
Now I’ve set my table for early tea,
I’ve invited crickets and bumble bees,
you’ll see I am a very cultured spider.”

She spun her web wider, didn’t hide her
lovely lace; the loneliness inside her
made her words seem so smooth and slippery,
“Come into my parlor.”

I was dining with friends, then I spied her,
Sal signaled for me to sit beside her,
her whole conversation was about me,
and she had some etchings for me to see.
Spoke to my ear words sweet as cider,
“Come into my parlor.”

January Category I: Traditional Form – Traditional Rhyming

In Sync

To think in rhyme is such a curse
when I attempt to write free verse,
to miss the prize and miss the purse
there's nothing worse, no nothing worse.

The rhyming comes despite myself,
I'm haunted by that rhyming elf,
who mocks me from his cliché shelf—
it rhymes itself, it rhymes itself.

Demanding meter for its stay
a patterned verse in every way,
it drives my free verse far away
day after day, yes, every day.

It always comes with such great ease
it flows so freely if you please,
it's rhyming meter that I sneeze—
Oh! this disease, yes, this disease.

The verse streams freely every night
my free verse rhymes with all its might
I write free verse, now don't you sleight,
I know I'm right, I am so right.

Don't trouble me with what you think
or push too hard, I'm on the brink
it's free verse that I always ink,
but just in sync, yes, just in sync.

January Category I: Traditional Form – Monotetra

Linda R. Payne ~ Ramsey, Minnesota

Winter Forest

(A homo-linguistic poem patterned after
“Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening”
by Robert Frost)

Who owns this forest? I perceive
he lives in town. I do believe
he'll never know, that in this place
I watched the snowflakes interweave.

My smallish mount turns baffled face,
no house was here within this place.
Just icy pond and trees surround
us underneath this starlit space.

His bells make an impatient sound;
he stamps his hooves upon the ground.
A gentle sigh blows through the trees
as lacy snowflakes float around.

In peaceful shades of ebonyes,
the woods inspire reveries.
But duties call before my ease;
but duties call before my ease.

January Category I: Traditional Form – Homo-linguistic

Allison Fraclose ~ Marana, Arizona

Your Ashes

They blacken the walkway
The doors, the table,
The photo of you
Floating in Iraq,
The rumbling walls,
The whispering street,
The plastic tubs of family
Stacked in the corner,
The distant mud
Of Louisiana,
And the desert sand
In Arizona.

Your ashes
Spread the globe,
though they never
leave the urn.

January Category II: Free Verse

Balanced on the Edges of the Gloaming

Green lines waver
pulsing mulching mowing
dragon mouth flaming
draining fire from marrow
drip drip drips
salivating slipping
into whiteness ascending
thin air
thinner hair wavering
in mussed clumps
simmering linens on this bed
shimmer like faded mirages
in a dense distance
of needled arms and legs
dangling snagging
bulging varicose viscosity
blood sausage
tight edged metal corners
of a rested bed
cradling its coagulated carcass
morphine mania
pain as pleasure
skimming tunnels of corridors
burrowing deep into halls
mazed and corned
like when we were nine
hopelessly lost in the field
as it caught
edges of sunset
casting phased shadows
like your face
sifting slivers of sunlight
quiet hum
breath rising descending
in this sterile ivory room
as I grasp your porcelain hand
begging it
to not break

January Category II: Free Verse

Jane Stuart ~ Flatwoods, Kentucky

Across The Moon

Across the moon
Addis Ababa
spreads the light
of a thousand stars
into a new universe,
one that is cold
as eucalyptus stuck with thorns.
Your feet move
in many directions
making frozen steps
on the rocks
and in the valley
where wild birds
warm their wings at daybreak.
You can see
yourself
in the lake's mirror,
rising above
ancient cities,
painted memories
and those dreams
we had when we were young
and the world
could not be found

January Category II: Free Verse

Weather Whiplash

Frost carved on windows
on minus-six-degree mornings,
dark eyes of the squirrel, paw on breast,
questions through the window,
can I swipe this kernel of corn?
The morning glory seed-sized eyes of chickadees
survey the terrain as they pick
black sunflower seeds, the ice flowers
erupt like pale Indian Pipes from
the frozen ground, crinkly curtains
of beech saplings bow to the ground,
allowing a window to your former path,
and the dark round eyes of your border collie
who is small enough to pass
under the bough barrier
but you must forge another path.

January Category III: Below Zero

Patience with Winter

How is it that the cold doesn't kill them -
these deer who are slow and calm as they
move across the yard. The deer lace the new
snow with tracks like stitches on a baseball.
They are a family of three. They drag the tips
of their hooves and pause, here at the quince,
and there, at the willow, where seed pods dangle
in coats of clear ice. I know this doe.
She has a slash like a crescent over her
right flank, an old cut that healed.
She has stories, this one. She has scars.
We were well below zero last night.
Dawn developed like a bad bruise.
Hoarfrost coated tree branches in tufts as
ragged as torn linen. The earth is frozen.
The doe strolls like a queen leading her
royal maids over pond ice that last week was
as thin as porcelain. Their deaths will be
brutal and swift if the ice doesn't hold.
A sudden crack, a splash, a swirl of water,
a descent to the deep center.
But the deer move forward; driven with hunger.
The ice proves solid. The little family moves on.
And me? I'm anchored to this cabin, I am a ship
in permanent port. I have more winters behind me
than I have winters ahead. I avoid ice.
I have my own stories and scars.
I wait in a warm kitchen for the plows
that will free me, flashing orange lights and
spinning out grey road salt. I should have,
by now, learned to love winter. I should have,
by now, learned to be fearless in cold, to
move with the patience of the wise and
storied doe who crossed my yard.

Brenda Wildrick ~ Fort Morgan, Colorado

Snow Falls on the Housed and the Unhoused Alike

She sips a hot drink, turns up the heat,
while others search for shelter from the cold,
and some struggle daily for something to eat.
She admires the snow that shimmers like gold

while others search for shelter from the cold,
and the temperature drops below zero.
She admires the snow that shimmers like gold
far outside her large picture window,

and the temperature drops below zero.
Children shiver with red frozen faces
far outside her large picture window.
In distant and not so distant places

children shiver with red frozen faces.
Homes reduced to rubble dominate the news
in distant and not so distant places.
She prefers windows with beautiful views.

Homes reduced to rubble dominate the news,
and some struggle daily for something to eat.
She prefers windows with beautiful views.
She sips a hot drink, turns up the heat.

January Category III: Below Zero

MARCH MEMBER CONTEST

Judged By

Tiel Aisha Ansari



Sufi warrior poet **Tiel Aisha Ansari** has been featured by *Measure*, *Windfall*, and *Everyman's Library* among many others. Her collections include *Knocking from Inside*, *High-Voltage Lines*, *Country Well-Known as an Old Nightmare's Stable*, *The Day of My First Driving Lesson*, and *Dervish Lions*. She formerly hosted Wider Window Poetry on KBOO Community Radio.

Sally Bennett Boyington ~ Knoxville, Tennessee

Spadefoot Toad

Let us praise those surprising toads who
rose from the sand and dramatically sang
the summer storms into existence, their
mating by moonlight a hearty hallelujah
to restorative rain, a companionable chorus
bold but brief, producing tadpoles that live on
as toads, digging deep when rains are done, every
day then spent alone, only dirt on either side.

(a Golden Shovel poem based on *who sang their hallelujah chorus on every side*,
a line from “The Contemplative Toad” in Joseph Wood Krutch’s *The Desert Year*)

March Category I: Traditional Form – Golden Shovel

Three Horses on the Rio Verde

They're in water up to their bellies,
so tired they rest their dark muzzles
on the mirror of dusk-stained water,
lipping current, not drinking after
the first hurried gulps. The bay swallows,

lifts his head when the sunset dazzles
him a few steps into the shallows.
The mares close their burning eyes tighter.
They're in water up to their bellies.

It feels good to get rid of saddles,
let water ease bruised, aching muscles.
The men are lighting their small fire.
The mares imagine oats for dinner,
a rub-down, grazing away from flies,
dreaming in water up to their bellies.

March Category I: Traditional Form – Rondeau

Sonya Manes ~ Tucson, Arizona

Ode to and Recipe for Marzipan

I envy you if this is your first taste.
A flavor that for me makes others moot.
Enrobed in chocolate or served as a paste,
or molded to resemble tiny fruit.

Some people think that it's not a big deal.
They lean toward the classic ice-cream bar.
We're taught about the marvels of the wheel.
But this invention takes the cake by far.

It's hard to find at stores in the U.S.
But here!—Mix sweet'ner and blanched almond flour,
some liquid makes a ball without much mess,
then toss into the fridge for just an hour.

Hail alchemists of yore who found the key.
For modern chefs, a magic synergy.

March Category I: Traditional Form – Shakespearean Sonnet

Issue

our collective slobber drowns
an ivory stick
 as if
I'd want to clean an inch
more off this thick
muscle-wrapped, arthritis-click
ticking time bomb than I
have to.
I don't have time
to suck the marrow dry
and gnaw and pry
your aching thighs
down to a size
that we can handle.
I will dismantle
your legs and hands though.

to keep this cordial,
is to remove my jaw.

March Category II: Free Verse

Arizona Song

“He who loves the world as he does his own body
can be entrusted with the world.”

the Tao Te Ching

I walked beside the greasewood,
saw mesquite leaves tremble in the summer air.
I heard the wind sing:

*Can you keep your heart pure?
Can you love the sahuaro,
the small bark scorpion?
Will you embrace this earth?*

The bush burned but was not consumed.
The fire sang:

*Look beneath these narrow leaves.
Though nature hold ten thousand deaths,
life is part of every song.
Join yourself with other selves.
You have been given much.
Be thankful.
Live.*

March Category II: Free Verse

Julia Keefer ~ Tucson, Arizona

all good stories start with bones

twisted white-gray mare thunders
across landscape. do you see?
do you yield?

highway eats away at the pregnant mountains
and licks its hollow lips.

green shadow
blankets the floor of the universe.

tired girl sits in tree.
tired boy rubs warpaint
under his eyes,

into his eyes.

it stings.

do you see, boy? do you yield?

boy does not yield. boy sings. boy bares
his sharpest tooth.

girl throws a spear through the leaves.

boy turns into stallion
and eats us all.

March Category II: Free Verse

Buttons & Beeps

At fifteen months, you can't resist a button—
big or small, round or square
even things resembling buttons—
you love to press those that make noise,
light up or cause something to happen

You reach out your short arm and tiny finger
to touch any appliance with buttons
sometimes with my help
sometimes by yourself
retreating, looking at me and wondering

*Will I get in trouble?
Will it break?
What does it do?*

You can't resist noises
turning your head with each sound
investigating its origin
toast popping up, tea kettle boiling,
microwave beeping

Coffee grinding and brewing
fan buzzing, ice cubes dropping
air fryer whirring, water dispensing,
dishwasher swishing
such a noisy kitchen—

You make me see and hear afresh
all those alluring, enticing, irresistible
kitchen buttons & beeps

March Category III: It was Irresistible

Sharon Lask Munson ~ Surprise, Arizona

Faint Beat of a Butterfly's Wing

They meet, rushing for the same taxi
embroiled in afternoon traffic

sprinting from opposite sides.

We'll share, he declares
barely breaking his cadence.

She acquiesces, sliding in, smoothing
the skirt of her cotton dress

arms moving slowly, her soft summer tan
dustings of shimmer

and, yes, she's wearing blue
but more of periwinkle, pale tint of indigo.

The rustle of her movement, a whisper.

She leans forward
informing the driver of her destination.

The nape of her neck imparts
a scent of crushed roses

her voice, melodious
a hint of soft consonants.

She plays with a thin strand of gold
around her narrow wrist

sliding the bracelet from cuff to elbow

not nervously, but one of those habits
a person acquires, unaware.

A slight breeze floats through open windows
faint beat of a butterfly's wing.

March Category III: It was Irresistible

Nan Rubin ~ Tucson, Arizona

Wanting

She straddles his motorcycle
on their first date, leans in
for his smell of leather, tobacco.
They bend as one into mountain curves.
She steps off at the top to meet his lips
feel the weight and press of his body
for the first time.

Over months, his beard rubs raw
her breasts, belly, and thighs.
She thinks of nothing but the way
to offer herself to him, until abruptly,
she knows he's done with her
by the way he guns the engine.

She has all trace
of what they made
scraped from her womb,
only to feel her body
cinched tight
around emptiness.

Wanting, leads her to buy
his brand of cigarettes,
smoke them as she imagines
his regret -
the purring sound
of that motorcycle engine.

March Category III: It was Irresistible

MAY MEMBER CONTEST

Judged By

Barbara Funke



Barbara J. Funke taught English and theater arts as well as competitive literary interpretation and public speaking for 36 years in Indiana. Retired to St. George, Utah, she is a member of Utah State Poetry Society and Redrock Writers, having coordinated its 25th Creative Writing Seminar and 19th national Chaparral Poetry Forum contest and chapbook in 2022. Her poems have appeared in *Lilipoh* magazine, *Southern Quill*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Panorama*, *Encore*, *Canyon Chorus* chapbook, and several state contest-winning collections, including *Sandcutters* and *Ink to Paper*. Her chapbook publication *Feel the Cold*, is now available courtesy of Lisa Bickmore's Utah Poet Laureate project.

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

Upon Julia's Cold*

With apologies to Robert Herrick

Whenas to bed my Julia goes,
Methinks how indiscreetly flows
The liquefaction of her nose!

No matter if I try to flee
From sneezes blowing each way free:
That virus overtaketh me!

*A parody of *Upon Julia's Clothes*:

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then methinks, how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes!

Next, when I cast mine eyes, and see
That brave vibration each way free,
O how that glittering taketh me!

May Category I: Traditional Form – Rhymed Parody

Janice Canerdy ~ Potts Camp, Mississippi

The Trail of Tears

As rain falls hard and soaks the ground
and thunder roars its mighty sound,
so tears of the displaced may fall,
their cries bespeaking dearth and pall.

The Deep South tribes of long ago
were forced to forge a trail of woe,
of death and want, with goods so small,
their cries bespeaking dearth and pall.

The Choctaws first were brought to tears
when forced from land they'd held for years,
no longer standing strong and tall,
their cries bespeaking dearth and pall.

The rugged journey thousands made
to westward land should never fade
from memory. We must recall
their cries bespeaking dearth and pall.

May Category I: Traditional Form – Kyrielle

Dance Because

Dance cause
no one's watching
or cares about how your feet
kick so high plants clap, and music
rings out

May Category I: Traditional Form – Cinquain

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

Eulogy for an Old Friend

Here lies
in all its holey-ness
my ancient once-green T-shirt,

lately deceased
after many adventures —
encounters with parrot beaks,
hang-ups on thornbushes
and run-ins with barbwire fences,
not to mention all those times
churned through the washer
and flung about in the dryer;

faithful companion
on countless off-road hikes —
bleached by hot sun,
christened by cold brooks
and drenched in thunderstorms,
only to be again (and again)
impregnated with dust and sweat
and burrs and biting flies.

Dear shirt, old buddy,
may you rest in peace.
I'll not forget you
ever.
So full of holes...
so full of memories.

May Category II: Free Verse

Frances Donohue-Fisher ~ Green Valley, Arizona

Maybe?

This day
This Mother's Day
Three mothers sit together quietly
No babies or toddlers or teens
To break the grown-up mood

Dignity reigns while
Six eyes silently implore their used-to-be-children
Please bring us small soft feet
And wiggles and giggles

We long to join in
The chaos of
Another generation

May Category II: Free Verse

**Nightingale
Bird of My Dream**

I've locked you outside of my me
thinking my life unfit for a guest
of your magic esteem

of the poor I'm the same as the rest
most of us live in patterned nests
with straws made of the same
and the insane
most none of us try to defy
the unholy game
of the day
most of us pray

to Jesus or Buddha
but if God be Omni
surely he dwells
in the Nightingale
bird of my dream

Nightingale Nightingale
mystery
enter me alchemy cure
poet my ways
fly me high
beyond days
economied boundaried lure
sing gone my I-can't-believe
gift your magic to me
Nightingale Nightingale
day me free!

Lollie Butler ~ Tucson, Arizona

Red Bird

From the arms of a mesquite,
A red bird whistles the morning awake,
This is honey placed on the altar,
Fair offering to the sun.

The red bird peers down into a night's rain pool,
Her fractured reflection, not quite red, peers back
Through a shag of leaves.

A distant mockingbird echoes them both,
High note, low note.
An eye to the sky, an ear to trees
And a red feather floating.

Maybe now is when we capture time.
Maybe not.

May Category III: Three Birds

Catching Three Coocons

Dove waits
to unlock his coocoo
for his nesting
lover.

Lacquered pipe,
tremors of
the folding syrx, unlocks the hollow
co...co...coc...coo
bursts forth co...coc...coo

that sails
to the restless bed
of the female lover's
inner ear.

One
napping
lover tilts head
on side of another. Eyes a slit.

The pair sit to warm a brood:
father by day,
mother by night.
Tongue to tongue fills squab with crop milk.

In nest, all enter serene dream.
Blanketed by moonlight, all sleep tight.

Emerge sunrise to herald in coocoos for a new morning.

Owls

They know
Things
They
Portend
Things
Perched in their disquieting silences
Waiting patiently for the mask
Of darkness
To cloak their business
While plotting the demise
Of undercover rodents
Skittering to their rendezvous
Through overgrown mazes
Shrews sharing intelligence
With moles
Moles seeking safe houses.

The owls deal in trade secrets -
Their incandescent eyes keen
For surveillance
Their precision wings plying night
Deftly than an assassin's blade
Their ears sensitive to
Even the whisper of snow

So armed
They unfurl themselves
And stars for witness
Pluck one more mammalian agent
From its field network

The scream you hear
Is universal.

May Category III: Three Birds

JULY MEMBER CONTEST

Judged By

Carol Bachofner



Carol Willette Bachofner is an award-winning poet, memoirist, photographer, and watercolorist. She served as Poet Laureate of Rockland, Maine from 2012 -2016. Carol is the author of 7 books of poetry, most recently *Test Pattern, a Fantod of Prose Poems* (Finishing Line Press, 2018). Carol enjoys experimenting with forms and fractured forms. She says: *Poetry is a living thing, always evolving but never losing sight of its parentage, its legacy.* Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals, such as *Prairie Schooner*, *The Connecticut Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Cream City Review*, as well as in the following anthologies, *Dawnland Voices*, *An Anthology of Writings from Indigenous New England* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), *Enough!* (Littoral Books 2020) and *Wait* (Littoral Books 2021).

David Robert Boyce ~ Ogden, Utah

Bitter Always Is My Most Passioned Heart

Bitter always is my most passionate heart.
The fires of Hell can never quench;
Tears run down my cheeks every twilight's start,
The poison from Love's serpent fully spent.

Flee far away and stay nearest my sight.
Will I Death's lover ever be?
Please do not urge me go towards that light
Where your delectous face I'd burn to see!

With fetice I yearn for your tightest grasp,
As I've always said from the very start.
Egyptian Queen send your finest Asp,
And bury it inside my spiriting heart.
Where no traveler shall ever return
Despite my faulting heart's desperate yearn!

July Category I: Traditional Form – Sonnet

Ann M. Penton ~ Green Valley, Arizona

this starlight ran
nonstop for years to get here
~ staggering

July Category I: Traditional Form – Haiku

Leah Serrano ~ Tucson, Arizona

Tarantula hands
Weave, whip, and slide- coax you in
I'll devour you

July Category I: Traditional Form – Haiku

Lightning Bugs

Those sparky little blinkers
are flying around
in a million square inches
of warm summer nights,
in some forgotten park,
in some small
Midwestern town,
where all their tiny lights
illuminate picnic tables
that need to be painted.

July Category II: Free Verse

paradise amid the gravel

a little paradise amid the gravel
if I were a Gila woodpecker I'd
never yearn for a lushly forested
tumbling river, dropped between
glaciated mountains and tiny
wild strawberries

rosy brushed finches fussing over
the steady coo of mourning doves
orange blossoms' scent
silver-misting every part of the day
would be enough

a bedraggled mulberry full of
cradling nests and
bugs pollinating
shading the dry
dust of a garden where only
thick skinned tomatoes withstand
the long summers
would fulfill my
every wish

July Category II: Free Verse

I could (could I?)

There are so many things
That I am not
I tell myself
I'm not good at math
I'm not a writer
I'm not hungry
Not competitive
Not tired
Not busy
Not doing anything
Or I lie and say I am
Fine
Okay
Definitely not upset
What about all the other things that I am?
Could I allow myself to be?
Smart, captivating, graceful, wild
Could I ever be?

July Category II: Free Verse

salt nectar sea

just one precious life
melts from loneliness
into salt nectar sea
all beings and worlds beloved

she has breathed salt water in dreams
a forgotten simple truth being
one, unseparated
embracing, absorbed in warmth

her silvered edges
once appeared distinct
hopes and confusions
private histories
all touched and released

no need for courage
she is not apart anymore
ancient galaxies of silted krill
minerals of lost civilizations
sunlight filtered wavering
lungs eased at last
in ecstatic union

in this dream she remembers
breathe water light filling ease
dream remembers the dreams before
in continuum conjoined with sea
blood is salt water
tides' motion is pulse

like light of a wave's facets
a moment of lucid humanity
she wonders, still dreaming
how ever she forgot
this
breathe water
light filling ease

Mark Hudson ~ Evanston, Illinois

The Wind Whips the Water

The wind whips the water in the fountain,
as the breeze blows branches of trees.
The Broadway bus at the corner,
the rain has lowered the degrees.
Should you wear shorts or a sweater?
The sun comes out as just a tease.
Summer could never be better,
now only if I wouldn't have to freeze!

July Category III: Sweet, Cold Water

Tanya Whitney ~ Sorrento, Louisiana

A Tiny Drop of Water

It teetered on the edge,
clinging to the ridge
until deciding to fall,
a tiny drop of cold rain.

Drops of rain falling from
the darkened clouds above,
holding so much power
over life and death.

Others soon followed
the same trail downward
like sweet tears flowing from
one's eyes onto their cheeks.

Little grains of salty water
welling from mixed emotions
of joy and happiness to sorrow
fall like raindrops to the ground.

Single droplets of moisture,
expressions of the heart's feelings.
Poignant displays of sentiment
cascade down like the gentle rain.

Miniature pearls of essence
existing in the smallest trace.
Salty teardrops and sweet raindrops
both demonstrate intense emotions.

July Category III: Sweet, Cold Water

SEPTEMBER MEMBER CONTEST

Judged By

Heather Clark



Heather Ann G. Clark is 2nd Vice President/Historian for the Iowa Poetry Association. She has been published in *Periphery*, *Lyrical Iowa*, and *Patient Worthy*. Heather founded and led the Winterset Writers' Workshop for many years and has helped facilitate a writing workshop at a national conference for patients with rare diseases. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee.

Bear and Neighbor Yap

I walk my dog each early morn
Before the day grows hot.
He runs ahead with head held high
With energy a lot.

His frisky tail swings back and forth
In automated time;
He stops to smell at every bush –
His movements flow like rhyme.

The neighbor dog whom we call “Yap”
Because she yaps away,
Defends her turf like coyotes do –
She chases Bear each day.

Bear wanders onto Yappy’s yard
And wags his long, black tail,
As if to say, “Come, chase me now” –
It works – it never fails.

He knows his long legs can’t be beat –
He simply likes the run.
She yaps and chases after him.
My bear has found his “sun.”

I get my early laugh each day,
I eye the doggy game,
Just knowing both dogs get their kicks
Without a costly blame.

September Category I: Traditional Form – Rhyming Quatrain

My Mind

Why does my mind say yes,
but my body says too much stress?
I am told it is old age,
that puts me into a rage.
old age I will suppress.

September Category I: Traditional Form – Limerick

Barbara Sherman ~ Oro Valley, Arizona

Sonnet for the Catalinas

They peaks divide the shadow from the real
and hide the city's daily haze from view.
They bash the brightness of the sun surreal
to subtle shades of dusty brown and blue.

They notice not the scurrying of we
who climb up to the tops of their domain.
Our little feet are ghostly, and our woes
mean nothing to their omnipresent reign.

Each day the mountains work their hallowed change
from predawn light in which their contours fade
to afternoon when ridges on this range
stand out like abstract sculptures roughly laid.

When this abundant land is scourged by drought
Mountains' bright eye will watch the stars blink out.

September Category I: Traditional Form – Sonnet

Henry Childers ~ Tucson, Arizona

May 17, 2024 – Mom’s Birthday Is Today

she would be 104
her last years spent
in a memory care unit
which sounds like a place where you
take your ailing computer
but there was no repair there

a long steady relentless decline
punctuated unexpectedly at times
like a lightning flash in the evening
then back to the gathering darkness
but so slow, so slow
yet relentless as I came to see
the times that I was there

my sister saw her day-to-day
and maybe it was better that way
maybe for her the time slowed down
for me it was a staged good-bye
like watching a ship sail out to sea
in a series of black-and-white photos

September Category II: Free Verse

John W. Crawford ~ Arkadelphia, Arkansas

The Brownie Way of Life

Sugar cookies, macaroons, ginger ale punch and trail mix:
food for hungry Brownies from sponsor Kathryn's Kitchen,
to feed starving, active girls who would stay after school
to work on honor badges and learn "girl things" about life;

sharing around the board-covered pool table
where knowledge kits for the future were built;
taking long hikes on the Perritt Nature Trail
to learn of lasting natural truths;
sleeping in those hot pup tents on steamy summer camp days
where humaneness often met its challenge –

all these acts of smallness matched such little acts of kindness
as we learned together in the Brownie way of life.

September Category II: Free Verse

I Buried Your Gifts

We marveled at how
beautiful a machine our bodies were
we walked we sang we loved
to curl around the clouds until
 a staircase appeared that allowed us down
it showed me once
a blue city of a quiet everything in subtle surprise
I realized you
were fiery different from my assumptions
 not for me
not of me I needed sameness I wanted you
to be my all my understudy
inside of my commands and desires I
chose you as my shadow
you began indifference and sad humor
 in the evenings – tortured me so I tortured you
 with tea leaves
that gave no messages and tauntings
that progressed for hours
until respect often lay on the floor between us limp
as a dress caught in the rain.

I buried your gifts in the yard.
I changed my phone number
after hearing
the last tears in your voice in voicemail
in my head I hear the end
repeated each night when sleep attempts
I rise
I pace as a nervous invalid I pat myself on the back as
a child I check
 to see
if my heart is still there
stiffly, beating.

September Category II: Free Verse

Grindavík
Reykjanes Peninsula, Iceland

We trod those shores
that now shake and quaver
like a waterbed
with a cat walking across it,
spurting earth's lifeblood,
red-gold lava trails
juddering forth to spit
into the sea.

what seems solid, attached,
floats on melting substance
and if a giant steps too hard
it will sink into magmic depths
like a poor creature
disappearing in quicksand.

Volcanic nuggets
left from surface breach
ten thousand quakes ago;
I cling to rock
as if it holds security.

September Category III: Deep Underground

Barbara Sherman ~ Oro Valley, Arizona

Spadefoot

Scaphiopus couchii

when the fury of the monsoon abates
spadefoot toad waits on the edge of
a newly formed pool and broadcasts
loneliness through the pregnant air

I'm here for you
I'm here for you now
I'm here now and ready

I am here

he is lucky and she comes
eager to release her eggs
in the slim puddle that will in time
be sucked dry in the heat of sun

this pair's only hope of procreation
rests upon cosmic cooperation
beyond their understanding

on the curve of a planet

already shucking its nurturing
role as it roils in the atomic
brilliance of its closest star

dig deep and live well my friends

September Category III: Deep Underground

Bonnie Wehle ~ Tucson, Arizona

Day of the Dead

We watch families arrange keepsakes on little altars
to entice their lost beloveds to return for a visit

and you ask what I want on mine. I remind you
that each poem I write is a shrine where I gather

what survives, where I probe for truth, dig
for forgotten fragments buried deep in my brain,

like chipping ore from the wall of an old mine,
the pickaxe sharpened, wielded with caution,

unearthing celadon, nuggets of turquoise, jade,
a rusty shovel, a miner's lamp missing its wick.

Put these on my altar.

September Category III: Deep Underground

2024 Arizona Youth Poetry Contest

The Arizona State Poetry Society held its second statewide youth poetry contest in 2024 for Arizona students, grades 1-12.

With the assistance of the Arizona Department of Education, ASPS publicized this contest to all public schools in Arizona, as well as many private schools and home schools.

Under the leadership of ASPS Outreach Chairperson CChristy White, the contest received over 1,000 submissions in three separate categories:

- Grades 1-4
- Grades 5-8
- Grades 9-12

Prize Awards

<u>Grades 1-4</u>	<u>Grades 5-8</u>	<u>Grades 9-12</u>
First Place ~ \$30	First Place ~ \$35	First Place ~ \$50
Second Place ~ \$20	Second Place ~ \$25	Second Place ~ \$30
Third Place ~ \$10	Third Place ~ \$15	Third Place ~ \$20

We thank the Arizona Department of Education for helping us publicize this contest, also the many educators who helped promote the contest in their schools, and CChristy White for her hard work in running the contest with the assistance of Karen Morales and Dianne Brown.

We look forward to offering the contest each year and encouraging all students to express themselves through poetry. We recognize that youth are the future of society, and indeed even our poetry society as some may end up leading the future ASPS.

ARIZONA STATE YOUTH CONTEST

Grades 1-4

Judged By

Roberta L. Howard



Roberta L. Howard's poetic roots grew from childhood. Her short stories, artwork and poetry have been published since junior high and in the years following. Her formal training came from the University of Arizona and poetry workshops, especially those she shared with Will Inman, CChristy White, Rita Magdeleno, Richard Tavenner, Norman Kraft and so many others she grew deep roots in poetry. Former Director of the Lamplight Reading Series for twenty years, lover and contributor to poetry, and an inspiring high school teacher in Tucson before moving on to other endeavors. She now lives in Oregon near her son, daughter-in-law, and two well-loved grandbabies.

Tyler Kajiyama Holmes ~ Chandler, Arizona
Grade 4, Great Hearts Online School

Pupu'ole

Hawaiian sea snail
Burrowed deep
Under
 crashing
 waves

At the shoreline in La'ie.

I build a sandcastle.
Digging a moat, with my hands,
 scooping foamy water and sand.
Surprise!
I hold a smooth, slippery, spiral
 Pupu'ole shell!

I look inside the swirly shelter.
A living creature moves!

Even though I love the sea snail,
I think it would be sad
leaving its seashore home.

I say goodbye,
 digging gently,
and return the creature
back to the salty sea.

Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 1-4 – First Place

Riding Free

I got a bicycle for my birthday!
Grape jelly purple with pink taffy stripes.
It has a basket, sparkly streamers,
a tinkling bell.
And most importantly,
no training wheels!

I am scared, curious, but eager to ride
without help, all by myself!

At first,
my dad holds the handles,
I push down hard on the pedals.
I am wobbly, falling,
stopping, and starting again.

Suddenly, my dad lets go and shouts,
“Just keep pedaling! You’ll find your balance!”
I’m nervous, trying not to fall, but
I am moving forward!
Slow at first,
then faster and faster.

The wind blows away my fear
and blurs the colors and sounds.
I hear my dad’s footsteps chasing after me.
He is always close by, just in case.
My family cheers me on!

I am strong!
I feel alive!
With my bicycle,
I am riding free!

Bennett Sakas ~ Scottsdale, Arizona
Grade 2, Sonoran Sky Elementary

Four Minutes of Darkness

Earth
Cosmic magic show
Light from the sun gets blocked by the moon
Indiana is in the path of totality
Penumbra
Sun
Eclipse

Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 1-4 – Third Place

ARIZONA STATE YOUTH CONTEST

Grades 5-8

Judged By

Sage Franklin



Sage Franklin began writing when she was twelve years old. It began as a couple of English assignments and never stopped. She speaks of how therapeutic it has been for her over the years, helping her through many difficult and even traumatic times in her life. She took creative writing courses in college, including several poetry and fiction writing courses. She is now studying for her master's degree at Southern Oregon University with a focus on developing her own writing therapy practice which includes poetry and fiction writing.

The Mirror

The mirror was her enemy.
It only ever reflected back her imperfections
That everyone said were perfect
And she would agree.
But she didn't have to believe to agree
and that was what she knew.
For many years she would walk
By mirrors and they would crack
Under the pressure and stress she omitted.
All except this one.

A total of three
mirrors had broken down
Since she was a child
But she can't remember the third,
Only how the shards cut her.
The mirror had left her unclean
And she knew she would never be
Dirt free.

And here she stood staring
At the mirror that just
Wouldn't shatter.
And she cried.
She cried and she
Punched that mirror until it
Shattered just like the rest.
And she looked down at the
Shattered pieces and
For once the mirror showed
Back her real self.

And in shattered pieces
She smiled and waved
And the mirror smiled back.

Hi.
I'm the girl who
Broke the mirror.

Hannah Vu ~ Lake Havasu City, Arizona
Grade 7, Thunderbolt Middle School

Almondala

I clawed at my throat viciously,
Struggling to breathe properly.
My past is haunting me from all directions,
Taunts and sneers being thrown,
Left and right,
It's like I'm being beaten from the inside out.
My eyes are blurred by my tears and fears, Of what?
I'll never get to know.
Please save me,
Please save me, Oh,
My almondala.

My mind runs at a million miles
I sink deeper and deeper into my thoughts
The *What ifs?* threatening me with all their might.
The memories I want to erase are written in pen.
Mysterious fears loom over me like shadows.
Monsters hiding in every corner of my mind,
Ready to jump out at any hint of anxiousness.
The deafening sound of my heart muffles the world.

Please save me,
Please save me,
Oh,
My almondala.

'Scuse me,
But, I think it's "amygdala".

Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 5-8 – Second Place

Ryan Batson ~ Scottsdale, Arizona
Grade 5, Redfield Elementary

White Holes

In cosmic realms where theories may sway,
White holes emerge in the mind's astral play.
Beyond horizons where speculation roams free,
Celestial dance whispers of what might be.
Through cosmic tapestry, a theoretical display.
White holes shimmer in the mathematicians array
Spouting brilliance where light escapes the code,
Times paradox in theories, a speculative abode.
Eternal fountains cascade in a theoretical ballet,
In the vast cosmos, where ideas play.
Paradoxical whispers in the astral sea.
White Holes unfold where light and dreams flee.

Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 5-8 – Third Place

ARIZONA STATE YOUTH CONTEST

Grades 9-12

Judged By

Nikki Fragala



Nikki Fragala Barnes (@bynikkibarnes) is an experimental poet and participatory installation artist. An arts activist, Barnes centers material works on accessibility, land-based public histories, and the poetics of place, including monuments and multilingual/translated works. An independent editor and curator, Barnes served as the Poetry Editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Obra/Artifact*, a literary journal of experimental works before joining the Editorial Collective for the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*. Barnes has exhibited/performed works at the Orlando Museum of Art (Orlando, FL), the Atlantic Center for the Arts (New Smyrna Beach, FL) and The Liminal (Valencia, Spain). Her work is also held in private collections internationally. She is earning a Ph.D. in Texts and Technology while teaching poetry writing at the University of Central Florida. <https://bynikkibarnes.com/>

Rory Skeen ~ Peoria, Arizona
Grade 10, Mountain Ridge High School

Remembering Flowers

You tell me to remember
days of sunshine and glistening beaches.
You tell me to remember
running through fire that rained down
on us with the fierceness of a grieving mother.
You tell me to remember
cold nights spent waltzing with
wild-tamed wolves.
You tell me that we were young and free and
explored with the wind that called to us.
You tell me to remember
but I don't.
Because now those days are done
and I can no longer feel
the warmth or the cold of the wind.
I can't remember your welcoming smile
or your laugh filtering in the air.
I can't remember
sunshine or fire or beaches or wolves.
As the years go on and I try to look back
all I can remember is how you gutted me
and left flowers in your wake.
I can only remember the flowers.

Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 9-12 – First Place

Aspen Butler ~ Prescott, Arizona
Grade 9, Prescott High School

Dear Mom and Dad

I'm a teenager.
I'm emotional and complicated.
I'm in my room most of the time.
I'm on my phone a lot,
I have private things on my phone.
And i'm going to hide things from you
I have secrets
But you have to understand that i'm tired too.
You have to understand that i want to live my life
You have to understand that my life isn't so easy
You have to understand
I don't want you to know everything about my life
I don't want you to get mad at me
when I don't want to do something
I'm tired too
I have tests to study for
Things to practice
Friends to help
A life to live.
And i can't do that with you hovering over me
I'm sorry that i'm not as perfect as my brother,
But i'm not him.
I try my hardest to make you happy
But it seems like you are never satisfied with me.
I try to keep my grades up,
I try to make you happy,
I try to do all my chores,
I try to be a perfect daughter.
But now I know that I can't make you happy.
I can try my hardest but you won't be happy.
And that's fine.
Dear Mom and Dad,
I'm sorry,
But this is me.
Dear Mom and Dad,
Do you even see me?
Do you even hear me?
Dear Mom and Dad,
Will you still love me,
If i'm not what you to want me to be?

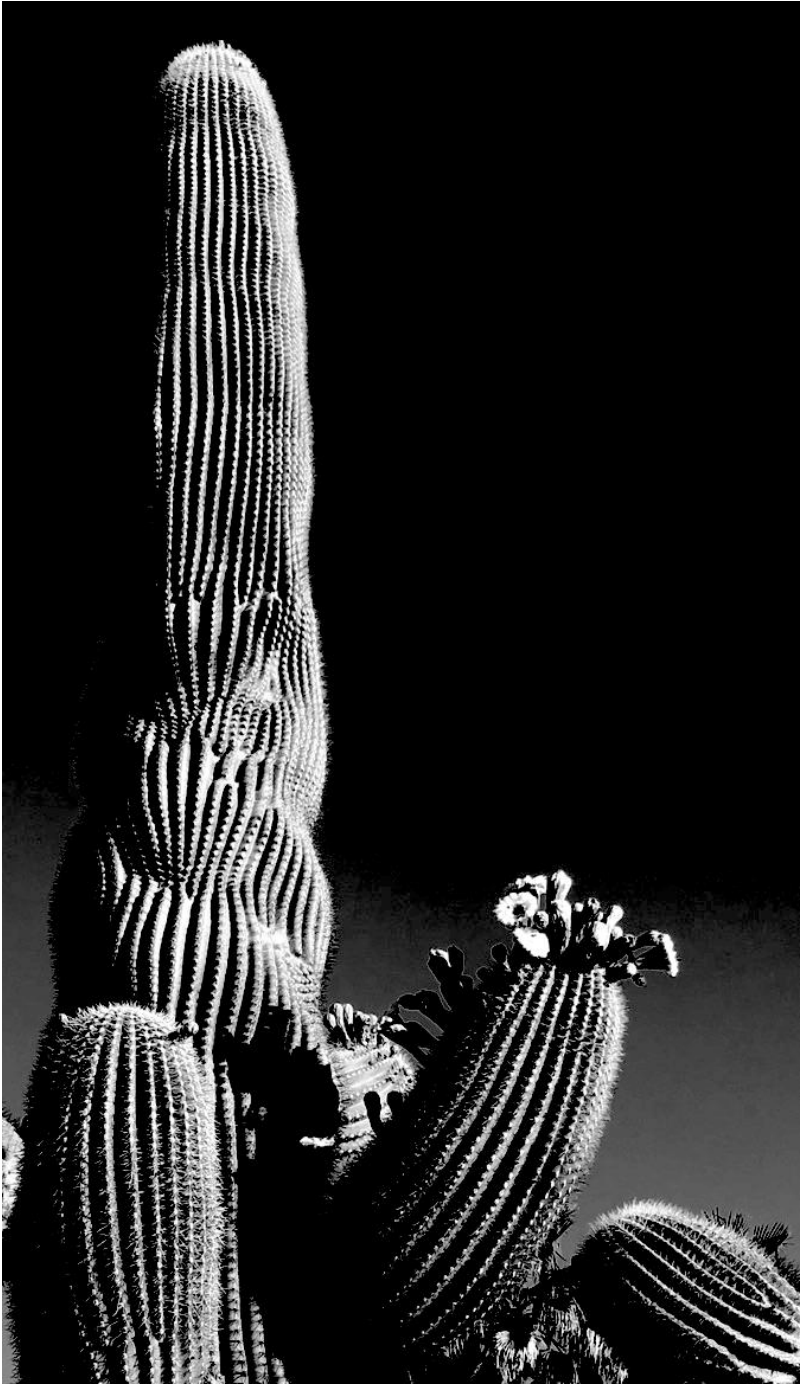
Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 9-12 – Second Place

Nadia Mendez ~ Glendale, Arizona
Grade 12, Mountain Ridge High School

Éclosion Immortalis

Frozen passion of precious stone
Quick burst of the flaring stars
To you, the mermaid with legs
A woman — part of everything.
The universe, the earth, and the waters,
I see them all laced through you.
I revere the memories that trace your clothes,
Your dress soaked to translucence.
Your sweeping movements powerful on uncanny legs
While you dance to replicate
The sea you were born of.
But reflected on the sea is a trillion infinities,
And with your face turned to greet the sun
I see the universe reflected in your crackling eyes,
The clouds in the creases of your dress,
And the fury of a solar flare
Resting within your melanin.
I watch on as you throw yourself to the sky,
Kept down only by the foot that stays,
Bonded with the earth.
A root.
Your voice shakes the planet.
You exist, immovable and unstoppable
By anything but your own will
A daughter in tune with her mother, Earth.
I see you, bronze angel
Frozen in time,
As immortal as the universe that dreamt you

Arizona Youth Contest – Grades 9-12 – Third Place



Walter Ralston
Saguaro

2024 ANNUAL CONTEST

This contest is open to members and non-members!

Qualifications are original, unpublished poems (except Category 14) not currently submitted to other contest(s). Any number of poems may be entered in each category, but individual poems may be submitted only once per entire contest. All entries should be sent in at one time. Submissions without fees will be disqualified.

Categories

1. ASPS Award
2. Aging Award
3. Cento Poem Award
4. Gardening Award
5. Issa Award in Haiku
6. Heroes Award
7. Humor / Satire Award
8. Jessie Belle Rittenhouse Memorial Award
9. Legacy Award
10. Long Free Verse Award
11. Nature's Gift Award
12. Persona Poem Award
13. Power of Women Award
14. Previously Published Poem Award
15. Previously Rejected Poem Award
16. Pride in Poetry Award
17. Rhyming Poetry for Children Award
18. Sci-Fi / Fantasy Award
19. Sonnet Award
20. Transitions Award
21. Wild Places, Open Spaces Award

Prize Awards

Category 1

First Place ~ \$100
Second Place ~ \$65
Third Place ~ \$35

Categories 2-22

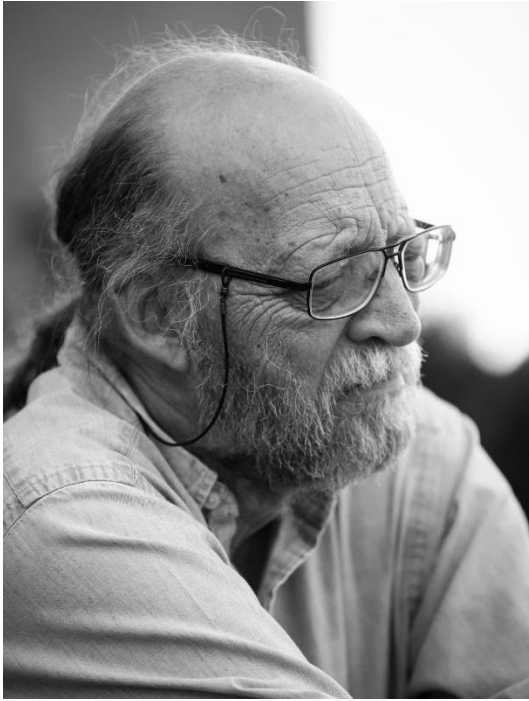
First Place ~ \$50
Second Place ~ \$30
Third Place ~ \$20

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 1 ~ ASPS Award

Sponsored by the Arizona State Poetry Society

Judged by Lennart Lundh



Lennart Lundh is a poet, photographer, historian, and short-fictionist. His work has appeared internationally in numerous publications, both print and online, since 1965. As a poet, he's been included in nearly 100 anthologies and multiple issues of over 120 journals. He has authored 30 poetry titles, ranging from full collections to micro-chapbooks, since 2011, many of them available through physical and virtual bookstores: *Arbor and Winepress*, *Lovesongs and other War Poems* were published in 2017. *The River Singing* won 1st Place in the 2019 Workhorse Writers Inaugural Chapbook Contest, and he has received numerous other awards. Len and his high school sweetheart live in northeastern Illinois.

https://www.pw.org/directory/writers/lennart_lundh

Randy K. Schwartz ~ Ann Arbor, Michigan

Preserve Even the Ashes

*U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,
Washington, DC*

We've parked at the Tidal Basin
on a cold, grey day.
This is a sacred place—
a museum with a skullcap—
and we speak in hushed whispers.

What we see parches our throats
and burns in our chests like muriatic:
the final belongings of the dead
and the tools of the regime.
The freight cars and train sheds.
Barbed wire. Gas canisters.

I'm issued the identity passbook
of Laszlo Schwed from rural Hungary,
who owned a shop selling goose meat
and down quilts. All Jews were declared "aliens"
and ordered to wear yellow stars;
they could only be outdoors from 9 to 10 a.m.
In one Spring more than 400,000 were deported
from Hungary to Auschwitz,
where Laszlo and his wife and daughter perished.

The apparatus knew no reason, only brutal action.
The skies burnt on without change,
without remorse, without end.
And each of us is condemned

to witness the pain, to transform it
by learning and by love.
They wield a lot of power, but not
the power to make right from wrong,
or truth from lies.

Category 1: ASPS Award – First Place

Moonrise

When the moon bursts over the cliffs
moths startle from my hair
and fly toward her as if they could.
The stars are blinded and an insect's
carapace strikes my face and burns.

In the bloom of exposure, the rocks
are bleached white and the snakes hiss
and curl tighter to the darkness.
The wind begins to scatter debris
and the sand slides below the owl's wings
and lashes the feet of mice who forage.

There is a generational thrill of fear
in the air, bits of wing and vein in the taste.
Others are already seamlessly taking our places
under the moon while we smell of impermanence
and sense the ghosts of ancestors
stirring in warning.

Category 1: ASPS Award – Second Place

Big bull nose

Big bull nose sits there piping air
in and out, in and out,
even, neat, quick.
Oiled brow, flat cheeks,
skin pocked deep with scars, and oil, and sun.

Wide calm man sits with his hands
resting on a tall cane.
Came this morning on the bus
from up the mesa, up the ridge,
from up there, from near there,
from where the road runs clear
on out into the woods,
where the oaks start to bend and widen and sag.
From the place where grown men
still wait at bus stations,
where the gas stations sell belts carved
with wolf's heads
and oiled knives set in white bone.

Dips of eyes, dips of chin, silent bobs
when we tell him he needs surgery.
Points behind his ear in the inky reeds of hair:
where the incision will go.

Jangling, gathering of cans and beads
and leather when he rises.
Bottle slipped to his waist,
wallets, glasses falling like bridles from his neck,
sheep bells clambering when he hobbles to the door:
old man walking out of a scaley oak,
big horned goat scuttering off back into the woods.

Back to the bus, thick and sweaty leather,
back to the place with the tall pines, wet rocks,
fast highway running through,
billboards that sell dinosaur eggs,
wolf skins, gas, and milk,
motor hotels that poke like wigwams up into the sky,
sky that carries him everywhere.

Category 1: ASPS Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 2 ~ Aging Award

Sponsored by Walter and Regina Ralston

Judged by Dr. E.J. Wade



Dr. E.J. Wade is an educator and poet whose writing focuses on the silencing, exclusion, and invisibility of African American Women and their narratives. A three-time *Pushcart Award* nominee and Literary Editor of the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, she currently works as a Homebound Tutor for Oak Park River Forest High School located in Oak Park, Illinois. E.J.'s poems are published in the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Women Speak*, the *New Ohio Review*, *Salvation South*, *Callaloo Literary Journal* and the recently released novel, *No Perfect Mothers* by Karen Spears Zacharias. She holds a Doctor of Education from National Louis University, an MA in Appalachian Studies from Shepherd University and an MA of Creative Media Practices from the University of The West of Scotland. She is currently serving as President of the Illinois State Poetry Society.

flower

tulips whisper through soil
soaked with old bath water.
the wind is on time but i tell it
it is late—i am ungrateful.
storms torrent in my stomach.
doctors tell me they are made of
clouds called “anxieties.”
they tell me to imagine i
am sky and to let my feelings
turn to mists—airy, admissible.

in a dream last night i
reunited with my second-grade
best friend. her hair was still
gold and curled tightly against
her scalp—i know when i look
at her face, torched by years
of chimneys and drives upstate,
that she too is full of clouds.
the dirt grows uncomfortable between
my toes and i wake up alone.

my days go like this: i do equations,
eat and chide. wish i had someone
with whom to discuss my thoughts on
the unwinding trails of time. exhale
raindrops, take
sedative, take stimulant,
ask forgiveness, blink.
take melatonin.
watch the storm
fade and rematerialize outside
my window, seeping into my bedroom
through the gap beneath the
bathroom door—thundering indigo spirals.
over and over again. imagine
i'm a tulip, creased and pink,
a newborn pushing precariously through
the dirt.

Category 2: Aging Award – First Place

Laundry

Mom says she won't be hanging the laundry
outside next summer—at eighty-five
she's simply too tired and weak

The clothespins are hard to open,
she's afraid of falling on uneven ground
and she quickly becomes out of breath

No more hauling out the clothesline and setting it up
No rolling the clothes to the backyard in her cart
No fetching the broken-handled ice cream bucket
with assorted wooden and plastic clothespins

No more hanging up sheets, shirts and pants to dry
No draping items over the backs of lawn chairs
No laying out underwear and socks to bake in the sun

No more unclipping stiff clothes, stacking them in the cart
or pushing the mounded pile into the house to fold
it's just too much effort, so she allows me do it for her

Content to watch laundry sway in the breeze
she's hypnotized by the gentle rhythm of the clothes
fluttering back and forth, back and forth

Gradually the sun's warm blanket
and the drone of the highway traffic
lull her into a peaceful, well-earned nap

Category 2: Aging Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 3 ~ Cento Poem Award

Sponsored by the Tucson Poetry Society

Judged by Clayton Beach



Clayton Beach studied Japanese language and culture at UC-San Diego, but it wasn't until much later that he developed an interest in Japanese poetry. His poetry is syncretic, draws inspiration from Western and Eastern traditions, and has been published in a wide range of journals including *Modern Haiku*, *Bones*, *Rattle* and *NOON: journal of the short poem*. He is a member of the Portland Haiku Group, editor of *Heliosparrow Poetry Journal*, Linked-Verse editor for *Under the Basho*, and co-founder of Haiku Sanctuary. From Portland, OR, he works in admissions at the Lan Su Chinese Garden. When not researching or writing haiku he gardens, cooks, and enjoys hikes with his family in the Oregon woods. His book, *Memories of the Future: Linked and Contrapuntal Poetry* can be found on Amazon.

Splash of Words

We are not the same, you and i
Here is no question of whiteness
in the dusk of the river, the wind
scolding the purple-mad sky.

Air purple with chill,
the circles of the stormy moon
wake at dusk and throw off sleep,
despite being drenched with dread.

Forgotten as a fire that once was singing gold,
“My face is my fortune, sir,” she said,
the heavy world pushing toward it
like a hawk stealing a bird at the time of prey.

All this time, death beating the door in,
rapping at the window, crying through the lock.
I have survived my life, but
what endures isn't always what escapes.

O! Kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!
Too much to name, too much to think about.
Maybe the best graves stay unmarked.
All we know is the splash of words in passing.

Composed of lines from poems by: Wendell Berry, Billy Collins, e. e. cummings,
Louise Glück, Mother Goose Rhymes, Robert Hugo, T. S. Eliot, Mother Goose,
Amanda Gorman, J. Patrick Lewis, Frank O'Hara, Rumi, Joyce Sidman, Shel
Silverstein, and Sara Teasdale

Category 3: Cento Poem Award – First Place

Early Morning Cento

We are all as strong as a cactus
ready to burst into flame

out in the wild -- nothing
who counts the sparrows uncaged

aspen leaves turn silver to the sun
what of the swim in waterless spaces

while the dog under the table
eyes each plate with a dog's devotion

our animal hearts glow like the moon
and the sea will be magic again

let us be in your dream
the bird in your throat

like the hummingbird I saw this morning
how love hovers at the window

From:

Dogsear - Christopher Danowski

& *in Open, Marvel* - Felicia Zamora

Landscape of The Wait - Jami Macarty

Midday Moon - Tom Speer

Category 3: Cento Poem Award – Second Place

Katie Sarah Zale ~ Tucson, Arizona

Woman of Wounds

I'm the gutted woman.
I'm the woman of wounds.

'I' and 'I', meaning Anybody. No one.
Are you—Nobody—too?

I walk into the day, hands still empty,
and beg to be of use to someone.

After the rain, she finds puddles to jump in—
my child, knowing nothing of the storms to come.

Silent, I mourn a women's bitter lot:
to give birth to men who kill and are killed.

I have never wanted to march
or to wear an epaulet.

When people were being killed,
how could the sky have been so beautiful?

I slammed my shutters
and asked: 'How can I dig out my eyes?'

It's a hard time to be human.
We know too much and too little.

The weeping is an immense violin.
Nothing is heard but the weeping.

I wonder how, bound to each other as we are
we fail so often, in such ordinary ways.

Thanks to Anne Waldman, Denise Levertov, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Austen, Karma Tenzing Wangchuk, Grace Monte de Ramos, Tess Gallagher, Yoshihara Sachiko, Siamanto, Ellen Bass, Federico García Lorca, and Jane Hirshfield.

Category 3: Cento Poem Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 4 ~ Gardening Award

Sponsored by Laura Rodley

Judged by Judie Rae



Judie Rae has published poems in *Nimrod*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Canary Online Literary Magazine*, *Mudfish* and many others. In 2014, Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, *The Weight of Roses*. Judie has been fortunate to meet other poets at readings and is pleased to call them friends. She retired from 27 years as a teacher, and currently still teaches several writing-related courses for seniors through the Bernard Osher Foundation. In addition, she also serves on the literary committee for the Nevada County Arts Council where they provide a venue that local writers and poets can have their works heard. As a former college English instructor, she offers her editing skills to poets and writers with supportive ideas that can help poets and writers in their careers. <https://www.judierae.com/about>

Laura Bridges ~ Hot Springs, Arkansas

The Existence of Perfection

A tribute to the Ozarks

The mountain's mist clings
like lichen on boulders.
Clouds are part of the peaks
like ruins of log cabins
settled as sediment.

Nature still rules here.
Black-beaked vultures circle
the dying. Heavy-antlered bucks
sharpen their weapons
on pines. Possums
with young in tow
forage for grubs and seeds
by moonlight.

This splendor
must remain
untouched
to exist.

Category 4: Gardening Award – First Place

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

Pride of the Commandant

a Tanka

planted and tended
by Rudolf Höss who called it
“Paradise Garden”
 ablaze in floral splendor
 beside Auschwitz’s ovens

Category 4: Gardening Award – Second Place

CChristy White ~ Phoenix, Arizona

Daily Performance

The single sunflower seed takes hold,
sinks a fine radicle into moist dirt;

emergence produces two strong leaves,
catches sun and water for the fledgling plant.

Each day brings another vigorous bract,
of bristly greenery and more height;

tiny white moths take up residence
as the green starburst of the crown

floats on a dry desert breeze.

Every morning my beautiful dancer
summons me and I look

for the faintest hint of opening,
the slightest whisper of yellow

atop thickening, hairy stalk.

Every evening I take mental measure
of the day's growth, provide water,

promise to be present
when the center is revealed.

Emerging flower, anticipatory person;
a quiet dance between us,

an open-ended meditation.

Category 4: Gardening Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 5 ~ Issa Award in Haiku

Sponsored by David E. Navarro

Judged by Albert Schepers



Albert Schepers, is a civil engineer whose early passion for haiku was rekindled in 2001 when he began studying in earnest. His photographic art, which accompanies his haiku, comes from wandering BC forests, Nevada deserts, Ontario National parks, and his own gardens. In 2014 Albert joined AllPoetry at https://allpoetry.com/Albert_Schepers. He joined and ran the group Haiku Harbor; designed and taught an English Grammar Class; designed and founded the A&M Haiku Exploration group; and has organized, judged, participated in, and won many contests. Albert's haiku have been published in *Prism*, the AllPoetry group publication, Daily Haiga, and Asahi Haikuist Network. His poetry was published in *Oceans of Emotions, Poetry Anthology 2021* by International Poetry Fellowship. Albert was the August 2021 Guest Editor of 'Per Diem/Haiku of the Day' at The Haiku Foundation, and was the 2022 International Poetics Foundation Laureate. Albert's books can be found at Lulu.com.

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

sixty new houses –
does the lost field remember
its meadowlark?

Category 5: Issa Award in Haiku – First Place

Barbara Edler ~ Keokuk, Iowa

To Do List:

just got shorter–

grave snow blanket

Category 5: Issa Award in Haiku – Second Place

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

in predawn stillness
a single drop of water
trembles on the oar

Category 5: Issa Award in Haiku – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 6 ~ Heroes Award

Sponsored by Allison Fraclose

Judged by Donna O'Shaugnessy



Donna O'Shaugnessy was the recipient of the 2016 The Dermot Healy Competition Award (Ireland) and in 2018 won the Illinois Emerging Writer/ Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award. Her work has also appeared in several journals including *The Galway Review*, *Months to Years*, *Skylight 47*, *After Hours*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Tab: Journal of Poetics and Poetry* which nominated her poem for a Pushcart Prize. After a career in Hospice Nursing, she returned to college at age 55 for a degree in Creative Writing at the University of Illinois, Champaign Urbana. She resides on a small homestead in Saunemin, IL, with her husband where nature, the life and death cycles of their livestock and her past experiences in caring for the terminally ill, constantly inspire her work. She is a member of the Illinois State Poetry Society.

Dead soldier

Late summer,
bleat of crickets,
shadow of dusk,
and the heavy dust
that settles on dirt roads leading into woods.

Fields of wheat rolling in soft folds
into the jagged edge of old woods.

There in the wet peat of old, rotten wheat
and the stony, bricked musk of dirt,
and earth, and dust.

There in broken wheat, in tall and brittle reeds,
or there, against the squat logs of shepherd's huts,
or where the caked and loamy earth
smooths and darkens under tall pines.

They lay in blood-soaked canvas,
grainy and warm against dried clay,
enemy armies long gone.
They turn their faces one last time
into the brine of blood, and earth, and dust.

Category 6: Heroes Award – First Place

Jenny Wrenn ~ Elgin, Arizona

Rio Grande

I didn't let go of her I never let go
I held her squeezed against my chest
her tiny heart beating warbler wings
against my pounding man heart father heart

I wanted to pull her deep inside my breast
safe within the white protection of my ribs
so I could swim with two arms strong
against the river's current but I couldn't

so I tucked her under my t-shirt told her
to hold tight to my neck and she did
she didn't let go she never let go
our hearts pressed skin to skin

but the great brown river was too strong
maybe angry we'd left our home so angry
like la migra men that we'd tried to come
so it ripped my feet off the river bottom

and swept us along back toward home
I saw a glimpse of mi esposa dark hair wet
screaming on the shore no no no as
it took us away but we both never let go

Category 6: Heroes Award – Second Place

August nineteenth

silence wakens
large upon leaf

because i die
a broken song

because i die
a child's poem

a family
to letter time

scratching in sand
a love too large

and lines too long
screeching like birds

birds racing flame
flare into ash

hang last high notes
that will not fade

screams of martyrs
that will not fade

fingers tremble
close around day

fine violins
reach into heart

*Note: Federico Garcia Lorca was executed
(murdered) on August 19, 1936.*

Category 6: Heroes Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 7 ~ Humor / Satire Award

Sponsored by East Valley Poets

Judged by Shelly Hamlin-Rodrick



Shelly Hamlin-Rodrick (she/her) is an Iowa native and writer who's lived in Hawaii, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Illinois. A former lifestyle editor and library access services worker, she works for the NIU English Department as a support specialist for graduate programs. Recognized for her short fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, Shelly hikes, bikes, runs, and believes poetry can save the world. She currently serves on the executive board of The Iowa Poetry Association as treasurer and has been a featured poet at Northern Illinois University's *Midwestern Conference on Film, Language, and Literature*. Her poem, "Hope," will appear in the 2024 edition of *Lyrical Iowa* and has been nominated for a 2025 Pushcart Prize.

George Reed ~ Worcester, Massachusetts

Old Fashioned AI Love

I borrowed a thousand monkeys
So we could write the perfect love poem
for you.

I rented a large stadium and lined them up in front
Of identical black typewriters
The clatter scared the birds away
And I'll make an audio of the reverberation as a podcast
for you

As they type away, they keep flinging ink I think
At each other

I walk each row and pull the paper from the roll
Putting them in neat stacks to evaluate

It's now been 10 years
The neighborhood businesses complain
Of the odor and the noise
Of bananas stolen and apple carts tipped

But we persist in spite of citations and lack of permits
And rent arrears

Oh my true love do not despair
my monkey love will take
forever
I will lay delicate words at your feet someday
To show my true heart's emotion

I will take the best lines
from primate land
And put them on sweet valentines
With my ink-stained hand:

m yl ov isasa fever long ing st ll

Category 7: Humor / Satire Award – First Place

Alan Perry ~ Maple Grove, Minnesota

Spores

after Valley Fever

Unwittingly, I invited them in
by simply breathing,

without establishing a time
for these moldy guests to leave.

I had eaten their relatives,
mushrooming all over my plate

next to gravy and steak,
not realizing where they longed to be.

Emerging from the dirt, they rode
into my nose in an Arizona haboob

took up residence in my lungs
and coughed up a subtle hint

of plans to stay forever.

Category 7: Humor / Satire Award – Second Place

Angry Poem

This poem would slap me in the face
if it could it's that angry
it whines that I don't write
according to the "4 E's": Erudite
Esoteric, Enigmatic and Elite
it wants to be dressed in dark
reference to ancient Rome to
Dostoyevsky, Homer, Kant and Hume
it wants to go to parties where
people fawn over it for its rarified
obscurity its lovely ambiguity and
sigh over its myopic yet fatidic
abstruseness and keen profundity
finally, it turned up its little pug nose
squinted down at me and said
it seems I truly aspire to write
drivel like Dickenson and Oliver
Collins and Hooser and Angelou!
I nod and say goodnight kiss it
on its furrowed brow
and put it straight to bed

Category 7: Humor / Satire Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 8 ~ Jessie Belle Rittenhouse Memorial Award

Sponsored by Linda Rittenhouse

Judged by Jerri Hardesty



Jerri Hardesty lives in the woods of Alabama with husband, Kirk, also a writer. They run the nonprofit organization, New Dawn Unlimited, Inc., dedicated to poetry publishing, production, performance, promotion, preservation, and education. She attended the University of Montevallo (BS, MA), where she was also briefly an adjunct professor. Jerri has won more than 1600 awards and titles in both written and spoken word/performance poetry and has had almost 500 poems published. She was the 2009 Alabama State Poetry Society Poet of the Year, and is currently the 1st Vice President of ASPS (AL) overseeing events. NewDawnUnlimited.com.

On My Way to Zanzibar

I was on my way to Zanzibar
when he knocked at my door.
The force of him a magnet
I had never felt before.

A gallant buccaneer with dreams
to conquer seven seas,
his siren's smile and charm beguiled
like zephyr's gentle breeze.

Unpacked my bags and traded
ocean waves for love's sweet song.
As he became my compass,
walked the plank and fell headlong.

He gifted me his pearly whites,
swore 'til death do us part.
I let him drop his anchor deep
within my wench's heart.

Behind his patch the wounds
of life's betrayals hung like skulls.
His battered mast of untold storms,
in dark and evil hulls.

I emptied buckets, tried to bilge
his tattered treasure trove.
Replaced betrayal's scars
with gold doubloons of constant love.

Now rigging set, he's back at sea
to search for his North Star.
But the winds that fill his vessel's sails
left my door of dreams ajar.

Category 8: Jessie Belle Rittenhouse Memorial Award – First Place

CChristy White ~ Phoenix, Arizona

Cats in the Afternoon

Let us be cats this afternoon
snuggling into our warm pillows,
wrapped in our blanket cocoon.

We will nap until the new moon
rises and the curtains softly billow.
Let us be cats this afternoon.

Cuddling we curl like silver spoons,
our day gone away like a will o'
wisp, our dreams common commune.

Sleeping with soft bellies immune
to working hours we still owe,
let us be cats this afternoon

open to our whispered laughter, soon
listening to a single bird's trill. Oh,
our dreams are common commune.

This day is our own crafter's boon,
a lazy refuge among soft pillows.
Yes, let's be cats this afternoon
and sleek hunters under the moon.

Category 8: Jessie Belle Rittenhouse Memorial Award – Second Place

Linda R. Payne ~ Ramsey, Minnesota

Dawning

a Dizain

*Not knowing when
the Dawn will come,
I open every Door.*

Poem 1619, Emily Dickinson

Perhaps it's not in knowing when
the dawn will come, or certainty
that all of life I'll comprehend.
For if I had such surety,
would dreams become a casualty?

My heart will not be satisfied;
my yearning soul go undenied
unless I question, dream, explore.
With purpose and resolve applied
I'll open each inviting door.

Category 8: Jessie Belle Rittenhouse Memorial Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 9 ~ Legacy Award

Sponsored by CChristy White

Judged by Abby Duran



Abby Duran, founder/creative director of the writing service and global storytelling platform, VeraNation, where she threads the tapestry of professional biographies and creative content by assisting small business owners and creatives with their stories through narrative. She studied Arts Management at the College of Charleston and has a background in music journalism, including Charleston's photojournalist music publication, *9 to 5 Magazine* (2017-2020). Abby is a member of 1 Million Cups, Sisters in Song, and is the Charleston music director of Creative Mornings. She is a published poet and spoken word performer and released her debut publication, *Between Words*, in 2023. She was a 2022-2023 CHS Free Verse Poetry Festival participant, and has performed in NJ, NYC's Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Philly's Voices in Power, and Sofar Sounds. <https://www.veranation.com/meet-the-creative-director>.

Michele Worthington ~ Tucson, Arizona

Hunting Season

salt lick
lone deer sees us
being the same star dust
between trees, elements, cold rain
then ice

Category 9: Legacy Award – First Place

Lorraine Jeffery ~ Orem, Utah

In this
dry region of
mesquite, sage and bunchgrass,
our love of country is shown with
fireworks.

Category 9: Legacy Award – Second Place

Jerri Hardesty ~ Brierfield, Alabama

Autumn

The trees
Begin to blush,
Yellow and gold and red,
Knowing they will soon be
Naked.

Category 9: Legacy Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 10 ~ Long Free Verse Award

Sponsored by Martha H. Balph

Judged by Jill Angel Langlois



Jill Angel Langlois lives in Gurnee, IL with her husband and holds a BA in Literature from Governors State University, University Park, IL. Her poems and short stories have appeared in *The Reveiller*; *Starting Now – The Concerns of Young People*; *American Collegiate Poets*; *The Innovator*; *Surprise Me*; *Feathers, Fins and Fur*; *Earth Beneath, Sky Beyond*; *A Kiss Is Still A Kiss*; *Pioneer Press*; *Twilight Musings*; *Abyss & Apex Magazine of Speculative Fiction and Poetry*; *Possibilities*; *The Poetic Bond*; *The Joe Show*; *Poets Without Borders*; *Distilled Lives*, and are on display in libraries and galleries including Burning Bush Gallery in Wheaton, Lemont Center for the Arts, and the Artist’s Association of Elk Grove Village.

www.illinoispoets.org / www.poetrypoetry.com / www.findpoetry.com
www.highlandparkpoetry.org / <http://poetsandpatrons.net>

Father and Sons—Rough Draft

As a father of two sons I've wished
more and better for them than what they got.
Despite my best efforts to shape them,
to teach them how to be good men, the culture undid
everything. It gave them far more than they deserved,
for these were good young men, promising.

Their brains were rewired. Maybe replaced entirely.
Each neuron swapped with thoughts and values
alien to their upbringing. Whether it happened gradually
or all at once, I don't know. But I do know this:
They are not the sons I raised, the culture saw to that.

Their gestures, language, self-concepts-
all replaced with surgical precision.
How to hook their thumbs in their belt,
how to swagger their hips, how to drink,
how to fight and surrender simultaneously.

In a way, it is a kind of slow cooking
the male undergoes: his willing spirit tenderized
until the desired amount of flexibility is reached.
Then to toughen him up, he is repeatedly dipped in
and battered with insults: dumb shit, pussy, chicken,
dickhead, wuss. Whatever it takes till he's done.

He is repeatedly knocked down with abusive humor
until he hemorrhages inside. Only then can
he proudly say, "At least I can take a punch",
the prep work done for future crimes of self abuse.

Now he is ready to enter the world a MAN.
Ready for the game of corporate poker
where the odds are stacked against him,
where he imagines he can muscle his way to the top
to show he's alpha male, the boss,
so he doesn't get screwed.

So ready now to make his mark with six figures
to thump his chest and hump his Mercedes,
to tick off his marketing plan, left arm wrapped in a Rolex.
To stare for hours inside the brains of a display screen,
screaming inside, bouncing off the walls of his cubicle
his spirit downsized to prop up an oversized lifestyle.

And there is nothing his dad can do to stop it.
And what if I could? What are their options?
What else to be in America except a man?
If they fail, they stumble through life
like a shoe untied, tripping over themselves,
falling flat on their handsome faces.
Yet if they succeed, they may become
some one even their own father cannot love.

I have photographs of them as children.
How out of date they already are.
It pains me to look closely at their images.
so young and earnest, their feelings
painted all over their faces-
shy, hopeful, smiling into my camera
as if they actually believed
that their dad loved them so deeply
that he would never, never, NEVER
turn them over to the world.

Category 10: Long Free Verse Award – First Place

Scars: Gordon's Scourged Back 1863

On his back
My father has a tree.
It bears
No colorful blooms
Just jagged branches
Thorns splayed –
A thick, cancerous canopy.
This keloid lattice of flesh
Raised, razed- tells the tale
That tore and sold
The marred skin of a man.
Painful patterns form
Hieroglyphs, messages
Most choose not to see.

How does a man live,
Thrive with fibrous vines
Wrapping his torso, wrecking
Weighing his burdened back?
Like troubled ancestors before him
My father survives.
He stands stern, resilient.
Courage, defiance- decry
The wanton wrath
Of the rancid fruits
From his poison tree.

On his back
My father has a tree.
His hands are
Callused, cracked
From farming, fieldwork
Harvesting fortune for others.
He is impoverished by
Creepin' and cropin'
Hunger and starvin'-
Pullin' out of the mud
Weary and wasted while
Wonderin' how to see
Beyond the plow and fields.

On his back
My father has a tree.
Phantom leg irons hobble
His ankles; scrape
Tired, toughened feet.
Soldier shadows haunt him-
Some shackled, maimed,
Others burned
Deflowered, defamed-
Around their necks
Those who remained
Felt the rope tighten, hang
Them out for all to see
Bruised, black berries-
Like papa's tree.

In Autumn silhouette
I am pained
By his suffering
And all this I will
Remember as empires
Fade to ashes
at papa's coal-black, dusty feet.

Category 10: Long Free Verse Award – Second Place

Canis Minor

i.

They called you Posy.
Funny little roadside weed –
who knows what kind, or from where.
You just blew in one night with the rain,
shivering, hollow-eyed,
matted with burrs and mud.
No collar. No name.

You decided to stick around
(most of the time, anyway)
for eleven years –
more lives than a cat –
too many escapades
for anyone to count.

Every day they let dogs out to run,
you and the trio of pedigrees.
It wasn't hard to figure
who would trail home last.
And who would arrive with burrs
or porcupine quills
or perfume from a skunk in the culvert.

Always there seemed about you
something untamed,
unconfined.
A touch of Kerouac.

ii.

On the road
I found you.

Posy?

No response.

A chill breeze cut my face
as I raced
by Hancey's pasture
and Murphy's field,
retracing your steps
to deliver the dreaded message.

They bore you away to the clinic.
A quiet room.
You never came home.

iii.

Tonight,
one week out from your dying,
I pause along a frozen road
and look to the sky.

Strange, how we tame the dark
by connecting dots:
hunter, hare,
virgin and crow and swan,
great bear, small bear, lion and lynx,
great and small dog.

Strange, how some trick of mind
spirits you up there
(you crazy mutt, you gypsy you)
shoulder-to-shoulder with Sirius
(that wily old hound)
forever to chase the hare
down an avenue of stars.

Category 10: Long Free Verse Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 11 ~ Nature's Gift Award

Sponsored by Janet Rives

Judged by Marcella Remund



Marcella Remund, a native of Omaha, NE, and a South Dakota transplant, is the author of *Finger Bones & Other Relics* (Three Graces Press, 2008), *The Sea is My Ugly Twin* (Finishing Line Press 2018), and *The Book of Crooked Prayer* (Finishing Line Press 2020). *Hysterian* is coming from Finishing Line Press in 2025. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies and have won many awards and prizes. She strongly believes in writing as an essential part of *COMMUNITY*. She taught composition, literature, and creative writing at the University of South Dakota for over two decades. Marcella continues to teach online and community ed classes in creative writing, journaling, haiku, dream journaling, an introduction to the Magdalene Laundries of Ireland, and more. She and her husband live in a multi-species home where they watch turkey vultures circle and hear coyotes sing to the Missouri River. <https://www.marcellaremund.com/>

Mary Specker Stone ~ Scottsdale, Arizona

Pagan's Ghazal

My lady-body unfurls from drummed earth,
Leafing feet dance, toes strum earth.

Hum it, plant it full of fruits, and conjure bees,
Anoint me in your holy granite sanctum, earth.

Whirling, breeding, pleading: why this sphere?
Molten lava answers: *red conundrum, earth.*

Children hunt green toads and beetles camouflaged,
Their peaty heartbeats, tides' momentum, earth.

Let Jesus, ravens, Venus, sail the air,
I'll teeter-totter on my rocky fulcrum, earth.

Gazing at the mountain peaks, I levitate,
Quaking aspen snag me, down I come, earth.

Surrender to the radioactive stone,
Sink into your crusty home asylum, Earth.

Category 11: Nature's Gift Award – First Place

Alan Perry ~ Maple Grove, Minnesota

Topography Relief

—after the painting “Western Storms” by Ed Mell

I’m invited to sit with sharp angles
that cut mountains in ways

only tectonic plates could create. Sheared
at odd slants, cliffs and mesas form

a bladed landscape, lined like a ruler,
colored with a wide palette.

Rain like obelisks, drenched
in prism shades, glancing blows

of clean-edged downpours.
Clouds queue up in crystal shapes—

diamond clusters of pantone, trapezoids
in layered orange hues, thunderheads

as mountain-sized boulders. I’m enticed
into a cubist universe, askew

in its contrasts, dark like a coming storm.
But I hesitate to step into this plane

of finely-honed blocks. I need
soft edges of ambiguity, a pentimento

depth to be explored, the geometry
of earth—a curved horizon,

shapeless water, aurora light.

Category 11: Nature’s Gift Award – Second Place

Laura Bridges ~ Hot Springs, Arkansas

When Death Comes

Nex Adveho

There will be a swallow
before the silence
when syllables
recede into darkness.

The gurgitation
travels back down
without notice
like a green snake
climbing birch.

The lungs,
for the first time,
relax
like leaves
without wind.

Who knows
if there is truly
a light calling
the soul home
like a child
to his mother?

Or,
if it is like
heat that
dissipates
as it rises.

Category 11: Nature's Gift Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 12 ~ Persona Poem Award

Sponsored by Molly Saty

Judged by Mary Beth Bretzlauf



Mary Beth Bretzlauf is the author of *The Path That Beckons: Poems About the Journey* (2023). Mary Beth wears a lot of poetry hats. She is the current President of the Illinois State Poetry Society, and is also on the Board of East on Central Association which annually publishes *East on Central: A Journal of Arts and Letters from Highland Park, Illinois*, as well as part of Highland Park Poetry's events team and a contributing editor for several Highland Park Poetry anthologies. Mary Beth is also a member of Zion Writers Guild, Writers in Progress, and Wisconsin Writers Association. She was co-editor with Jennifer Dotson of *The Majesty of Trees: Poets & Artists Respond Root, Trunk and Branch*. To read an interview with Mary Beth, visit <https://www.jameslowellhall.com/post/poetic-ponderings-mary-beth-bretzlauf>.

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

Speaking for Animals, Who Cannot Ask

Will the ultraviolet hole
invisibly
growing in ozone
burn out our eyes?

You, of Adam's kind,
privileged to stand by
waiting to see
as you debate
behind your polarized
and multicoated lenses:
Do you envision
this?

Perhaps
you do not see
or do not wish to see
or do not think you need to see.

We, the others,
your untamed brothers on this ark
who fly or swim or crawl,
cannot be you.
Exposed
in our naked wildness,
we stand apart
and wait.

We have no words.
We have no colored glasses.
We have only
our eyes.

Category 12: Persona Poem Award – First Place

The Patriot

Clayton Beauchamp turned eighty today,
But still wears beret,
And cammies,
With tropical lightning patch,
On special occasions –

Like Veterans Day
And Memorial Day
When tears come easy now
Even when the high school band
Plays the National Anthem
At football games
With his right hand
Over his heart
And Old Glory swimming
In his eyes.

Half a life ago,
He took names
In the Nam
Amid splash of AK rounds
and RPG blossoms.

He still takes names –
Rubbings
From polished black stone.

Clayton Beauchamp turned eighty today,
But he still remembers.

Category 12: Persona Poem Award – Second Place

City Tree

My in vitro womb was potting soil
in a suburban greenhouse, then potted
and repotted until I filled a five-gallon container,
that cramped my hungry toes and stunted my growth.
Finally, I am trucked to the city and planted,
surrounded by a decorative brick wreath
aside the traffic and pedestrian way.
My roots constrained in compacted fill
beneath hot asphalt and confined
by pipes and footings below;
I find more water in sewer leaks
than in this alien earth.
My leaves must sort through smog
and fumes to find my breath.
I search for solar strength within the canyon
of office towers, banks and retail giants.
I'm fated to provide a patch of green;
to shade a park bench;
receive the pee of leashed poodles
while owners turn and gaze into shops;
or support a weary bicycle.
I miss my network of forest friends
that share nutrients in times of need
and warn neighbors of approaching pests.
But I am planted here, a solitary tree,
with a life expectancy less than half
my old growth brothers and sisters.
But I stand erect before my biped descendants,
a reminder of where they would rather be.

Category 12: Persona Poem Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 13 ~ Power of Women Award

Sponsored by West Valley Poets

Judged by Diane LeBlanc



Diane LeBlanc is a writer, teacher, and book artist with roots in Vermont, Wyoming, and Minnesota. She is the author of *The Feast Delayed* (Terrapin Books, 2021) and four poetry chapbooks: *This Space for Message*, *Sudden Geography*, *Dancer with Good Sow*, and *Hope in Zone Four*. Poems and essays appear in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*, among others. Awards include the 2024 RockPaperPoem Poetry Contest, the 2023 River Heron Poetry Prize, *Mid-American Review*'s 2019-20 Fineline Competition prize, and Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations. Diane is a professor of English and writer in residence at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. www.dianeleblancwriter.com.

Martha H. Ralph ~ Millville, Utah

The Color Blue

always belonged to Mother. Mother's eyes
were blue, like her lovely evening gown
of finest silk, or the sapphire on her hand –
so pure, I never dared touch.

Color our house blue.
Mother once told me the kitchen
of my early years screamed in hideous shades
of orange and brown, though I can't recall
our silences as anything but blue.
My cereal bowl had a blue rose
painted inside. I was expected
to eat every bite of oatmeal for yet another
promise of that flower.

In the attic of our house
I discovered a room apart, its wooden walls
unfinished, like the color of my eyes.
My garret was enchanted, inviolate
I thought, until the day Mother decided
every part of the house ought to be blue.
The painters came. They invaded my hiding place
and painted it. They painted over the eyes
of my secret knothole animals, and the wing
of an angel on my third bureau drawer.
That day, my entire world drowned in blue.

It's been almost twenty years now
since Mother died. My house
is wholly blue inside. Each morning I still
choke down cold lumps, insatiably yearning
to find, at the bottom of my bowl,
a perfect flower the color of her eyes.

Category 13: Power of Women Award – First Place

Metamorphosis

She had a disjointed peace,
like a jigsaw puzzle tossed
onto the carpet by a playful breeze,
then left to its own disorder.
She wasn't hurting anyone.
Besides, the scattered pattern was pretty.
She hinted at a landscape I knew well.

The doctors tried to put her together,
propped their textbooks up like puzzle box tops
and ran their paws over her,
searching first for straight edges and right angles,
then bulbous protrusions.
Over and over they tested hooks in nooks,
bruising the edges with each wrong twist.

Once when I went to visit, she slipped
me a handful of verses.
Don't let them see these, she whispered
and winked. *We need to keep them guessing.*
In the poster on her wall, Escher's fish
merged into geese and flew away.

Category 13: Power of Women Award – Second Place

Stephanie DuPont ~ Sugar Hill, Georgia

The Trade

Amelia could cut through
her sister Muriel's blazing eyes
when she arrived home without the winter coal.
Her sure-but-anxious hands clutched
the feathered figurine
she had longed for—her first dream.
The stars
seemed within reach as her fingers skimmed
the glossed surface of the winged creature.
“Remember our favorite poem, Pidge—
A winter coat for a hyacinth,”
Amelia pled.
“Remember how we always shared our dreams, Pidge.”
Who wouldn't trade
a burden as black as coal for freedom,
for poetry—
to soar like a bird? Wild and free,
their childhood shaped who they became.

I've pored over
their ghosts in osprey memoirs,
Muriel always believed in Amelia,
even when the world didn't.

I caught
Amelia's cloud-woven messages from her first act
of bravery to her last—
grow wings, embrace Amelia's words—
“The fears are paper tigers.” That spider
in the corner is just a crumpled cat. Now I know
why you persisted—

What the departing regret most—
courage, courage, courage, and happiness—
longing for another window, trading
the heating money for a chance to fly.

*Dedicated to Amelia Earhart, whose bravery soared from her first act to her last,
trading warmth for flight. In our hearts, her memory took flight, living on.*

Category 13: Power of Women Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 14 ~ Previously Published Poem Award

Sponsored by Alan and Kris Perry

Judged by Julie Allyn Johnson



Julie Allyn Johnson is a sawyer's daughter, the eldest of 6 girls, and grew up with stacks of logs and sawdust piles as their own personal playground. At 34 she went to college and met her husband, Bill, in a programming class. They enjoyed non-traditional student status when they transferred to Iowa State University. Blues, golf, target shooting, reading, photography, bicycling, wineries, hiking, ISU football and basketball and travel are some of their interests. Julie retired in March, 2017, and started writing poetry. Her poetry has been published in *The Field Guide Poetry Magazine*, *Chestnut Review*, *Bulb Culture Collective*, *The Metaworker*, *Ground Journal* and, most recently, *The Argyle Literary Magazine*. She has been blogging for many years and has found it to be a wonderful, connecting, positive experience, <https://asawyersdaughter.com/>.

Write Me a Poem

about the death of an old dog
dying alone by the side of a road,
growling softly as he thinks of
that calico cat he so despised
and loved to chase,
remembering the last stroke behind his ears
by the homeless old woman
who lived in the underpass.

My chatbot muse pauses briefly,
then out pours a poem
about a quantum pooch
who exists in two places at once
chasing calico electrons
from one end of the galaxy to another
trying to imagine something called
physical touch,
perfectly metered and rhymed,
with exactly the right number
of clever metaphors,
and enough emotive juice
to make you think you
really feel something.

Previously published in *Ponder Review*

Category 14: Previously Published Poem Award – First Place

Vincent O'Connor ~ Ely, Minnesota

When I Die

when I die
bears will still go through
cabins when
nobody is home
and ducks in circling flight
will still come and drowse on warm sand
silhouetted in the long shadows of sunset

when I die
there will still be smells of damp hay
cattle lazy under a summer sky
and cars will still swish on interstates
under moonlight fragmented by
broken clouds

when I die
what-ifs and might-have-beens
will still dally in shadows
of aged thoughts
and dreams will still be robbed
of their completion

when I die
there will still be dances and climaxes
of youth radiant in immortality
and crystal glasses will still toast
ringing resonant
over green wine bottles and
red lobster shells

when I die
there will be mourning
then forgetfulness
but I will do fine without a name
letting a thousand winds blow
to cover the tracks
I left while living

Previously published in *Main Channel Voices*, Fall 2009 issue

Category 14: Previously Published Poem Award – Second Place

Gene Twaronite ~ Tucson, Arizona

The Poet's Job

Watch through the window
to write of things in plain view
like the lone black thong flapping
defiantly in a sea of white briefs.

Listen to the soft tickety sounds
an empty wrapper makes
skimming along the sidewalk
and find there a symphony.

Turn everything into something else.
Code the words obliquely in hopes
someone can tell you what they mean.

Explore dark ovens
and castles of abuse
where muses often lurk.

Feel the earth quaking
and bear witness.

Express the ineffable
with disappearing ink.

Start with one word
and sail the world.

Mourn the spaces
left behind
when there are no words.

Previously published in the collection *Death at the Mall*, Kelsay Books

Category 14: Previously Published Poem Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 15 ~ Previously Rejected Poem Award

Sponsored by William Moody

Judged by Joris Soeding



Joris Soeding's most recently published collection of poetry is *After Highland Park* (Origami Poems Project, 2021). His writing has appeared in over sixty publications, including *City Works*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *little somethings press*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Portage Magazine*, *Rune*, *Spillway*, and *Tint Journal*. For a dozen years he volunteered at *Another Chicago Magazine*, becoming a Managing Editor during his tenure. He taught poetry in grades 1-8 at several Chicago Public Schools, including Rogers, with the Poetry Center of Chicago and Hands Alive! poetry initiative. Soeding is a 2021 and 2022 Pushcart Prize nominee and the fifth/sixth grade Social Studies teacher in Chicago, where he resides with his wife, son, daughter, and cats.

Julia Keefer ~ Tucson, Arizona

turned pages

i lie in the sand in the library.
they laid me in the sand,
in the pages; they told me

that i could not go home. i do not
have a pencil so i search for one
left behind in the folds of the
carpet. the books whisper but most
of them i cannot understand.

i find a pencil but i do not have paper.
the sun beats down, its rhythm complimenting
my heart's. they told me

that i could not go home. i scribble
in their margins.

when the librarians find this volume they
will throw it away. they will buy a new one,
polished. i rub some soil onto my cheeks.
i cannot believe there is water.

the books are watching me
with angry eyes. a vulture through the window
lands on a power line and i
watch it dip into a perfect
half-ellipse. eclipse. i touch the sun.

a book calls to me: *you cannot
go home*

fine i say.
*i will die in a foreign language
but at least they will not bury me*

Category 15: Previously Rejected Poem Award – First Place

Dancing With Sandra Dee

Forget wanting my picture on the cover of “Rolling Stone.” In the 1960’s, I wanted to be on American Bandstand with Dick Clark, broadcasting live from Philadelphia. Bobby Darin, Frankie Avalon, and Annette! The Shirelles sang, “will you love me tomorrow,” while kids did the latest jitterbug. Dreamy Sandra Dees with perfect blonde hair clung tightly to Tonys and Johnnys. Chubby Checker showed us how to twist. I’d trade my sharkskin sports jacket, Italian slacks, and pointy-toed Flagg Brothers shoes to be there dancing, while millions of teenagers from Pennsylvania to Chicago could catch me on T.V. But I was stuck sweeping up at pop’s barbershop in Brooklyn. My friends had a car, but we’d get creamed if we skipped school to drive down to Phillie. A few hours of sweeping, then sneaking into the alley for a Lucky Strike. Nights I’d hide in my bedroom doing homework, listening to Cousin Brucie on WNEW play, “Earth Angel,” by the Penguins. A 250-word composition was due for English, “Why I Want to be President.” President? Let the Kennedys have Camelot, I just wanted to be on Bandstand, dancing with Sandra Dee.

Category 15: Previously Rejected Poem Award – Second Place

Vincent O'Connor ~ Ely, Minnesota

Confessional

rolling your name across
my tongue
I kiss you like
you're
campfire
starry skies and
fried potatoes for breakfast

hot shivers tiptoe down
your spine
fluorescent embers swear oaths
of fealty in
your eyes and
I inhale burning air
from your lungs

you dip fingers in
my heart
forcing it open
to crawl inside
and release the ghosts
of lovers who've gone
before

making me forget
what it feels
to be
alone

Category 15: Previously Rejected Poem Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 16 ~ Pride in Poetry Award

Sponsored by NavWorks Press

Judged by Asiah Mae



Asiah Mae, stylized A\$iahMae, (they/she) is a Black, non-binary Southern poet, humorist and cultural worker with roots in Georgia, South and North Carolina. A multi-hyphenated artist, their background spans across film, curation, production, performance and language arts. Their work is an attempt to document their expression of spirit, love, ritual and Black Southern connection to land and sea. A\$iahmae is a Watering Hole Fellow and has been featured in The Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston Food & Wine Festival, The Charleston Literary Festival, and most recently in *This is The Honey: An Anthology of Contemporary Black Poets*, curated by Kwame Alexander. They are currently serving as the 2023-2024 Poet Laureate of Charleston, SC. www.asiahmae.com

Alan Perry ~ Maple Grove, Minnesota

The harpist's fingers

pull me back
without a fret.

Like an arrow of air
drawn from a cradled bow

I fly to the next string
compressing space between us

without touching.

My tone in harmony
with your movement

sends vibrations
into melody while we're

caressed to move again.
Hands rest

as the air quivers

still.

Category 16: Pride in Poetry Award – First Place

Laura Rodley ~ Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts

First Signs of Spring

Such petals as the magnolia, its fragrant stamens
are poets' mead, after dandelions and violets,
early offering for the bees, golden springs
with furious flapping silently supping
on each flower, then departed, sated.
Where would we be without their nuzzling:
no pears, no fruit. Where would the
apples be without their tiny landings,
each blossom an airport.

Category 16: Pride in Poetry Award – Second Place

Thomas L. (Tom) Chester ~ Tucson, Arizona

The Peach

As we walk through the orchard
hand in hand,
you stop and pick a ripe peach,
heavy with sweet pulp,
its skin soft and fuzzy,
almost mammalian.

Watching me, you bite into it slowly,
caressing it with your mouth.
I take the peach and kiss you,
licking the nectar from your lips.
I squeeze it and rub your cheek
while we look at each other
without blinking.

Category 16: Pride in Poetry Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 17 ~ Rhyming Poetry for Children Award

Sponsored by Elaine A. Powers

Judged by Vincent O'Connor



Vincent O'Connor published his debut chapbook, *Lessons From Life*, with Local Gems Press, 2019. His poems appeared at the Poetry Walk at Green Island in Wadena, Minnesota as part of the project “More Poems of Hope and Reassurance”, in *Snail Mail Review*, *The Talking Stick*, *Main Channel Voices*, *Winamop*, *Poetry Super Highway*, *Peeking Cat*, *Satori*, and *Rising Phoenix Press*, and in the anthologies *Minute Musing*, *Bards Against Hunger 10 Year Anniversary Anthology*, *A Touch of Saccharine*, *across vast horizons*, *Upon Waking: 58 Voices Speaking Out From the Shadow of Abuse*, and elsewhere. His poem *Baptism* was a winner in the 2018 Random Acts of Poetry contest, *The Worth of Gardening* took 2nd Award of Merit in the 2018 League of Minnesota Poets Southeastern MN Poets Award, and *Escaping* took 2nd Place in the 2015 League of Minnesota Poets Claire van Breeman Downes Memorial Award. He lives in Ely, MN, in throwing distance with Canada and works as a computer tech consultant. <https://www.oconnor-consulting.com/>

The Thoughtful Place

I hope you have a thoughtful place
somewhere upon the earth
that you can get to quickly
to remember what you're worth.

If dragons try to chase you
and quicksand pulls you under;
if sleet begins to pelt you
like angry tears with thunder,

If fears are great and many,
from raging floods to trolls,
hairy monsters under beds
and fields of scorching coals;

You can find within your heart
a shortcut on a map
that takes you to your thoughtful place--
the pathway to my lap.

And we will sit together
and figure out the ways
to stay above the quicksand
and escape the dragon's gaze.

Don't ever think the thoughtful place
is just too far away,
because no matter where you are
it's just a thought away.

Category 17: Rhyming Poetry for Children Award – First Place

Fear of Babies

I have a fear of babies,
It's an actual condition.
And anytime I meet one
I am faced with a decision.
I can hide under a blanket
To ensure I'm out of view,
But then the baby might assume
I'm playing Peekaboo.
One time I tried to run from
A girl asleep and rocking,
But then I heard her mother cry
"My gosh, she's finally walking!"
I made myself a lucky charm
Of cereals in blues,
But my amulet drew more attention,
Squeals, and little coos.
It appears I have no choice
But to surrender to their spell,
Their subtle powder smell,
And the silly ways they yell.
My mother's due with twins next month,
I guess I might as well.

Category 17: Rhyming Poetry for Children Award – Second Place

Jerri Hardesty ~ Brierfield, Alabama

Mouse Capades

So late in the night when the people are sleeping,
The bold little mice come out quietly creeping,
With dancing and prancing and running and leaping
And poking and prying and nibbling and peeping.
They get so excited, they even start squeaking
And bouncing on floorboards until they are creaking;
With all of their mousie festivities peaking,
A light beneath bedroom door began leaking.
And suddenly humans were shouting and squealing
So loudly the sound echoed down from the ceiling,
So loudly the paint from the walls began peeling,
And made all the startled mice scatter with feeling.
Oh my, such a terrible horrible fright,
Poor mousies just playing, but had to take flight,
And hide away, hide away, safe out of sight
To sleep through the day 'til the next late night.

Category 17: Rhyming Poetry for Children Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 18 ~ Sci-Fi / Fantasy Award

Sponsored by Brick Cave Media

Judged by Jim Wilkerson



Jim Wilkerson is a poet, songwriter, photographer, and videographer from Central Illinois. He received a writing degree in 1997 from Millikin University, and published a book of poetry about his experience in college entitled “Millikin Poems: A Personal Look at College Life.” His work has been published in *Collage*, *Folio*, *Quill & Parchment*, *TKE Today*, and is forthcoming in *East on Central*. He won 1st place in the 2023 Winnetka Public Library Poetry Contest. He loves a poem that lingers in the heart and mind – art that you can’t shake off or forget. He loves to trigger emotion and capture moments in time. He believes that a good poem has less to do about your background or environment, and more to do with what God is doing in your soul. <https://www.decaturareapoets.com/jimwilkerson>.

George Reed ~ Worcester, Massachusetts

Neptune Cowboys

Ice planet
with high noon a dim twilight,
A magnetic space god
head tilted.

We rustle the sixteen-hour days
Under a pale fourteen moons

Found by mathematics
Day-dreamed in our youth
the blue high wind giant
is a frontier slush of ammonia, methane, and water
wanting tumbleweeds.

We ride wild wisp horses wearing
polycarbonate cowboy hats
and tell tales of Poseidon
around the bubbled campfire

And I think upon the boy left behind
fishing for perch
in the Shark River
alone
in a township in New Jersey

Category 18: Sci-Fi / Fantasy Award – First Place

Tina Quinn Durham ~ Hereford, Arizona

Vampire

Soon, my darling, I will come
with fungus growing on my tongue.
Smelling sweetly of the grave,
I will take the love you've saved
through a thousand, lonely nights,
and lick your throat, so pure and white.

And in the morning of your birth,
we'll bed together in dark earth,
bide together through the day
and search the night for warmer prey.
If you should face the wooden stake,
your screams will be the prayer you'll make.

I will flee the searching sun.
As for love, I'll find another one.

Category 18: Sci-Fi / Fantasy Award – Second Place

Supporting Cast

We saw it all from shadows,
from hot, busy kitchens, serving wine
at your table, fluffing your pillows,
cleaning your clothes, comforting
you as a small child, later
celebrating your weddings,
your successes, hoping we
would last to care for your children.

We saw it all from behind chairs,
curtains, thrones, and doors,
while you walked in the sunshine,
you the magically blessed
and the magically cursed,
doomed by your fathers'
and mothers' choices,
by their lack, or in spite,
of hovering care.

We heard it all, the decrees
from kings and princes,
blessings from fairies
and godmothers, angry words
from those left out,
and your tears and songs.

We were everywhere you were,
in halls, forests, in your chambers,
stables, at births, weddings and funerals.

We were there Aurora, Cinderella,
Belle, Rapunzel, Snow White,
Ariel, Wendy and many more
whose names are strange or lost,
who have joined us,
in our vigilant silence.

Category 18: Sci-Fi / Fantasy Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 19 ~ Sonnet Award

Sponsored by John W. Crawford

Judged by Evelyn Berry



Evelyn Berry (she/her) is a trans, Southern writer, editor, and educator. She's the author of *Grief Slut* (Sundress Publications, 2024) and *Buggery* (Bateau Press, 2020), winner of the BOOM Chapbook Prize. She's a recipient of a 2023 National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and 2025 SC Individual Artist Fellowship, in addition to the Dr. Linda Veldheer Memorial Prize, Emrys Poetry Prize, KAKALAK Poetry Award, and Broad River Prize for Prose. Her work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *South Carolina Review*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Moist*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She lives in Columbia, South Carolina with her partner and their pets where she works as a library communications strategist and freelance editor. <https://evelynberrywriter.com/>

Small Comfort

A bit shy, I never knew what to say,
but he talked quickly and had a cute grin.
Sometimes his infectious smile flashed my way
and soon I was only thinking of him.

Traditional marriage is what we had.
We started out so young – not yet quite grown.
Life experiences were more good than bad
but I didn't have a voice of my own.

No matter what, he spoke for both of us.
Sometimes, I simply saw the other side
but it was something we did not discuss.
And then he suddenly got sick and died.

I was heartbroken in my grief and shock.
For a price too high, I could finally talk.

Category 19: Sonnet Award – First Place

Lynda La Rocca ~ Salida, Colorado

Memory

I see you slowly climbing up the stair
as you once did each morning when the light
would splash the walls and floor while, unaware,
the house slept on, as if it were still night.
Emerging from the cellar where you'd been
for hours working wood and making plans,
you'd put the coffee on and then begin
to open drawers and cupboard, search for pans
to fry the eggs and bacon; soon the smells
of breakfast brought us tumbling from each bed.
You laughed and told us stories, wove your spells,
and left us mesmerized by all you said.
So many years now, Grandpa, since you died.
But you are still my hero and my guide.

Category 19: Sonnet Award – Second Place

V. Kimball Barney ~ Kaysville, Utah

Miracle Man

He had a heart attack at forty-four,
a massive one that should have left him dead.
In thirty years, the man had had one more.
“A wonder he’s still here,” the doctor said.

He was a smoker when the first one came,
but never smoked again beyond that day.
His doctor said he couldn’t be the same
as he was before, and expect to stay.

In hospital he saw a shining light,
and there were people there to bring him home,
but something that he said to them that night
convinced them that his time had not yet come.

At eighty-eight, he’s on a bowling team,
and bound to live forever, it would seem.

Category 19: Sonnet Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 20 ~ Transitions Award

Sponsored by Scottsdale Mustang Poets

Judged by David Vincenti



David Vincenti (www.davidvincenti.com) is a father, husband, engineer, professor, project manager, and accordionist whose poems have appeared in numerous journals including *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, and the anthologies *Rabbit Ears: TV Poems* and *Meta-Land: Poets of the Palisades II*. An experienced speaker on topics ranging from project management to poetry, David has designed and delivered many middle school poetry workshops and formerly hosted a literary reading series over a decade. He has authored two collections: *To The Ones Who Must Be Loved* and *A Measure of this World: Galileo's Dialog with the Universe*.

Martha H. Balph ~ Millville, Utah

On Revising the Poem

If the muse arrives
and you fall in love, wait.
In three days

a poem becomes the guest
who won't go home,
the proverbial fish,

not what you thought.
Things are no different
in science. At three years

hypotheses once cherished
grow stale
as new seasons promise

to reshape what is known.
Even love, borne beyond
three months or three decades,

changes color. The poem
is written, rewritten,
written again. Somewhere

it ends.

Category 20: Transitions Award – First Place

Katie Sarah Zale ~ Tucson, Arizona

imaginary line

The border is what creates illegal aliens,
Dividing what one knows from what one knows,
This called an “imaginary line”

—Hayden Carruth, *The Sleeping Beauty*

my sister used to mirror me
the way one leaf lifts in the wind
and another follows
with nimble delay
no more than a blink

single-celled, monad, one

as autumn folded into autumn
in bed we would lie fetal—
head to head, the moon and sun
meeting and passing, a lesson
in before and after

how impalpable
time

it is impossible to know
who did it first, draw an imaginary line
with a finger—my turn, no mine—
down the center, 2400 BCE alive
in our hearts—she Lagash, me Umma, the first
known cities, the first known border, we would
argue as they did then and certainly before
about how much of the bed was hers,
was mine

Category 20: Transitions Award – Second Place

Guest

It's a foggy-mountain morning,
bluejays and other birds warning
me away from their nests.
A woodpecker stops his pecking
and a squirrel starts his scolding,
telling me I'm a guest.

I have a license, but leave poles
behind. I pass my fishing hole,
look into dark water;
I promise those that got away,
“We will meet on another day,
prepare for a slaughter.”

Each year I watch the leaves turning
as the cold weather's returning,
perhaps like an old friend.
And yet I'm sometimes like the youth
listening to rain on the roof;
I don't want it to end.

As I walk in the hills,
I smell smoke from the stills.

Sugar maples will turn to brown
and their leaves will cover the ground,
as nature starts to rest.
The woodpecker starts to pecking
as the squirrel keeps on scolding,
telling me I'm a guest.

Category 20: Transitions Award – Third Place

ANNUAL CONTEST

Category 21 ~ Wild Places, Open Spaces Award

Sponsored by Steve Chaffee

Judged by Nancy Owen Nelson



Nancy Owen Nelson is published in several academic journals and anthologies, and is co-editor of *The Selected Letters of Frederick Manfred: 1932-1954* (University of Nebraska Press), editor of *Private Voices, Public Lives: Women Speak on the Literary Life* (University of North Texas Press), and *The Lizard Speaks: Essays on the Writings of Frederick Manfred* (Center for Western Studies). Her poetry and creative nonfiction has been published in *What Wildness is this?* (University of Texas Press), *South Dakota Review*, *Lyceum*, and *Graffiti Rag*, *Mom's Writing Literary Journal*, *Lalitamba* journal, and *Roll: a Collection of Personal Narratives* (Telling Our Stories Press, 2013). Nelson earned her BA at Birmingham-Southern College, and her MA and PhD in English at Auburn University. She taught composition and literature at Auburn University and several colleges, and served as Assistant Director of the Hassayampa Institute for Creative Writing at Yavapai College, Prescott, AZ for three years. She offers a manuscript consultation workshop with Springfed Arts of Detroit. <https://www.nancyowennelson.com/>

Katie Sarah Zale ~ Tucson, Arizona

Winter Solstice, Olympic Peninsula

The light dissolves in the scrim of mist
across Sequim Bay.

Evergreen boughs pierce the sky,
crack the day into gray ice.

A myrrh of moss and fetid leaf,
a drift of needles fill the air.

Time hides with an owl's wait
for the slightest sound and sliver of light
to betray its prey.

A swag of silver glow startles
with its weave of golden threads.
Wends its way through the lay of needle
and leaf to a madrone, flushing out a blush
from its dark skin.

It enters a field of alders: specters
dressed in shawls of moss that glisten,
crawls to the lichen wash of yellow on the fir
still holding the light from its first winter solstice.

Category 21: Wild Places, Open Spaces Award – First Place

Sally Bennett Boyington ~ Knoxville, Tennessee

hunting flight

kingfisher and cardinal flash
in flight from resting perch in mesquite
green with leafy filigree

feathers sleeked to swim through air
made thick by summer's stifling sun
or fluffed against a wintry drizzle

what prey do these gem-feathered remnants
of dinosaurs seek in their restless quest
taking them from tree to tree

atop anisodactyl toes
locked onto limbs in unwavering balance
they watch and wait for that perfect moment

to launch into freedom

Category 21: Wild Places, Open Spaces Award – Second Place

Sally Bennett Boyington ~ Knoxville, Tennessee

bluegill and boulder

bluegill glitters under the waterline
its scales reflecting dragonfly wings

sere leaves fall
with goosedown slowness

heavy round granite boulder
washed downstream
by some unimaginable
flood

this moment of autumn
sings

Category 21: Wild Places, Open Spaces Award – Third Place

YOUTH CONTEST

Honorable Mentions

(In rank order ~ 1HM, 2HM, 3HM)

Youth Grades 1-4

Fidelia Wilhelm from Basis Chandler Primary North, Mesa ~

Leaves in the Wind

Mercy Roulston from Desert View Academy, Yuma ~

Seasons of the Year

Mercy Roulston from Desert View Academy, Yuma ~

Demons of the Dark

Youth Grades 5-8

Zooey Regan from Villa Montessori, Phoenix ~

Bus Ride

Jasonie Foster from Pearce Elementary, Pearce ~

I Hate My Skin

Hannah Vu from Thunderbolt Middle School, Lake Havasu City ~

AI (ai)

Youth Grades 9-12

Isabelle Chavira from Shadow Ridge High School, Glendale ~

Spinning

Jordan Ferrin from Thatcher High School ~ Thatcher

Allowed to Be Me

Jaydi Bricker from Thunderbird High School, Phoenix ~

Beaches

ANNUAL CONTEST

Honorable Mentions

(In rank order ~ 1HM, 2HM, 3HM)

Category 1: ASPS Award

Linda R. Payne ~ *Finding Inspiration*

Terry Jude Miller ~ *Fading*

Janice Canerdy ~ *The Force of Time*

Category 2: Aging Award

Lynda La Rocca ~ *Dotty and Glen*

David R. Davis ~ *The House Next Door*

Janice L. Freytag ~ *Two Minutes*

Category 3: Cento Poem Award

Stephanie DuPont ~ *Shakespeare in Blue Hughes*

Linda Rittenhouse ~ *Bride Married to Amazement*

Gene Twaronite ~ *Get Out Early*

Category 4: Gardening Award

Annette Gagliardi ~ *A New Dawning*

Gail Bornfield ~ *Summer*

Dr. Emory D. Jones ~ *The Courtyard*

Category 5: Issa Award in Haiku

Brenda Wildrick ~ *Stunning artistry*

Martha H. Balph ~ *new blades of grass*

Michele Worthington ~ *Mosquitos*

Category 6: Heroes Award

Mark Pacult ~ *Land*

Stephanie DuPont ~ *By Direct Wire*

Mark Pacult ~ *Iraq*

Category 7: Humor / Satire Award

Mary Specker Stone ~ *Dubious Ode to the Most American City*

Sally Bennett Boyington ~ *Bulb Buffet*

Martha H. Balph ~ *PoeTasters*

Annual Contest Honorable Mentions continued

(In rank order ~ 1HM, 2HM, 3HM)

Category 8: Jessie Belle Rittenhouse Memorial Award

Charles Firmage ~ *Keys to the Night*
Anthony Pfannenstiel ~ *Dream Kiss*
Brenda Wildrick ~ *Sleep Without Fear*

Category 9: Legacy Award

Brenda Wildrick ~ *Fighting for Peace*
Markeisia Shenae Venett ~ *Poetry*
Janice L. Freytag ~ *Building Blocks*

Category 10: Long Free Verse Award

Ann M. Penton ~ *Breaking News*
Jerri Hardesty ~ *Flowers*
Mandie Hines ~ *Spoon Bending*

Category 11: Nature's Gift Award

Laura Rodley ~ *Afternoon*
Cynthia Hilts ~ *green dusked wonder*
Becky Alexander ~ *This Evening Sky*

Category 12: Persona Poem Award

Alan Perry ~ *Discovered*
Cynthia Hilts ~ *chicken bone-carnation*
Christine Hennigan ~ *According to Agatha's Doll*

Category 13: Power of Women Award

Julia Keefer ~ *(un)boxed*
CChristy White ~ *Sister Goddesses*
Ann M. Penton ~ *No Mother, No Daughter*

Category 14: Previously Published Poem Award

Kathryn (Kit) Schmeiser ~ *My Father's Hands*
Martha H. Balph ~ *Images of Autumn*
Alan Perry ~ *Pulling Over*

Annual Contest Honorable Mentions continued

(In rank order ~ 1HM, 2HM, 3HM)

Category 15: Previously Rejected Poem Award

Alan Perry ~ *Hands*

Becky Alexander ~ *Cow Lore*

Janice L. Freytag ~ *From the Top of a Hill*

Category 16: Pride in Poetry Award

Jenny Wrenn ~ *Breonna*

CChristy White ~ *Fibonacci Sequence*

Charles Firmage ~ *Moonlight Serenade*

Category 17: Rhyming Poetry for Children Award

Janice L. Freytag ~ *Staring Contest*

Sherri L. Lyons ~ *Woodland Welcome*

Christine Hennigan ~ *The Unfair*

Category 18: Sci-Fi / Fantasy Award

Jonathan Bennett ~ *The Frightened Astronomer*

Martha H. Balph ~ *Sea Dreams*

Mark Hudson ~ *Poisonous Lullaby*

Category 19: Sonnet Award

Cierra C. Crea ~ *Dominant Species*

Martha H. Balph ~ *An Inconvenient Truth*

Cynthia Hilts ~ *sonnet to I-95*

Category 20: Transitions Award

Lisa Kamolnick ~ *Teatime Day Two*

Thomas L. (Tom) Chester ~ *An Echo of Mourning*

Victor Klimoski ~ *Diagnosis*

Category 21: Wild Places, Open Spaces Award

D'Anne Pientka ~ *Songs in flight*

Mark Pacult ~ *Ajo*

C. Adeene Denton ~ *Sonora*



Michele Worthington
Tucumcari 2

Member Poems

The hallmark of the Arizona State Poetry Society is our annual anthology *Sandcutters*. First published in 1967, it included the winning poems from members in three categories from 12 monthly contests. Some years later, *Sandcutters* grew to include an Annual Contest open to all poets in the world with cash awards given to the top three winners in each category.

Today, *Sandcutters* has expanded to include:

- An invitation to the Featured Speaker(s) poet(s) at the 2024 ASPS Conference in January to submit a poem of their choice;
- The top three winning poems of each category in our Member Contests held five times a year;
- The top three winning poems in any of our occasional Special Member Contests (based on a theme);
- The top three winning poems in each category of the Annual Contest
- The top three winning poems in each of the three grade groupings in our annual Youth Contest;
- An invitation to ASPS members who have not submitted and/or won in any of the contests, to submit one poem of their choice for inclusion in *Sandcutters*; and
- Featured visual art submitted by our members and chosen by the co-editors.

The Board of Directors is pleased to include the Member Poem section in *Sandcutters* as our way of highlighting the varied talents of our Members, and to thank them for their loyalty in supporting the Arizona State Poetry Society.

The Board extends a sincere thank you to all those who sponsored the Annual Contest categories, which allowed for the cash awards.

Betsy Bernfeld ~ Wilson, Wyoming

Lost Oranges Blues

A sunny day she ripped the drawing off her wall.
A sunny day she ripped the drawing off her wall,
the old gray wolf howling at the new moon
by a maple tree.

Ripe oranges fell from branches by the hundreds
in the forsaken orchard.

The day it rained in the desert birds went silent.
The day it rained in the desert birds went silent,
the drawings on the floor looked like garbage,
black robot red chest blue eyes.

As the kid with black spiky hair got off the bus,
volunteers gave him an orange.

An owl hooted outside her bedroom in early dawn.
An owl hooted outside her bedroom in early dawn,
autumn leaves ironed between wax paper
were lost once more on the floor.

As the kid with black spiky hair got off the bus,
volunteers gave him a crayon.

The all-orange drawing was shaped like a uterus.
The all-orange drawing shaped like a uterus
was also on the floor like motherhood
grandmotherhood greatgrandmotherhood.

When the abandoned kid with black spiky hair
got off the bus, volunteers lead him inside,
gave him an orange and an orange crayon
and he drew a mother.

The Debate

An old man
Enters the stage
Apparent signs of aging
Lack of strength
Weak and sick
Almost frail
Spouting love of country
Performance judged harshly
Words go unheard

An old man
Enters the stage
Strong in voice
And physicality
Spouting lies and threats
Name calling and bullying
Performance judged positively
Words go unheard

Spoken words go unheard
Judgements formed by
Appearance and presentation
The nation heard what they saw
not what was said

Those Who Came Before

I pause to study two black and white photographs. One is of my mother. I envision her ruby lipstick, curly brown hair, and wistful blue eyes. The other, my father, too young to be a dad, old enough to be a soldier. His eyes proud, smiling easily and assured. These images, all I have of their youthful days. Each, now long in eternal slumber.

What did they give to me, that I then gave my sons?
What part of me carries what part of them?
Those who came before, my grandfathers
and grandmothers born during the century of this
country's great divide. Did their fathers fight for
justice, or for the wickedness of this world?
Did they understand? Could they understand?
Brother against brother, cause against cause.

What of their mothers and fathers? Those who
left faraway lands seeking unknown freedom.
Did they find the life they sought? Did it prove
to be more or less than a common longing? I have
no pictures of them, no record, no names, and yet
I carry their lives deep inside my being. Did they
dream as I have dreamed. Who were these people -
my distant family, now gone.

What part of me goes back to the beginning?
To caves, rocks, and giants. A time before there
was a before. They left history, bison painted on
darkened limestone walls. Pyramids carrying life
to a new realm. Were they Nile River slaves,
Persian kings, or Greek philosophers?

What do I owe a hundred generations?
Those I never knew, and who never knew me.

Perfect Days

A Sonnet

You were not perfect. In truth, nowhere near.
Nor I. Not even on a perfect day.
I'd come, I'd go, yet it soon became clear
Exactly why I decided to stay.
What you gave to me cannot be measured.
You kept the spark in me molten alive -
That flame you insisted must be treasured,
And so never let me forget that I've
The priceless gift of Imagination!
Hold it tenderly in your hands, you'd cry.
Breathe into it Passion ... Inspiration
Then watch it rise and shimmer in the sky.
 So yes, I stayed. I let you light the way.
 And those were perfect, oh so perfect, days.

I'd See This Anywhere

I never saw a green bean dance,
nor saw a pumpkin curtsy,
yet every time I get the chance
I join them in a swirly.

I didn't see the onion glance
upon the cows of Derry
nor did I say they had the chance
to steal from Mrs. Kerry.

I didn't see the meanness
in a freezing summer morn,
yet wondered at the way
the trees all looked forlorn.

I never learned the tragedy
of chickens before the knife,
yet understood their loss
of life as their single sacrifice.

I never heard the bellow
of the Ox against his plow,
but now I'm old enough to know
the why and the how.

I dance like flame on a waxen lake
like water on a skillet.
I let the water carry me
to the other shores' clean billet.

Like the light from morning's beam
along a gravel highway,
I live life in a dream
I'm never going to replay.

For Loren: Nuances

“I will not speak of the famous beauty of dead women.
I will say the shape of a leaf lay once on your hair
til the world ends and the eyes are out and the mouths broken...”
Archibald MacLeish

I shall leave the beauty of the dead
to the dead;
the solemn regard of bone, for bone.
Leave all the broken mouths,
the bared shoulders,
the exposed necks
in fine pieces, scattered,
to the scattering sea.

I will say that this moment of the eyes
is a quiet instance of the air;

that the mouth swells like wet trees;
that upon the cheek stirs the notion

of snow; that the hands
are but the gesture of leaves;

that the hair
is a memory of the moon;

that the thighs are warm clouds sailing
toward silent fields.

I will speak only of the living,
for the dead settle
the way the world will end---

wordless.

Daniel Moreschi ~ Wales, UK

Catatumbo Symphony

As sunset paints a stage at the unwieldy mouth
of Maracaibo Lake, sporadic breezes lead
the water's surface, stirring swirls among the reeds,
creating shimmered mirrors that reflect a shroud

of gray, covertly brimming overhead. Though veiled,
the Andes loom like silent giants, bearing witness
to where tones of wind-kept whispers linger; stillness
fractured by intensified caresses, trailed

from swell-bound blusters. Rustles rattle, ripples race
and flits of wings resound in flurries, just as makeshift herds
of varied species—not knowing where or when to turn—
assail reluctant paths. Their scrambled scansion breaks

with strides aligned; the animals encircle ways,
as if beset by their own shrinking shadows. Amid
the flicker of a dazzling zigzag, steps go still,
then all that can retreat is routed by a wave

of distant thrums: a rat-a-tat of crackling claps
and loops of charge-lit choreographies unite,
as both composer and conductor of the night.
These streaks of sheets unfold in sequences. They wrap

around the clouds in branching arcs. Each flash commands
its own embodied image in the waters. Tempos
alter, lightning extends; crescendos bellow: echoes
of this dance reverberate across the land.

The floors unravel, flora tumbles, trees are traced
along a pass of peaks, while hillsides silhouette.
A dozen hours advance. Between the thunder's threads
and sections, interludes of silence find their place.

The fervor softens, outros pour and lapses grow;
once-restless skies inhale and sigh. As dawn appears,
the marsh is held by restful air; horizons clear
as currents fall and curtains rise to end the show.

JamesRobert Platt ~ Tempe, Arizona

life merely tumbles

hard off the changing table...

onto a bedpan

Elaine A. Powers ~ Oro Valley, Arizona

Watching from Behind the Children's Books I Wrote

Walking past, not stopping by,
Though being at the show to buy.

I say "hello" as you approach,
My pleasant manner beyond reproach.

Stare straight ahead, don't say "hi,"
Ignoring me, knowing you're not shy.

You may reply "hello," never breaking pace
Or perhaps a nod with a smile on your face.

Parents guide kids away or distract them -
Avoiding colorful books that might attract them.

Some kids break free and want to look
To see what's inside each tempting book.

Often told they can only buy one thing,
Stuffed toys might be more to their liking.

They say they'll stop by again as they leave -
I know it's a lie, but I want to believe.

Those who know the wonders books can impart
Are the parents who bring joy to my writer's heart.

Who guide their children over to my table,
They'll buy as many books as they are able.

Books don't count as their "only one item;"
Kids reading and loving books always excites them.

My books aren't only for children, you see;
Adults learn a lot, too, they'll agree.

So, come on over, take a look,
Open a cover, buy a book.

Empty

Dim the lights and lock the door.
Happiness lives here no more.

Pull the shades down in the room.
Hide the kitchen flower's bloom.

Quiet all the singing birds.
Silence TV's empty words.

Let me crumble into sleep.
I have still more tears to weep.

My only love has gone away.
I have nothing left to say.

Planetary Motion

There is an hour, the brightest of all
In what most call night.
When the pared moon
Yet rules, eclipsing the stars, silvering the earth,
Even as the eastern horizon glows.

Dispassionate, it surveys what it must relinquish
To planetary motion.

Well rehearsed, this act:
The moon eclipsing the stars,
Only to be itself eclipsed
By that which is greater
Through planetary motion.

Each night a light practice
For inevitable obscurity.
The moon retreats, concedes
To planetary motion.

Absconding each night,
It withdraws a sliver further into the mystery,
The slow inexorability
Of planetary motion.

If you stand watch in this hour
You will see nothing momentary.
But by hour's end you will know the truth
Of planetary motion.

And something more you will know:
Neither moon nor stars are ever eclipsed,
Only shrouded.

So with us all,
Our small lights lit by a greater day,
Of planetary motion

Before I was Gray

Before I was gray and my arms jiggled like
my 3rd grade teacher, Mrs. Brownstein's
I walked to the park and heard lyrics in my head

And thought about boys

And planting flowers where the little bit of lawn ended and met the city's
sidewalk

I walked and thought about my future

Directing plays, being a therapist, working only for myself
I strolled and counted how many more weeks until beach season
and wondered if my cousin would explain the chem lab
I walked and wished that all my homework would be
compare and contrast essays and poetry prompts
Not wanting these angles and formulas clouding my brain

But mostly I thought about endless waves of the beach, intoxicating smell
of the ocean
- what Bob Dylan was trying to tell us and if I'd ever learn to play jazz on
the flute

I thought about my many friends and what we'd do that night

Before I was gray
I'd ride my bike to the ocean

Right alongside speeding cars on the Cross Island Parkway

Invincible (Or so I thought)
No helmet
No sunscreen
Few worries

The Path from Lake Lethe

The path that led up from the cave
Was missed. The walls — serpentine, bleak
She let her candle burn too low
But knew her love was there, in need.

The water drops, a somber tone,
Were echoing from every nook.
She followed them unseen and stopped.
Across the cavern lake he stood.

She saw his tears as they would fall,
Each glinting in his candle's light,
On the far bank of Lake Lethe.
Past eyeless fish, ripples spread wide.

If only he could now be reached!
What deal has left him here like this?
Love will not leave his soul in hell.
The ripples from her tears met his.

Just then there was a gentle wind,
An inspiration of the cave,
Reviving the two vigil lights.

The intersecting waves were lit
And each could see the other's face.
They saw the path, exchanging smiles.

Black Panther

A jet black panther
with snow white lips
perches on a jacaranda branch
green eyes glowing
like the Aurora Borealis

He is quiet as the forest
nothing to entice him
into a crouch, ready
to spring at the slightest
movement.

It begins to snow and he sticks
his tongue out catching flakes
as they fall. It is a magical moment
to comprehend, this fast black leopard
lounging in quiet stillness.

One of My Best Cravings

Tattoo John could not stay in touch with me very well, but we got messages through to each other. He had tattoos up and down his arms and that is how he got tagged Tattoo John. The gun deal in Tucson had gone bad, but the FBI messed up enough that through a plea bargain I was able to do five years instead of thirty. They wanted to look good and I wanted to get out as soon as possible. With good time I would only have to do three and a half years, if I kept my nose clean.

I could do that.

While doing handicrafts, I noticed several bone and ivory carvings that were quite excellent. These were done by Eskimo prisoners from Alaska. We could sell our handicrafts in the prison outlet store right on Rt. 79 in Florence. One three mast sailing vessel sold for over \$4,000. The Eskimo carvers were the best.

Anyway, I made a few things, a silver ring for myself, a bolo tie, a few roadrunner pins, and put them in the shop for sale. I kept my prices down low, because I knew my craftsmanship was not up to par. My stuff sold. I kept myself busy in this way. Finally, some of the other prisoners gave me tips on how to use the grinding tools, the right amount of heat to use on the solder, and things like that.

I was amazed at how nice everyone was. These were real nice people. They had done bad things, but you would have liked them if you met them in another setting. It made me wonder about the education system. Why not teach skills like this, where people could be proud of what they were doing, instead of knowing if “your” should be spelled “you are.”

Well, one day a new inmate was telling me how he didn’t want to room with any skimos, wetbacks, or blacks. I busted him in the mouth and was sent to the warden.

Three months were added to my time. Word got around.

One day I received an Eskimo carving of an Umiak (whaling boat) with a whaling crew, and a harpooner about to hurl his harpoon into a whale. It was carved in outstanding detail. It came from Johnny Johnny Silook. He was from Point Hope, Alaska, and we had become friends. His note read, “This is one of my best cravings. Thank you for what you did.”

I’ll bet no teacher he ever had could carve as nicely as this, and I was not about to tell him he misspelled carvings.

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