

The Blue Guitar



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www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

Co-Editors’ Note

After what had to be the hottest summer on record in Arizona, fall is finally in the air and the arts scene is exploding.

We kicked off November with our own incomparable Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts, featuring musical and literary performances and art activities for youth. A huge thank-you and shout-out to our consortium leader, Elena Thornton, and her husband, Jim Thornton, for all of their hard work organizing, running, and performing in the festival; our co-sponsor, Creative Drill Sergeants; our location sponsor, Desert Ridge Marketplace in Phoenix; and all of our performers, readers and volunteers.

Other arts festivals coming up include Hidden in the Hills Artist Studio Tour in Cave Creek, Carefree and north Scottsdale later in November as well as the Fall Tempe Festival of the Arts and Fourth Avenue Street Fair in Tucson in December.

We have so much to be thankful for with such a vibrant arts scene in Arizona!

Poetry lost a shining light this year with the passing of Arizona poet Norman Dubie, author of some 20 books of poetry.

Norman was an enthusiastic supporter of The Blue Guitar magazine and appeared in the Spring 2016 issue.

A Regents’ Professor of creative writing at Arizona State University for decades, Norman also taught and inspired hundreds of students; I was lucky enough to be one of them. With our heartfelt thanks for all of Norman’s good works and contributions to the art of poetry, this issue is lovingly dedicated.

Rebecca “Becca” Dyer
and Richard H. Dyer Jr.,
Co-Editors



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Rebecca
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Norman Dubie

File photo

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6 Poems by Susan Cummins Miller

Terra Incognita

i.

Searching a dimly lit maze
of storage rooms, closets, shelves and bins for misplaced
fabric for a tumbling-blocks quilt destined to cover the curving
space above the beehive fireplace. Are the maze

and that unconsummated pattern of Escher-like etchings
of lines and angles, the pieced blocks and searched passages, shifting
the focus and vanishing points? I swear I'm climbing
one set of blocks, summit in sight, but I'm slipping

down or bushwhacking across or staying
the course of topographic contours, never gaining
elevation, yet never losing, until I find myself in the depths
of a sheer-sided ravine with only the sky for company.

ii.

There was a time when the rocks reigned. Before the rains came. Before the waters ran down to
collect in bowls and crevices and cracks in the crust. Before amino acids linked arms, bonding in
the sulfur-rich depths above black smokers.

But the first bonds formed with the stirring of electron clouds within the earth's mass/skeleton:
silicon finding oxygen; sulfur capturing iron and lead, magnesium and manganese. Calcium,
potassium and sodium do-see-do-ing with silicates. Without the rocks cooling to a brittle crucible
there would be no oceans to serve as nurseries for Life, only eruptions and explosions, crustal
cracking and quaking. Shifting, bockety terrain. Water evaporating for untold eons. Until it didn't.

So I ask you this: With no auditory receptors to accept the generated waves, did the shifting earth
produce sound?

Continued on page 4

Tucson writer and 2023 WILLA and Spur poetry awards finalist Susan Cummins Miller, a former field geologist, paleontologist, and educator, is the author of two poetry collections ("Making Silent Stones Sing" and "Deciphering the Desert"), seven novels, and an anthology of women writers of the American frontier. Her poems, short stories, and essays appear frequently in journals and anthologies, including the recent "Trouble in Tucson" and "SoWest: Wrong Turn." www.susancumminsmiller.com



iii.

The earth's surface is now so intimately known that you lament that *terra incognita* no longer exists. But let me take you out into the canyon behind your house. Let me guide your fingers to this sedimentary layer. Now, trace the cross-beds of shifting dunes locked in place by limey cement. Picture the meandering stream that carved the valley on its way to an inland sea. Look, here: This U-shaped cut-and-fill event, a moment in time when a new watercourse channeled through older layers. And here, where limestone beds loaded with mollusks recorded a new regime, a shallow sea rising to swamp the borderlands. But it's a quiet bay, not the rocky headland where waves crash against the cliffs and tidepools carry starfish and sea anemones, crabs and sea urchins. Each layer of earth beneath our boots is an unknown world awaiting attention.

iv.

"I want to know if anyone has ever, really, gotten to the bottom of anything in this world without dying," a poet put to me on a Friday morning in July. For years I've searched for an answer. I found only this:

Yes, but only if you believe that what is is no different from what is not—that the whole is a 3D, all-encompassing Mobius strip where inside and outside, body/spirit, beginning/ending, shamrock, scimitar and 10,000 things, hide-and-seek, needle/haystack, pistil/stamen, rock-paper-scissors, top/bottom, up/down, you/me, past-present-future, living and dying are one and the same indistinguishable, indestructible, infinite energy.

But then, of course, it follows that the answer must be *No*, as well.

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Aubade: Tucson

Day steals over the cloud-decked
Catalinas. Sky water falls from eaves,
splashing forehead. Baptism
by runoff. Holy water thrice blest
by sunrise, quarter moon, endless sky.
Is any edifice more sacred
than my yard on this October morn?
Salvias feed hummingbirds. Fan palms drop
black manna. Scarlet lantana runs
rampant. My flower-bedecked altar
is hard-graveled dirt, my altar boys flap
wings. Shadows genuflect, then write
prayer poems on earth-toned walls that curve
and flow. No defining where wall ceases
and house begins, where brick and mortar
end and I begin, all resonating
to the chant of falling water.

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Time Out of Mind

Hiking a range of low mountains
just to see the dawn break above
a glacial lake as if for the last time.

Wandering, searching
for that bridge to nowhere at the edge
of somewhere, anywhere—a secret spot

that's nevertheless familiar, as if I've carried its image
in my cells and the intervening years have failed
to diminish its power. Bright rays of the rising sun slide under

the sweeping branches of a white pine, setting aglow
the moss and lichen. Wandering, limbs extended, blood pulsing,
memories of earlier traverses flutter in

like aspen leaves, then drift away. Pausing,
sitting, back to a rough limestone outcrop, I sip
water from the old canteen, grateful to have been given

enough time—grateful for these brief, soul-stealing
minutes of peace in the dwindling days
of a constantly repurposed life.

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For Those Who Dared

The wind speaks. Talking
heads and ministers pontificate, quoting
sacred texts that define distaff roles. Eons ago
the heart of the sky pulled the key. Exotic words dropped
among the unknowing gathered in parched valleys, chanting,
while high on the mountainside toughened
fingers carved in stone punitive measures for those
who erred, for those who dared

to speak, to search
the far reaches of the featureless plain for a way
to unlock what had been locked.
This evening one pink blossom drops
from oleander hedge. Change: soundless,
pastel. The earth shudders. Waxing moon leads
Venus toward crimson-brushed clouds. On the rutted
road a stooped shadow guides
the woman home.

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A Twitch in Time

The spiny lizard clings
to the rough, speckled sides of the emptying pool. My need
to rescue even those creatures who are better adapted than I drives
me to net it. When the lizard loses

a length of tail in the process, I console myself by remembering
that lizards often sacrifice tails to the beaks of hunting
birds. But this inch of severed tissue and nerves still twitches,
a witness to the will to survive.

When my mother died, her departing
energy left only quiet hands folded
on the hospital sheet. Not one, final, reflexive
tremble. She was content to go gently

into that summer noontide. Yet when,
minutes later, her spirit and I shared
the short ride to the hospital lobby I sensed
her preceding me, oh so circumspectly, out into

the parking lot where, rearing up in a localized
whirlwind, she danced a tarantella so exuberant
it blew my final gift of orchids right off
the roof of the old Cherokee.

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Rhapsody: Summer

Rhapsody of desert days of plenty: sandstone opening of the wisdom eye, grist for the spirit in this solstice, fire-making season. Start where you are—the empty, magenta desert, the unnatural openness of mind. To master understanding, breathe: You are alive and attentive to the silence of radical acceptance. In the places that scare you see the reflections of women seeking the path within, the water path entering the cave of the heart. The miracle of overcoming. *Start where you are*: The simple re-enchantment of evening, creating sacred spaces within stone circles as canyon wrens sing coloratura.

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2 Poems by Kathleen Williamson

Reigning Rain (A Sonoran Sestina)

Red tail hawk carved of cottonwood root
suspended under saguaro rib ceiling skies.
The squat hill in the window, a dragon at our back in the west
growing out of a once-there river.
The old folks reminisce about cottonwood trees.
Archeologists dredge up ghosts while owls hoot to foretell the dead.

On this scorching day, a Tohono kid's Goth guitar could wake the dead,
rip them shredded from the ground and roots.
No wood outside of memories to carve from any trees.
California smoke eclipses the Sonoran skies.
But none can witness and speak like the river
of her drying and clogged cardio-vascular system in the West.

Flocks of F16s scream east and west
overhead blasting what isn't yet dead.
Humans don't (but birds do) look up from the river.
Snakes and gophers duck for cover under rocks and roots
from the metastasized burn of contrail striped skies.
Ancients sought safety under the shade of mesquite trees.

An Aeolian harp sings through these canopies of trees;
A Dissonant dry wind from the southwest.
A thousand cicadas chirp rain prayers to the skies.
The Santa Cruz June is a still-life life-like drawn out dead,
starved of all memories of monsoon and roots
as desiccated frogs lie comatose beneath the baked caked river.

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Kathleen Williamson moved from Brooklyn to Jerome in 1974 and became a known Arizona performing songwriter. She was mentored in folk music by the late legendary Katie Lee, a lifelong friend. After graduating from NAU in 1985, she moved to Tucson and earned doctorates in law (1988) and cultural anthropology (2000) from the UA. She has been awarded TAMMIES (Tucson Weekly's Tucson Area Musician Awards) for Best Songwriter in 2003 and 2005. Her songs have been featured twice on Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now." Though Kathleen has published numerous scholarly law and anthropology articles, upon retiring from law practice, she (finally!) took her first poetry classes at Pima Community College where three of her poems were published in the 2023 edition of Sandscript, the college's annual literary and arts magazine. Kathleen is honored and delighted to offer these two Arizona poems to the readers of The Blue Guitar.

A pleading, the Feast of San Juan in the river,
to replenish our birds, our love-lives and trees.
Mariachis and icons chant, clap and root.
Yes, root for a team of clouds to parade from the Pacific west
where the sun goes to rest, the place of traditional dead.
All creatures reach to pull the monsoon from the skies.

Wet angels fall from the skies.
Every drop returns to the river.
Mud liberated from kiln-dried clay whelps toads from the dead.
More summer ahead but greening the trees
And each passing night, the Scorpion crawls west.
We watch, we wait, under wide hats and dusty boots, the taps of our roots.

Time to plant trees, say the living and dead.
A Yaqui deer dances along wing-shaped clouds on the river.
With roots in the west, the savior is hurled from the skies.

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Endgame

Along the placid Colorado River at Laughlin,
before sunrise, Betty is
dreaming dreams to promptly forget, in her Casino hotel room,
—smoking allowed—a balcony overlooks
a parking lot of beached cars bearing plates
from all the Western states,
bloated raccoons waddle, meander and comb the edge of the river
breakfasting on refuse tossed and flushed by guests and staff and gamblers and
gravity to the river and
other opportunist critters and varmints that gather on the bank
of Casino life on this tranquilized sliver of the mighty Colorado.
Before Betty takes the elevator,
 —after her third cigarette of the morning and finishing the free room coffee,
 down, down to the second floor
 bingo hall,
 where she sets up her ten sheets and dot markers
 at her usual seat for the 8:30 game
 which, over the course of the day, will be followed by
 10:30, 12:30, 2:30, and 4:30 games—
hundreds of swallows will swoop, dive, soar, circle, spin
and flit in and out of the circle holes of their cob mud nests
glued under the eaves and landings of the east side of the Casino hotel.
Dozens of visitors
and Bullhead City trailer residents on the ropes of the Casino symbiosis
shuffle through their daily routes and routines.
Betty strides and deescalators her way to the Casino hotel buffet.
She produces her free breakfast coupon
earned from all her free games at the Casino and
leaves a tip, part of the booty she scored last night
foraging in the second-hand smoke aisles of infinite slots
checking each bandit for forgotten change or tidbit winnings.
She trusts the games more than people and friends, she thinks,
before retiring to her room; finishing off a pack of Merit Lites and channel-surfing herself
into a somnolent landscape of late-late-late night infomercials.
She never loses at the slots
even when she plays, which she does well enough, though winning isn't the agenda.
The Casino hotel keeps track of Betty via the eponymous assigned
plastic card she inserts in each machine that reads it, and her.
She keeps it safe on a long lariat around her neck.
Just keep playing to score
a luxurious room for enough nights away from her boiling broken mobile home
on the other bank, and enough meal tickets
and enough free shows.
Scammin' the high life!

Continued on page 13

Dolly, and Willie, and Waylon adoration tribute shows.

Front rows,

rewards for the playing, and the staff all know her name.

The daily faces on the elevators and lobbies, “hi, how are ya,” “how’ya making out?”

Skimming the river’s commodities,

shade and shelter booty under the roof’s overhang.

The working-it lush life.

Social security buys her ciggies and the Casino provides maid service and chefs. So, why bother calling old friends to see how they’re doing?

And no point in making new friends; people suck. She knows people don’t really like her

Appalachian drawl, butch haircut, brassiere-less vest, and homely face

and she proves herself right about that ... all the time.

They’re all just after something.

Thrift store bargains last forever here, so a wardrobe comes easy.

The cheapest jalopy will get her back and forth over the river.

Betty doesn’t know the sludge of social media and forgotten passwords.

“Everyone’s a winner!” shouts the signs along the Riverwalk.

But Betty doesn’t look like a blond with a perm, waving a fistful of cash and having an orgasm.

Betty’s been at this for about five generations of raccoons, at least those wild ones

that didn’t die of starvation due to human intervention.

She hasn’t had a lover since 1985. No starry nights. No grass under her feet.

No winning. No losing. Not even boozing.

Only high gilded ceilings, filtered air, curdled Casino carpets, ashen hive-mind expressions.

She knows that if she stepped outside the roulette wheels of her days

She’d see she’s already in an urn floating downstream.

But that thought is so deep down, buried under waffles and free packets of saccharin.

Sometimes she wonders ... The VA covers her meds ... But

How’s this all gonna pan out when her luck runs out?

A memory flickers of her praying in a hillbilly revival tent

and passes, unfurled in her next visible exhale and dissipates up to bottomless blue sky.

Down by the hotel docks between Riverside and Aquarius where caddisflies swarm around the eyes and

up the noses of offended tourists,

a feral cat sits on a once sunken life-jacket, snacking on a tossed burger bun, oblivious to God and Betty.

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3 Poems by David Chorlton

Vienna Wind

There's a colloquial snarl to the wind
that blows with a slide
to each syllable and complains
in three-quarter time. When it's cold it stings
and it's cold all the way
from the east where it whistles
to this allegretto street. It's an ill mannered wind
that knows a good tune
when it blows one. It's a dirge of a wind
with a stockpile of remembrances
pushing to be set free. It buttons coats,
ties scarves and makes eyes water.
Here it comes again, going nowhere
in particular but never stopping
to reflect on the storm
that coughed it out and spread
its black wings wide.

© 2023



"Vienna by Night" by David Chorlton
Oil on canvas
30 by 40 inches



David Chorlton is a longtime resident of Phoenix and hasn't objected to the temperatures until this summer! He grew up in Manchester, England, with lots of rain and later lived in Vienna with frequent winds as well as fine music of all kinds. He paints occasionally as well as writing poetry, and this year saw the publication of "The Long White Glove," a true account of a 1961 murder for which one of his cousins was wrongly convicted (from New Meridian Arts). It is a story that reminds him that Kafka was as relevant to Vienna as it was to Prague. Back in Arizona, David keeps a close eye on the local bird life and all that he recalls well from the south of the state.

Photograph Lost

(Taken at Franz Kafka's grave in Prague)

Long ago it must be/I have a photograph
Paul Simon (Bookends)

In winter he was ice. Stood still
on the square. Looked intensely toward
a somewhere only the wind could find.
A passing cloud
took him away when it passed over
and rumor had it
he soon became snow.
But he returned with each season, as blossoms
in spring and a shadow
when summer's honeyed light
raised the castle from its hilly foundation.
Then came a storm
and a shower of words
beat against old cobblestones. He walked
on stars each night and came down
to street level when the darkness became
too heavy to bear. Follow here, follow
there, and he always
disappeared. It seemed important
to prove a meeting actually
occurred, a photograph
to document the kneeling underneath a leafy
canopy and placing
of a stone to show respect. Even that
is nowhere to be found now,
true as the moment was
it chose to be a melody to honor
one who never liked music much at all.

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Dreamscape

It's been a hard week bringing dreams
to life as if doing so
would help the rain to fall,
a hard week of watching
lizards chasing lies into the shrubbery
at the edge of Elliot Road. There are clouds collecting
every day, bullying the sunset
but remaining dry
by the time the rabbits sit
in moonlight on the grass, ears raised
to listen for a signal
from the universe. Green light on the Loop road,
starlight in the sky, no one brakes
in Heaven when it's dry.

The jasmine in the front yard
thinks in flowers. The bougainvillea
has magenta dreams. The hours
pass discreetly when there isn't much to do
outside of standing by the window
watching for a sign
from the forecasters or gods, whichever
steps up first to say
this summer was a long mistake. Or
did we only dream it: are we
dreaming now? Every day's a quest for truth.
Is imagination

different from an untruth?
If we imagine rain will all the leaves turn green?
And does it take remembering
to prove a fact? There was a missing day,
a blackout day when sunshine
bathed the world, and brakes squealed
out in pain. No witnesses, just
the sleeping mind that knows
it happened here and hides the details
where the inner life alone
has access. It says Step back, don't cross,
be patient, rain is on the way.

© 2023

3 Poems by Janet McMillan Rives

North Euclid Avenue

Local road work detours me past
Grandma's house, my mother's home
from birth to marriage. Hard to recognize
in its current state—flaking stucco,
cracked window, two stones missing
from the low wall by the sidewalk.
There's just enough familiarity left
to imagine a scene from a century ago,
a simple day in my mother's childhood.

I can see her on the front steps
admiring her father's poppies and roses,
waiting for his return from the night run
to El Paso. She spots him up the block,
intrepid in overalls and engineer's cap.
As he chats with the neighbor, a professor
on his way to class, he feels a brush of air
from his daughter's bashful wave.

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Janet McMillan Rives was born and raised in Connecticut and currently lives in Oro Valley, Arizona, where she moved after retiring from the University of Northern Iowa as a professor of economics. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Beyond Words*, *Lyrical Iowa*, *Raw Art Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Unstrung*, *Crosswinds*, *Creosote* and *Canary* as well as in a number of anthologies. She has published two chapbooks: *"Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie"* (Finishing Line Press, 2020) and *"Washed by a Summer Rain: Poems from the Desert"* (Kelsay Books, 2023).

To Listen

I hear a hummingbird *whirr-whirr*, glimpse
a glossy needle fly from salvia to honeysuckle
sense the buzz of three bees feasting on aloe
then notice the voice of a verdin. I spot the nest
its doorway on the bottom. The bird? Nowhere
to be seen, only his *tseet-tseet*. I listen

reminded of my grandmother who relied
on ears, her sight gone before her daughters
had started school. She listened to the radio
to a neighbor, to her sister—listened
and remembered every word.

I follow the verdin's bubbly chatter
see-lip see-lip, stand on a rock, tilt my head
around a branch for a better view.
No bird, only his tune, *tschep tschep*,
a song perhaps about family.

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Night Whistles

An open window on an August evening,
warm New England air carries sounds
of a Central Vermont night train
reminding me someday I'll need to abandon
this nurturing place which holds no future.
I wish I could stay.

Decades later another open window
one I'd like to crawl out and leave my
life behind. I hear the West Chester Branch
commuter train, the one that will weave me
past suburbs of brotherly love
to a job I hate, days I despise.

In time, in a place of escape, I pull back
bedroom curtains to let summer
breeze in. A hollow whistle
from an Iowa Northern engine
carries across cornfields, green
that envelops me, grounds me in comfort.

Tonight I sit on the patio of Borderlands
Brewery in my mother's ancestral town.
A Southern Pacific rumbles past.
The engineer blows a long
and two shorts, Poppy telling Grandma
he'll be home soon.

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A Poem by Karen Nowicki

A Life of Infinite Birth

In the quiet corners of my mind, a shadow dwelled,
A lifetime of self-doubt, a tale it tells.
Though no evidence, no proof, to paint me as a loser,
I was trapped within this cage, the anxious accuser.

I walked through life with heavy steps, burdened by the weight,
Of doubts that haunted my every move, a relentless debate.
A prisoner of my own creation, I couldn't break free,
From the chains of insecurity that bound me.

The world offered praise and worth, in moments bright and clear,
But still, I questioned, still I feared, the judgment I held dear.
A voice within that whispered doubt, a cruel, persistent muse,
It echoed through the corridors, a constant, haunting ruse.

I yearned to see the truth of me, to break this endless chain,
To find the strength to rise above, to silence the refrain.
For deep within, I knew I was not a loser or devoid of grace,
But a soul with worth and purpose, a unique, enduring space.

In quiet moments of reflection, I sought a different view,
To challenge self-doubt's dominion, to find what's real and true.
For I am more than these shadows, more than the doubt's embrace,
I am a life unfolding, a journey to embrace.

So, I'll press ahead, one step at a time, though self-doubt may persist,
I'll strive to find my inner voice, in which I truly exist.
For I am not a loser, not without value or worth,
I'm a story still in progress, a life of infinite birth.

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Karen Nowicki is the owner of iNudge LLC, the parent company to Phoenix Business RadioX and Deep Impact Leadership Coaching & Consulting. Karen has spent over 30 years in corporate, small business and educational leadership roles and for the past 10 years has held an impressive private client list that includes c-suite leaders in a variety of industries, including: technology, medical, higher education, hospitality, and finance. Executive leaders and business owners hire Karen to bring more purpose and fulfillment into their work, life and relationships. Karen stays grounded through meditation, hiking and paddle boarding. She is an "almost" Arizona native, having lived in the East Valley since high school and celebrates her 40th reunion with classmates this fall. She is Mom to Grady (29), Madison (27) and Ivan (16) and notes that these fabulous souls are what makes her the happiest and most proud.



Julia

By Mary Knapp

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Have you ever noticed that when you get down to it, most people's lives are relatively ordinary? Julia's life was like that. She lived a long time ago, like most people did. Parts of her story are true and very ordinary, and other parts you wish had never happened ... Anyway, since I am already started, I will go ahead and tell you the rest. This is Julia's story.

She stood frozen to the dock, immobile, scanning each face with eyes like daggers as the crowds passed by in the Philadelphia rain.

The smell of fish and the noise of the crowds was overwhelming but she didn't notice any of that. Instead she was focused on just one goal and that goal was to find her husband Andrew among all the chaos. He had promised to meet her at the dock and together they would finish their journey to their new home in America, the land of opportunity, in the coalfields of Pennsylvania.

Some of her fellow passengers stumbled bleary-eyed across the wharf onto the immigration platform, each of them slowly finding long awaited relatives and anxious friends they had promised to connect with. The lines started to thin out noticeably but Julia refused to lose heart. She told herself that if other families were finding each other and reuniting, then soon it would be her turn as well. Andrew, would be there among the long lines. She just knew it. She willed it to be so.

She reached over gently and squeezed her baby Maria in her arms and then bent low to tell little Stefan and Matthew, once again to keep a sharp lookout for their father – a concept that brought fear and confusion to their little hearts.

They had no memory really of their father and Julia herself sometimes found it hard to remember his face. But she frequently remembered his persuasiveness when he urged her to dream of a better life once they arrived in the new world. They would surely be blessed with a large family, he assured her, all their children healthy, all of them attending school. That was the picture he had painted for her at least.

But even in their first few years together, back in the old country, when they were young, she had discovered that it was easy for Andrew to make promises that he couldn't always keep. After all, didn't he have another family he had left behind in the mountains before he met her? Why should his failure to show up on the dock surprise her now?

But that had been only part of her sorrow. As a child, Julia had become separated from her family when the Ottoman army stormed their village. Her aunt found her in a sea of orphans by some twist of luck and saved her from starvation and the ravages of the holy warriors. Julia knew that her aunt, herself on her own, could no longer protect her from the wolf at the door.

It was during these days that she met Andrew and almost against reason, she found herself trusting him despite his feeble promises. And so together – Julia and Andrew – somehow – they survived. When they heard about the opportunities to mine coal in the far reaches of the new country, their decision to bet everything they had – which was practically nothing – to bet it all on an unknown life in an unknown land seems equal parts crazy and courageous.

Suddenly she noticed the air had grown still. The rain had stopped and she found herself on the dock again, but something

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After a career as a biologist, Mary turned her attention to traveling and writing — literary nonfiction mostly with a dash of poetry — and has plans to see what tomorrow may bring. You can reach Mary at marymknapp@gmail.com.

was different. The difference was that at last Andrew was there just as he had promised and he stood there patiently waiting for her and the children.

He had walked up to her amidst all the crowds and confusion – hesitant – his face gruff with a days old beard, and silenced with his own inner turmoil. He had finally materialized on the dock, in the rain, his own little family surrounding him, for better or worse. This would have to be for better. “Oh God,” Julia breathed, “please make this new life better.”

Andrew gathered Julia’s bags and boxes and led her and the children past the door and out into the waiting arms of their future. But likely their reunion that day was less sentimental than practical. They had come so far but had miles to go, anyway you slice it.

Just a few months after they had settled in, in the shanty coal town, little Matthew was playing along the railroad tracks when the train started up unexpectedly and right there and then he lost both his legs in an instant. His brothers had to pull him around in an old wagon for the rest of his life. He became a tailor and died young.

Of the remaining five brothers, they all went down to work in the coalmines before the age of eight, some emerged disabled, and most died of Black Lung disease. On a normal Saturday night, Julia herself had to raise her voice to remind Andrew that he was married to her and not the next door neighbor.

On those occasions, mild, implacable Andrew would visit the jail dutifully whenever called upon to organize Julia’s bail for disturbing the peace. And a few years later, he would have to visit the jail often to raise bail again as Julia became a Union

organizer. Andrew was too shy to make a fuss when his friends asked him how it felt to have a rabble raising wife whose picture appeared quite frequently on the front pages of the newspaper. “Is she a woman?” they chided him. “Does she even cook?”

Julia was indeed a woman and she was an excellent cook as well. There would be a queue outside her kitchen during the holidays to get a warm slice of her Serbian Christmas bread. I can remember that warm smell now. So delightful!

OK, I’ll admit it, Julia always took a shine to me – a fact I did nothing to discourage. As a little girl, I would run behind her trying to catch up. I watched the long thick white braid that she wore, swishing back and forth, back and forth across her shoulders.

When she started getting feeble we convinced her to come out to Montana to spend some time with me and my husband out on our farm. One night there was a blizzard and we told her not to but she went out to the barn anyway to get some fresh milk from the cow. On her way back to the house, she must have lost her way in all that snow and she froze to death. Next day, when we finally found her, all you could see was her laying out in the field, with her long white braid amongst all that snow. Her white braid matched that white Montana snow to a “T.”

Anyway, that was Julia’s story. It was an ordinary story, but it was a beautiful story too.

Dedicated to my great-grandmother Julia Csendes.

Bear Attack

By Duann Black

© 2023

Ron raised his rifle to his left shoulder, aligning the scope to his left eye. He heard the bear crashing through the underbrush somewhere off to his left. Ron swore the ground shuddered with each footfall. Fearing he would miss his mark caused him to shiver. He wondered if his ammo had the punch needed to bring the killer down. Its growl grew louder at its approach.

The bear mauled two young children playing with a snapping turtle at the edge of the millpond. Ron noticed them playing from his front porch. The bear attacked without warning. It was over before Ron could grab his rifle and ammo bag from his truck. He was closest to the sound of their pitiful shrieks.

He fired twice as a call of alarm to the neighbors as he ran after the killer. As he rushed headlong into the reeds at the pond's edge, the blood and gore that remained of the two boys fueled his need to find the monster. Realizing he was not taking the correct action, he stopped next to a black walnut tree to catch his breath, calm his nerves, rein in his anger, and listen. He did not know where the bear was located. A moment later, he knew exactly where his target was. It was the hunter. Ron was its target.

His rifle muzzle danced as adrenaline coursed through his muscles. *Focus and breathe, Ron. You've got only one, maybe two shots. Don't miss or you're dead.*

Resting the rifle forestock on the palm of his right hand, he tucked his elbow into his ribs for a steady brace. The rifle butt rested snug in his left shoulder notch. For added support, he held his left arm tight against his side. His right foot pointed at the oncoming target while his left angled outward about 45 degrees. Legs shoulder-width apart, with his right leg forward, he bent his knees slightly, centered his body over his hips, and leaned slightly forward. The position was comfortable and familiar. The changes took only a moment.

Twisting at the waist, he turned his torso and head together as one unit, first left, then right, keeping the rifle muzzle pointed where his eyes focused and his nose pointed. His finger rested on the trigger. *This will be a close shot. Aim center mass, no finesse.*

Ron focused on the sound of the bear crashing through the underbrush. He made minor adjustments to keep the bear directly in front of him. There would be a scant distance between them when the bear came into view. No room for error.

The sound of the rifle firing startled him, again and again.



Duann Black is an author and poet with stories to tell and things to say. During a multi-year break from emptying ink pens onto paper, she was the chief editor for her husband, Alan Black. They published 20 books, including "Metal Boxes" and "A Planet with No Name." The author is currently working on a two-book collection of short stories she and Alan wrote. She is a well-traveled military retiree, always ready with a story to share.

Surveyor

By Duann Black

© 2023

“Hi, Melvin, how’ve you been? I haven’t seen you around lately.”

“I just completed my drone pilot classes. Starting my own business tomorrow and really looking forward to it.”

Wilbur didn’t say anything for a while.

“You okay, Wilbur? You’re quieter than usual?” Melvin tinkered with his phone.

“Hah, yep, I’m okay. I was just thinking about you manning the controls of a drone. I never thought you’d do anything like that. What business are you planning on starting tomorrow?”

“I’m going to be a roof surveyor. There appears to be pretty good money in it, so I hear, at least in other countries. I figured with all the old houses here in Britain, it would be a good business to get into. It’s easier than using a ladder to get to a roof and then being crazy enough to walk on the roof to test it for weakened areas. The drone can photograph them and check for damage beneath the tile or slate using onboard LIDAR — Light Detection and Ranging equipment. Besides, walking on those types of roofs can add to the damage. A drone doesn’t need to land to do its job,” Melvin said.

The men watched a pigeon fly by. It landed on the edge of the roof of the grocery store across the street from the park bench where they sat. “I’ve got it!” Wilbur said.

“What have you got?” Melvin asked.

“I suppose a roofing company would find value in knowing where pigeons pooped the most — you know, the east end or the west end. That section of the roof would need to be reinforced to handle the weight unless there are professional pigeon pooper-scoopers who deal with that regularly. Not being a building owner, I wouldn’t know about that sort of thing.”

Melvin scratched his chin. “Professional pigeon pooper-scoopers? I don’t recall hearing about that occupation before.”

“I have a great idea for your business card logo. Three lines: Melvin Grandbee, Professional Pigeon Poop Surveyor, Drone Pilot License Number zero–zip–nil. Your graphic is a herd of panicked pooping pigeons fleeing from a drone swooping in from behind to survey their steamy poop pile with active LIDAR.” Wilbur used his hands and facial expressions to illustrate his description.

Melvin came up for air a short while later. His hearty laugh almost toppled him from the bench. Changing applications on his phone, he quickly typed in notes on Wilbur’s suggestion. “My business card will be the best in the business, sure to bring me plenty of jobs. Thank goodness for pigeons. Thanks for the suggestions, Wilbur,” he said.

The pigeons roosting on the grocery store lifted off. As they flew toward them, both men covered their heads in case the pigeons had overheard their discussion and planned to target them with poop bombs.

Security Contractor

By Duann Black

© 2023

Arriving at the conference center early, she found the ballroom, signed in, and entered to scope out a good seat.

Inside the chilly room, she noticed a couple of familiar faces. None of them knew her name and probably would not remember her face. After selecting a seat at an empty table, she settled in. Pulling her notebook from a worn backpack, she listened to conversations around her.

Most people were sharing their parking misadventures. Signs were supposed to direct attendees to parking close to the meeting ballroom. She saw no signs anywhere in the parking areas. Luckily, she found a spot close to the correct ballroom.

Before attending each monthly meeting, her routine never changed. She read all meeting communications, scoured digital location maps for threats, checked satellite photos for potential escape choke points, and reviewed sensor data for abnormalities. If no adverse data was found, she attended the meeting. She also mapped out flexible response options should something unexpected happen.

Turning her attention away from conversations, she read the video screen. It displayed the names of the organization's board of directors. For the first time since joining, she did not recognize any name.

Maybe it was time to make a change. Membership kept her up-to-date on local threats. If she canceled her membership, she would lose a reliable source of weekly security information.

Not for the first time, her thoughts turned to her future. Every week she wrestled with it. Should she continue working as an independent security contractor or move on to new endeavors? Should she carry on with life as is, or change her future dramatically? Every week, she never found enough information to answer these nagging questions.

The day after she resigned from Q-Force, every aspect of her life changed. Her position at Q-Force and her military career were connected. Leaving one forced her to give up the other. Her world turned upside down and, for the first time in her life, thrust her into an unknown future. Her dreams shattered like thin icing on a delicate cake. At first, she assumed she had made the best choice. Today, she questioned her decision with a new focus.

As an independent security contractor, she had no shortage of jobs. She was skilled and excelled at getting each job done fast and accurately. Qualities she strived to perfect, others found difficult to achieve. Her office was her transport and her

transport was the best money could buy.

All she knew was the military and security. She grew up knowing she wanted a military career. She strived to be the best officer she knew to be. When Q-Force requested her, she jumped at the opportunity to join the elite organization. She lived each day doing the job she trained for and loved doing.

One cold-hearted trigger pull stripped it all away. Losing her partner after forty years of adventure, tedium, ducking headshots, and fighting over whose turn it was to get coffee took a greater toll than she ever imagined. She missed him daily. The hole in her heart was as large as it was the day he died. She was just beginning to deal with that fact.

These meetings only fueled her loss. Her heart was no longer in it. Maybe it was time to let it all go. But what else could she do? A moment later, her decision was clear. Her immediate dilemma was deciding whether to stay for the rest of the meeting or leave. Her chair waited patiently at home for her to park her butt for another day of writing stories about her first career. No one could read those stories. That career was classified, but writing the words kept the nightmares and heart tugs of lost love away for a little while.

Maybe it was time to take a break. Time to close her business, or find someone with the brains and brawn needed to enjoy the grind of an independent security contractor's life. Money was no issue, it never had been. Military retirement covered her monthly bills, and a disability stipend more than paid for her travels, even if she went first class.

An hour into the meeting, the first planned break started. She quietly packed up her notepad, hefted the backpack to her shoulder, and moved with the crowd toward the patio. Walking past the restrooms, she turned aside and exited the building nearest the parking areas.

A couple minutes later, her transport rose from its parking spot in response to her orders and opened the door when it sensed she was three steps away. Once she was seated and secured, it launched using a randomized route to deter followers.

* * *

The stealthy tracker maintained its distance. It performed random zigzag moves to disguise its purpose. In four years, it never failed to keep up with its target.

No one ever truly resigned from Q-Force. Its highly trained members were too valuable for the Empire to lose. There were

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always jobs available that fit independent security contractors (former Q-Force personnel) best. This specific target was once one of Q-Forces' best, too valuable to let fade into the mediocre workforce of some backwater planet. Keeping her engaged with security contracts was vital to the Empire.

* * *

An employee flagged the stealthy tracker's video feed and informed the supervisor that the subject was altering course unexpectedly.

The supervisor, a Q-Force section leader, had a decision to make. The target needed to be retained without revealing that she was under constant surveillance. Q-Force teammates were always Q-Force teammates. Active military or contractor status made no difference. The individual was not required to know this truth. The Empire had invested too much time and effort in Q-Force personnel.

Watching the video feed, the section lead wondered how long it would have taken him to decide what to do and how long to act upon the decision.

If their roles were reversed, losing her would be a crushing blow he felt he would not soon recover from. He had prepared for this event; he knew she would one day decide and act upon her decision. It surprised him it took her this long to take action. No matter what her working relationship with Q-Force would be in the future, he could not lose her. She was too precious.

The Orangutan

By Duann Black

© 2023

There I was, minding my own business at the science fiction convention when I spotted an orangutan peeking around one of the massive gray pillars holding up the ceiling of the exhibit hall. I tried staring him down, but he ducked back out of view. At first, I thought he was going to play hide and seek with me, but after half a minute, I gave up hope he would reappear.

Looking at the crowd of people floating by my table, no one was making eye contact. *They're no fun. Maybe they're getting tired. After all, it's close to 5 p.m. Maybe they've been on their feet all day parading up and down the aisles to be seen, photographed, and complimented on their cosplay costumes. Others have been dragged along by their spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, best friend, brother or sister, or mom and dad to have no fun in a vast crowd full of nothing they're interested in. That's the nature of the convention beast.*

I looked back at the pillar. The orangutan was back. He looked so real—but that's impossible. Only service dogs were allowed in the exhibition hall during the convention. I looked directly at the ape and smiled. He smiled back. *Look at those teeth! This ape must be real. How did an orangutan get into this building? Am I the only one who sees him? Am I really seeing him? I was reading a book about an orangutan recently. Maybe that's feeding my imagination.*

The orangutan moved away from the pillar where I could see him clearly. *My heavens! He must be real.* Coming from the left, at the end of the aisle, loud voices sounded like they were moving toward me. Looking back toward the ape, he winked at me, smiled, and faster than I thought he could move, disappeared down a cross aisle away from the commotion.

The disturbance increased in volume as it moved closer. Rounding the corner to my aisle, an angry crowd followed city police.

I attempted to look innocent, but that usually got me into trouble. Both officers make a beeline to my table. I stood up and smiled. "Hello officers, what do you like to read?"

One cop looked confused. The other officer gave me an unhappy look.

"Where did it go?" the unhappy cop asked.

"Where did what go, sir? A spaceship, an errant balloon, a masked cosplay refugee, or all of my non-customers?" I barely kept a smirk off my face.

"The ape, you must have seen it," the police officer stated.

"Early this morning, I saw a cosplayer in a black ape suit. He didn't stop at my table and I'm not sure which direction he went, sir."

"An ape didn't run past your table in the last five minutes?"

"No sir. I admit my attention hasn't always been on the aisle. I reorganized my books in the tubs under the table a little bit ago, but I didn't hear any running." Thankfully, I didn't need to lie to the police.

"Keep a lookout. If you see an ape in this aisle, yell out which direction it's heading and the aisle number."

"Yes, sir. Good luck with your hunt. Is it a criminal or just an escapee?"

The police didn't respond. They left the aisle in the opposite direction the ape had gone.

The vendor across the aisle rushed over to ask me what the cops wanted.

"They're looking for an ape. I told them I saw a cosplayer dressed in a black ape suit earlier today, but I don't know where he is now. Do you remember that attendee?" I asked.

"I do. He didn't talk to anyone, just a cosplay looky-loo."

"The cops told me to yell if I see an ape in our aisle. They want the direction and aisle number."

The vendor looked up the aisle. "Hope that cosplayer didn't get in with an unauthorized weapon and hope he hasn't already injured someone."

"Me too. The police hunt cleared out our area of the exhibit hall fast," I commented.

"Agreed. Where did everyone go? It's getting mighty quiet in here. It sounds like the hall is emptying, but I didn't get a text alert to vacate and there haven't been any overhead announcements." He shrugged.

"Most of the crowd moved past us on the cross-aisle. I'm sure we'll find out what's going on soon, especially if it's trouble." I shrugged.

"I'm gonna follow the crowd and see if I can find out anything." Off he went.

The rest of the aisle quickly emptied of vendors as their curiosity overtook common sense. I saw no reason to leave the comfort of my table. It wasn't like a tsunami would kill me inside the exhibit hall, maybe an earthquake or a sinkhole under my chair, but certainly not an empty exhibit hall. *Ha, ha.*

Ten minutes passed without incident. I heard a clamor at the far end of the hall, but silence reigned in my location. After double-checking my book display and rearranging my giveaways, I grabbed my notebook to begin a new short story. Moments later, a sound close behind me startled me.

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An orangutan stood six feet from me. He winked and smiled, then looked at my display table. My wagon and book tubs filled the area beneath the table. His smile took on a look of concern, like fear. I pointed to the empty table behind my chair at the center of our author area. Its drape almost reached the floor, and two folding chairs were parked in front of it. I moved the chairs aside and raised the drape so he could see the size of the space beneath. I took two tubs from beneath my table and placed them on the folding chairs, thinking he might understand how it could give him a hidey-hole. He winked at me. Moving faster than I expected, he folded himself into the space beneath the table. Once in position, he closed his eyes.

I quietly told him I would do my best to protect him. Lowering the drape, I adjusted it as low to the floor as possible. Moving the chairs in front of the table, I found clutter to place on the floor beneath them. When done, I gently lifted the corner of the drape. He winked at me again. Placing a corner of the drape over a chair so he could watch me, I retrieved a bottle of water and a snack bag of dried mango bits. Opening each, I took a sip of water and ate a couple of mango bits, then handed the bottle and bag to the ape. He sipped the water and then emptied the bottle. He tentatively sampled some mango, smacked his lips, and emptied the bag into his mouth all at once. I retrieved the empties; we exchanged smiles, and I lowered the drape.

Soon after, folks began returning to their tables. I hoped my orangutan would remain silent and as still as a sleeping mouse. The exhibit hall remained open for two hours, though many exhibitors didn't return to close their displays. In my aisle, only seven vendors remained. When the announcer declared the hall closed, I was the only one with an open display.

To the left of me was the exhibit hall wall and a freight elevator. The security guard seated next to it enjoyed several naps throughout the day, despite the crowd noise. Currently, the chair was vacant. Looking behind me, I saw the orangutan peeking at me. Catching my eye, he winked. I smiled back and gave him another bottle of water and more mango bits. *I wonder if he needs to pee. How would we handle that?*

Certain that someone would arrive soon to shoo me out of the hall for the night, I pulled the chairs away from the table so the ape could exit his cozy table cave. He didn't move. Looking up at me, he slowly smiled.

He looked so shy. *Is he shy or is he scared? Is he cozy warm under the table and unwilling to come out into the much cooler air-conditioned hall? How the heck do I get him out of the hall without getting caught? Then what? Drive him to the zoo? Take him home with me? I can't release him into the forest—there are no safe caves for him to curl up in, no water in the river, and no fruit for him to eat. It's summer. How would he survive 100F heat?*

I closed my eyes and shook my head. *There's an ape on the loose during a science fiction convention—who do I call? Do I call 9-1-1 or the police non-emergency number? Would they believe my story or come to take me away? Do I confess to exhibit management that I've been harboring an orangutan? Why would they believe me—I'm a fiction writer. There has got to be some way out of this mess that protects this handsome, friendly animal.*

No solution came to mind. *I wish my new friend could speak. I have a gazillion questions that need answering.*

Two folks pushing a cart filled with trash bags moved toward the elevator. The security chair was still vacant. They turned into the alcove and pushed a button. The elevator was functioning. I wondered where it went and if it was possible to reach my vehicle in the underground parking garage without getting caught.

"Someone good has to be looking for you. Wish I knew your name. By the way, I'm Sammy." Not thinking, I offered my hand to shake the ape's hand. To my surprise, before I could pull it back, he reached out to take it. Slowly he unfolded and exited his table cave. I had never held hands with an ape or been this close to one before. I checked the aisles, making sure we were alone.

"Do you want to go home now?"

He winked and nodded. I had the impression he knew exactly what I was saying.

"After you finish eating the mango bits and drinking your water, we'll walk back to where I first saw you."

He closed his eyes for a moment and nodded.

"Can I take your picture? I'd like one of you next to my exhibitor's table."

Another wink and nod. Before I could move, he hopped into my camp chair. I grabbed the phone, not wanting to miss the moment. I stood in the center of the aisle and asked him to smile while I took several photos of him seated behind my book display.

"Thank you. Now let's see if we can find someone that knows you." Looking to my left, I caught sight of a police officer on his cellphone not far away.

The ape climbed out of the chair and moved toward me. I started raising my hand as a sign for him to stop and then realized I didn't want to alert the cop that I was not alone. I hurried to the edge of my table to prevent my friend from entering the aisle. "Danger," I whispered. "Can you hide again?" I pointed to the table cave. The ape re-entered the space, and I reconfigured the table to hide him. By the time the officer was close enough to see my display area, I was double-checking my sales numbers. When he entered my periphery vision, I looked up. Nodding at him, I returned to my calculator and sales list until he stopped in front of my table.

"Yes, officer, what can I do for you?" I asked as I stood.

"Did you write all these books?"

"Yes, I did, sir."

"Mind if I check them out?"

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“Please do. I’m not in a hurry to leave. Letting traffic clear as the attendees exit makes for a smoother drive home. You can read the back blurb on the books. They won’t bite, I promise. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask.” Doing my best not to look behind me, I answered his questions and offered him a free magnet, rock, word search, pen, and business card.

“Can I buy a couple of these now?”

“Sure, if you have cash. I don’t have any other way to handle sales. My cashier has left for the day.”

“If you hold the books I want to purchase, I can meet you in the morning before the exhibit hall opens and buy them then.”

“I’m happy to do that for you.”

He handed me seven books, then selected a moonstone, two word search sheets, a pen, and two magnets. I filled out a sales slip and let him see the total price. “Can I have your first name?”

“Martin.”

“Martin, I’ll be here in the morning. The cashier should be here about thirty minutes before the hall opens. Will that work okay for you?”

“Yes, thanks. My son will like the rocks, my wife loves word searches, and we’ll all enjoy the reads.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Martin was close to the freight elevator by the time my new friend pulled back the table cover to peek at me.

“The coast is clear.” I moved the chairs out of the way. “I’m a bit nervous so I hope you don’t mind that I keep up a running conversation until we find your owner, friend, handler, or whatever they’re called. Let me close up my display area so I won’t need to return until tomorrow morning. I’m sure whoever brought you here will be excited for you to return.”

Unfolding the bedsheet I used to place over my display table, the ape reached toward it. I handed him two ends and together we carefully draped it over my book display. “Thank you. I appreciate the help.” I folded up my camp chair and placed it under my table, cleaned up the back area, placed the trash in my bag for disposal, and declared myself ready to depart.

“Okay, handsome stranger, let’s see if we can find someone that knows you. We’ll start at the pillar where I first spotted you and go left from there.” I take the ape’s hand and, after a wink, we set off toward the pillar in the ghostly quiet exhibit hall.

Reaching the pillar, I peeked around it. No one was in sight and no sounds were coming from that direction. “Off we go.”

Lights flicked off to our left, bank after bank blinked out. Darkness was encroaching behind us and to our left. We walked faster, forward into the welcome light. The hall’s south wall was in view and I could see empty food vendor stands, clean floors, and orderly booths. The exhibit hall’s silence was getting louder.

“Hopefully, someone is over here waiting for you to return.” The

orangutan stopped, almost causing me to fall forward on my nose. “What? Do you hear something? Do you see something familiar?”

The orangutan looked to our right. I didn’t see anyone or hear anything. Wait. I smelled something, something familiar. “Okay, let’s check out this way.” The closer we came to the center exit, the stronger the aroma. “Cotton candy, that’s what it smells like. I don’t recall a cotton candy vendor near the central elevator, but that doesn’t mean there wasn’t one today.”

My friend picked up the pace. All of the doors to the center atrium were closed when we reached them. Nightly, they locked all but the double door closest to the exit elevator. There were no signs showing which door that was. I moved to check the first door. The orangutan pulled me kitty corner and grabbed the doorknob on door number five. It opened.

The smell was fantastic. I spotted the vendor’s booth near the escalators. A man was cleaning up the sugar spin tub. My friend released my hand and rushed toward him.

“Harpo, you’re back. Did you have a wonderful adventure today?” The man, an older gentleman, turned toward me. “Hello. Have you been entertaining Harpo today?”

“More like he’s entertained me, sir. He helped me clean up my table and close it up for the night.”

“Good.” Harpo and the man, his owner or father, hugged.

“Thank you, young man ...”

“Sammy, sir.”

“Thank you, Sammy, for taking care of Harpo. Did he find a quiet place to nap?”

“Yes, he did. We made a cave out of a table with a drape hidden behind two chairs at the back of my display table. The police were looking for him earlier but didn’t find him.”

“Young man, it’s time we exited the hall before they lock us in for the night. Here is a coupon for free cotton candy tomorrow. Thank you for becoming Harpo’s new friend. He wanders off once every convention, searching for someone new who needs to be his friend. Anytime you’d like to see him, just call his name and he’ll find you.”

“What?” I blink.

Harpo was gone. The old gentleman was gone. The cotton candy booth was gone. I couldn’t smell cotton candy.

“You need to exit the building. We’re closing up for the night.” Two convention center security personnel walked up to me from behind.

“I’m on my way. Thanks. See you bright and early tomorrow.”

I reached my parking spot in the underground garage. My Jeep was almost the last vehicle to depart. Before exiting, I looked over the cotton candy coupon. There were instructions on the reverse.

WARNING — Use only when alone. When looking for your friend, call Harpo’s name. Enjoy some time with him and have a little cotton candy. WARNING — Use only when alone.

“Harpo?” I looked toward the front passenger seat.

2 Poems by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Kicking the Leaves, But Somewhere Else

for Don Hall, just now, in his manner for a time

1

In our necessary regard for the fardels of time
we walk again with purpose-defeating
unsteadiness until we reach the deepest ruts,
muddy potholes, hidden roots, trodden crumbling
emblems of the continents of distraction that serve
to catch and hold the first dry leaves of fall.
I am diverted by a knapped mirage of insight.

**

We stall.

We kick leaves like children have kicked leaves
since children skipped, inventing childhood,
how many human generations ago?
How many mammalian genera past?—too few left
now not to face the looming horizon of extinction—

perhaps since leaves were created and evolved
for our own spectral ancestors, swinging among branches,
grazing on thickets they dashed among, to mate,
to flee, to distract the predator, to be eaten. To be!

Or, yes, learn to play. The aged orders now,
surviving as the top and the bottom of the food chain,
evolution's subtle or secret choice—predators, parasites,
prey—we forget all past in our remembering
and learn to play again every morning.
Mindfully ravenous, once we learned to learn each day.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom's family moved to the Sonoran Desert of Arizona in 1954. They brought Richard along, for which he is still both appreciative and bewildered. The Sonoran Desert, for all of humanity's wounds and insults, remains a gift. Sederstrom's seventh book of poems, "Icarus Rising: Misadventures in Ascension," which occupies that desert from Tempe to Guaymas, appeared in 2020. A new book, "The Dun Box," which regards "The American Century" as a total of minus 21 days in 1945, is finally finished as much as our world will let be, and has been released.

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These leaves, a ripened amber glow—maple, aspen, birch, oak—
share with those from Bohemia—beech, hornbeam;
Germany—hanging birch, beech, oak;
France—elder, elm, maple;
Sweden—birch, alder, maple;
England—beech, ash, aspen—and
a Paleozoic Common of fern, horsetail, cycad, lichen.

A peasant entente among our creature-ghosts,
their collective aura a timid northern glow among
leaf-fall countries before they were countries:
unmapped continents, unnamed cultures
twenty, thirty, forty millennia ago, limned on cave walls
to share animal courage, animated souls—
Shared blood. Shared breath. Still Life!—

The aurochs at Chauvet. Or the prints of the hand
with a bent finger—fellow creatures dream-walking with,
into each other and into our common being,
and their progeny, maybe two thousand generations
growing up kicking leaves life after life,
all that many leaf-falls before Bohemians and Germans
and French and Swedes and English were or ever dreamt
of being, called what they found themselves called.

Then ragged nations were impressed on old land,
carved and hacked into Earth with her creatures.
Countries' crops of humans were impressed too
and carved, starved and left to rot, having ripened
as the fodder of forgotten kings or sustenance
for flattered pudgy emperors, begetters of pain,
like Ex-Potus Bloviatus. They left what had become
Nations to live for a time open-landed and nationless:
kicking leaves. Maple. Birch. Aspen. Oak.

* *

The paleolithic bone flute would match
the song of the invisible thrush in each past world.
Same time, same flute, same bird. Our song, always,
And Clare's, Whitman's, Hardy's, Eliot's,
the song for anyone who is or chooses to become lost
save for, saved by the flute signal of the hermitic bird
still, and still the always searched invisible guide.

Continued on page 32

2

And we share walking out the drive also,
not crowding it with new footprints,
with Francis Fenton on one side of me
and Hugh and Vera Fenton on the other side.

They stumble at first, our visiting spectral kin,
especially Francis—dead so many years longer,
over two hundred and forty— that he is to be excused
for being less spry than Hugh, dead only sixty years
but no easier to see, no less easy.
But you have not met Francis or Hugh and Vera.

So we slow until our ancients find their footing
and so that each of us can kick out to send leaves
in front of our way, and we needn't introduce you
to the old members of family and half-forgotten history.

Take the hand of one of us you know,
or might get to know in some comfortable infinity,
and the conversation will lean the right way,
introducing strangers who are not strangers
because what we focus on is not where we are going,
but what we may learn each from each.

Focus on our unsteady going, our moving in no direction
save what is defined by the road we mostly ignore.
Because we kick leaves. We kick not together
but in togetherness, in appropriate surprise
at our re-incarnations and pre-dis-incarnations.
Leaves flutter groundward, upward,
wayward.

We flutter,
some of us in and out of the realities of dream
as we follow the leaves
that follow the one season
into the next season
inward through deeper foliage of autumns—

delicate maple, ash, birch, poplar, and aspen leaves
rendered feeble now, skeletal from our exercise.

Continued on page 33

3

And I would not avoid declaring that I am thinking,
while I kick leaves toward the end of our road and the mailbox,
of Donald Hall and his poem whose title I don't suppose
I should appropriate but likely will have
if what I see at the top of the poem is what it seems,
and I think of the Fentons in Hall's family,
and the Fentons in our own family, even myself,

and the two Aunt Graces, each a sister of a grandfather,
Don's grandfather, and mine— two grandfathers
separated by half a continent and by our works and days,
accents of living, and so far as I know we have
no chronicled relation that we might claim in common.

Still, it is relation, or hopeward ir-relation that is part
of what keeps the elder poet, just old enough
to be an uncle of my inspirations, my dialect.
Now only one of us can grow any older.

These common drifts are what we share as poets
long before language interferes with our living
and so long as each of us is still kicking leaves.

So Carol and Don Hall and I share this little road
this morning or afternoon or darkening evening
walking down to the mailbox kicking leaves:
birch, maple, aspen, poplar, basswood, oak,
mostly oak, by the time fall grays and begins
to whiten into winter.

4

Workman oak now and last, the last to maintain
the flagging agriculture of fall. The way seasons follow
in circles around time, the six of us follow along together,
or the seven or eight of us
though no number matters much now.
We are wed together also into the leaf-kicked tracks
of the generations we create among the leaves.

Continued on page 34

We require no language outside our senses,
sharing as we all do the remembered sound of leaves
all finally buried and mulched under the first
heavy lasting snowfall. Shades of brown and rust
from oak leaves determined to remind us
of our familiar contracts, to limit our winter distances

and remember our promises to return
to next year's falling shades—red, brown, yellow, gold—
toward the gray or white amidst those senile poplars
across the road, the boundary outside at the rigid time-stile
supporting the unused mailbox rusted shut.

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For That Other Thing and Its Makers

[2023 to 1977: we three come to terms]

*As for that other thing
which comes when the eyelid is glazed:[i]*

*A full moon shone like a slice of raw onion.
When he left the beach the sea was still going on.[ii]*

On some of those formal-minded
occasions, I know—having trained
and prepared for decades—how to behave.

Then I look about, and the circumstances
that I have trained and prepared for
for decades aren't really circumstances at all,
but images of the sound of wings
struggling out from the waxwork
of a forgotten entry stanza.

Together now, we might notice
that we have been freed
from our own vocabulary,
and, for the appropriate moment, freed
from the encumbrance of any vocabulary.
But we know who offered us the last lines,
and that they are now ours.

I think that Walcott—
well we, had read *Day by Day*
with great care and surprise,
and so we had prepared for understanding,
almost mortally unprepared
for the shock that no new book,
“any book” is ever going to happen,

and it may be likely
that we see in the poet's last work
not the weary edifice,
“our greatest contemporary poet,”—
ah, Epic!—
a failed and wounded poet among
failed and wounded poets,
and a fellow voice now, and sign:

Continued on page 36

*... something that once had a fearful name
walks from the thing that used to wear its name,
transparent, exact representative,
so that we can see through it
churches, cars, sunlight
and the Boston Common,
not needing any book.[iii]*

So it was a grieving relief
to at least three of us that we
are still a part of a fading company,
as though any of us may share now, to

*seek leave of nature unimpassioned by my body.
I am too weak to strain to remember; or give
recollection the eye of a microscope. I see
horse and meadow, duck and pond,
universal consolatory
description without significance,
transcribed verbatim by my eye.[iv]*

Then the Day?
*when we lived momentarily
together forever
in love with our nature—*

*as if in the end,
in the marriage with nothingness,
we could ever escape
being almost safe.[v]
may be relieved now.*

The other thing—never ever to be
only one or the other or the other
and no longer need be the consort
ghost, end and grace note only
day by day.
[vi]

[i] Derek Walcott, "R.T.S.L." Paris Review, No. 74,
(Fall-Winter 1978).

[ii] Walcott, *Omeros*, Noonday 1990 (Final Lines).

[iii] Walcott, "R.T.S.L."

[iv] Robert Lowell, "Shifting Colors," *Day by Day*, 1977.

[v] Lowell, "The Day," *Day by Day*.

[vi] Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C minor.
Initial notation [and major theme?].



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for the Arts website, www.artizona.org.**

Who we are

All about The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a nonprofit organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008. We hold a 501c3 tax-exempt status.

We are all-volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.

The Arizona Consortium seeks to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary arts center that will provide a home for our activities and foster artistic growth for people of



all ages in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting.

Please visit www.artizona.org or www.theblueguitarmagazine.org for more information about

becoming a member, networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting work to The Blue Guitar arts and literary magazine, Unstrung poetry magazine and The Blue Guitar Jr. literary and arts magazine for youth.

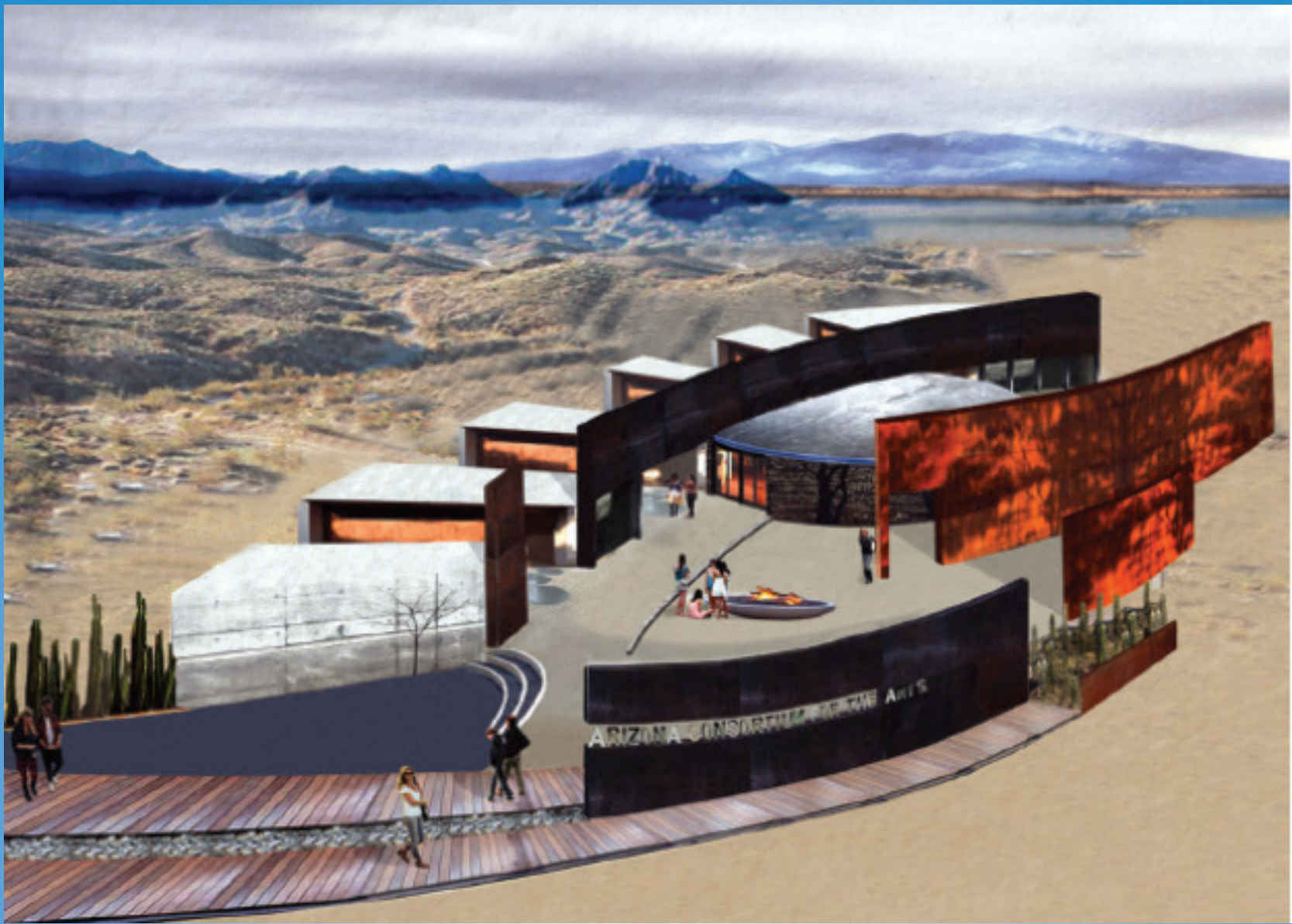
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form.

For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to artists, and support inspiring projects, your financial support is needed.

Every dollar received will support our website, the publication of our magazines, and the establishment of our future center.

Please visit our donations page, <http://www.artizona.org/donate.html>, and donate today!

Thank you for your support!



A rendering of the consortium's dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, building designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The consortium's vision for a multicultural arts center

The rendering of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, Building Designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The Center will be a source and a destination for creativity and inspiration. It will be a home for many wonderful community organizations, creative and innovative multicultural and multidisciplinary activities, classes and projects representing and celebrating our diverse community.

The Center will be a cultural icon in the Phoenix area.

The Center will be an inimitable foundation for a unique experience, one that you'll want to share with family, friends and community.

Designed by Effie Bouras, the Center will feature numerous spaces for the arts in all genres, performances and presentations. A flexible and variable seating performance theater for rehearsals, concerts, theatrical presentations, video art and films, lectures, meetings and recordings will be available free-of-charge or at a minimum cost.

Meet the staff of The Blue Guitar magazine



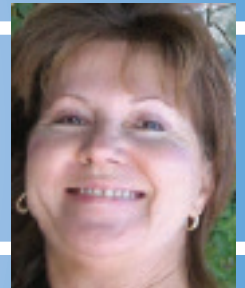
Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at info@artizona.org.

Rebecca Dyer, co-editor: A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher residing in Mesa with her husband, Rick, her Blue Guitar co-editor. Reach her at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

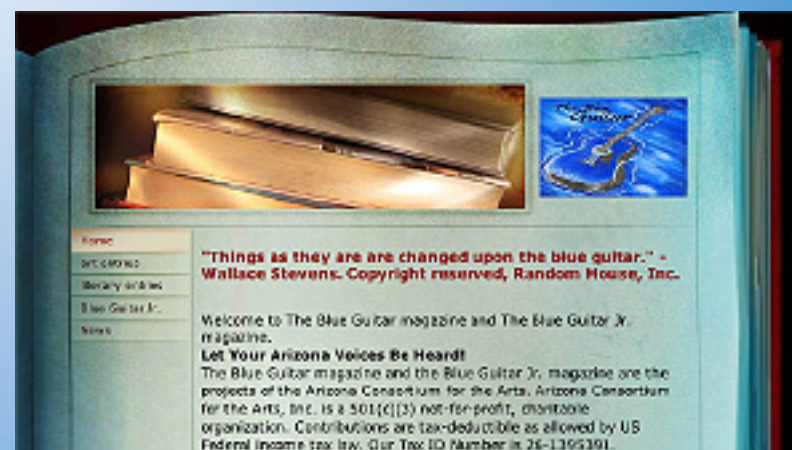
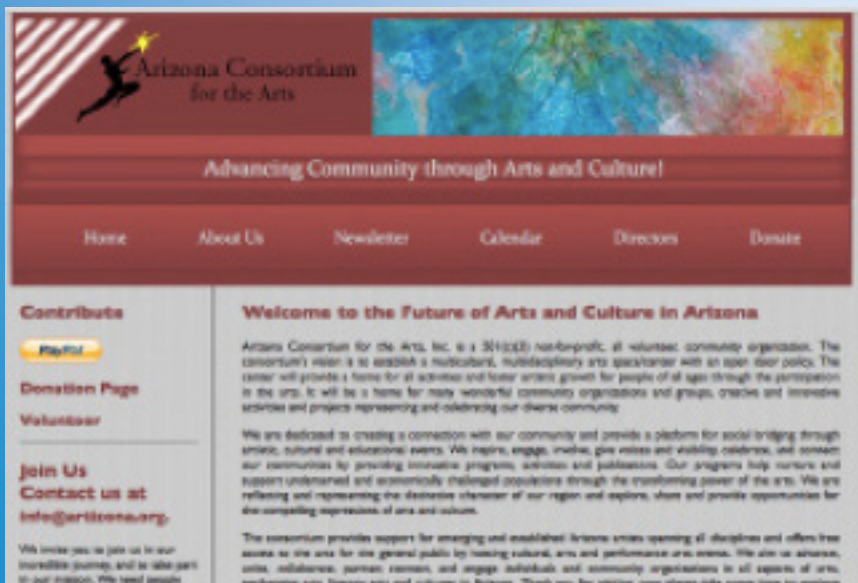


Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the managing editor of seven monthly newspapers and websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for The Blue Guitar: Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic-painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at mboyerart.com.



Check our websites for news on the arts



Check out The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website, www.artizona.org. There, you can sign up for an e-mailed newsletter. Also follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

The Blue Guitar Magazine's website is www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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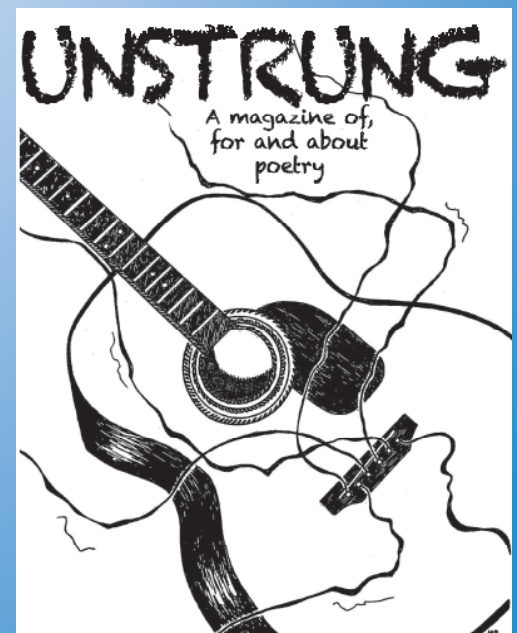
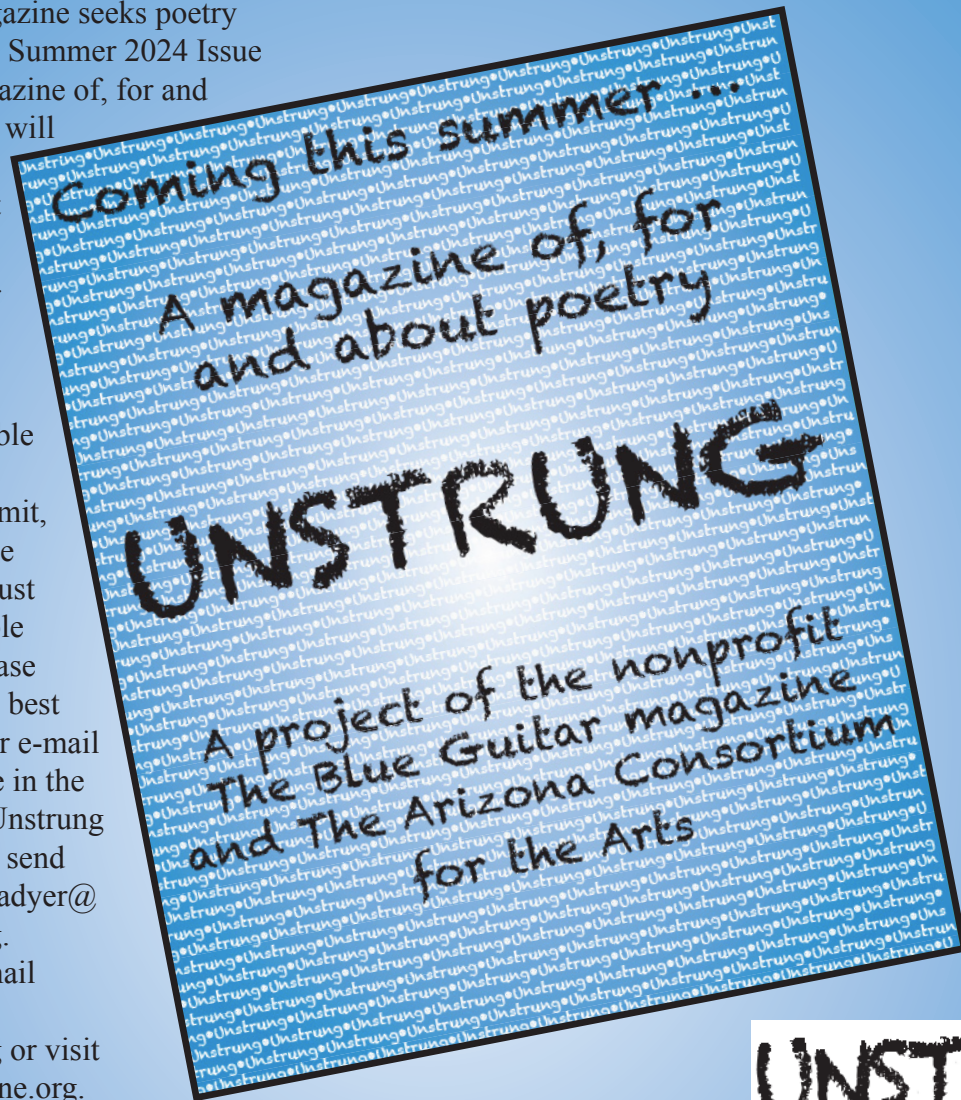
A Call to Poets for the 2024 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2024 Issue of Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry. Submissions will

be accepted from June 1 through July 4. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, e-mail Rebecca at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, is a nonprofit project of The Blue Guitar magazine and the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about Unstrung magazine, The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:

www.theblueguitarmagazine.org
and www.artizona.org.



A Call to Writers for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who write
and to adults who write
for children and teens

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks literary submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who write for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2024, in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — all geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Artists for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who create art
and to adults who create art
for children and teens

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks art submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who create art for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2024, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the artist must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple mediums; up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name, contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Please include your name and the best way to contact you. To submit or for more information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Writers for Spring 2024



The Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Spring 2024 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted

elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

A Call to Artists for Spring 2024

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Spring 2024 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Any artists who work in any visual art media, are 18 years or older and are part- or full-time Arizona residents can submit. It is free to submit and up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name and contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.



The Blue Guitar magazine is a nonprofit project of the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

"Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar."

— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens' 1937 poem "The Man With the Blue Guitar."

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FREE!

*“Things
as they are
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