

# The Blue Guitar



# Table Of Contents

## Art

“A Heart & A Wild Tongue” – Gem Elena Abarca ..... 4  
 “Honey Bee Canyon” – Seamus Rae ..... 5  
 “Three Views of the Chiricahuas” – Lizzy Sorensen ..... 6  
 “Suikei-en Garden,” “Yume Japanese Gardens”  
 – Ayla Yume Probst ..... 24-25  
 “Siblings,” “Childhood Home,” “Demeter,” “All-American”  
 Athlete,” “Caress” – Jocelyn James ..... 31-35

## Poetry

“Stepping Stone” – Jeremiah Cannaday ..... 3  
 “Radiation Dream,” “Land Scene,” “Rainbreak,”  
 “Roadrunner, Mountain and Time” – David Chorlton ..... 8-11  
 “To Carry On,” “My Grandmother’s Palimpsest,”  
 “The First Three Days,” “Too (after E.E. Cummings)” –  
 Roxanne Doty ..... 12-15  
 “The Invitation,” “Father’s Day” – Alfred Fournier ..... 16-17  
 “Forever a Wordsmith,” “Uptown Market,” “Missing  
 Acrostic,” “Starting Over Double Abecedarian”  
 – Kimberly Thornton ..... 19-22  
 “Displayed,” “Ignoring Beauty,” “Let the Sun Rise”  
 – Betty Mermelstein ..... 26-28  
 “I Choose Power,” “Moments of Peace,” “What It Means to Be  
 a Woman in America” – Lysa Cohen ..... 39-44  
 “Cents,” “Stalker,” “Ansatz” – Abraham Aruguete ..... 47  
 “DSCH: Obituary in C Minor,” “My Aspirations Are Gray  
 Still,” “Shoenberg’s Last Word Was Harmonious!” “For  
 the Beauty of Gems and Metals,” “Pewter,” “Round the  
 Troposphere” – Richard Fenton Sederstrom ..... 54-62

## Fiction

“Little Sea and Little Storm” – Alfred Fournier ..... 18  
 “The Star Soccer Player” – Ruben Martinez Garcia ..... 36-38  
 “Florida 40 Years Later” – Duann Black ..... 50-53

## Non-Fiction

“Golden Saguaro” – Gem Elena Abarca ..... 4  
 “Touch Grass” – Seamus Rae ..... 5  
 “A Heart in Two Places” – Lizzy Sorensen ..... 6-7  
 “There Are No Bad Creatures” – Sammie Oligmueller ..... 23  
 “Respect That Extends Beyond Aesthetics”  
 – Ayla Yume Probst ..... 24-25

“Riding the River” – Sandra Rose Simmons ..... 29-30  
 “Chair Pose and Chutzpah: My Misadventures in Yoga”  
 – Lysa Cohen ..... 45-46  
 “Confessions of an Ex-Highly Performing Charter School Kid”  
 – Abraham Aruguete ..... 48-49

## News

The 2025 Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts ..... 65  
 All about The Arizona Consortium for the Arts ..... 66  
 The Consortium’s vision for a multicultural arts center ..... 67  
 The Blue Guitar magazine staff biographies ..... 68  
 Sign up for The Consortium’s e-newsletter ..... 68  
 Call to poets for the Summer 2025 issue of Unstrung ..... 69  
 Calls to writers, artists for the 2025 Blue Guitar Jr. .... 70-71  
 Calls to writers, artists for the Fall 2025 Blue Guitar ..... 72

## Editors’ Note

My brother John was a big guy, 6 foot, with huge hands like bear claws. A gentle giant, he loved poetry, painting and people. He also had schizo-affective disorder, which ended a brilliant career in book editing and put him on disability. It also isolated him. Through it all, he wrote and painted. Because of his mental health challenges, he did not take care of himself, and, in the middle of the pandemic, he passed away from health complications. He could be stubborn, fiercely holding onto his independence, which benefited his art but not so much his physical well-being. When John died in 2021, he left behind dozens of writings, three manuscripts of poetry and 19 paintings. My husband and I were struck by the experimentation of his visual art, how he played with lines and shapes, textures and bold colors. It was a privilege to see his journey as an artist and writer and showed us how art connects us all, even in death. John will always be in our hearts. But besides the great love he had for us, just as importantly, he left another legacy: The impulse to create overcomes all. No matter what. — Rebecca “Becca” Dyer, Co-Editor



Untitled,  
by John M. Dean

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The Blue Guitar arts and literary magazine is a project of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

# A Poem by Jeremiah Cannaday

## Stepping Stone

Why strive for love, when I am only stone,  
A bridge that others tread, yet never own?  
They walk across, their sights set far ahead,  
Leaving my soul heavy, bound by lead.

I ache for love that's tender, warm, and true,  
Not someone's path to find the skies anew.  
To be the rock where weary hearts take rest,  
Then vanish on to chase the love that's best.

But here I stand, though cracked and weathered bare,  
Still dreaming someone might take root and care,  
To see not stone, but soil rich and deep,  
Where love might plant a seed, and dare to keep.

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Jeremiah Cannaday, 18, is a senior at Peoria Accelerated High School. He will graduate in 2025. He hopes to study creative writing at Glendale Community College and then transfer to a four-year university. He hopes to become a New York Times columnist. He enjoys writing poetry, reading and watching "SpongeBob Squarepants." He loves writing because it gives access to unexplored emotions.

# Golden Saguaro

## By Gem Elena Abarca

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The landscape is draped in gold and the air is infused with warmth as the November sun descends into the mountains. I am surrounded by beauty. The bounty of creosote, auburn speckled rocks and fine sand where a monsoon river would flow, birds I am too untrained to be able to identify, cacti of all heights; and I am here to figure out what they are saying.

I raise my arm to shield my eyes from the sun's bright rays. I am draped in the same gold that the sun is casting; but before I was draped in the sun's gold, I was kissed by her. I was born kissed by her the same way my parents were kissed by her. The same way my people are kissed by her with rich, tan, brown, Ebony skin to withstand the rays of her light and relish in her warmth.

I am Mexican because both of my parents are Mexican. My parents are Mexican because their parents are Mexican, but they were all born in Mexico. I was born in America. That intersection is where I find myself as I stand before a golden saguaro. Tall and mighty, I wonder how the saguaro rationalizes and contends with itself. It is well over seven feet tall, well older and wiser past my age, and it is burgeoning with water as it struts a swollen body.

Do the land and its inhabitants also wonder who they are and where they belong? Tucson, before 1853, before becoming Tucson, a city of America, used to be part of Mexico. The land and its soil, therefore, was Mexican before it became American



Photo courtesy of Gem Elena Abarca

**"A Heart & A Wild Tongue" (Still). Gem Elena Abarca performance video, November 2023. Duration 4:59.**

through siege, purchase, and ownership.

Saguaros are known to live 150 to 200 years, growing an inch each year and mapping the wealth of water in their bodies by expanding or contracting their new growth according to their intake of water. The land and its soil, and its children, therefore, are Mexican before they are American. Does this saguaro ever wonder how Mexican they are, how American they are?

Naive in comparison to this saguaro, I look up like a lost child, and ask, "Who are you?"



Based in Tucson, Arizona, Gem is a trans multidisciplinary artist who specializes in performance-based works, often incorporating organic materials to examine themes of ethnic identity, gender, place/land, and Western society's relationship to nature in the Anthropocene through anti-colonial ideologies. Inspiration for Gem's work emerges from their experiences as a trans Mexican-American reconnecting to their Indigenous roots while living in America, their interest in punk, and the avant-garde. The artist's work and solo exhibition can be visited in Tucson in galleries such as the UofA's Joseph Gross School of Art gallery, and the 7 Legged Spider Gallery April 25th-May 4th, Fri-Sun from 12-7 PM.

# Touch Grass

## By Seamus Rae

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**F**rigidity is not a feeling I am used to when going on a hike in Arizona. Every other time I had followed the well-worn paths in places like Sabino Canyon or the trail at the Sonoran Desert Museum, dryness and heat clung to me, hoisting me back while I walked. On my most recent visit to Honey Bee Canyon, I dressed more warmly than I ever had on a hike before, and still felt the wind blowing through me. It was a strange feeling, a discomfort that was unfamiliar in this place.

Like most people who go outdoors, I was expecting discomfort. I was not expecting to feel warm in late January during a cold streak, and frankly, I dread the coming of warmer weather, which always stays that way until the end of the year in Tucson. This new discomfort made me think about what it is about nature hikes that keep people coming back in a world of modern conveniences. Why do we seek discomfort in an age where everything is designed to make us feel at home? Why did I feel something was missing before my walk if I knew it was going to bring discomfort?

Telling someone to “touch grass” is an insult directed at those who have spent too much time away from the outside world. It is a phrase meant to inform someone that their opinions or worldview needs to be, quite literally, grounded. The term’s popularity is a sign that most people recognize that the “real world” is nature. I took the opportunity to actually physically touch a blade of grass while on my walk. The yellow, dead blade rolled in my hand stiffly and had the texture of wheat. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps this is the real world.

I encounter natural things every single day of my life, but I rarely find myself “surrounded” by nature. Even on my hike I was close enough to the roads to sometimes hear and see cars. In my day to day routine, I always pass small mesquite trees and walk over patches of scrub. I see small lizards scurrying



Photo by Seamus Rae

### Honey Bee Canyon.

among dead leaves, and sometimes even stop to watch a bird of prey fly overhead. I enjoy all these moments, but all the nature I happen upon is relegated to a convenient spot. Plantlife is used to separate parking spaces. Undomesticated ground animals hide in rocks that are just off of sidewalks. Birds make their nests in electric towers far from the ground, where they believe they cannot be reached by man. Everything has its place. A tree is allowed to spread its roots, but only so long as it stays within the space it has been relegated to. It is allowed to grow, so long as its branches do not obstruct the view of a business from the street. Even the canyon I walked in is a minor slice, a natural place allowed to exist in a small window. Maybe we have displaced that which makes us uncomfortable to the point where it can only exist in a small, confined space so as not to get in the way of the modern amenities we all need. What happens when that space is needed for something else?



Seamus Rae is a writer and student at the University of Arizona. He is currently in his senior year and studying journalism in Susan Swanberg’s Environmental Journalism class. He lives in Tucson, Arizona.

# A Heart in Two Places

By Lizzy Sorensen

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I march along the snow-laced trail at Chiricahua National Monument, surrounded by my hiking comrades for the day. We move single file, one after another, like elementary school kids returning from art class.

I'm third in line, alongside the friends I made my freshman year of college. To my right, layers of mountains stretch into the distance, scattered with towering rock formations that seem balanced by divine intervention.

The version of me that roams the desert is free, independent and brave.

It's hard not to think about who I was a week ago, pacing through my neighborhood with my dad, bundled up against the slicing cold. By 4:30 p.m. the sun had nearly vanished—a trademark of the Chicago winter.

The two places I call home couldn't be more different. I traded flat plains that let your eyes wander for miles for rugged mountains clawing at the sky. I swapped maples for palms and vibrant grass for saguaros.

Returning to the Midwest is like time travel. Suddenly, I'm sixteen again, living in the comfort of my family home. Seeing my sisters every day is normal. I have to ask to go out and the fridge is always full. I don't think twice about what's for dinner. I am safe, cared for and comfortable.

I'm torn between these two worlds and the versions of myself that inhabit them. I'd like to think they can stay separate, but they bleed into each other. Every time I return to Chicago, I bring pieces of Tucson with me. And every time I leave, I find new things to miss.

It's a bittersweet part of growing up. The moment I left home for college, my heart was destined to be divided. I am



Photo by Lizzy Sorensen

I captured this view at Chiricahua National Monument on Jan. 19, 2025.



Photos by Lizzy Sorensen

The rock formations are a trademark of the landscape at Chiricahua National Monument.

Continued on page 7



Lizzy Sorensen is a senior at the University of Arizona from Oswego, IL. She will be graduating with degrees in law and journalism in May and is going to be attending law school in the fall.

**Continued from page 6**

consumed by the feeling that, for the rest of my life, I will always be missing someone or something. When I'm hiking Chiricahua with friends, I long for a hug from my parents. When I'm standing in my snow-covered backyard, I wish my college roommates were there to take it in with me.

For the rest of my life, I'll belong to more than one environment. Who knows what places will claim parts of my heart ten or twenty years from now?

Somewhere in the middle of it all is my real self—a true blend of the places I've lived and the people I've loved, constantly evolving.

# 4 Poems by David Chorlton

## Radiation Dream

The sky is floating through a room equipped  
with moving parts that glide  
without a sound; screens  
displaying numbers that relate  
to the position a resting body takes while  
beams are focused on places  
eyes can't reach. The world outside rolls over  
in its sleep

until the power brings the sun  
to life. An owl passes from the dark  
to the bough on which she rests to address  
the mysteries, calling for the agents  
of destruction to turn to healing  
and connect the sleeping  
to the waking world.

A hawk's eye circles  
over open space. A diagram appears  
on screen. She fixes her attention  
on the far below. The ring of parts moves gracefully  
around and around. Wings angled,  
she comes down from the sun to Earth, electricity  
in flight.

Blue heron, Laughing falcon, melanoma,  
alligator, pocket mouse, fruit bat, Harpy eagle,  
free-tailed bat, Scott's oriole, lymphoma, Black-  
tailed rattlesnake, jaguar, mountain  
lion, and sometimes

it seems that cancers  
are the life force in the universe with  
the unsuspecting simply  
in their way. Lie still,

the moon is on  
its circle course. This room is where  
a slender thread becomes slow lightning.

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David Chorlton lives in a part of Phoenix that offers more interesting wildlife than would be expected in an urban area. 2024 saw the publication of "Dreams the Stones Have" from The Bitter Oleander Press, a book dedicated to the desert and drawing on various parts of Arizona.

# Land Scape

An earthly blue so rich it smiles. White space  
where the air would be  
with green and yellow singing  
to the clouds. If rainforest  
could walk it would become  
the desert's lonely immigrant  
and if the clouds  
could finally decide  
where they belong the winds would lift  
to carry them. There's energy in yellow  
where a mountain  
has a place to stand,  
shoulder to the elements, peak high  
above the grasslands, the rivers, deltas,  
horizons untangled  
from the edges of the world. A straight line  
would be lost  
among the streaming lianas;  
no borders here, no way in  
or out. There is a push  
from underneath the visible, strong enough  
to disrupt harmony, balance  
and proportion.  
Texture floats  
on texture, all so densely woven, yet  
there is a spot of red  
shining  
where the sky bleeds from a pinprick.

© 2025

# Rainbreak

Rain before dawn, wind hiding  
behind the trees the hawks have taken  
for their own, the mountain rolls over  
to shake moisture from its back  
and the desert feels its heart beat faster  
beneath the weight

of cloud. What news  
does the sun bring after its time away  
from one-eyed Earth? Sky dark, sky light,  
which way leads to a healing  
for the aching plains and shorelines?  
Hear the forests cough,

the rivers ask  
directions to the sea, and the snowcaps  
beg for mercy. It has been weeks  
since the arroyos licked their lips, but the stones  
do not complain. They have travelled  
so far to be

in the land of drought and stars  
all they need to live  
is to share such light as guides  
the lost rain home.

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# Roadrunner, Mountain and Time

It's nine forty-five in the roadrunner's eye  
and he's bathing in light  
on a morning too cold for his feathers.

It stays seven-thirty for hours  
to the goldfinches flowing  
where seed hangs. Always the same  
time in desert

as the city, but the minute  
and the hour hands don't meet  
at the ridge. And the trails  
refuse to hurry from  
the foothills to the rocks that balance  
on rocks. Shadows slide

in their own good time  
into gullies, far from traffic  
or the ticking of earthly clocks. Slow breath  
from dawn to dusk, lose a little time  
along the way,

watch for him returning  
with his cuckoo strut and tail  
high before it gets dark, dark, dark  
in all the places laws are written, plans are drawn  
and a storm of small print

follows  
the appointments made at midnight, precisely  
twelve o'clock when the mountain  
is asleep.

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# 4 Poems by Roxanne Doty

## To Carry On

Maybe read only the headlines  
skim the stories, not every day  
a couple times a week, once a week  
or listen to John Prine, blow up your TV  
throw away your paper.

Then, read some poems, lots of them  
read them twice, three times  
don't fret if the words hold mystery  
let them be, give them space  
words have their reasons, trust them.

Look at the night sky, the stars, galaxies.  
Pleiades is made of more than 1,000 stars  
visible from almost every part of the globe  
full with ancient myth and legend.  
The moon, look at that.

Don't forget the uncountable outrages  
visited upon humanity by humanity  
but make a list to told in your heart  
of some things you are grateful for,  
that fill you with wonder.  
Your list might be endless  
like the stars.

(Acknowledgement: John Prine's *blow up your TV, throw away your paper* is from "Spanish Pipedream.")

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Roxanne Doty lives in Tempe, Arizona. Her debut novel, "Out Stealing Water," was published by Regal House Publishing, Aug. 30, 2022. Her first poetry collection was published by Kelsay Books in the spring of 2024. She has published stories and poems in Third Wednesday, Quibble Lit, Superstition Review, Espacio Fronterizo, Ocotillo Review, Forge, I70 Review, Soundings Review, The Blue Guitar, Four Chambers Literary Magazine, Lascaux Review, Lunaris Review, Journal of Microliterature, NewVerseNews, International Times, Saranac Review, Gateway Review and Reunion-The Dallas Review. Her short story "Turbulence" (Ocotillo Review) was nominated for the 2019 Pushcart prize for short fiction.

# My Grandmother's Palimpsest

The radio played Nat King Cole every day that summer in Nashville. My grandmother said his voice was liquid and I thought of root beer soda from the candy store down the street, soothing and perfect like a soft hand on your shoulder. I loved *Ramblin' Rose*, wanted to be like her, wild and windblown. I was ten.

That summer my grandmother learned her favorite singer was black. *Oh mother*, my mom said, annoyed and impatient. *You never saw a photo? And what difference does it make?* We had his albums but my grandmother only had Nat King Cole's voice on her radio. She shook her head and stopped listening denied she ever treasured him.

My grandmother didn't look the same after that. I still loved her. Loved her Juicy Fruit chewing gum and ivory hair clip, the bingo games on Friday nights. But, I blamed her for the *whites only* sign at the laundry mat, and the white ladies at Christ the King who wiped the pews after black church-goers sit in them. When a black family moved next door, I was only allowed to play With my new friend, Shirley who was ten like me, outside. *I can't have her in my house*, my grandmother said.

We moved to New York in the fall and my grandmother's words faded but they were never erased. Effaced and written over, they echoed through my childhood, bore traces of the old words, ugliness ebbing and rising again and again tainting our world, the world we leave our children.

That summer in Nashville comes back with a sad fury, but Nat King Cole's words remain unspoiled, beautiful to hold onto. *Wild and windblown. Who will love you with a love true?* I stopped thinking of my grandmother when I heard them, just that man and his liquid voice.

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*Palimpsest: something altered but still bearing traces of its earlier form; something having diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface. Origin = mid 17th century from Greek palimpsestos, (palin = again) (psestos = rubbed smooth).*

# The First Three Days

## Day 1

I am stopped at a red light on a freeway frontage road, a silver SUV to my right. The driver's arm rests on the open window frame, his cigarette dangles as wisps of smoke curl into the air of this first day of a new year. A woman stands on the curb to my left holding a cardboard sign. She wears a wool cap, looks young, maybe in her twenties. Her skin is smooth, unlined, fresh. Pretty face. I catch her eyes and she walks over. I pass her a couple of dollars and she walks away, glancing at the SUV as we both hear the man with the cigarette yelling in a deep, powerful voice full of hate and anger. *Fuck you! Get a fucking job!* He drags on the cigarette, hits the steering wheel, screams those words over and over. We are the only vehicles on this road. For a second I hope an official vehicle of authority will appear out of the blue but, I realize it would likely be the young woman that would be confronted by the law, maybe cited, maybe fined and not the angry white man. When the light turns green, the SUV speeds through the intersection with an intensity that matches the hatred in his words.

\*\*\*

## Day 2

My daughter calls me from Brooklyn and tells me one of her students has been shot in front of the school where she teaches. At 8AM, the first day back after the holidays. He made it into the school before collapsing. She says there was blood all over the place. I think of her innocent child face, a time before she saw blood like that. Blood I never wanted her to see. I think of the 17-year-old boy who was shot. I think of the young woman the day before, the look on her face as the man screamed at her. I think of all the ways the world tries to break our children.

\*\*\*

## Day 3

In the morning, I make a fruit salad of organic blueberries, raspberries and strawberries for my friend's birthday brunch and gift wrap the little book I got for her, *How to Walk* by Thich Nhat Hanh, with soothing chapter titles like, Stopping and Finding Calm, Touching Peace, Taking Refuge, Walking Home. A swath of reddish-orange stretches across the sky. I don't know if I think it is beautiful or if it looks like the scattered glow of distant wildfires or smears of blood across a high school floor.

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# Too (after E.E. Cummings)

too (is every day)  
much to endure  
our hearts (for  
war czars, dictators  
    distortion their faces)  
    echo this winter  
    the words  
a season souls  
die (anyone and all  
of some in these times  
    of shattered norms  
    erasure)  
    young blood  
in the streets believe  
    (everyday  
    we don't)  
    in less

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# 2 Poems by Alfred Fournier

## The Invitation

A great danger has been waiting for you.  
A Pandora Tsunami of unclaimed sorrow  
sits in a sealed envelope on your table.  
It has been delivered from your past  
over mountains of hardships,  
through generations of loss,  
across the open fields  
of everything you've hoped for.  
It is postmarked by a fate  
too large and fantastic  
to shoulder or believe in.  
And no one is going to force you to open it.

If you do, be ready.  
Ready for the wind to blow  
the important papers from your desk.  
Ready to let go of the life you've known,  
of friends too timid to follow.  
Ready for the ocean to arch high over you.  
Look, there! Into the mouth of the whale.  
Something too grand to be imagined  
is waiting for you  
in the belly of darkness.

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Alfred Fournier is the author of "A Summons on the Wind" (2023, Kelsay Books) and "King of Beers" (2025, Rinky Dink Press). His poems have appeared in South Florida Poetry Journal, Indianapolis Review, Hole in the Head Review, The Blue Guitar and elsewhere. He lives in the foothills of South Mountain in Phoenix, with his remarkable wife and daughter and two birdwatching cats.

# Father's Day

I never aspired to your kind of heroics.  
Raising eight children by proxy and bluster,  
one eye on the horizon, one hand on your belt.

And wasn't it what you'd always wanted?  
To find love in a place  
where the bombs weren't dropping?

So you hopped on the American dream,  
fresh from the war. Swept that sweetheart  
with her only-you smile across the dance floor.

Nothing you wouldn't do to bring that harvest home.  
A life neither of you could have imagined  
from the sparsity of childhood.

So you stood at the altar  
and the vow flew from your lips.  
The following year, the first child came.

I've often wondered what it was you thought about  
in moments when you let your gaze drift  
from the work of your hands.

Until I looked in my own child's eyes,  
felt the pull of a future larger than me,  
I had no ground to understand you.

This love that fathers so often mistake for duty.  
A seven gun salute ringing from the bow  
of the best we can make of ourselves.

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# Little Sea and Little Storm

By Alfred Fournier

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Little Sea and Little Storm were the best of friends. In the space where water meets sky, they played and dreamed and danced with all their hearts.

When they were apart, Little Sea explored the tiniest and most obscure inlets on her shores. She swished back and forth across rounded shells of snails that clung to smooth and ragged stone surfaces at the edge of the land. She felt the pull of Mysterious Moon, and she wondered.

At times, she was lonely for her wild friend, but she was never bored. She enjoyed the quiet. Though she eagerly anticipated her friend's return, she intuitively understood that it cannot storm all the time.

Her friend, Little Storm, didn't die when he wasn't raging or running, blowing or thundering. He, too, had a quiet side.

When the skies over Little Sea were clear and bright, he receded to the curved edge of the atmosphere. From here he watched the world, which seemed small and glorious, like a perfect blue marble.

Eventually, pressure would build, clouds would form, and he would slide out of his quiet nature as if he were undressing.

Playtime!

Sparks of excitement charged all through him, and he spread his long fingers across the sky. From his belly, a low laugh—deeper than his years—boomed over Little Sea like a friendly hello, and he released a bellyful of rain to splash across her surface like a million little kisses.

Little Storm descended on Little Sea, who greeted him with her smiling waves, enjoying the feel of his whipping winds across her once-placid surface. He scooped up big handfuls of her wetness, and together they splashed and crashed with joy at their reunion.

Little Sea lived for these uninhibited moments—to be tickled and torn apart, and to always come back together, the way water does. To move at the untamed will of her creative friend's playful urges—to be swept up in it all—the two of them merging like unexpected art.

When they played, she was free, even from the tug of Mysterious Moon.

It was in her nature to surrender to the nature of what she was.

Little Storm was her favorite friend. Their love ran deep.

# 4 Poems by Kimberly Thornton

## Forever a Wordsmith

*For Edwin T. "Mess" Messal*

If the mind was the hammer,  
the page is your anvil,  
and your words are the blade—  
something to hold.

Deep in shadow all fire is quenched,  
yet some plants know darkness  
as a womb to germinate:  
cornflower, larkspur,  
calendula, treasure flower.

Not all plants are perennial,  
and I know the warmth from lips fades,  
but your voice will linger,  
glide across many starry skies,  
casted,  
forever forged in moonlight silver,  
a perfect edge.

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Kimberly Thornton is a creature feature lover and bird-noticer. Studying plant medicine, psychology, sociology, and philosophy has changed her life. Find her poetry published in various places, including Carve Magazine, Etched Onyx Magazine, Up the Staircase Quarterly, and in the anthology "Along the Shore: Strategies for Living With Grief" from Orange Blossom Publishing. She can be spotted in Arizona, and right now she's probably talking to someone about "Buffy."

# Uptown Market

The farmers market this Saturday  
Won't be indoors this time  
But in that banquet-like room of the church,  
The red carpet floors, white walls,  
No windows, obscuring mid-morning  
Like a place that forgets time.  
Now that the Phoenix days are cooler,  
Vendors set up outside.  
I want to be seen with you in the winter sun,  
Point at the dogs walking around sniffing the air.  
Maybe we'll see something interesting, like last year  
the man with two parrots on his shoulders.  
How he wore a perch like a backpack,  
The little bird bodies wrapped in tiny shirts,  
Wings tucked in to prevent flight.  
Or like the Waymo that drove through the parking lot,  
Ghost quiet driver's seat, no passenger—  
*Suspicious* is all I could think.  
The woman next to me stopped short like I did.  
We waited as it passed.  
From what I saw, no one was dropped off.  
It didn't stop for someone who was waiting for a ride.  
It just silently entered one side of the parking lot  
And exited out the other onto the main road.  
The woman and I looked at each other,  
Eyes wider than normal for either of us,  
Eyebrows arched.  
*Weird*, I said.  
She nodded, and we headed safely to the sidewalk,  
Went our separate ways—  
I toward my favorite bread vendor.  
I like to think she was meeting someone she loved.  
When they reunited, said their hellos, kissed,  
She told them the story.

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# Missing Acrostic

Mexican Blue Oak can grow here and where you once walked.  
Indigenous peoples knew of its medicine long before now.  
Since your absence, I've turned to the healer stitched in my bones.  
Science stands over centuries of knowledge, intimate wisdom  
Inherited by the people—Ayurveda, the Sumerian tablets, Chinese medicine.  
Nearby, pink lapacho watches my neighborhood.  
Gardens where you now walk must be filled with them.

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# Starting Over Double Abecedarian

Arizona is a state with sunsets of topaz.  
Blocks away from where I grew up, I wake and can't say  
*Comforting* is a word I'd use in a syntax  
Describing being near the familiar. Years ago, south mountain was my  
Early mornings of safety and quiet. Now, I improv,  
Fooling myself into thinking this is an experiment—instead of a château,  
Go somewhere filled with loud accelerating cars. My ardent  
Heart knows this isn't home, but starting over allows  
Introspection. I've turned to friends, bringing them closer  
Just to listen and improve my EQ.  
"Keeping it simple" after a breakup  
Like I read on the front of *Cosmo*.  
Most days I am in  
Need of meaningful conversation, no shiny charm  
Or luxurious vacations, which will  
Perfectly explain why I had to leave. Long ago my dad would ask  
Quietly why I quit things so easily—long before J—  
Reasons are given and carefully thought out. I  
Started a flame and became the moth,  
Tiny wings and all, and then I was leaving,  
Unable to take care of both of us, tired of neglecting myself.  
Veins pulsed for someone who wouldn't flinch away as I ached,  
Waiting to be held. Each rejection slowly formed  
Xenoliths, building walls around logic.  
Yearning in that way created a tomb.  
Zirconia is diamond-like; my loneliness was a new mania.

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# There Are No Bad Creatures

By Sammie Oligmueller

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Summertime was humid air and a cacophony of frogsong in the dead of night. It was running free through the grass and cattails, watching little white moths flutter to and fro like snowflakes who had forgotten which season they were meant to be in. Summertime was laughter and joy, except for the days punctuated with wasp stings and tears.

Before I had ever set foot in Arizona, my family lived up north in a little Midwestern suburb. Behind our house was a small pond, which I recall as being much larger than it probably was, that birthed my interest in the natural world. The spotted leopard frog was my favorite inhabitant of this little oasis. From tadpole to froglet to full-grown adults, I loved these frogs because they were harmless and even ate those dreaded mosquitos. Frogs, I decided, were good creatures.

Wasps, on the other hand, were entirely horrible. Their loud buzzing and the rapid darting of their golden bodies warned me to stay far away, often forcing me away from my beloved frogs. I couldn't wrap my mind around their worth in the

world. What did they do besides sting people? Bees, I had been taught, are friendly and pollinate our flowers, but wasps? I wished for nothing other than their total obliteration.

If I had only picked up a book on wasps, I would have learned how important they are and the incredible variation in their forms. I would have seen the beauty in their alien bodies. I would know their vital role in the environment: keeping other insects and pests at bay. How they are the lesser-loved ancestors of bees, who stole the pollination spotlight. I would have seen that, overall, they mean me no harm, their aggression only a demonstration of their will to live. Instead, I ran and told myself they were the enemy.

Who am I to judge the worth of other creatures? Me, in my clumsy rubber shoes, trampling over the endless world just beneath my feet. Me, who cannot fly or build a nest or live by the cycles of the sun. I realize now, there is neither good nor evil in the animal kingdom, except for that which I so arbitrarily attribute. But the wasps and frogs don't need my approval anyway — they'll go on living how they always have, and won't spare a thought towards me.



Sammie Oligmueller is a student at the University of Arizona. She feels strongly about the world around her; in her eyes, nature, art and people are intertwined.

# Respect That Extends Beyond Aesthetics

By Ayla Yume Probst

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In the modern world of traffic congestion, busy schedules, and stress over school, work, and money, many people crave a bit of peace and tranquility, solitude, and relaxation. It may sound difficult to achieve, but there are some refuges right around the corner.

Suikei-en Garden in Shibamata, Japan, was a place where time seemed to slow down, allowing me to fully immerse myself in the beauty of nature and the elegance of landscape design. As I wandered through this peaceful retreat, tucked away in the outskirts of the bustling Tokyo city, I was struck not only by the artistry but also by the way it seamlessly blended the natural world with elements of Japanese culture and philosophy. My visit to Suikei-en wasn't just an opportunity to experience a stunning garden; it was a moment to reflect on the intricate relationship between us humans and the environment. It was also a moment to connect with my culture.

Japanese gardens are a profound experience that not only deepens one's connection to nature but also highlights the commitment to environmental sustainability. As I explored the garden, I found myself reflecting on how they seamlessly integrate this consciousness into its cultural practices. The garden, with its peaceful atmosphere and sustainable design, provided the importance of preserving nature and respecting its cycles. It was not just an imposition on the landscape but rather an extension of the natural environment, incorporating local flora and working with the land's natural topography. It's carefully designed to blend into its surroundings where ponds reflect the surrounding trees and rocks, a perfect example of how human intervention could enhance, rather than disrupt nature's beauty. The colorful, patterned koi swam in the crystal-clear pond, rocks covered with moss were arranged to mimic distant mountains along with the ancient, gnarled trees that have



Photo by Ayla Yume Probst

**Suikei-en Garden in Shibamata, Japan.**

stories to tell. Their caring attitude towards preservation is so evident in these parts.

The use of native plants, which are well-suited to the local climate, reflected an understanding of the importance of conserving resources. This deep respect demonstrates that we can coexist with aesthetic and cultural values. Water was used sparingly, and the garden's layout seemed to minimize waste and energy consumption. The fact that such a beautifully designed space could also be environmentally friendly was a clear and powerful example of how Japan has embedded sustainability into its cultural fabric. It's a connection that runs through not only gardens but also city planning, architecture,

**Continued on page 25**



Ayla is a Tucson-based student writer who believes words should do more than fill space—they should make you think, laugh, and occasionally question reality. Her biggest accomplishment is surviving the Arizona heat and she wishes to travel more because of her love for spontaneous road trips. When not penning her next piece, she can be found chasing dreams, lost in a good book, or pretending to have her life together one cup of coffee at a time. With that said, her best friend is her laptop other than her dog.

and daily life. The presence of small, green spaces amidst urban sprawl emphasized the value of nature in even the most developed areas. It was a refreshing contrast to the often concrete-heavy urban landscapes I was used to, where nature feels like an afterthought. It reminded me that it isn't just about policies or innovations—it's also about how we live our lives and interact with the world around us.

Though worlds apart in geography, this similar peaceful escape can be found at the Yume Japanese Gardens in Tucson, Arizona. It sits right next door to the Tucson Botanical Gardens. Here I was able to experience the fully immersive culture of Japan by feeding koi fish, sitting in the tea house, walking through their small bamboo forest, and strolling through the Zen Garden. An ancient heritage covering three quarters of an acre in central Tucson.

Japanese gardens in the U.S. typically mirror the grounds of imperial residences and large temples or villas. As for the Yume Gardens, however, it offers more of a private vision that of a courtyard garden within the walls of traditional homes such as the ones in old traditional Kyoto. While it may seem surprising and unusual to many without the colorful flower beds to delight one's eyes or plant labels that instruct you, these types of private gardens employ metaphors and the interplay of space and illusion to lead you to meditate on your personal reflection on nature.

Walking along the garden's meandering paths, I was struck by how the natural elements around me seemed intentional and balanced, carefully curated to foster reflection and calm. It was small but intimate, and meticulously designed. The garden blended the art of Japanese landscaping with the Southwestern desert. I immediately noticed the stark contrast between the warm, dry air of the desert and the cool, serene atmosphere of the garden itself. The sounds of the outside world—cars, voices, and the city noises—faded into the background, replaced by the gentle rustling of leaves and the distant but soft trickles of the water. The layout was purposefully created to guide visitors through spaces designed to evoke contemplation. I was attracted by the centerpiece of the colorful pond, mesmerized by the graceful movements of the koi swimming lazily through the water. As I sat by the pond, I realized how much I had been craving this kind of stillness and connection to the earth. In a world that often moves at such a rapid pace, both Suikei-en and



Photo by Ayla Yume Probst

**Yume Japanese Gardens in Tucson, Arizona.**

the Yume Gardens reminded me of the value of taking a step back, taking in the fact that living with nature is not something that is separate from us, but it is an integral part of our lives.

Change is inevitable, with plants and trees that go through seasonal cycles. These gardens evolve with the changing seasons, so too does the environment around us. Climate change, resource depletion, and habitat loss all force us to confront the fragility of our planet. The garden, with its careful balance of elements, served as both a meditation on the beauty of nature and a reminder of our responsibility to care for it. Each garden serves a distinct purpose, thoughtfully considered, and pleasant. It fills me with pride to be related to a rich history of resilience, artistry, and wisdom passed down through generations. My heritage taught me to value this simplicity, embracing my Japanese identity.

I felt a sense of clarity when I left, having experienced the connection between culture, sustainability, and the environment in a single, beautiful space. It reminded me that in a world that often feels chaotic and uncertain, we can still find moments of peace and inspiration—if only we take the time to find such hidden gems. Whether it's pointy desert plants or tropical and leafy ones that aren't naturally occurring, we can find an appreciation for nature and life, leaving with the feeling of rejuvenation and a sense of wonderment for diversity in the world.

# 3 Poems by Betty Mermelstein

## Displayed

Head pivoting,  
smile revealed from the girl  
on the swing,  
showcased scenario  
in a transparent box,  
life stage displayed on  
her memory's shelf,  
judged, celebrated  
standing collection of  
posed experience  
encased in lucite hopes and realizations,  
given as gained

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Betty is a retired Mesa teacher, living in beautiful Gold Canyon with her husband. She has had various articles, poems, and short humorous essays published, as well as having self-published ebooks and paperback books for children and adults. The poem “Going Home” was the first-place winner in the James Whitcomb Riley Festival Written Poetry Competition in Greenfield, Indiana, in October of 2019. Her writing is showcased on her website: <https://www.punkynotes.com/>. Betty is passionate about her family, traveling, and ballroom dancing. She is a volunteer through dancing and by being a Citizen Archivist with the National Archives Catalog.

# Ignoring Beauty

Skylarks trill in the morning of the meadow,  
landing on dewy branches that match the glistening  
grasses below their perches.  
A running figure outstretches its hand,  
but not to feel the overgrown pasture nor signal to the birds.  
It reaches out for help, being chased by evil during war.  
How did they not notice the beauty of the meadow?

Untouchable scattered giants travelling across the sky,  
earth-opposite material of airy substance  
shaped to recognizable forms seen by  
a boy on the ground.  
He focuses on them to detract from the bullies  
running toward him.  
Could they not control their emotions by following the clouds?

Cool reflective sheets stretch to curving sides  
where mallards chase dragonflies and  
smallmouth bass linger in the reeds.  
Two boats pull alongside each other  
and make their illegal trade,  
hidden by cattails.  
Was the allure of the lake not enough?

Its colors give us joy,  
Its sounds capture our attention.  
Its aromas produce our memories.  
Its visions swell our hearts.  
Let nature's beauty affect our being,  
overriding the negative forces.

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# Let the Sun Rise

Let the sun rise  
and present its challenges,  
for bright moments will support you.  
The laugh that you share,  
The child's hand you hold,  
The kindness you give,  
The meanness you let slide,  
The rudeness you turn away from,  
The problems you can't control,  
All will get you through the day.  
There is always hope.

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# Riding the River

## By Sandra Rose Simmons

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Part I

Our neighbors Don and Jo Ann invited us to a picnic with them and their two kids, Michael and Sandi. Jim and I welcomed a reprieve from the August heat in a shady spot on the river. After lunch, Don says he and Jim are going to tube the river. But Jo Ann shouts, “Ladies first,” insisting that we should take the first turn.

Jim agrees to stay with the three children—two four-year-old boys, our son Jeff and their son, Michael, as well as their six-year-old daughter, Sandi. Don says he’ll pick us up in about an hour and a half at the bridge. Jo Ann and I set out in our swimsuits on inner tubes for an hour ride down the river.

The muddy, green river slowly glides through the dusty golden, brown desert bordered on either side by cactus and brittle bush. In places the river has carved small caverns into its banks. Farther down a sand bar reaches out constricting the water’s flow. The river gurgles over the rocks that line its bottom, becoming a roar at the narrowest point. At times the water is so shallow, we carry the tubes, struggling to maintain our balance on the slippery rocks.

A turkey buzzard circles overhead, searching out a dead critter for his next meal. A rustle nearby comes from a placid cow munching on the thin dry grass near the water’s edge. Distracted, I float too close to the bank and the current pulls me into a bush overhanging a swift channel. Startled, I fall from my inner tube, and it floats away. I stumble on the rocks and a strap on my sandal breaks.

I cry out to Jo Ann. “Hey! I lost my tube. Can you catch it?” She paddles after it, grabs it, and brings it back for me. We laugh at our close call.

She tells me, “To be on the river without a tube is to be stranded.”

After what seems like two hours of floating, we see no sign of a bridge ahead. Jo Ann’s face is red and my skin tingles.

As we approach another rapid, my stomach knots. I clutch my tube.

The water roars around the next bend. Completely unnerved, I yell to Jo Ann, “I have to get out. I can’t handle this one.”

We wade over to a sandbar on the right. The desert stretches as far as we can see. My broken sandal makes walking impossible. “We don’t know where we are. What are we going to do? What if no one finds us?”

Jo Ann tries to reassure me. “Don knows the area. I’m sure he’ll find some way to rescue us. I guess we have no choice but to sit and wait.”

As the sun goes down, we shiver in our wet bikinis. We take them off and sit naked on a couple of large rocks. Jo Ann warns me that snakes and other critters might visit us. My anxiety escalates and I scan the area for invasive creatures. Tired and worried, we gaze at the stars and distract ourselves with conversation.

“Look!” says Jo Ann, indicating a light in the distance. “A helicopter is using a search light to scan the river. At last, our saviors have come!” We struggle into our wet suits as we watch it approach.

The helicopter lands on the beach. One man runs out, wraps us in blankets, and helps us into the copter. He tells us we are the first people they’ve ever rescued alive on the river. I ask about the bridge where we were to meet Don. He replies, “The bridge is on the Salt River, and you are on the Verde.”

The helicopter sets down on a dirt road by Don’s car. We thank our rescuers and climb into Don’s old white Ford. He embraces his wife. “I’m so sorry about all this. I reached out to

Continued on page 30



The author writes: “My stories are inspired by people and their struggles to not only survive but thrive and find meaning in life. I have drawn from my social work experience to explore situations and issues that challenge people. Family and friendships have played a major role in my life and helped me maintain balance and perspective as I navigated the difficulties of being a working single mother and caregiver to my elderly parents and life partner. Nature, travel, hiking, dancing and spirituality are often woven into the narrative. I am a member of Desert Sleuths Chapter of Sisters in Crime, Mesa Writers Guild, Society of Southwest Authors, and ALWAYS (Alliance for Literary Writers, Authors & Yabbering Scribes) and participate in many local author events throughout the year. My short story ‘The Hobo Shack’ won the 2017 Tempe Community Writing Contest for Adult Fiction, and my short story ‘Family Secrets’ was published in the Fall 2019 Edition of The Blue Guitar. My novel, ‘Moon Glow,’ is available on Amazon.”

the sheriff's department and an Indian tribe to get help."

As we drive back to meet up with Jim and the kids, I notice some rather scary creatures. An ugly wild pig runs by, a javelina I'm told. It looks ferocious with white tusks jutting out of its elongated snout. A little farther, we see a large black furry tarantula in the middle of the road. I have lived in Arizona for only one month. I now have a new respect for the hazards of being a desert dweller.

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## Part II

Three years later, John and Candy assure us that a day tubing the Salt River will be safe and fun. They have gone tubing many times. We are well prepared with sturdy sneakers, sunscreen, and extra clothes. We load a cooler of food and drinks in John's inflated raft. Our seven-year-old son, Jeff, wears a life jacket and rides with John in the raft.

There are a lot of other people on the river today. Some of them have tied whole rafts of inner tubes together. John says "It's better to go it alone. It gives you more flexibility if you get caught in a current or stuck on a sand bar." He sounds experienced, so I put my fears aside.

Soon we are floating in a small unconnected cluster. Our excited voices float in the air above us. The rhythm of the water gently rocks my tube, and the warm sun melts away my concerns. I feel free and light, like a leaf wafting about in the breeze.

As we come around a turn in the river, my tube drifts to the left. Ahead I see another tuber going in circles. He laughs as the whirlpool shoots him out. Before I know it, I am spinning in the same vortex. I don't like it, but before I have time to work myself into a panic, I am floating free down the river again.

We ride peacefully for about an hour without any further excitement. Ahead of us I see the bridge. I smile in recognition and relief that this time things are going according to plan. We stop on the beach for a picnic lunch. Many other tubers have paused to eat and play at this wide point on the river. After our short break, we continue our tubing adventure.

There are fewer people on this section of the river, and they seem louder and more adventurous—the combined effect of beer, sun, and fun. Up ahead we see people gathering high overhead on a cliff at the river's edge. A man takes off his clothes and yells, "Geronimo" as he jumps ten feet to a small pool below. After a few seconds he emerges and lets out a whoop.

John says, "That's dangerous because rocks hidden below the water's surface can do a lot of damage if you miss the mark."

A woman and man jump naked together. Jeff giggles at the sight. I'm relieved to see their heads bob up to the surface.

This section of the river is narrower and shallower than the first leg of our trip. At places we must pick up our tubes and walk to avoid dragging our bottoms on the rocks just below the flowing water. At several points, islands separate the river's channel.

Jim floats ahead and veers to the left, around a large island. John and Jeff drift to the right where a tree hangs over the riverbank. Pulled by the swift current, the raft rams into the tree. Candy and I see the raft go under. She follows Jim to safety on the left bank.

I hear Jeff cry. In panic, I move in that direction. The same undertow that captured Jeff and John pulls me into the tree. I grab onto the trunk leaning over the river. Remembering my previous experience, I cling to my tube.

John yells, "We're okay."

Relief washes over me until I realize the current is pulling me down. Should I fall back into the river? What if the tangled roots of the tree catch me and hold me underwater? I tighten my grip on the tree.

Someone on the steep incline comes to give me his hand and pulls me out. I sit trembling in the shade of a tall pine tree. I can't see John and Jeff because they are downstream, and a boulder separates them from me. I want to climb out, but the bank is too steep. I yell to John, "I'm okay. What do I do now?"

John shouts, "You have to get in the river."

My fear mounts. "I can't."

"It's the only way out."

Trembling, I get on my tube and float to where John and Jeff wait. John has retrieved and folded his punctured raft. Fortunately, the air mattress inside the raft is still intact. They climb on the mattress, bringing the folded raft with them.

We float together to the opposite shore and reunite with Jim and Candy. They have recovered the cooler and some of its contents.

Candy reports, "We lost the food and drinks, but we saved John's car keys. It's a good thing we put them in a plastic container that floated."

I plead, "Can't we get out now and walk to the car?"

John shakes his head. "It's too far. We have to float to where we left the car."

Reluctant, I grab my tube and join the others to float down the river again. This time Jeff is riding on Jim's lap, an oversized load for the tiny tube. Tired and subdued, we make it to our destination and scramble into the car.

We survived. No one will ever persuade me to go tubing again.

# Jocelyn James

Tucson Artist



**“Siblings”**  
Found images and acrylic paint on paper  
2024



Jocelyn James is an African American artist from Arizona. I am a senior at the University of Arizona. I am a mixed media artist that mainly works with paper and collage materials. Go to <https://www.studentmadearizona.com/shop?tag=Jocelyn+James>. Social media: <https://www.instagram.com/artbyjocelynjames/>; and <https://www.tiktok.com/@artbyjocelynjames>. Contact the artist at [jamesjocelyn256@gmail.com](mailto:jamesjocelyn256@gmail.com).

# Jocelyn James

Tucson Artist



**“Childhood Home”  
Found images on paper  
2025**

Jocelyn James’ artwork focuses on growing up in predominantly white spaces, and deconstructing her own ideas of ‘whiteness’ and ‘Blackness.’ Through found images and other paper materials, Jocelyn creates strong relationships between seemingly unrelated objects, drawing the viewer’s attention to the power of narrative through image, line, and color, expressing her own experiences as a Black woman growing up in America.

# Jocelyn James

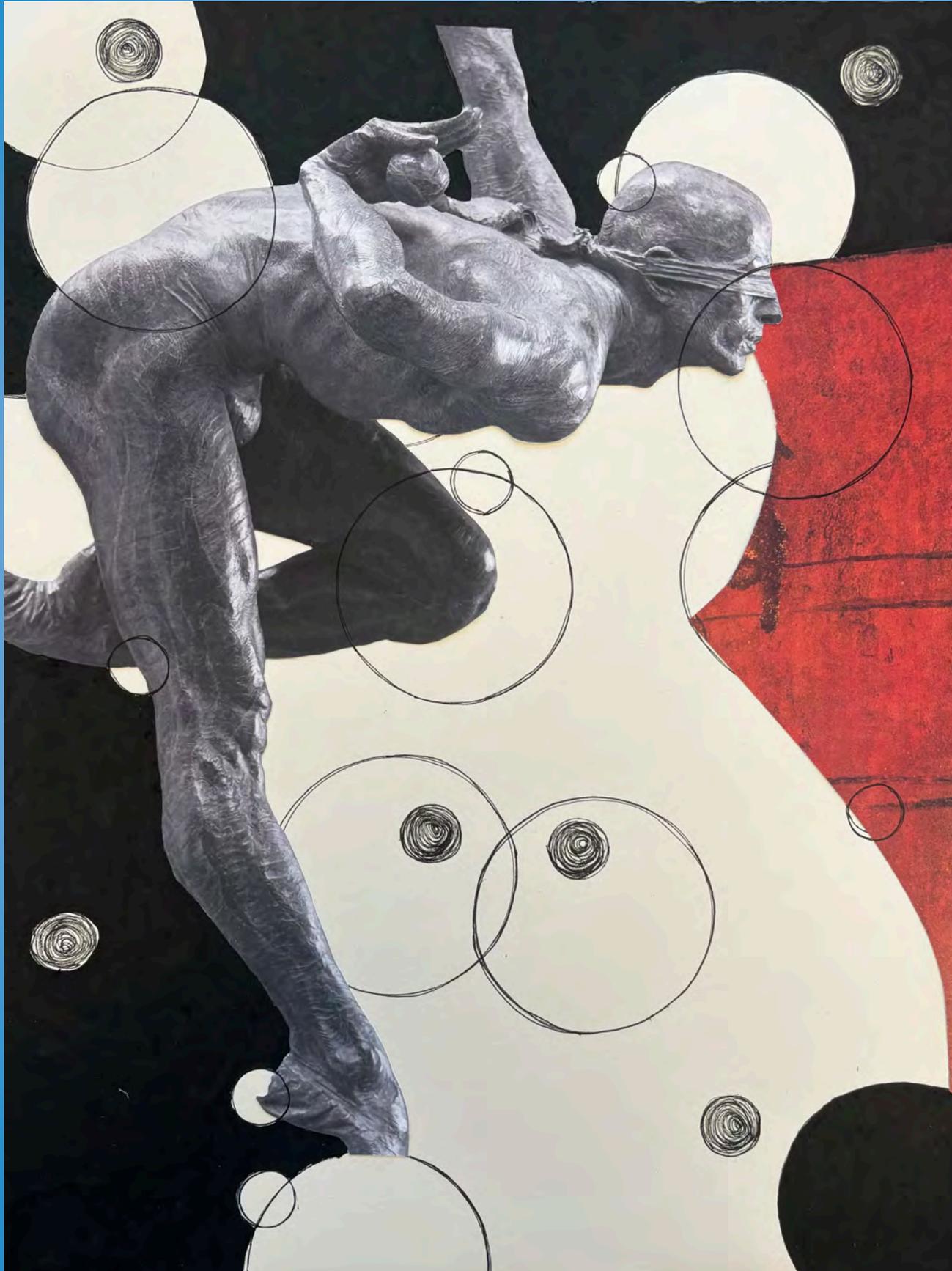
Tucson Artist



**"Demeter"**  
Found images on canvas board  
2024

# Jocelyn James

Tucson Artist



**“All-American’  
Athlete”**  
Found images, ink  
pen on paper  
2024

# Jocelyn James

Tucson Artist



**“Caress”**  
Found images,  
coffee, on watercolor  
paper  
2024

# The Star Soccer Player

By Ruben Martinez Garcia

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The soccer field's quality varied. Some parts were lush. Some parts were barren, showing either mud or dirt. Other parts were dry. The goal's net was gone, or rather, so sparse that what was there might as well be referred to as gone: little ropes still caught in its frame blew in the breeze. This net had been punctured by kids who were so eager to do something grand, like shooting with all their force. The frame of this goal had rusted, dented, scraped, and scratched. Time and rain had done the rusting. The roughness and foolishness with which the kids played did the rest.

On this field, Jacob played often, joyful in his skillful dribbling. The most fun he had was against two bad defenders who now approached him. Jacob, after having moved slowly with the ball, bringing it forward with small steps and delicate taps, suddenly juked left. That tricked one defender. Then, he juked right. That tricked the other. Between them now was a gap, which Jacob gained greater access to by kicking the ball through one of their legs and then he ran between them. They turned to chase him but collided and fell, groaning pathetically. Other kids laughed.

One defender, astonished, went up to them and berated them for their lack of coordination. They meekly defended themselves, each saying they did their best. The defender groaned and continued with the game, easy to reset now that, as was typical, Jacob scored. Jacob celebrated along with his teammates and even gained respect from those who had been impressed with his skills.

Matt had watched Jacob with envy. Other players made his concern no better, taunting him by saying he ought to give Jacob his jersey, which, at its chest, had the team logo: a gold outlined circle with a stunning crown on top and a blue banner set diagonally behind it.

One kid went further in his taunt: "Honestly," he said, "Jacob doesn't even need your jersey. They'll give him his own one soon."

"HoNesTIY, jAcOb dOeSn'T EvEn NeEd—Shut up!" Matt said.

They laughed.

"What? It could be true!" the kid said.

Matt sighed. "Why would anybody just recruit random kids at a park?" he said.

"I'm pretty sure it happens in Brazil."

"Because it's Brazil! They're amazing at this."

"It could still happen here."

Matt eyed this player to gauge his seriousness.

With a French accent, the player said, "A great chef can come from anywhere."

Exasperated, Matt threw his arms up, shook his head and walked away, saying, "I hate it here." As his anger started to fade, it had left behind a plan. He went to Jacob and asked if they could talk.

They went on the outskirts of the field, as the rest continued to play. Matt, with feigned sincerity, told Jacob that he wanted to help him improve. Of course, he explained, he knows that Jacob is doing quite well (Matt almost choked saying this), but to become more skillful he advised Jacob to use a heavy soccer ball. In explaining the exact benefit, Matt mumbled, not fully convinced of his own lie, then said: "The idea is, um, that once you will gain greater confidence in yourself. Because if you can play with such difficulty, then how would you do without it?"

Jacob nodded solemnly, said he understood, and thanked him. Matt watched him return to the game and wondered how this would come about, hoping, all along, that it would result in

Continued on page 37



Arizona native Ruben Martinez Garcia holds a degree in English with a concentration in rhetoric from Arizona State University. He lives in Tolleson. Contact the writer at [ruben19mtz@gmail.com](mailto:ruben19mtz@gmail.com).

discouragement and misery.

The next day, Jacob returned to the park and played at the next field over. He carried a gym bag and a new ball, its weight so heavy, it strained his hand. He left the bag next to the goal post. When he dropped the ball outside the penalty box, it made a deep thud. This ball had not simply flattened the grass, but crushed it; not simply hit the ground, but cratered it.

Jacob stepped back from this ball and remembered the greats before him, who had taken similar freekicks. With great force, they had made the ball travel perfectly to the corner of the goal. With great precision, they had curved the ball away from the goalkeepers, who, no matter how outstretched they were, could not touch it. With great skill, they kicked balls with no clear trajectory, elusive to everybody, until, at the end of its trail, it dipped and scored. With all this in mind, he felt powerful to take the shot. He took three strides and, once his left foot was next to the ball, he tilted his body just slightly and swung his leg. At the impact, the ball barely rolled forward—maybe an inch. But his momentum was too great and so he fell forward and rolled on the ground, where he lay for a while, dirty, groaning, baffled, and feeling like a fool. He stared at the sky with a face of distress, twisting and turning his back in the hopes that the pain would subside.

Afar, Matt had witnessed this and became giddy, smiling and almost jumping with joy. “I love it here!” he said.

Determined for greatness, Jacob did not stop playing with this ball. He got small soccer cones from his bag and placed them in a row, separated them by a foot. He started to dribble his heavy ball, weaving between said cones, and did so with agony. At every slight touch of his foot, he groaned meekly. By the time he reached the end of the cones, he was sweating. His ankles were throbbing. He looked at the cones and sighed. “You know what, I overestimated my abilities,” he said and retrieved some of them. Then he continued with his left foot, his touches weaker and his groans louder. After a few laps, he plopped to the ground and took out his phone and searched how to tell when ankle pain is severe and how much ankle surgery costs.

After this vital research, Jacob stood and he threw the ball up and when he went to swing his foot, he held back and let the ball thud before him. He hung his head and sighed in sorrow. He put his cones away, picked up the ball, and went home without looking up. To the sympathetic eye, this was a sad moment, because it meant a passion’s death. To Matt’s eye, however, this was a spectacular moment, because it meant that his competition was gone.

The following days were filled with unhappiness. Everyone asked about Jacob’s return. There was, however, no information to give. Eventually, it became inappropriate to mention his name, as it killed the mood. The thing was, Jacob often made the game so fun—fun by having impressive skills to watch; fun by

challenging everyone’s abilities; fun by energizing others to play smarter. For anyone who had played with Jacob, the fun in the game itself simply was not enough. Yet, they had to play as if it were.

One kid talked to Matt about the situation, opening up about how sad he was that he no longer saw Jacob there. Matt, avoiding becoming an outcast through dissent, faked his sorrow, saying, “Yeah, yeah. It is ... awful.”

The kid said nothing, seemingly needing more consolation.

Thankfully, he had not looked at Matt, who rolled his eyes, but continued: “I wish he stopped doing whatever he is doing now, and just be here with us. But there’s not much we can do I guess.” He shrugged. Then, with increasing fake excitement, he said, “I’m telling you, if he came right now, that would be so, so—Oh my, god,” he said, depleted, his body drooping.

“What?” the kid said, turning and following Matt’s gaze.

It was Jacob.

Everyone noticed now. They waved at him, smiling. Some went to him, asking him where he had been. He explained that his new training had swollen his ankles. He thought it best to take things slow by continuing said training at home, where, had anything drastic happened, he knew he was safe, either because he could rely on his parents or because an ice pack was never too far away. Asked if he was okay to play now, he grinned and said, “Why do you think I’m here?” They loved that response. Before beginning, though, he went to Matt and thanked him for the advice.

“Oh,” Matt said, shocked. “I didn’t know it would, um, help so fast.”

“It did! I think you’ll be able to see,” Jacob replied, smiling. “I just feel so light now.”

Everyone got to their spots and the game started.

Once Jacob got the ball, he started to dribble with baffling speed and precision. Matt tried to keep up. Desperate to stop him, he slid towards him, only for Jacob to be out of Matt’s reach. There, Matt stayed, dirty, pathetic, and cursing to himself. At such speeds, attackers often tap the ball too hard, creating a space for a defender to intercept the ball. The defender only needed patience. Jacob, though, never created this vulnerable space. Having gained such remarkable speed, he kept the ball always beside him. At the edge of the penalty box, he stopped abruptly. The defender waited for his move with a solid stance. Jacob stepped left, dropping his shoulder. This faked the defender. In a split of a second, Jacob darted right and shot.

It was this shot, above all else, that created the most dazzling spectacle. It had been hit with true power. To follow it with one’s eye was almost impossible, so fast did it go. It had sliced the air, whistling sharply. The goalkeeper dove up and to the right for the ball, his arm stretched out. It grazed his fingers. At that

Continued on page 38

speed, it had inflicted him with a burning sensation. Then, the ball hit the inside of the post and went inside the net, or at the very least the goal frame where the net was supposed to be.

All praised Jacob, now aware of how vast his potential really was. He thanked them humbly, saying it was nothing. This in turn made it so that they went on and on, so that he, too, could accept just how great he was. Matt could not handle the blow of these praises. With a rage he tried to make sound honorable, he said to everyone, “Guys, it’s not even a big deal! Like cool—he is good enough to play varsity! Then what? Let’s be serious. If playing good doesn’t go anywhere, it will end up just being some high school memory. If it *does* go somewhere, it won’t go far. He might get a scholarship for something completely unrelated and then find out that all that effort was for nothing. All this cheering for him—the ridiculous cheering—meant nothing.”

All were moved to despair, knowing that, more than likely, he had a point. It was what happened next, then, that came as an even bigger surprise. A limo parked by, and from it exited a tall man, wearing a blue three-piece suit with a white button down. His chin was broad and squared, covered with stubble, which traveled to his head and around a bald spot. In his eyes, there was seriousness, coolness, and power. He was an imposing figure, whose muscles, though aged, had not lost their strength. On this suit jacket, he wore a pin, matching the logo found on Matt’s jersey, but made more glorious through its shine and its authenticity.

As he approached, they swarmed him, seeking autographs or pictures—anything to prove that they had been graced by his presence. He thanked them for their enthusiasm, but emphasized his goal must come first: to talk to Jacob, who they all turned to with wide eyes, except for Matt, who was frozen, ready to scream—indeed, a faint growl rose in his throat.

The soccer manager explained to Jacob that his determination and skill were so impressive, that he must be trained to get to a professional level. If he was willing and if his parents agreed to it, they would offer him that training.

“I think we can make that happen!” Jacob said, smiling a bright smile.

They shook hands.

“Let’s go!” everyone shouted.

Walking away was Matt, grumbling to himself: “I *do* hate it here.”

# 3 Poems by Lysa Cohen

## I Choose Power

I choose power—  
Not the loud kind,  
Not the kind that storms into the room,  
Throwing elbows and shouting orders.  
I choose the power that simmers,  
That breathes,  
That knows the strength of stillness  
And the ferocity of quiet resolve.

I am the power of a whispered “no,”  
The strength in a steady gaze,  
The certainty of standing when the world tells me to sit.  
I am the power of roots,  
Growing deep beneath the surface,  
Holding steady in the storm.

Power isn't force—it's choice.  
It's saying, “I am enough,”  
Even when the mirror questions back.  
It's knowing I carry centuries of voices,  
Of women who dared,  
Who dreamed,  
Who whispered truths that cracked open mountains.

I choose power that nurtures.  
The kind that builds bridges instead of walls,  
That lifts up instead of tears down.  
I choose the power that holds a hand  
And says, “I've got you,”  
Even when the weight of the world presses down.

Continued on page 40



Lysa Cohen is an educator and writer who explores themes of resilience, identity, and the unexpected humor in life's challenges. With a teaching and academic coaching background, she has spent the past two decades helping students find their voices—both on the page and beyond. She holds an M.A. in English, an M.Ed. and M.Phil. in Education, and a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. She has also been published in *Be Open*, *Black Coffee Poetry*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Page & Spine*, *The Penman Review*, and *Zen Poetry*.

I am the power of firelight in the dark,  
Of songs sung in defiance,  
Of letters carved into stone  
By hands that refused to be forgotten.

I choose power that heals.  
That stitches wounds with care,  
That wraps the broken pieces  
In gold,  
Turning scars into stories of resilience.

Power is not fear.  
It's the courage to walk forward,  
To open doors closed for centuries  
And hold them wide for the next.

I choose power because I am.  
Because my voice is not an echo,  
But a symphony.  
Because my strength isn't borrowed,  
But born of every step I've taken,  
Every fall I've risen from,  
Every choice I've claimed as my own.

This power—it's mine.  
It's feminine,  
It's fierce,  
And it's here.

I choose it with open hands,  
With an open heart,  
With the full weight of who I am  
And who I'm becoming.

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# Moments of Peace

In the middle of all this noise,  
where the world spins too fast  
and the air feels too heavy,  
I stumble on it—  
peace,  
like a forgotten melody humming beneath the chaos.

It's not a grand moment,  
not fireworks or fanfare.  
It's quiet.  
A soft inhale,  
the kind you almost don't notice  
until you do.

It shows up in the glow of sunrise,  
gold light slipping through blinds,  
touching the corners of a room  
like it's apologizing  
for being too beautiful to ignore.

It's the steam curling up from coffee,  
tiny tendrils rising,  
as if they've got nowhere to be  
but here.

It's in the wind teasing the leaves,  
a gentle nudge,  
like it's reminding them  
to dance,  
even when no one is watching.

It's the sound of a child's laugh  
cutting through the noise of the world,  
bright and pure,  
like hope got caught in a net and let go.

Peace isn't loud.  
It doesn't push.  
It waits—  
patient, steady—  
for you to notice it  
in the seconds you almost let slip away.

**Continued on page 42**

It's the pause  
after the tears dry.  
The quiet that comes  
when you stop fighting the world  
and just sit with yourself.

I collect these moments.  
I tuck them in my pocket,  
hold them like talismans  
for the days that feel too big.

Because I've learned something  
in all this rushing,  
all this reaching:  
Peace doesn't demand to be found.

It's already here,  
waiting for me to slow down  
just enough  
to see it.

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# What It Means to Be a Woman in America

It means waking up every day  
With the weight of history on your shoulders,  
The echo of generations whispering,  
“Be strong, but not too strong.  
Be bold, but don’t make waves.  
Be everything to everyone,  
And expect nothing in return.”

It means walking a tightrope  
Between ambition and expectation,  
Every step measured,  
Every move watched,  
Your success applauded,  
But never without a question:  
“Who did you leave behind to get here?”

It means being told,  
“You can have it all,”  
But discovering “all”  
Comes with fine print:  
Sacrifice, exhaustion,  
And a lifetime of proving  
That you deserve a seat at the table  
You’ve already earned.

It means your body is a battlefield,  
A subject of debate,  
Legislated, judged, dissected,  
As if your choices are not your own,  
As if your worth is tied  
To what you can give,  
Or what you can bear.

It means smiling when you want to scream,  
Shrinking when you want to stand tall,  
Apologizing for spaces you have every right to occupy.  
It means being told to “lighten up,”  
While carrying the darkness of a world  
That still doesn’t see you as equal.

It means knowing your words  
Will be interrupted,  
Your ideas claimed,  
Your value questioned.  
But speaking anyway,  
Because silence has never saved anyone.

Continued on page 44

It means being everything at once:

Daughter, sister, mother, partner,  
Caregiver, breadwinner,  
Peacemaker, warrior.

It means the strength of steel  
And the softness of a whisper,  
The resilience to break,  
And rebuild,  
And break again.

It means hope,  
Even when it feels like there's none left.

It means fighting for a better tomorrow,  
Even when today feels impossible.

It means carrying the dreams of those who came before,  
And planting seeds for those who will follow.  
To be a woman in America  
Is to be a paradox:  
Both celebrated and overlooked,  
Empowered and restrained.  
But most of all,

It means refusing to give up.

It means surviving,  
Thriving,  
Demanding more,  
Until the world finally catches up  
With the truth we've known all along—  
We are unstoppable.

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# Chair Pose and Chutzpah: My Misadventures in Yoga

By Lysa Cohen

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Yoga. Four little letters with the power to strike fear into the heart of any middle-aged woman—or at least this middle-aged woman. After relocating to Florida, my mother and I decided that joining a community yoga class twice a week, taught by a seasoned professional, would be a great way to bond. Because nothing says “family time” like sweating profusely in a room full of strangers while discovering your deepest insecurities.

Our first step on this newfound journey of health and enlightenment was, naturally, a trip to the nearest big-box store. We needed yoga gear, and we needed it cheap. Discount mats, blocks, bags, and loose-fitting clothes were all tossed into the cart with gusto. For the record, there isn’t a force on this planet that will get me to squeeze my decidedly un-yogic body into a sports bra and skin-tight leggings. I believe in breathing room—in my clothing, not just my yoga practice.

When you sign up for “community yoga,” certain expectations arise—or rather, certain *lowered* expectations. I mean, it’s a *community* class. Indeed, this meant there’d be a lovely mix of amateurs like us. I once was on the dance team and flag line in high school. I was limber in my youth, practically Gumby-esque. Surely, I’d slip right back into the groove. (Insert laugh track here.)

The class was held in our local community center’s multipurpose room—a term that evokes community dances, HOA meetings, and the occasional bake sale. As we walked in, we paid our class fee, looked around, and looked at each other with wide eyes. “Oh, crap,” we mouthed in unison. This was no ragtag group of beginners. This was serious. The women in the room weren’t just seasoned yoga practitioners—they were practically Olympic athletes masquerading as retirees. And every single one of them was over sixty. They were toned, flexible, and could probably bench press me with one hand while holding a Warrior Two pose with the other.

My chutzpah—which, for the uninitiated, is the unshakable confidence all educated, chubby, middle-aged Jewish women possess—left me faster than you can say “namaste.” Mom and I slunk to the back of the room—not just the back row, but the back corner, as close to the fire exit as we could manage without setting off alarms. We unrolled our discount mats, positioned our flimsy blocks, and tried to blend into the background of high-end yoga equipment.

Class began, and within seconds, we regretted every life choice that had led us to this moment. As the rest of the room gracefully flowed into Downward Dog, my mother and I wheezed and grunted our way into what could only be described as “awkward hedgehog.” The next ten minutes were a masterclass in humility, self-loathing, and the startling realization that muscles can pop in ways you didn’t know existed. Bread-loving bodies like ours don’t bend so much as fold unevenly, like Bavarian pretzels made by someone who’s had too much schnapps.

And then, in a move that sealed our status as the class jesters, we reached for chairs. Yes, chairs. While everyone else adjusted their blocks and balanced serenely on one leg, we hauled over two folding chairs like we were at a bingo night. Our cheap blocks were about as effective as stacking Pringles cans to reach a ceiling fan. On the other hand, chairs were sturdy, reliable, and fully capable of supporting both our sagging spirits and our refusal to face-plant during Warrior One.

Weeks passed, and slowly, I began to gain confidence. Too much confidence, as it turned out. One fateful day, I attempted the splits while caught up in the euphoria of managing a semi-passable Chair Pose. Why not? I thought. I’d been flexible once. That muscle memory was waiting to spring back, right? Wrong.

There was a sharp, unmistakable pop as I lowered myself toward the floor. Time stopped, and my vision blurred. Somewhere in the distance, my mother gasped, “Oh my God, are you okay?” I was not.

The result? A torn ACL, six weeks of physical therapy, and a newfound limp that turned every staircase into Mount Everest. My mantra became, “Up with the good, down with the bad,” mumbled through gritted teeth as I hauled myself one step at a time, gripping the railing like it might give me a gold medal for surviving stairs. Daily tasks took on the aura of Herculean challenges. Grocery shopping? A gauntlet of unforgiving parking lots and uneven sidewalks. Carrying a laundry basket upstairs? Not unless I wanted to reenact a tragic one-woman version of *Humpty Dumpty*. My once-ambitious dreams of perfecting the falling star pose were downgraded to the humble goal of mastering a wincing half-squat without yelping.

The knee brace was just the beginning of my transformation into a walking cautionary tale. Add an ice pack, perpetually

Continued on page 46

Spring 2025

Velcroed to my leg, and a grimace that could frighten small children, and I became a spectacle of suburban grit. “What happened to you?” neighbors would ask, their voices filled with concern and amusement. “Yoga,” I’d reply darkly, like I’d been wounded in battle, which, to be fair, didn’t feel far from the truth.

Recovery handed me plenty of time for introspection—or at least a kind of petty frustration masquerading as introspection. Why had I done it? What had possessed me to attempt the splits, of all things, with a body powered more by carbohydrates than core strength? The answers, when they came, weren’t flattering. I hadn’t been proving anything to the seasoned yogis in the room; they’d been too busy standing on their heads to notice my overzealous antics. No, the person I’d been competing with was myself. Or rather, I’d cobbled together some glorified version of myself from distant high school memories and a stubborn refusal to accept reality.

When I eventually returned to class, my limp and I were welcomed back like prodigal daughters. “She’s here!” someone exclaimed, clapping with the enthusiasm of a proud parent at a kindergarten recital. The applause caught me so off guard that I nearly limped back out the door. Instead, I forced a smile, nodded awkwardly, and made my way to the back corner, where my trusty chair waited like an old friend who knew all my embarrassing secrets and loved me anyway. I approached it with new humility, patting the metal frame in a silent truce. It had seen me at my worst and was still there, waiting to catch me when I inevitably wobbled.

The first class back was a mixture of triumph and mortification. Triumph, because I was there, defying my inner critic, my achy knee, and the small but persistent voice in my head whispering, “You should have taken up knitting instead.” Mortification, because I was there with a limp so pronounced that even my Child’s Pose looked like it needed a support group. Still, I showed up.

Over the following months, I learned the art of letting go—*mostly*. I stopped caring if my poses were perfect. I stopped cringing when my tree pose looked more like “branch in a hurricane” or when I fell out of it entirely. Instead of glaring at the floor in shame, I’d laugh, get back up, and try again.

Progress came slowly, but it came. I could feel it in the small victories: holding downward dog without silently cursing gravity, managing a passable Warrior Three without feeling like I was auditioning for a slapstick comedy, and, eventually, daring to venture out of the back corner for certain poses.

Yoga became less about stretching my body and more about stretching my capacity for patience—with myself, others, and life’s unpredictable twists (or splits). Once sharper than my ability to roll my eyes, my competitive edge softened. I stopped looking around the room to compare myself to the toned, elastic retirees who could twist themselves into human origami. Instead, I focused on my mat, my movements, and the joy of being exactly where I was—wobbly poses and limp, included.

I learned to breathe deeply. I focused on my movements. I tried to embrace the idea that yoga was a practice, not a performance. Occasionally, I even succeeded. Well, for about five seconds before my mind wandered back to my to-do list or my knee gave an ominous twinge. Letting go of old habits is harder than any pose, and mindfulness, it turns out, doesn’t come with a cheat sheet.

Yet, in those rare instances when I managed to stay present—when I wasn’t lamenting my lack of flexibility or mourning the knee I used to take for granted—I caught glimpses of why people stick with yoga in the first place. There’s something oddly empowering about being in the moment, even when that moment involves muttering curse words at an uncooperative hamstring. Maybe I wasn’t achieving enlightenment but learning to laugh at myself. And if that isn’t a form of progress, I don’t know what is.

However, the real gift wasn’t just in the poses or the practice. It was the people. These weren’t just my classmates—they became my people. The kind of people who cheered when I finally managed a pose without toppling over, who clapped like I’d won an Olympic medal when I held my first unassisted plank. They laughed with me when I fell, assured me, “You’ll get there,” and reminded me to be kinder to myself when I muttered, “I’m hopeless.”

Yoga stopped being just exercise. It became a way to reconnect with myself, others, and the world in ways I never expected. It was messy and hilarious, full of wrong moves and belly laughs, but somehow, it was exactly what I needed.

# 3 Poems by Abraham Aruguete

## cents

i never made a cent from this  
as lines are drawn under my eyes  
i never made a cent from work either  
pushpin as poetry, purposelessly.

© 2025

## stalker

closure, a language.  
ratio, intellect.  
accuser, art.  
no one was waiting  
for me to get better.

© 2025

## ansatz

time in backwards worked i if  
it would be a gastro-confessional  
(blood in the stool)  
twitch like dying streaming services  
ultimately ultraviolet  
not very tasty, drum stick skin  
bilagaana marijuana  
oh well it's yearyester week day month  
and i am eating my corn in lines now  
though i much would prefer circles.

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Abraham Aruguete is a human being. He has inhabited Northern Arizona for most of his life. He has been published in Asylum, The Blue Guitar, and Unstrung. He can be found on Instagram as abrahamaruguete.

# Confessions of an Ex-Highly Performing Charter School Kid

(Or, alternatively, how to flunk everything and feel good about yourself in the morning)

By Abraham Aruguete

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I remember kids lining up to do volunteer work for the National Honor Society. I forget the amount of time it was, but keep your grade above a certain point average, and you'd get a bullet point on your college application card. They would file in, go to meetings, talk about the good they did, fill out a form, and that was the end of it. Clean. Systematized. A way to do good for others and get your back scratched too.

I did not like it. I did not join the National Honor Society.

Four years or so later, I am in an emergency room. Haldol is being injected into my arm, and a doctor is holding me down as I mutter something about a sex trafficking conspiracy and how I need to protect the undergraduates from the evil conspirators. For two months prior, I had sat in my room growing increasingly more paranoid of the outside world. I had dropped my classes, posted erratically on social media, and made frantic phone calls to my family. It took some lying, but they got me into the emergency room. Needle insertion. More muttering. Fade to black.

Two years before I was born, a highly performing charter school was founded. They promise to make kids globally competitive, through extended homework hours and an emphasis on standardized test success. Eleven years after I was born, yet two years before I was set to move off reservation, the charter school in Flagstaff was founded.

Global competition, much like mediocrity, in the wise words of David Foster Wallace, is a relative term. They all place in the top 100 of "public" schools in the US, according to US News rankings. They have an attrition rate to match, as well—above fifty percent, according to Yale Education studies. They pay eight-thousand less in average teacher salary as of fiscal year 2024, at least, when compared to the local Flagstaff Unified School District, according to their respective websites. Academics-wise, it's really just Chipotle private school. You're competitive relative to the other schools in the state of Arizona, which ranks near to dead last on education. But globally? There was a single Indian transfer student at the university, along with a German transfer student. Both placed directly into graduate real

analysis sections. Us? Well, we went into Vector Calculus. Some of us passed on the first try...

I am looking at a LinkedIn page twenty-odd years from the founding of the charter school in Tucson. Here is a charter school graduate. No internships, besides the ones the school offered. 4.0, Math, History. A little webpage to their work. Honors thesis and everything. They are a tenants' organizer, a job which I assume has some meaning associated with it, but probably does not pay very well. Very globally competitive. I shoot them an email. No response.

Of course, the state collegiate system has its share of false promises. I am in a meeting with my adviser at the university. "I'm not really getting good grades—should I continue on with this math major?" "Of course," replies the adviser, "You can get into Jane Street!" Jane Street being a trading firm that hires exclusively from Ivy League grads and/or people with 3.5 GPAs and above. But I do not know this. I believe him. Three years later, I was rejected from Jane Street.

Post-psychosis but before the application to Jane Street, I am told by my adviser that I should graduate. I got the credits required in 2.5 years, 3 with the psychotic break. I stand at a 3.1 major GPA, and a 3.43 overall. I think about taking some more classes before deciding to graduate to stay with my parents, who are understandably worried post-psychosis about how I would fare on my own. My degree comes in the mail.

Elsewhere, another non-charter-school-but-similar-enough kid drops out and tries a music career.

Two years later, they will fail.

Flashback to when grades came in, high school. The cries ring out. "I got a 4.0! I, too, got a 4.0! I got a 3.7! A 3.2..." Muffled tears. "I'm just stupid, it's alright..."

By now, most of the class we started with in middle school has already been cut by attrition. Hours of homework and an accelerated pace mean you can't keep everyone. Everyone who is left is deemed "smart." But are they "globally competitive" smart?

In a graduate statistics class, the lights are too loud. A voice is

Continued on page 49

Spring 2025

talking, I don't hear much of it, but they say something along the lines of "Everyone who graduates from this degree program gets a job! One hundred percent employed!" I look on LinkedIn, again, and see graduates from the program are currently unemployed. I know this has happened before. I dropped out. I could teach.

Another charter school kid makes a LinkedIn page about how they are a graduated marketing major with no internship aspiring to become a sales professional. Work experience: menial clerical work. I do not email this one, as we weren't that close in the first place.

Another charter school kid—triple major, Arabic, Environmental Engineering, CS. Works as a course coordinator for the University of Arizona. It seems that even lengthening one's college stay doesn't save one from the whims of the job market.

Another charter school kid. 3.76 GPA in Data Science. Works as a data engineer for AmEx for a bit before moving to New York. What is the difference between the first kid and that other kid? I don't know. Internships? But how do they choose who gets the internship?

Another charter school kid. Woman in CS. Cushy job over at Honeywell in Phoenix. Another charter school kid. Woman with quadruple major, none STEM. Federal Paralegal.

Another charter school kid. Marketing major. Worked as a caddy in a golf course before finally hitting on some low-paid stepping stone to their career. God bless.

Flashback to my history teacher, one of the few people I really admired there. Former steel worker from Indiana, worked in grocery stores until he lucked on this job. Supposedly he asked if the staff were raising the next generation of fascists. I demur—maybe half the class were into some form of clerical fascism, a quarter into Social Darwinism, and the rest were ideless figurants barely noticed by the other three-fourths. Regardless of belief—they were all smart, though maybe not "globally competitive" smart.

Right before graduating, a quarter to a third of the graduating class has joined the National Honors Society. Several kids join as many clubs as possible, to resume pad for college applications. Some take community college courses. Others stuff in as many as nineteen to twenty APs. Everyone applies to MIT, Harvard, Stanford. I am of low self-esteem. I apply to Cornell, Swarthmore, and Harvey Mudd, as I was paraded around as high achieving minorities are often paraded around. I got into Cornell and Harvey Mudd. I go to neither.

At my university, a year after the above anecdote, I am lying down on the grass with another charter school kid, the one who will go on to be a summa cum laude tenants' organizer. We are talking about books we haven't read—cannot read. I barely

skimmed through Anti-Oedipus' intro. "I like Deleuze..." he says. No one below the age of twenty has actually read Deleuze. That is a lie less than twenty somethings tell themselves to make themselves look smart.

I met several college socialists in my career as a student, as one does at any given university. Not one would check in on me during my psychotic break.

Not one would talk to me after said psychotic break. So much for progressivism. This is the part where I make things simple.

This is the part where I preach.

There's some sort of lesson to be learned when we have created adults who can solve calculus problems like the back of their hand, but are so neurotically status obsessed and self-obsessed that they can't hold a five-minute conversation about the weather without making it about what they've done or are going to do. Let alone check in on their fellow students on a more than academic basis.

It's like the self-absorption of these types—not in the sake of some commune or something, but literal self-absorption—is this black hole form of individualism—that is, that unending mirror to the face, the mirror to others, the self-reprisal about never being good enough. Even when they have that power, that unyielding influence, of money, middle class jobs, and fame, so rarely are any of the benefits directed outward towards anything—a cause celebre, family members, etc.

Maybe there is some kind of deeper meaning when the local elite of our generation won't send even an envoy when someone is undergoing psychosis in their midst. Maybe it points to that deeper, darker truth, the one we will idealistically deny before walking by twenty homeless people on the street—that really, when shit hits the fan, you will have nothing but the state and your family to call home to—that no one else will give you the time of day.

But really, the big lesson to take home is perhaps "No damn cat, no damn cradle." The Xs of the Cat's Cradle of the Chipotle-private school weren't wrong—we all scored well on exams, we all did relatively well in comparison to our public school counterparts. However, plenty of us were "globally competitive" as clerks and teachers' aides and golf caddies. For all the podiums and fanfares, there wasn't a whole lot behind that cradle. And the really sad part—in between the COVID, market crash, post-COVID hire stagnation, AI becoming operable on a production scale, rapid offshoring of jobs, and increased, ever-globalized competition—so few people bothered to admit things were wrong. Because of that, so few people ever realized they weren't the only ones in that position. So few people realized that there were other people out there, just like them, hurting and hustling and eating shit—that even getting a job didn't guarantee much more than a condo—and that maybe if they just shared this pain, it wouldn't be so bad.

# Florida 40 Years Later

By Duann Black

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Seth set the laptop on top of three encyclopedias stacked on a flimsy card table. Hoping it was stable, he configured the digital slide show software so he and his lovely wife, Pamela, could operate it from their phones. Seth was told he would use their equipment when he agreed to do this presentation. Today, without warning, Seth was forced to make do with what little was available because the community center's presentation equipment was being used in another building. This situation was not what he expected from this well-respected community center.

While Seth tinkered with the electronics, Pamela welcomed attendees into the conference room. Receiving hugs from the ladies and kisses from several gentlemen, she offered to shake hands with everyone. Most of the senior citizens wanted more physical contact than a handshake. Feeling uncomfortable with hugs and kisses from strangers, it took a while for her nervousness to settle and her welcoming smile to appear.

Guests filed into the rows closest to the front, nudging others to sit close to their friends. Seth watched Pamela handle the hugs and kisses, well aware it was not her favorite thing to endure, even after dealing with his family of huggers and kissers for 39 years. He smiled and winked at her when he caught her eye, making certain he was not smirking. He did not want a lecture later about how funny he thought it was that she was forced to deal with the physical stuff while he had fun with the electronics.

When the line at the door ended, Pamela nodded to Seth, closed the door, and waited until everyone was seated before lowering the lights. Seth turned on the slide show while she walked up the aisle to stand on the other side of the digital display.

The Scotisons always stood on both sides of the video screen when giving a talk. Having an audience look left or right at

the person speaking about the slide helped keep the audience attentive. When the audience focused on two people standing in one spot, the temptation to fall asleep won every time. Fewer interruptions caused by loud snoring always made a better presentation.

When they were ready, a gentleman standing at the left edge of the group introduced Seth and Pamela and their topic. His spiel was short and sweet. As the group clapped, he took a seat at the end of the front row. It was the perfect introduction, just what Seth and Pamela liked.

Seth brought up the title slide of their presentation, "Florida 40 Years Later, Seth and Pamela Scotison."

"Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our travel adventure. We hope you enjoy our trip to Florida, nicknamed the Sunshine State. Famous for sunny skies, picturesque beaches, and Spring Break, there is always something to enjoy in the Peninsula State. Please note that I just gave you two nicknames for Florida."

Pamela held up a small bag. "Beneath each of your seats is a bag containing two Florida souvenirs, a small notepad, and a pen. If you would like to take part in the restaurant raffle at the end of our talk, please use the pad to answer the quiz questions at the end of our talk. We invite you to write notes to help ace the quiz."

Pamela advanced to the next slide. "Spring Break!" It showed a beachfront house, a white Chevy convertible, and a stack of books overlaid with a large X.

"Forty years ago, I was a senior at Vassar College. For Spring Break that year, I joined four classmates in Melbourne, Florida, where we stayed at a beach house owned by my best friend's family. We had everything needed for a fun break from college classes: white sandy beaches, the use of a car, restaurants close

Continued on page 51



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 just published on Jan. 1 "Stories to Tell, Book One" (available on Amazon), the first of a two-book collection of short stories she and Alan wrote. Duann is a well-traveled military retiree, always ready with a story to share.

by, and no studying required. Within twenty-four hours, we were partying like there was no tomorrow. I'm sure one or two of you know what I mean."

There were several chuckles and comments from the audience.

Seth brought up the next slide. "Spring Break vs. Dullsville." The slide showed a stack of books on a desk, a carafe of coffee, and a student asleep with his head resting on an open book.

"Spring Break forty years ago was a one-time experience for me. I was dragged kicking and yelling from my Harvard dorm room by my study group mates. I planned to study during the break since I didn't have the funds to go anywhere, much less to Florida. One of the guys convinced his father to fly us to Florida in his Learjet, open their Melbourne beach house, and loan us the keys to both vehicles in the garage. At least, I believe his father agreed to everything. I never had the nerve to ask. Shortly after reaching the house, both vehicles headed into town to find the first party in sight."

Pamela advanced the slide. "Why Florida 40 years later?" It showed an alligator, an airboat, and a pair of filled drink glasses. She smiled at Seth, and he nodded.

"I met Seth at the second bar we entered. My friends and I parked in the lot next to a bar at the north end of town. The first bar we checked out was a local hangout. Several older guys were at the pool tables, and seated at the bar were men and women drinking beer while watching the television screens mounted above the counter. It was as quiet as a tomb. We exited before anyone turned to notice us at the door. We heard the second bar from a block away. It was so full that we had to fight through the crowd to enter. By the time we reached the back wall, several of us had made eye contact with guys we wanted to chat with. I leaned against the wall next to Seth. Before I realized it, we were chatting at a table, ordering our third round of drinks. The rest is history. We met forty years ago in Melbourne, Florida, and graduated from college that same year, 1985. In the fall of 1986, we married."

Pamela again smiled at Seth.

Seth blew her a kiss.

The audience clapped, oohed, aahed, and chuckled.

"Earlier this year, we retired and thought it would be nice to return to Melbourne, where our journey together began. We looked at an old photo album filled with pictures taken during the only Spring Break we took part in and decided on three locations we wanted to revisit. We'll talk about the first time we visited each location in 1985, and then we'll share what we found when we returned this year."

Seth brought up the next slide, "Buddha's Alligator Ranch," showing an alligator laying on a log, two gators locked in battle, and a baby gator smiling at the human holding it.

"Our first date was to Buddha's Alligator Ranch near Deer Park. I rented a two-seat sports car, so we had a valid excuse to be alone. It was a leisurely drive on country roads to reach the dirt road leading to the ranch. Buddha's tourist trap—sorry, alligator ranch—was on the south side of a single-lane bridge over Jane Green Creek, east of Puzzle Lake, in the middle of nowhere. Neither of us was brave enough to hold a baby alligator, but we enjoyed learning more about gators than we thought possible. It turned out to be a fun day."

Pamela advanced to the next slide. "Benny's Airboat Rides." It showed an airboat filled with tourists, a small airboat, and a pair of soaking wet customers.

"Someone should have warned us to take towels and leave our hats in the car for Benny's airboat ride. We arrived shortly after Benny opened. He recommended we take the small tour where both of us could drive the boat. Benny drove down Bull Creek for a few minutes before stopping to explain driving procedures and adding a speed limiter to the throttle. Wisely, I allowed Seth to test-drive first. He took the driver's seat, grinning from ear to ear immediately. He spent ten minutes driving downstream before it was my turn to drive northward toward Bull Creek Bill's Lake Park along Billy Lake. When my ten minutes ended, I happily let Benny take over. Driving an airboat is not as easy as it looks. While we sat in the front of the boat for the rest of the tour, Benny took off like a bullet, heading upstream through Billy Lake like an alligator was on our tail. He unexpectedly swung to the left, almost tossing me out of the boat. If Seth hadn't grabbed me, I'm sure I'd have been gator bait. My hat was gone, never to be seen again. By the time Benny returned us to his boat dock, we were drenched head to toe in lake water. That's us on the slide, soaked to the bone, but smiling because we survived. Since we were already wet, we spent the rest of the day enjoying sun and fun at Satellite Beach, where no alligators lived." Pamela gave Seth an unhappy face as he laughed.

Seth brought up the next slide. "Beverly's Beverages Bar," showing a neon sign, a small building next to the road, and a wall display.

"This stop was my favorite. We heard about it from a guy at the grocery store near Canova Beach on our second day in Florida. We checked it out after surviving Buddha's alligators. When we arrived at about 7 p.m., it was quiet. Only a couple of customers were seated at the end of the bar. A woman behind the bar told us to park at any table we wanted, and she would come by to take our drink order. We sat at a table near the front window toward the back. We didn't see any drink menus, so when she arrived, we asked what drinks were available. She pointed at the wall behind us and said we could have anything listed on the wall, or we could have Spring Break beer. The wall

Continued on page 52

was covered with drink concoctions, so we started with beer. By 10 p.m., the place was filled to overflowing with a mix of locals and college students. There was a contest to see who could down the most beverages listed on the wall before passing out. We stopped drinking after one beer and two mixed drinks. We had more fun watching people pick their choice of drinks with interesting ingredients and matching names.” Seth chuckled for a moment.

“What are you laughing about, Seth?”

“I was just remembering the owner of Beverly’s Beverages Bar,” he said. “Her name was Bev and no one, for fear of her wrath, called her Beverly, a name she intensely disliked.”

“Pamela, do you remember your favorite beverage from Bev’s Bar?”

“Back then or now?”

“Either will do, dear,” he said.

“Bev’s apple cider drinks were tantalizing in aroma and flavor, simply delicious. What was yours, dear?” she asked.

“I thought the whiskey pumpkin sour was a winner,” he said.

Pamela advanced to the next slide, “Florida Spring Break Revisited 2025.” It showed two photos: Seth and Pamela as a young couple in 1985 and a recent photo of them.

“We planned to revisit our three favorite locations from Spring Break, assuming they still existed. We started with Buddha’s Alligator Ranch. When we found the correct dirt road, it ended at Jane Green Creek. The bridge was out and looked like it wouldn’t be rebuilt. The sign over Buddha’s entrance hadn’t been repainted in decades by the look of it, and it tilted precariously to the right. Rather than getting out of the rented 4-wheel drive SUV to help Seth negotiate turning around, I had him back away from the creek to a spot wide enough to turn around. Neither of us wanted to know what happened to Buddha’s alligators.”

The crowd laughed, and Seth answered a couple of questions before bringing up the next slide, “Wet and Wild 2025,” showing an airboat full of passengers.

“Bull Creek Billy’s Lake Park on Billy Lake is still a popular destination. Benny retired years ago, and his airboat rental company folded. Today, there are sleek new airboats on the lake ready to take a boat full of customers on a harrowing ride up and down the lake. Naturally, we went on a speedy airboat tour. This time, we remembered to leave our hats in the car. Thankfully, we left our cell phones behind, too. By the end of the tour, no one in the boat was dry. It made no difference where you sat. The goal of the airboat driver was to get you drenched head to toe repeatedly.”

Seth pointed to the third row of the boat on the screen. There they sat, dripping wet but smiling. “We didn’t get to drive the boat this time, but it was a lot of fast fun. The tour lasted

longer than we recalled Benny’s original airboat tour, and we had plenty of action turns, sudden stops, and speedy startups. Best of all, no one saw any alligators, and no one fell out of the boat. We recommend the tour, but not for anyone with a heart condition.” He showed a brief video of an airboat tour speeding along the lake.

Pamela brought up the next slide. “Two Drink Limit 2025,” showing a patio filled with a cheerful crowd of people, a neon sign for Beverly’s Beverages Bar, and an old building with a tarp covering part of the roof.

“We spent the middle of our week stuck at the resort. More rain fell from the sky than the amount of water in Billy Lake. After the storms subsided, we decided to spend our last night of vacation at Beverly’s Beverages Bar.” She held up a vintage Beverly’s Beverages Bar t-shirt as proof of their visit.

“If you recall from our first trip in 1985, there was a wall filled with the names of drinks available at the bar. There were a few funny drink names listed. We hoped to find more this time. Driving down the road that still looked like it was on the edge of town, we almost didn’t stop. The neon sign was lit, and the parking lot in front had several vehicles, but the building looked like a train wreck. Turning into the lot, we discussed turning around or staying. In a moment of silent thought, we heard music. Rolling down the windows, we heard laughter coming from the back of the building.”

Seth took over again. “I went to check it out, and when I saw what was happening, I returned to the vehicle to retrieve Pamela. The tarp on the roof covered the damage caused when a tree collapsed during the storms. The cut-up remains had been neatly stacked next to the building. The commotion coming from the back side of the building reminded me of our first visit. I remembered the backyard patio in 1985. Older customers gravitated there, probably to escape the loud music and wall-to-wall college students filling the main bar. When we rounded the back corner of the building, we found a crowd partying like it was Spring Break.”

Pamela waved glittery pom-poms to demonstrate the party effect.

“They welcomed us with smiles and sat us at the picnic table closest to the back door. From that angle, we could see the wall covered top to bottom with drinks having unusual names. The kitchen and bar were open, but no one could sit inside. Someone had printed out photos of the wall so we could select our drinks with ease. After we shared what had brought us there that night, we ordered cheeseburger platters, including fried pickles. We chased them down with a tall glass of pumpkin beer as we listened to the history of Bev’s bar shared by those who knew it best: Beverly, Pete, and Jack. Bev and Pete retired years ago, giving Jack the bar. Their wall drink list expanded annually as

Continued on page 53

part of their educational scholarship fund. They met on the first day of fall to sample five new drinks and voted for the two to add to the wall. Those would be the special drinks until the first way of winter. Each one sold raised money for their scholarship fund. After all these years, every drink listed on the wall is still available to order.”

Pamela brought up the next slide. “Fall Drinks,” with a picture of a 5-drink flight paddle.

“We picked 5 drinks from the wall, what they call a 5-wall sample flight. In order from the left, we selected: a comfy Dixie’s Hot Carmel Toddy, the Pine Needle-infused Whiskey, the flavorful Rum Maple Cocktail, the yummy Cider Pear Cinnamon Punch, and a lip-smacking Cranberry Chilled Bourbon. Thankfully, the samples were jigger-sized. Any larger and we wouldn’t be driving back to the resort until morning. Mind you, the prospect of sleeping in the rental vehicle in the bar parking lot was not inviting enough for us to chance it. Besides, we had a morning flight to catch and still needed to pack. In case you haven’t guessed by now, we are very casual drinkers. We enjoyed chatting and making new friends too much to try putting a dent in the wall drink list.” Pamela stepped over to Seth’s side.

“We recommend Beverly’s Beverages Bar to each of you if you’re ever anywhere near there. The patio crowd is entertaining, the food is excellent, and the drinks are uniquely flavorful. My ribs were sore for three days because of laughing the evening away. We also happily donated to their educational scholarship fund. We believe it’s a worthwhile cause. Through the years, the photo of each student who has benefited from the fund is posted on the opposite wall in the bar. There is little space left. Jack is considering adding moveable wall panels so visitors can see all the students and provide room to add many

more through the years. If anyone is interested in learning more about their scholarship fund,” Seth advanced to the next slide, “here is the QR-Code for their website.”

Pamela nodded to the gentleman who had first introduced them, who was standing next to the light switches. He turned up the lights. “Please turn to a blank sheet of paper on your notepad,” she said, “and print your name on the top line.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, that’s how we spent our first and most recent Florida vacations. Did everyone take plenty of notes? Are you ready for the quiz?” Seth brought up the quiz slide. “Because reading the questions may be difficult at the back of the room, I’ll read each question and give you time to write your response on your paper. When we’re done, Pamela will collect your quizzes so our host, Mr. Thomas, can select the winner of the restaurant raffle. We hope you enjoyed our talk. Thank you.”

The audience clapped as they prepared to take the quiz.

“The first question is: Where did we spend Spring Break in 1985? The second question requires a yes or no answer: Does Florida have a nickname? The third question is multiple choice: Did we see a. alligators or b. crocodiles on our trip? The fourth question requires a yes or no answer: Did we both drive the airboat? Your last question is: Who is Bev?”

Once everyone appeared done, Pamela collected the sheets and helped Mr. Thomas sort them while Seth fielded more audience questions. Once they had found all the sheets with the correct answers, Mr. Thomas fanned them and had Pamela pick one. After rejoining Seth at the front of the room, Pamela handed him the winner’s answer sheet.

“Today’s restaurant raffle winner is Malcolm George,” he said. “Thank you all for joining us today for our presentation on Florida 40 years later.”

Pamela turned to kiss Seth, who drew her into a bear hug. “When are we returning to Florida?”

# 6 Poems by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## DSCH\*: Obituary in C Minor

*The Autobiography of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8*

Tonight we will walk out,  
Carol and I together,  
and we will look above the western horizon,  
where seven stars will join Earth ‘

in a gathering as close  
as family separated  
by distances and time  
and distortion and delusion.

\*\*\*

But now  
I relive the kindred ties of Shostakovich's  
final string quartet, his Obituary he said.

In and out of every nightmare,  
try to compose, new and new and new, its happenings.  
The obituary, in C minor,  
has had 65 years now to re-compose itself,  
and does with each new ear.

True to its purpose then the work collects pasts  
to display the silence of one final end.  
As perhaps each of us, one after another,  
the notes enter separately and blind to the pain  
we are each entitled to display as scars.

Continued on page 55

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.



Some notes are bullet wounds,  
spread around into the Russian cold like ice pellets  
to open the minds of Stalin's victims to the clear reason  
of Five-Year Plans and artists to their doctrinal failings.  
Notes from one's composition

may become the obituary of the suicidal pasts  
and a new autobiography in the tonal present, in C minor.  
DSCH will have three days.  
For the artist in a dying land it is most honorable  
to weep for what can no longer happen, but will.

We relive what we never lived through before,  
from the Year of Four Emperors (one of whom  
had the drear fortune to die of natural causes)  
to the current gaggle of fattened princelings waiting  
in the shambles to gill and gut their helpless prey,

to watch their generation of lemmings  
that snap and bite  
all the way to the blooded rocks  
washed clean by each striving wave  
to ooze into the forgetting ocean streams.

\*\*\*

The first players of the quartet finished  
to find their composer weeping quietly,  
his face buried into the hands that wielded  
the grave-yard shovel of his pen.  
They pack their instruments in silence.

They leave  
one by one into DSCH's afterlives.  
The Quartet wafts its themes into the air  
like soul-healing petals,  
blown too far to heal.

\*\*\*

We will not see the planets, Carol and I.  
They will, those that appear at all  
be no more than half-illuminated dots  
drifting above dirty clouds

of that human delusion  
that can pocket a spinning world  
to pay one day for the murdered beauty,  
a murmur in the four strings—our obituary.

*\*DSCH—A musical motif that Shostakovich used as a code for  
his own name, as spelled in German.*

# My Aspirations Are Gray Still

*in memory of B. Wilberforce Wooster*

Preparing aspiration, I shall exhale now.  
First I shall open the front door.

I shall go outside and I shall look up  
toward the stars.  
I inhale. I inhale deeply.

I shall look into the stars and then  
I shall see that I see no stars.  
The night is cloudless. The night is moonless.  
I hold my breath.

The night is lightless except for the stars though  
I see no stars.  
The sky I may aspire to look into is a gray sky.

I exhale. I inhale. I inspire.  
I hold my beath. I exhale.  
I inhale again deeply. I open the door.

My breath is still held.  
I go back in. I exhale.

I exhale from the depths.  
I exhale until my lungs have expired  
into the air-conditioned room.

Still exhaled, I hold my lungs empty.  
The air in the room inurns my expiration.  
The air in the room inurns my share of the gray  
that was the sky and the stars  
and the air around me.

\*\*\*

My expiration, my breathing for eighty years  
on Earth must be no less gray  
than what I inhaled of the night.  
I inhale. To what,  
gray air being what I inhale,  
shall I aspire? I hold my breath.  
I have inspired now and now I hold my inspiration.

**Continued on page 57**

**Continued from page 56**

What color is left for inspiration?

The color left for inspiration is the same  
as the color left for expiration.

I shall, you suggest, aspire toward immortality.

What color will immortality choose for itself  
and toward which I should aspire?

Is gray part of the color wheel?

Is black part of the color wheel?

Is white part of the color wheel?

Perhaps I shall aspire to the innocent vision  
of surviving dogs circling their own aspirations,  
the odors of our shared expiring horizon, gray

Still

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# ‘Shoenberg’s Last Word Was Harmonious!’

Is the last-word watchword the signal to watch *from*  
as much (more?) as *for*?

I shall, who have advanced the necessity of Story,  
save that word for my own final breath—  
Then you at the bed will think that  
I want my life to be told for posterity.

You will not know that I mean—  
what I might (might not) want told  
is what proceeds from Story—  
and that might be silence.  
But even silence remains, a word.  
Let death stop at a start, microphysics beyond. . .

Our lives tell no story.  
Our narratives  
are parts and particles of speech  
composed into petty exposition.

*non — je ne  
laisserai pas  
le néant*

. . . and consider also  
the mere time it took you  
to read the words on that page.  
Time itself is the repository of every atom.  
And what else may be coeval?  
Time without atoms is bereft of all things:  
the atoms and all that atoms compose.

The oblivion that is you is  
still minutely finite  
until time—confined to infinity?  
shackled to endlessness,  
composed around atoms, runs out. Tries to?

Time gone, so runs away  
the final possibility of your peculiar  
terror of death.

Or no.  
Our lives offer up the atoms  
of story. Of Lucretius . . .  
the blind cosmos that is—  
the mad gods we invent.  
Mammalian hallucinations  
ruptured from chthonic sanity.

© 2025

# For the Beauty of Gems and Metals

Come under. Come under!  
Tezcatlipoca,  
Tezcatlipoca del Norte  
invites you!  
Come under from the rage of the sun.

Come to where it is cool above the pulsing  
magma that breathes beneath  
the soothing fabrication of climate  
you imagine you still control.

You will caress the gentle cooling,  
the congealing wads of gold, molded  
to the shape of your grasp,

the claws of your eyes wide open  
above the magma-belched diamonds,  
blue, yellow—  
clear,

clear as virtual dreams clenched,  
jammed tight into your pockets,  
woven into the intestines of your clean greed.  
Open wide.

Lucky you.  
Not having cold obsidian's mirror acuity to mull  
beyond pure reason,  
a literality beyond thought.

Imagine your safety.  
Bring a friend.  
Come under where it is cool, where  
Earth Herself  
offers relief from the soul-searing surface.

The fire of desert rock,  
the gathering heat,  
whirling molecules of evolution,  
the magma and moil  
of evolution in the turbine of new eruption.

Continued on page 60

Come under. Come under, the chill  
obsidian voice repeats.  
Come under!  
Earth invites you,  
who offers relief from the heat,  
relief from the truth that the sun sends  
racing toward the jiggling  
atoms you know as you, that,

for your illusion of comfort  
you must not know how,  
in a shadow of security, evolves  
the re-creative lighting  
of your extinction.

© 2025

# Pewter

*re-remembering James Baldwin*

Windshear slaps,  
rips into an abandoned roof,  
whines through the strings

of a smashed piano, banshees  
an angry injured barn owl  
awake, who hisses, snarls,

flaps a lame wing toward  
a storm-blasted curio-  
bland bust of Plato.

They cohabit for seconds  
the same augury  
in the same looming

corrugation of clouds.  
Owl and storm-knapped marble:  
axial remnants.

Which broken emblem  
will recognize first  
whether gray horizon

obscures or signals flood  
or fire? What human  
is left on scarred Earth

willing to rise above  
the ruined cottage,  
to brave flying shards,

to assess some evidence of fate,  
when delusions explode  
for the final next time?

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# 'Round the Troposphere

*for and in memory of Frank D'Angelo*

Wraithfully, like as not it is best  
not to argue with the gods we invent—  
until after we have become acquainted that is.

If the invention is accidental,  
the poet's glass or,  
well yes, four. *Vin ordinaire, s'il vous plaît*—  
then we can't be expected  
to recognize what we flout. Besides,

Dionysos is perhaps the only self-invented god,  
accidentally probably,  
but by one of us, spirited so to speak,  
other inventors having died off  
into the side shadows,

if an amphitheater has shadows outside  
the shadows of the Oidipos family,  
the Erinyes, and poets.

The invention planned and executed—  
executed gods are always popular,  
their dead eyes so puppet-like  
in their re-appearances,  
their enervating grace.

Our arguments against them  
are arguments against their inventors,  
ourselves, herein, whitherin residing the core  
of the maniacal sanity of artists—

the way of the poet,  
of the prophet,  
of the scapegoat.

Dangerous work, so have at it!  
Lunge. Parry.  
Dance!

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**For more details, go to The Arizona Consortium  
for the Arts website, [www.artizona.org](http://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](http://www.artizona.org) or [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://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.

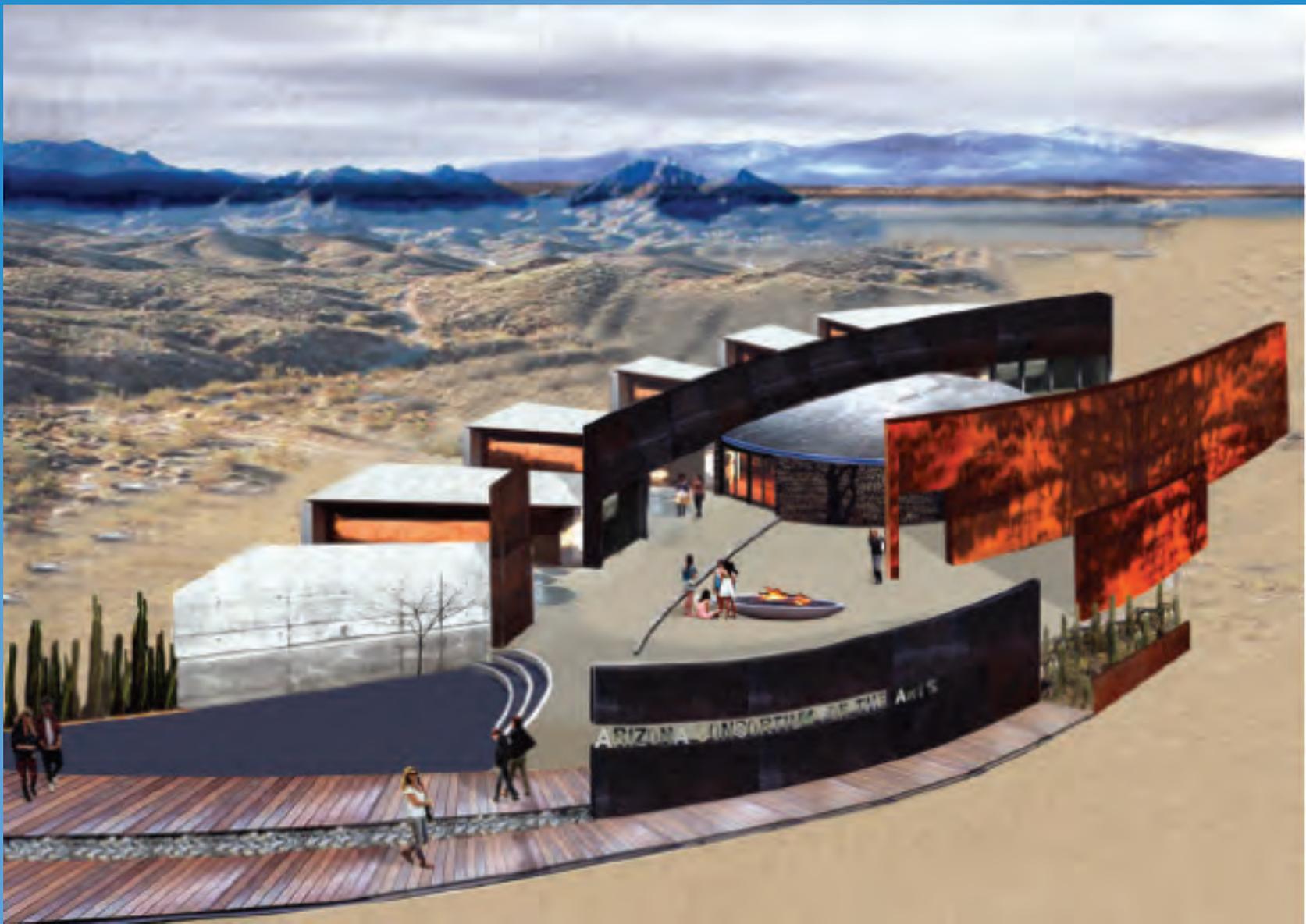
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form.

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](mailto: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](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).



**Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor:** Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the managing editor of six monthly newspapers and websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto: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](http://mboyerart.com).

## Check our websites for news on the arts



The Blue Guitar Magazine's website is [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).  
Like us on Facebook.  
Follow @BlueGuitarMagAZ on Twitter.

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

[www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org](http://www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org)

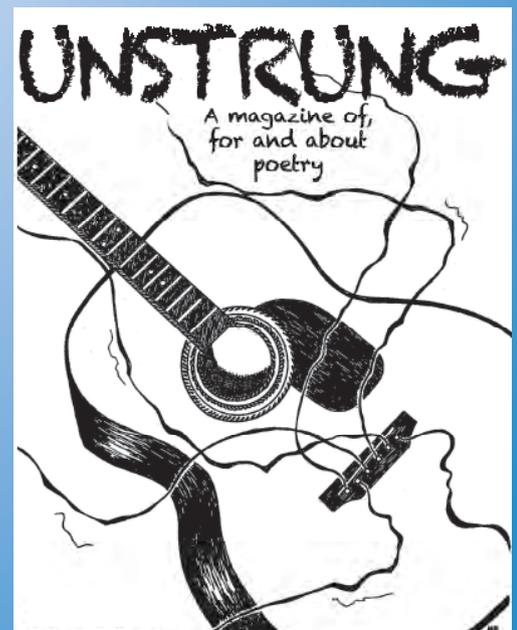
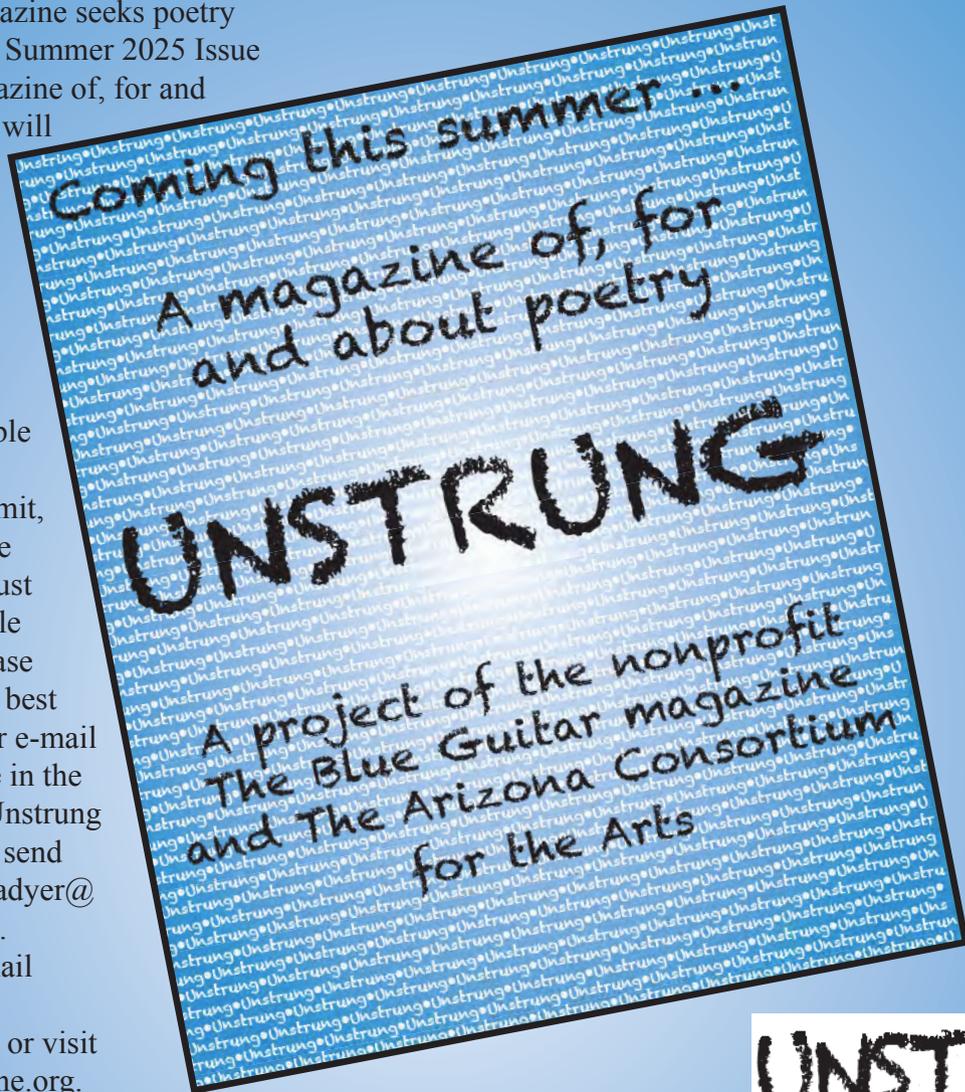
Spring 2025

# A Call to Poets for the 2025 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2025 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](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, e-mail Rebecca at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org) or visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://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](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://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

**T**he 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, 2025, 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 (no AI-generated works). 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](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For additional information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://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](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://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

**T**he 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, 2025, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona (no AI-generated works). 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](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For additional information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

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[www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).

# A Call to Writers for Fall 2025



**T**he Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2025 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work (no AI-generated works) 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](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

# A Call to Artists for Fall 2025

**T**he Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Fall 2025 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 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 original images (no AI-generated works) can be submitted. Please submit images of work by e-mail and 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](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://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](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://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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Volume 17,  
Number 1  
Spring Issue  
**FREE!**

*“Things  
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