

UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,
for and about
poetry



Summer 2012

The Poets

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Unstrung is a project of the nonprofits The Blue Guitar
and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts



Karen B. Call

Four Mornings

May 27, 2012

I woke at 3:30 and listened to the night silence.
The clock's blue beam shown into the room
and I turned over hoping to go back to sleep.

I woke again at 5:30. Cool air breezed around me;
the sound of a thousand moths hovered above me.
Light threaded through the open door.

I lay still and listened to the cooing of distant doves.
You slept and I watched your chest rise and fall
as the CPAP machine made its white noise.

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There is a pocket of coolness this morning;
a storm in the Pacific Ocean has made magical air
just for the two of us.

May 28, 2012

It's 5:30 a.m. on Memorial Day this year.
I'm up because my neighbor
dragged his garbage and recycle dumpsters
to the curb. I look out the kitchen window.

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Continued from page 3

A rabbit hops around the yard across the street.
It pauses before it scurries over the hard-packed dirt
to a bush, kicking up dust
that flurries then drifts, settling into a new place.
A baby bunny scampers under the prickly pear,
then to the curb, mama now beside him.

Birds soar above them and land in the creosote bushes
swaying on thin branches.
Shining through the leaves the sun makes lacy patterns
on the dirt.

I smile to myself and breathe.

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May 30, 2012

I woke at 3:30 a.m.
I lay listening to a cat yowl
hoping to fall back asleep
and I breathed.

I woke at 5:30 a.m.
I lay feeling the cool air brush by my face
doves cooed in the distance.

I woke at 6:50 a.m.
I lay knowing I was alone
my husband awake and gone.

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Continued from page 4

I rose at 7 a.m.
and dressed for my walk.

As I walked I wondered if one morning
the sun might pause
and drift back to sleep to rise later.

I met other walkers and we nodded.
I wanted to ask them what they would think
if the sun dozed off one morning
and didn't make it up as usual.

June 3, 2012

This morning on my walk
I stopped to look at a saguaro cactus
covered with white blooms near its crown,
that place from which it grows.

This morning on my walk
I came upon an old man
wearing a tan straw hat at a jaunty angle
and a long-sleeved white shirt
with creases down the sleeves.
He walked with a woman
wearing a turquoise sweater
and leaning on a cane.
He touched her arm;
she turned her head and smiled.

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This morning on my walk
I remembered
when we walked together,
talked, laughed and you introduced me
to your Arizona.

This morning back at home
I look for the crown of our togetherness,
that place from which we grow.

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Karen B. Call

Now I'm working on poems about Tucson mornings. I have a notepad and small flashlight by the bed so I won't waken my husband as I write those early hours' thoughts and any when I waken. I take a morning walk in my neighborhood and make notes of what catches my attention.

At home with coffee I begin the poem by reviewing the morning's notes and writing my thoughts down to see how it all fits together. At this stage I write across the page, prose style. I'm not concerned with verses, line breaks or word order yet. I'm figuring out what I'm trying to say. When the words are down, I read it aloud to hear what I have. Then I rearrange it all into the right order, tighten the piece, make adjustments and read the poem aloud several times. When I don't have any more changes to make, I put it away to mellow overnight. I'll finish it usually the next day but later I'll still tweak poems.

7



Photo courtesy of Jan Scoggins

Karen Call came to Tucson on New Year's Eve 2001 from northern Wyoming. She retired while in Tucson and stayed to make it her home. Karen has essays in "Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West" and "Woven on the Wind: Women Write About Friendship in the Sagebrush West." She travels with her husband, Bill, who she met in Tucson, to visit far-off places and their three sons, wives and three grandchildren (so far) in Pennsylvania, Colorado and Oregon. She has been a member of a snail-mail poetry round robin for more than 15 years. Contact her at Karenmb@cox.net.

Cathy Capozzoli

Send Rain

When fresh clouds
frame winter mountains,
thickets of dirt
turn to silt as
water threads the early river.

Thin hairs coil
into fine fertile earth,
now moist for the root.

8

First roses light the thaw,
set the melting path
with first takes of leaves.

Snakes nest in rising sunlight.
Bees visit the blooming lotus.
Blossoms thread abandoned limbs.

May the branches of banyans
draw water to dried ink—
roots to my pen,
the river to my hand.

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Cathy Capozzoli

Not all words in English were created poetically.

I love words that resonate inside me. I keep paper all around me, in my car, my purse, even my kitchen. When I hear a word that fills me with love or fear or melancholy or feelings of solitude, I write it down, and stash these scraps of paper in a messy binder that also has copies of favorite poems or prose passages that arrive in my life. These come from everywhere--the internet, books of poetry, the New York Times.

I also hear phrases or poetic combinations of words in conversations in my own head, with others, overheard in hallways or restaurants. I write down these segments, too, and add to the stash in my crusty binder.

I keep two journals at my desk, one for musings in sentence form, and the other for words or phrases that leap into my hands as I work. Lately, I have opened a file on my computer, and store images and phrases in there, too.

To write poetry, I sit quietly at my desk, with these scraps and musings spread in front of me. Like a patchwork quilt, one or many poems emerge, stitched together from scraps, threads and ruminations about living this embodied life.

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Photo courtesy of the author

Cathy Capozzoli is a poet and a student of acupuncture and oriental medicine in New Mexico. Her connection with Arizona, in addition to having lived there for 5 years, is that she loves the Arizona Consortium for the Arts and all of their literary endeavors. Her second collection of poetry, "Tenth Sky," is forthcoming from Blue Light Press of San Francisco in winter, 2012. She is at work on her third collection of poetry, "Five Seasons." Reach her at info@cathycapozzoli.com.

David Chorlton

Hohokam Woman and Metate in Madera Canyon

10
In oak shade close
to the stream running shallow
a Hohokam woman presses
her knees into depressions
they left when she rose
from her yesterday's work
and with a round stone
in the palm of her hand
grinds mesquite beans
into flour. She turns her wrist
a little to the left and back
while moving her arm
from the shoulder
and shifting her back
as she looks now and then
down to the bajada
and toward the huge rock head
that juts out of the earth
as if it had broken through time.
Leaning on her left arm

held stiff, she keeps pushing
with the right in a liquid
movement while the leaves
on the cottonwoods behind her
rustle and from a tangle
of twigs and dry grass she hears
quail passing through. Pressure
and release continue. The woman's
easy motion never slows until
she takes hold of a branch
on the tree that gives her shade
and pulls herself upright when
in granite's late glow the mountains
rise and the ridgeline
burns into the empty blue
turning slowly rose with clouds
drifting across the day moon
where it cools from ivory to ice.
© 2012

David Chorlton

Please don't give me a manual and expect me to follow the instructions on how to make some new device or appliance work. It isn't that I can't understand the steps to be taken, just that something in me refuses to accept that there is a single way to reach any goal. Perhaps I'm imposing poetry onto the practical side of life, because when I'm writing I rely primarily on intuition. Getting started is always the most difficult part of the process for me. I sit down, often unaware of where I intend to go, or at least without a first line or idea that seems interesting enough to have me continue. Once I have that, on a good day I feel myself sinking into what I'm doing and building associations into a poem until the ending becomes apparent. It is a largely subconscious journey, one that holds my attention by courting the mysterious way things relate to each other. I heard once that the creative type doesn't have (or employ) the social filters most people automatically use, and that allows everything into and out of the mind regardless of how appropriate it is. Draw your own conclusions from this, but the creative advantage can easily turn into a social disadvantage! That happens when, as in my case, the process is never quite switched off.

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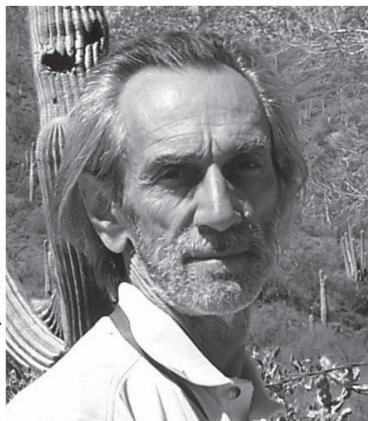


Photo courtesy of Roberta Chorlton

David Chorlton has lived in Phoenix since 1978. Born in Austria, he grew up in Manchester, and in his early 20s he went to live in Vienna. In Arizona he has grown ever more fascinated by the desert and its wildlife. In 2008, he won the Ronald Wardall Award from Rain Mountain Press for his chapbook "The Lost River," and in 2009 the Slipstream Chapbook Competition for "From the Age of Miracles." Other collections include "Return to Waking Life" (Main Street Rag Publishing Company) and "Waiting for the Quetzal" (March Street Press). "The Taste of Fog" is his first work of fiction. Contact him at rdchorlton@netzero.com.

David Chorlton

A Day in Arizona Territory

On the wooden balcony
above the Chinese laundry
globes of satin light hang
and calligraphic secrets
frame the door to the room
where prayers burn to a taper.
The first man to wake up
from his opium sleep
comes out for fresh air
and as he paces up and down,
his pentatonic footsteps
make the day's first sound.
Walking around, you might
hear next the straw broom
in a small boy's hands
as he sweeps the part of Granite Street
where the apple and cigar stand
has opened for business, or
the bottles clinking
on the plaza as half a dozen
men set up their wares in hope
of earning the first cents
of a fortune. Above the soft
percussion of hooves on the road

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when a horse pulls its owner
into Prescott on two wheels
come voices still hoarse from the mines
and sometimes the tongue
of the Irishman who can't stop
reliving his part in the Civil War
rattles louder than the train
as it takes the final bend
before arriving. Just outside town
Yavapai women
are stripping agave to the root
preparing it to roast. They live
where they're allowed to
now, remembering when all
the land they see was theirs.
On most days you listen
to what you most expect,
with bargaining and boasting
through the hours, except
when there's a moment
so quiet you can hear
the platform give on Courthouse Square
and a bone crack
in a robber's neck.

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David Chorlton

Salt River Merchant

Quong Hop sells barley in the dark
from a small adobe refuge
with no windows
where he spends each day
always in the same round-collared shirt
and blue suspenders.

When he steps outside for air
and stands at the doorway,
he leans back against
the rectangle of mystery
through which his customers must pass.

They have seen him
wearing a suit and bowler hat
in the annual procession
with the flag at its head and the gong
that is a golden splash
when he strikes it, but never know
what he is thinking
as they dismount from their horses,
and cautiously follow him inside
where he states a price
in Spanish, completes
the transaction in English,
and to say goodbye
reverts to his habitual Chinese.

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David Chorlton

Tombstone

We could be forgiven
for mistaking the photograph
to have been taken at a crucifixion,
or else been modeled on a painting
from the renaissance, so composed
are those beneath the body, limp as it is,
against the pole, but John Heath
couldn't be forgiven
for his part in the murders
down in Bisbee; protestations
of his innocence as the white
handkerchief was tied around his face
be damned. The cross bar
is at the very top of the pole, but too short
to have borne the man's arms. The rope
is tossed over it,
but the lack of tension
in the left knee and the way the head
appears weighted down with resignation
suggest there was nothing more to be done.
The picture shows sky all the way
down to the grey suggestion
of a mountain as backdrop
to the scene. It was, according to the shadows
cast by hat brims

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across the eyes of the men standing close
to the telegraph pole, a sunny day
for February, so the miners
dressed for daylight could enjoy it
after their hours in the dark. They turn
toward the camera with no urgency,
content to be a part
of a fine day on which there happened
to be a distraction to break
their monotony of drink and smokes.
The men had arrived at the jail
at the time the Chinaman was due
with breakfast and when the Sheriff tried
to stop them he was quietly removed.
It was their way
of advancing Arizona, they wrote
on a placard posted on the pole,
which made the occasion
a useful lesson to the children
whose mothers brought them
out to look, a lesson endorsed
by the coroner's jury,
who concluded that death
occurred through emphysema,
caused by strangulation, which, for all
anybody knows, was
self-inflicted.

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David Chorlton

Geronimo's Birds

It must have seemed a good time
in December, late in the eighteen-eighties,
to wear civilian clothes
and find a patch of sunlight
in which to spread white cloth
for an officers' picnic
with the wives relaxed as though
the rustling in the nearby trees
had come from jays and not
Geronimo. The setting made
the food taste good, and when
a spotted towhee flashed
past the party, one lady
called it pretty while others looked
to see what made it fly. These were
nervous years with raids made unexpectedly
and with the heat came
hummingbirds like drops of blood
suspended in the air, present
for a second and gone
as fast as horses
fleeing into Mexico. A general
in July would sit back on his porch
curved into the canvas
on a folding chair and watch an oriole

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perching high enough to see
whether there were Indians
close by, while Geronimo would never
rest. He circled every target
the way the red-tailed hawks do,
looking first from far away
and following the silence
to a kill. I never do wrong ,
he told General Crook, without a cause .
And the Cooper's hawk
never takes a gilded flicker
without having an appetite. Geronimo's people
were hungry. They were quick
but the land on which they lived
changed faster than they
could run. When thick-billed parrots
flew in the mountains
Geronimo heard their calls
as laughter in the pines, and soon
he was no longer there to listen.
Then the parrots disappeared
and the trees could not remember them
when some returned years later,
only to be hunted by
the stronger birds, the ones
who were never moved away
and kept in bland captivity.

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David Chorlton

Bisbee 1912

When they walk along the Gulch
the men step sharply
to avoid the effluent that streams
freely past the restaurant
whose tablecloths are always fresh
and the store
where food is canned and stacked
in pyramids and rows as orderly as if
it were a temple where
a man might pray for his own
preservation. Everybody breathes
the same air, with the smelter
never sleeping. Karl the tailor's
job is to make them look human
once they have washed away the mine dirt,
and Nobile sells them general
merchandise with his colleague, Medigovich,
who's growing concerned
that the Serbs who came to work
are leaving to fight
their country's newest war behind a flag
that leads them to the train
waiting to allow them time
to reconsider their allegiance

19

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to the present versus that to the past. As the brass
band plays to urge them on
the ladies at the YWCA don't even look up
from the linens they repair
while they sit in wicker chairs
with their sewing machine running almost
as fast as the needles
in their chattering mouths. They have
everyone's name on the tips
of their tongues, except for the ones
nobody uses, not here
with the border so close, where
Mexican describes each Jose, Miguel and Maria.

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20

James M. Gaitis

A Self-Reflection on the Origins of Poems

In this mediocrity
of almost once
and nearly twice
at times an urgent, reminding call
visits itself
upon me

A thought
perhaps generically inclined
emotional, metaphysic
associates finite words,
quantifyingly definitional,
to meld in personal phrases
propositions
of a self-styled meter

21

And
if the opening moves
are played
the pawn
skirmishing
within the framework
of individual and etymological limitation
might do well to sacrifice
the Amazonian queen

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I realize
 this radical frivolity
might presage things
 here still to come
What? Should I succumb
 to a Delphic failure
 to adequately measure
 the interiors
before I exit
 the peripheral room?

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22

James M. Gaitis

When I sit down to write a poem, I am very much like a runner at the starting block who cannot race unless he finds a way to translate the sound of the starting gun into physical motion. Just like the runner who knows that a bad first step will be fatal to his chances of winning the race, a misstep by me in selecting the right first words to a poem or the right opening phrase most often spells doom for my effort. I depend on the element of risk, which I believe underlies great poetry writing and the success of many great poets. Risk, it might be said, can open many unseen doors. Once the opening moves are made (i.e., the first words are written), I believe writers of poetry do well to risk allowing the poem to emerge subconsciously from their innermost emotions, which arguably are better suited to exploit the infinite number of ways that vocabulary, when unfettered, can interact to conjoin expression and beauty into the innumerable forms that poetry can take. In Siddharthan terms, let the fall be free.

23

James Gaitis (pictured at his home in Montana) earned a BA in English Lit from the University of Notre Dame and a JD from the University of Iowa. A former resident of Tucson, he is the author of two novels, including *The Nation's Highest Honor*—a desert satire. He and his beautiful wife currently live in Montana's remote North Fork of the Flathead, on the west flank of Glacier National Park. Contact the poet at gaitis1@aol.com.

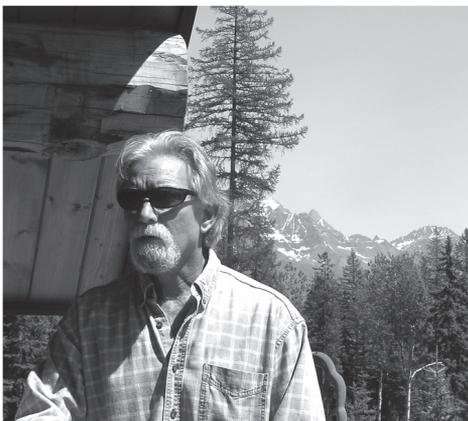


Photo courtesy of the author

Amanda Kay Gilleland

Serenity

When my last breath leaves my body,
a lily reaching full bloom,
pine trees will sigh in the wind
and water will cut through narrow creeks
singing me to sleep.
My skin will absorb my sister's tears,
Small drops of salt water,
each one full of love.
We shall cry together,
until both our dark chocolate eyes
dry in the warm comfort of the sun's rays,
and all that are left are wet trails running down our cheeks.
My father will clutch my hand tenderly
and with his hard calloused palm against mine,
I will be braver.
My Mom will hold me in her arms,
and rub my back lightly, her fingertips like silk waterfalls.
With my head in her lap,
my hand in his,
her tears mixed with mine,
the ocean's gentle tide will take me.

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24

Amanda Kay Gilleland

As a child, I always assumed that poets were conceited and snobby members of the upper-class echelon. I imagined Emily Dickinson, who bore a strong resemblance to my fourth-grade English teacher, smiting me with her wit and ambiguity, while holding a rose-patterned teacup. In my mind, a person was only wholly pompous if they toted around flowered teacups everywhere. I went around for years telling people I despised poetry, never realizing that two of my favorite childhood authors, Shel Silverstein and Dr. Seuss, were writing poetry in the books I adored so much.

It wasn't until high school that I truly realized the beauty and power a poem can hold. The first poem I ever wrote was about a homeless woman I had spoken to briefly outside a grocery store as a child. This woman and our conversation haunted me for quite a long time, appearing in my dreams over the years, and tugging at something in the back of my mind. I write poetry to stop those tugs.

25

Mandi Gilleland is a young poet and aspiring author who lives in Tucson, and loves the desert sun almost as much as she does writing. She volunteers at the University of Arizona Medical Center, and has a deeply rooted addiction to reading literature. She is currently studying English Language and Physiology at the University of Arizona. You can reach her at akg2@email.arizona.edu.



Photo courtesy of the author

Amanda Kay Gilleland

The Great White Lady

You look at me through the eyes of the sycamore.
Towering and twittering, life teeming through your limbs,
your sagging skin is almost completely molted.
Behind it the breathtaking bone white shines through.
Slender and strong no wind moves you.
What secrets are hidden in the curve of your limbs?
In between your index finger and thumb?
In the smoke you exhale into the dark decrepit night?
When you sweep the stairwell of dust over and over again
do you think of the child who wanted to learn but taught instead?
When your back creaks and your breath becomes ragged,
and the arches of your feet scream in agony,
you still stand tall ironing out every wrinkle
though your bark is peeling apart.
The sun will come out tomorrow you sing,
the wind waltzing through your leaves,
tomorrow there will be sun.

© 2012

26

Amanda Kay Gilleland

Sunshine

Swaying in the torn leather passenger seat
of my saffron nineteen seventy Volkswagen
beetle

Underneath the round perturbed fishbowl
nestled inside a book whose pages were cut by a scalpel
into perfect rectangular prisms

Shines a piece of the sun

Hot and white, burning brighter than a child's laughter in summertime.

Needless, endless, breathless, trestles holding me
everlasting in an embrace warmer
than hot chocolate.

© 2012

27

Ryan Holden

Camera Lucida

Can I trace the bridge
of her nose? Adjust
the angle of sunlight
onto thin wax paper,
the kind her butcher
wraps the chicken in.

Rub charcoal on glass,
cast her shade
on sheaf after sheaf.

Can I hold her face
captive in a prism?
Watch each color

drift from freckle
to earlobe to small
hairs on her shoulders.
The light washes
through each wrinkle,
each glass prison.

Is this the purpose
of a silver frame—
hold on, love, hold
on—bound
& her image in these
optical, illusory, rules?

© 2012

Ryan Holden

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Ryan Holden received his MFA in Creative Writing from Arizona State University. His poems have been recently published in Country Dog Review, ditch, and Ampersand Review. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2011 by the Hobble Creek Review. Reach the poet at ryanholdenasu@gmail.com.



Photo courtesy of Monday Storm

Ryan Holden

a conversation with the floor

30 & she answers with a sideways story to avoid a question she doesn't feel comfortable answering *are you homeless*—her name is on the lease—with a preamble a movement of sentence fragments (I stay at two places) or a downwards glance (I was paying the rent before when I was working I saved to pay in advance a large chunk but my roommate is paying it now) & she can answer (no) to the question so it'd seem there would be no reason to be ashamed or feel like a direct (no) might be problematic & I'm holding her hand so I can count the accents of her story each syllable an arrow marking a way to try to get behind the programming of her mouth & a freedom to be ok with a fear of judgment I can see how her eyes count the specks in the white floor tile to avoid looking over at me while she goes through a series of questions she doesn't want to be judged so she answers each question roundly with an explanation even while the lady asking reassures her that *it's just the questions I have to ask for this form* I can see the automatic movement of a pen filling out form after form each checkmark or signature can be read as assurance or indictment

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& I hold her hand or brush her hair out of her eyes
but what comfort can I provide her my judgment is
her terror & even though I'm wearing the shirt
from the night before & she's wearing my boxers
underneath her skirt a sense of modesty in the ER
with hospital gown & what that reveals is that I
hold her hand or brush her hair back or scratch her neck
& draw little hearts on her back with my nails she still
can't be sure whether I'm casting judgment through
my comfort & each heart drawn is a needle
in the blood infected & the doctor said *staph, probably*
MSRA he prescribes a standard antibiotic anyway
& we still have to go fill that but there's form
after form with questions that drive her eyes into the floor
& leave the little nail-drawings in flesh gasping
trying to say that *I love you & everything's going to be*
ok but each voice is choked off by form after form
& each sideways story is necessary in its roundabout
way so I hold her hand in that cold room & wait
for the pen to stop checking boxes & an indictment in her eyes

© 2012

Ryan Holden

mosaic collection

when that mirror
shattered

you polished
every shard

& placed each one
in a box you used

to build walls
at odd angles

you glued
the pieces to

scattering light
in all directions—

a scar on your left hand
matches your mother's

your real one
not the reflection
who raised you
© 2012

32

Ryan Holden

camera obscura

it's us
standing in the room now
drilling a hole in the shoebox-
sized coffin to let
the light in there
is no film but the image
of us can stay lit on your
eyes developed on your skin
& it is something
for you to carry after
we have photos of you—first step
first trip to Disneyland first
day of school first bicycle
ride—your mother stopped
recording earlier this year—
a new digital camera ready
to give to you for college
that sits in a box
under my desk—we have
this small hole the image
of us may be blurry
but we need ourselves
recorded on your face

© 2012

33

Ryan Holden

Funhouse

Fold glass—
watch the body shrink & expand.

Circle light away from her
wrists as they vanish to sky.

Pause for a moment to look up at her
reflection—see color under the eyes.

Stretch glass into thinnesses—
wish for the radiation of bones.

© 2012

34

Ryan Holden

Clear Sky Building

A praying mantis on glass
wall stops to identify
itself in the soft reflection.

There is wonderment in a prayer
to forsake its identity in
opposite form—to speak

aloud the idea of forelegs
curled in on themselves,
to recognize the slight

discoloration of wings.
Undergo movements,
wind-blown & vagrant.

Will it disguise by twinning,
bowing its head to the mirror,
reciting small mantras

to capture a variant
nomenclature?
It's ego in crush

of stillness
to release its image—
the mortality of photons.

© 2012

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Melanie McCuin

On the Occasion Captain Alfred Stormalong Slew a Monster

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I remember her eyes, rolling and rolling like cannon balls in the seats of their translucent sockets. My captain's forearm flexed as he cut her tentacles. She was twisted into a double carrick knot. She was a loop around a loop around a loop, a string of suckers and swiveling hooks, he had pulled together and tied to the side of our boat. The first mate pulled her onto the deck of the Tuscarora, and we watched as Stormalong spread her legs to reveal a black beak, hard as diamonds, beaded with ice and salt water, a colossal mouth. She had been hunting near our clipper ship. I had never seen one such as her, an undulating muscle, a fan of arms, waving above her mantle like pink kelp. Our ship's cook poked at her gills, fingered her insides, sang about the man who brought her to the surface. *To my aye, Stormalong, to my aye ...* Her beak opened, then closed, opened, then closed, as she drowned, and I wondered what she saw in those last minutes, as the gulls circled the main mast. Was it only Stormalong's knife, swift as a gunner's hand, ready to dig out the great opals that were her eyes?

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Melanie McCuin

All Writers Are Pirates, All Pirates Are Thieves

A poem is not built from nothing. As writers, we draw from a bank of memories to create something new. But what happens when we continuously craft our verse from the same tired details? A year ago, I was relying too heavily on my previous experiences. My poems were repetitive. So I started interviewing people—friends, relatives, bar patrons—sifting through their reminiscences, looking for material. I did not ask them the obvious questions—“How did that make you feel?”—but the unobvious questions. For example, I asked a friend about her favorite place to hide when she was a girl.

What did it smell like? I said.

Turnips and rotted wood, she replied.

She reconstructed her grandparents’ shed for me from recollections of saws, mold, and the squeaks of mice. I scavenged the meatiest bits and fused them with my memories to produce a new poem. Am I a thief? Yes. But shouldn’t all writers pillage the shores of foreign memory for a glint of lost gold?

37

Melanie McCuin graduated from Arizona State University in 2005 with a BA in History. She has been published in *The Blue Guitar*, *The Gila River Review*, and *The Salt River Review*. She plans to pursue an MA in English at Northern Arizona University beginning in the fall of 2012. Reach her at melanie.mccuin@gmail.com.



Photo courtesy of Judy Wood

Melanie McCuin

As My Mother Washes the Dishes

Her hands are not five-finned fish pushing through the water. They are not the paws of some mutt walking down the street in moonlight. They are wanted, wet, people things. They work in tandem like two fleshy, long-boned thoughts, one answering the other with the press of a sponge. These are my mother's hands. They pulled at my hair with a sharp-tooth comb. They sewed bows and lace on the hems of my skirts. They dressed me, yanking shirt collars down so hard, I saw the lights of God. My mother's hands have slapped my mouth. I was thirteen then, with two hands of my own, wild bucks that rammed their horns through plaster and dug into the pants of my PJs at night. My mother, with hands so much like hands, could not understand the animals that grew from the stumps of my arms. She struck my face, I think, to connect with the human in me. Now, her hands dry the dishes and stack them high.

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Melanie McCuin

The Broken Column

(Based on Frida by Hayden Herrera)

Dear Frida,
when we met, you were hanging in a museum,
tough as bone. *You were a bomb*
wrapped in red ribbons
of surgical tape.

Your spine
had crumbled, but you were bright
as blood, and we shared a joke. Three jokes.
Cezanne, Picasso, Degas—
the bitches of Paris—we laughed
at their animal women,

those girls, lovers who entertained,
who posed with trained limbs, who exposed their
white breasts and underbellies,
especially Degas's dancers. He painted them
as rats, didn't he? They scratched their backs for him
with tiny paws.

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Continued on page 40

Not you, Friducha. You stand in deserts
inherited at birth, painting rain forests, plump hearts,
bursting into flame, burning like the ends of your
final days.

That day you made me

want to drill deep to the marrow
of my bones and discover with honest eyes
the black velvet hair that coats
my upper lip.

© 2012

40

Melanie McCuin

Home Coming

Out here, near the Mekong River, we shit in barrels. No plumbing. So we piss in used oil containers, and after a week, two of us carry the mess down to the clearing to be burned. That's where we found Henry this morning, slumped in the corner, a body and half a head, leaning against a steaming drum. Two days back at Base and he shoots himself in the latrine. None of us said it out right, but Henry'd gone goofy when we were on leave in Japan, where we'd lost ourselves in acid rock and geisha wails. Now, he's being shipped home in pieces, a smashed cup. And I'm back in my hammock. I go to Mass tomorrow—06:00 hours—and usually I sleep heavy, except tonight I can't rest. They're burning our feces down to ash. The air is a wet blanket. A few tents down, someone is playing a record, someone is shuffling a deck, another guy is turning a page, Rimbaud, maybe Verlaine. Henry's mom is waking. She doesn't know what's coming home. She'll put the coffee on and yell at Henry's brother to feed the dog. Poor thing hasn't been fed regular, since Henry left. But they all make do while he's gone. Her husband repainted the garage by himself. She attends church alone and lights candles for the dear departed. Henry used to hold the offering, had done since he was a little boy, now the money disappears into the folds of her pocketbook, and she struggles to find it as the basket heads her way. She didn't want him to go, of course, but his number came up, and as Father says there is a season for everything, a time to sew, a time to reap, a time to speak and a time to hold one's tongue. It was Henry's time, and he writes, at least, long letters that smell like unknown dirt.

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He tells her about his friends, the colored boy who shares his socks, that quiet kid who always goes to Mass on Sundays, the one who tells him not to drink too much and plays the ukulele. It's comforting to know her son is surrounded by goodness, a nation of altar boys waist deep in the rivers of Vietnam, together. Henry's mom will check the mailbox at noon. She'll drive to the store and buy a carton of smokes, some bologna, a few apples. She'll tell the cashier Henry is fine, he's just fine, and when she gets home, she'll stop to remove her boots in the mudroom and just before she enters the kitchen, she'll kiss the cross around her neck, the way she does when she's hopeful, the way she did before Henry boarded the plane for Saigon.

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42

Kaitlin Meadows

The Ice Breaks At Last

It was the longest winter on record,
Cruel cold and deep ice,
Silence and solitary sleep,
Wordless loneliness
And frigid longing.
On the darkest night of no moon
We made love,
Warming ourselves slowly
On each other,
Melting old walls,
Disarming our long barricaded
Resistances.

The first sound
Of spring kindling,
Fish rousing,
Birds set to wild singing,
Awakening appreciative laughter
In the deep belly of the lake.
The long, bleak spell
Of our heart's sad winter
Broken
At last.
© 2012

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In the morning,
We awoke entwined,
Warm and amiable,
In the damp heat left
From our unfamiliar combustion,
And heard the unmistakable
Crack and rumble
Of ice breaking
On the frozen lake.

Kaitlin Meadows

My Reason For Writing Poems

I write poems to make discoveries,
To feed my obsessions,
To tame and shape my essential
curiosity,
To frame and enclose my internal
wonderment,
To say things I can never think to
say
At cocktail parties or to strangers
on trains,
And because, quite simply,
I must.
I write poems
Because they are the only path I
have

To explore the thickly embroi-
dered,
Heavily textured landscape
Of my imagination
And to map that place of no name
Where answers find new questions
And memories
Become truths.
I write poems
To invent myself
Right before your eyes
And to tell you the story
Of my emerging vocabulary,
Opening my word smith's heart
That you might enter
And find solace.

44

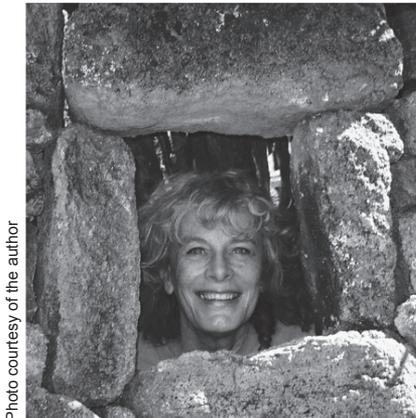


Photo courtesy of the author

Kaitlin Meadows is the Mistress of Mer-
riment at her enchanted art studio The
Creative Cottage where she teaches cre-
ativity and art classes, makes masks and
books, paints and sculpts, works with clay
and invents mischief. She holds a twice
monthly writing circle called Word Weav-
ers for women interested in writing and
sharing in a nurturing environment. Please
check out her classes at: [www.thunder-
moonstudios.wordpress.com](http://www.thundermoonstudios.wordpress.com) or visit her
website at: www.kaitlinmeadows.com or
contact her at: paloma@dakotacom.net.

Kaitlin Meadows

Learning To Speak

Does language wear out like hips
And insight fail like eyesight?
When we are gone,
Does rain fill up our space?
Do the oak trees
Remember us
And the lilacs remark our absence?

Siblings a decade apart,
We never spoke at home,
Like two continents drifting
In our own separate seas,
Two refugees
Of different wars,
Separated by the ocean of years.

But we talk now
In the waiting room of the hospital,
Over cold coffee and stale cake,
About pain, loneliness and loss,
Speaking the same language at last,
Realizing too late,
We always did.

45

Continued on page 46

*She cannot be dead,
I say,
Who will prune the roses,
Bake the birthday cakes,
Remember the names of all
My imaginary lovers?*

*She cannot be dead,
You say,
There are still golden jars
Of her marmalade in my cellar;
Handkerchiefs smelling of lavender,
Ironed and folded
In her top drawer,
Waiting to catch more tears.*

Together we agree,
She is with us now
More than she ever was,
Having taught us
At last
How to speak.
© 2012

Kaitlin Meadows

What Made Magellan Want To Know?

the Druids were convinced
by remarking the cross quarters
of sun and star,
arranging the light,
just so,
through alignments
of stone,
that they could engineer
a foot hold
on the chaos of the world

47

in the apothecary of life's
mysterious chemistry,
we try desperately
to concoct antidotes
for the poisons
we call
medicine

Continued on page 48

we struggle to reweave
raveled trust
in the hearts
of bloodied refugees
driven from their hearths
by the madness of
insuring democracy
with bombs

we eagerly suspend reason
just long enough
for someone to walk on water
or fishes and loaves
to materialize from
thin air,
but not for the Buddha
to lift his white lotus of peace

we believe urgently
that wine blood
drunk greedily
and thin wafers
of flesh
melting into nothingness
under our starving tongues
will save us
from ourselves

48

we screw our engineered seeds
into waiting furrows
of atomic spring,
drill into the thin sheath
of our wounded earth
to suck at parched teats
of oil rivers gone dry,
aquifers leached to sand

we build mirrored telescopes
to search the skies for others,
plumb the ocean's depth
for beings that never
seek the light,
gouge into the layered strata of
our pasts,
but refuse to remember
what cannot be forgotten

is it only me who wonders
what made Magellan want to know,
Pasteur discover healing in mold,
Gandhi realize peace
can never come
through violence,
and Frida paint
the whole complicated
geography of love
though broken
and betrayed?

© 2012

Mary Maxwell Miller

Wind Through Dried Grass

Pounding in the metal posts
to mend the gate the Hereford bull tore through,
(his blood now dried on my jacket)
I knelt to twist the wire on a fence
that should have been repaired months ago.

The tufts of red and white hair
I pulled from the barbed wire
were lifted by the wind, torn into smaller pieces
like vultures would rip decaying flesh.

50
The meat packers stated
he was the biggest animal
butchered in the plant.
His body had to be sliced in half
for the pulley to hoist him onto the rack
(as if that would make me proud)
and the two bullets lodged in his head
wouldn't deter from the quality of the skull
should I choose to keep it.

Continued on page 51

As a calf, he pushed against my knees.
I'd wrap my arms around him, scratch his red ears.
As a 2,500 pound adult bull
he leaned his huge head into my shoulders
for his ear scratching and tick removing.
But he would charge any male who ventured
into the fields near his female herd.

As I struggled to tighten
the last strand of barbed wire,
I hurled gloves, wire cutters,
post-hole digger and myself
down into the sand
very near to where he had laid
bruised and broken,
to rest,
to listen
to the wind rustling
through the dried weeds and grasses
that would turn green by spring
to feed his new born calves.

© 2012

51

Mary Maxwell Miller

How can humans not write? What do they do for an outlet???? Journaling, any form of “writing it all down,” solves a problem, saves a memory, lessens psychic noise, captures a new thought, quiets anger. Reading others keeps one knowledgeable, motivated and humble. For me, poetry, always poetry, for the discipline of cohesion in rewriting, rethinking, quieting mental chatter in this overly verbal, noisy world.

52

Native of Arizona, mostly a closet poet ... peeking out. Reach the poet at mmaxwellmiller2@juno.com.



Photo courtesy of the author

Kelly Nelson

Crash Land

Walk off the plane.
Think: *mistake*.
Haul two bags.
Find a room. The ice
that won't melt
under one snow
and the next
wasn't shown in the color brochures.

Two years later ...

53

Walk onto the plane.
Think: *at least*
there was a river.
Stow two bags.
Pick an aisle seat.
Unstiffen my lips
from their pinched embouchure.

© 2012

Kelly Nelson

54

What kind of artist are you? I was asked that question several times this summer when I was a Visiting Artist at the Cultural Center in New York Mills, Minnesota. A poet, I'd say, a word artist. Like a sculptor works with wood or a painter works with oils, my material is words and I try to make something out of words, something that holds together, something that makes sense beyond myself. There are many writing books and websites that offer prompts, tiny directives aimed at sparking your writing. Those rarely work for me. What does work is setting challenges for myself. How would I write about my two years spent in Michigan? I asked myself. What came out was "Crash Land." While taking a Spanish class, I wondered, how could I use Spanish words in my poems without italicizing the words and without losing the reader? "Gringa at the Ticket Booth" is one of those poems. Using my own prompts or writing challenges is one way I go about building art out of words.



Photo courtesy of Carrie Meyer

Kelly Nelson lives in Tempe and teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University. She serves on the Tempe Municipal Arts Commission and volunteers as a docent at the Tempe Center for the Arts. Her poetry has appeared recently in *Dash*, *Eclectica*, *Ozone Park* and *Paddlefish*. You can visit her website at www.kelly-nelson.com.

Kelly Nelson

Gringa at Ticket Booth, Chichén Itzá

Hola, buenos días, I have come
(do not attempt
compound tenses)

I want to see
the ruins
(do not take your eyes
from his lips
when he speaks)

sí, soy Americana, I live
in a state of ruins, I mean
a state with ruins
(well, both really,
what you must
think, news and all,
of the people
in my border state)

one ticket
please
to enter.

© 2012

55

Kelly Nelson

Promises

The man who stole my wedding ring
warned me:
“Don’t call the cops.”

I nodded and later
called the cops.

“Five tennish, twenty three or twenty four,
Dodgers cap, blue jeans, a small green tattoo
on his wrist, a turtle, I think, or a teardrop.”

56 It’s impossible to tell the officer
I don’t want it back.

My voice goes on saying
“I’ll be sure to call in
if I remember, anything, more.”

© 2012

Kelly Nelson

Home Town

We've agreed to go back. Once. Before we're too shaky to tromp through the woods, through the skunk cabbage, to the stream to find whatever remains of the statue she made at sixteen, a girl standing with her arms crossed, a girl we left the day our mom moved out.

We'll carry her to the car, drive to the county park, lug her to that low lookout, the one spot in town where you can see someplace else.

No, we'll decide, we can't leave her there.

We'll head to where the main road meets the highway at the town's only stoplight. We'll park and wait for the bus to the city.

57

The driver will balk, but there are no rules against an unaccompanied statue riding the bus.

We'll wave. We'll drink Tab and eat Entenmann's donuts, a celebration for everyone who makes it out.

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Frances New

Step by Step

We humans have always
mixed ourselves with our surroundings.
We are dependent on inanimate things.

Long ago, our forefathers fashioned stone tools.

Not so long ago
James Watt cultivated the steam engines
so we may move faster,

so we may find out
that no two humans are fashioned by the same cookie-cutter.

So we started to dream,
and are still dreaming.
So we work together,
so we labor harder, faster, ...

so we move around,
we escape,
we connect,
...
and we dream...

Continued on page 59

Continued from page 58

I no longer think it strange
when the angel announced to Mary
that God would become a man,

paving ways for us to open our mouths,
letting out new songs
as told in Acts.

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59

Frances New

As to my process of writing, I would say it is exactly like childbearing and giving birth. I had no idea when a seed took up residence in my mind or heart and refused to go away. The gestation period varies — from a few days which is rare to many months. Of course I have an additional problem in that the English language was not my birth-language. It took me all these years to feel, right now, that I finally got it.

60

Frances New, born 1927 in China to Christian parents, came to the States in 1947. She was naturalized in 1954 under the 1948 Displaced Persons Act; became a widow in 1980; retired as a librarian in 1996 and earned her MFA in Creative Writing in 2004.

Hannah Richard

All the White of Heaven

Milk, white, is slicing gray
Walls in half as I watch the ribbon
Fall from the bottle
Into my bowl
And I put the bottle down
And twist the cap
With concentration
Not to throw up eating.

Skin, white, is splitting red
Rivers down the middle of my legs
And the ribbons jump, they leap
Down the bathtub drain
And I drop the razor without a sound
And choke on the breath
Fighting its way up
When I don't want to breathe.

Eyes, white, bright and healthy
Because crying blues my iris, like this
And the whites are shining like cleaned
From the purification
That comes with losing your feeling
By flushing it out, down the bowl,
Down your face, the water travels
Down the drain, down the hatch.

61

Continued on page 62

Paper, white, is unnerving, breathing
Never easy, I'm uneasy
Stomach kind of turning and words nipping
Like little flames, blown out in the breeze
Gone before the heat
Can even leave some ashes
There aren't any ashes
There aren't any words, the ink is useless.

Beads, white, dividing
Duvet cover from comforter
Hands that hold you "let it out, baby,
Let it out" also with expectation
That crying once is ever enough
When your body holds an ocean
And the words you can't get out
Float there in a bottle.

The note, white, in the bottle
Bobbing to me, bobbing far then
Never reaching though the glass
Brushed against my fingertips
Red and raw from biting, crying
In the dark because not even the lamp
Is allowed to see me like this
I will never write this.

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62

Hannah Richard

When I set out to write a poem, I do not start with any great or unusual process to seek out inspiration and capture it. My poetry is a collection of private thoughts and love letters left unsent and cries against injustices I have witnessed or experienced. In the coded stanzas of metaphor, I leave a fingerprint of myself to say, ‘this is who I am; this is where I’ve been.’ Unlike with my art or films, I do not write poetry for anyone else except for myself. I do not write poetry based on anything other than my thoughts and feelings at that time. Poetry is very personal to me, it is my diary, it is my platform for saying out loud the things I just cannot in life. If inspiration eludes you, ask yourself why you are writing. What are you trying to convey about yourself or to your audience? I believe inspiration comes from knowing why you are writing, not necessarily what you are writing. Are you trying to reach out so others feel less alone? Are you trying to profess and confess your feelings when you can’t say the words out loud, even in a breathy whisper? Write honestly, lie blatantly, say what you want, how you want. That’s the best advice I can offer.

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Photo courtesy of the author

Hannah Richard is an award-winning writer, artist and filmmaker living in the West Valley, raising her Chihuahua to be a productive member of society. Recently, one of her films received an ‘Excellent’ rating at the International Thespian Festival. This same film also earned her acceptance into the Zaki Gordon Institute of Film, where she will be starting as a freshman this fall. When not teaching her Chihuahua proper bedside manner or otherwise engaged with her artistic pursuits, Hannah records stand-up comedy that she posts to YouTube. She encourages all of you to visit her online at www.hannahishappy.deviantart.com or www.youtube.com/hannahbehappy. You can also reach her at her e-mail: hannahdraws@yahoo.com.

Edgar Rider

Billie Jeaning at Le triomphe de dolphin

In a land far away no ice mochas to be found

Blinded by anticipation

ready for the unknown

I stepped off the plane after 10 hours

and walked on Zambian concrete.

Started to get to work No time to rest at least for the first day in Zambia

met with native film actors they said, us, the whites looked serious.

Feeling like a minority at the local acting Lusaka Playhouse

finally being pointed out there goes another white. A real role reversal.

Eventually when we settled in we got to relax

Mosi on down drinking the Mosi

the key to the castle is to kick back and drink it

Lest I have to explain they had beer called Mosi and Castle

there is not a type of brew above being sampled.

Beer can bring countries together

The owner of the resort Dr. Edger Ngoma was a generous man
a pretension for calling himself a doctor but of what nobody knows.

He had a shirt that said Marijuana and was in opposition to it

but his shirt just said marijuana there was no explaining to him.

If you are opposed to it put a line through it or x it out.

Continued on page 65

64

Continued from page 64

We partied a lot at clubs nice to see some similarities.
Never dreamed of someone sampling a hair metal band in
Zambia it truly felt like I had come home to Europe's Final Countdown.

Eating fried caterpillars and flying over Livingstone's Victoria Falls
wondering with a never ending supply of water
why the need to turn off supply?
The commode is full and ready to be flushed
it needs relief too.

The connections are plenty
people in Africa need their sports entertainment,
discussions about spectacle superstars
Hitman and the sharpshooter lots in common.

65

Karaoke in Zambia favorite of the
dining host singing the obvious Toto's Africa.
The worldly ties that bind us,
pop culture abounds,
at a karaoke restaurant
an '84 Michael Jackson impersonator visits
me I follow suit
Billie Jeaning at Le triomphe de dolphin.

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Edgar Rider

In 2006, Edgar Rider was lucky enough to join a group of Mesa Community College students on a trip to Zambia. Even today he remembers the exhaustive experience of getting off a 14-hour flight back home to Sky Harbor airport. He is grateful for keeping in contact with some of his Zambian friends.

66

Edgar Rider's work has appeared in strange and curious journals such as the aptly named Curious Record based in Australia. Some of his work has "stayed classy" in the Birmingham Art Journal, Avatar Review and Existere. His essay "Life Lessons of Grandpa Fannin," about his grandfather, was recently published in Copperfield Review. Edgar graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre. Contact the poet at ecrider@asu.edu.



Photo courtesy of the author

Esther Schnur-Berlot

The Summer Girls

brimmed with optimism
hopping along on one
foot kicking the potsy
down a chalk grid
sidewalk. They leaped
high in the air
in a full turn
of laughter
skipping off to join
friends forever
singing off-key
holding hands
Ring-Around-the-Rosie
All Fall Down.

In the game of chance
not all found
pockets full of posies.
Coming up empty
they tucked away
their laughter
in a container
of disappointment.

© 2012

Potsy – New York hopscotch

67

Esther Schnur-Berlot

How and Why Poetry

Sometimes I'm not even sure if I'm writing poetry but I do find it cathartic to vent my emotions without tempering imagination. When I write, authenticity becomes the craft. For me hate, jealousy, envy, love that includes setbacks, success and failure are far more interesting subjects than moon and June. The gift of surprise often bowls me over when the right word wanders by and the magical combination of the perfect metaphor appears. Looking back at some painful experiences I'm now able to laugh at and find myself writing a wildly absurd poem. Poetry is also the place I go to, to shout at life's injustices. I enjoy being a visual artist with pen in hand, coloring words with dialogue, accents, clothing and ethnic aromas that give the poem a sense of place and history.

Whether I send my poetry out to the world or place my scribbles in a drawer, the act of exploration helps me discover more of me.

Esther Schnur-Berlot is a transplant from New York City where she worked behind the scenes in TV commercials and then on to California where she taught wearable art. Now living in Tucson, she devotes her time to writing poetry. Esther's poetry has been published in the California State Poetry Quarterly, the Sonoma Collective and Desert Voices. E-mail lberlot@q.com.



Photo courtesy of Christa Lubatkin

Esther Schnur-Berlot

Still Spinning

Unraveling knots
of tangled strands
living in woven
yesterdays.
Fingers pluck
at sun yellows
interlaced
in melancholy blues
tired threads
grow weary
and break
leaving gaping holes
of tangled knots
unwinding
in a tugging dance

to find harmony.
An array of boucles
enrich the tapestry's
fantasies
awaiting fingers
to weave into the palette
soft melon sunsets.
Crimson chenille
bleeds through
open wounds
of misty mauves
wending their way,
to soften the drama
of withering time.
© 2012

69

Esther Schnur-Berlot

Elegy for a Shirt

You were the last one

ON SALE

A Ralph Lauren

eighty percent markdown

English patterned roses

That screamed –

I'm yours

It was an intoxicating buy

*Did I deserve to wear the label
of the rich and understated?*

Falling in love

with a no-frill floral shirt

was a first

I a thrift store junky

had scoured racks endlessly

for the perfect

glitterati collectible

after ten years

you were still my cover

for respectability

to impress the job interviewer

and to meet the in-laws

sun bleached your hues

of peach and sage

softening your image

with each washing

you emerged more delicate

finding a moth

caused endless sobs

I stitched your wounded

rose with mulberry thread

as you began looking

tired and worn

I began flirting with the new

ready- to- wear

tossing you in and out of

my give-away-bag

it was painful to send you off

to Goodwill

© 2012

70

Esther Schnur-Berlot

In Over My Head

Flailing in a pool of depression
words recede into a stream of tears

Lost phrases disappear
as I wait for dreams to awaken poems

I spent my childhood living
in a cocoon of yearning.

How naïve to believe The Pushcart Prize
was a perfect tomato off a peddler's cart

or that the Pew Fellowship was an award
for outstanding church attendance.

I make demands on my Muse
she casts away my pleas.

Now I stand before the Robber Baron Foundations
Rockefeller, Guggenheim and Carnegie

a beggar in awe.
drowning in aspirations

as I read the new poets –
dusted in moon glow.

© 2012

71

Esther Schnur-Berlot

A Montage

flows through the transom
of my closed eyes.

A scent of honey cake
clings
to Ma's homemade floral
faded dress. My face
gently brushes her effusive
breasts as she nudges me
bellowing.

72 *Get up already, get up.
You'll be late for school.*

She pulls at my legs trying
to put on my shoes and socks
as I kick away, resisting help.
Through open windows
neighbors repeat Ma's chants.
Get up already, get up.

Does Ma notice my silver strands,
flabby dimpled arms and fleshy thighs
all plucked from her gene pool?

Continued on page 73

Slipping into focus, Pa is wearing
suspenders over an underwear
union suit and looks puzzled.

*You've grown so tall.
When did you start painting
your face?*

He thumbs through my magazines
books and newspapers strewn about.
The child
in me still waits for his approval.

Both look at me quizzically
I've grown old beyond their years.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

What's It Like?

Seven Poems on Being a Poet

What You May Be Looking For

74
If you've been there many times before—
Noticed that the corpse of old adobe
Wall is maybe a little lower, weaker,
Bits of ancient straw sticking out
Like a boy's cropped hair or maybe
A very old man's scarce colorless whiskers—
Maybe just kicking around with your boot
You may learn to sense what you might
Be looking for, even if you're not looking
Much for anything—especially then.
If you sense what you're looking for
You will nudge with your boot
A ragged tooth of ancient pottery.

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You pick it up, sense its familiar desert
Roughness, a patina between your fingers.
The shard is gray, almost a triangle
Rounded and with a bit of old rim.
The shard is bare for a thumb-nail width
Under eroded remains of the bulge of rim
And the bulge of lips that caress the jar
That the small shard had been with the thirst
To which the lips were indifferent.
But the water in the jar! The cool intimacy.

The jar of permeable half-fired clay
Is cool from evaporation of the film of water
That almost glazes the outside of it,
Which beneath that smooth band
Is pressed in by the potter's finger-nails
Small quarter-moons of indentation
That inscribe rows incised into the clay—
I see two rows on the shard.
I try to unravel my own thirst now
Lifting to my lips the story of our thirst together,
How we came to be so thirsty together,
The cactus shriveled droughts we have shared,
The diminishing heft of the clay jar
As we pass it from lip to lip,
Word for word, look and stroke.

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We sit, she and I under the reed-thatched
Roof of our ramada braced upon a circle of adobe wall,
Waiting for the sun to quaver into darkness,
The air to cool. Night and coyotes sing.
Bare feet leave departing prints in moon-lit sand.
Leave the pottery shard in place, its place,
Now that you sense what you are looking for,
Your place, the place you start from.

What's It Like?

76 “Do you ever wonder what it’s like being a poet?”
Something like that. That might not have been
The question at all. It was close enough for me.
She asked it to someone else in the room anyway.
What’s it like? Some of it is like sitting

In this corner, listening. Writing. Staring
Into the ether. Staring. When I was seventeen
I was sitting in a chair at a friend’s cabin,
And I was staring into a pine knot in a paneled
Wall. It was, I think I remember, fish-like.

Then this girl. Blanche, maybe. Blanche yelled,
“Have you seen enough?!” Blanche was furious.
I had been staring into that ether, but right above
Her bedroom door, which had to have been open,
And Blanche had to have noticed that when she

Slipped out of her bathing suit and into
The balmy summer air. She slammed the door
Into my innocent sputtering. What's it like
Being a poet? It's like missing the best part
Of the burlesque while it's going on, but living it

Wholly at moments like this. It is *remembering*
All the things that never happened into what's
Happening now—Blanche glistening.
Her hot summer tan. Her lips.
Her soft voice whispers.

An Evening on Brandy Brook Bridge

77

The deceptive wooden bridge that spans Brandy Brook
Hides the little concrete dam that turns the brook
Into Johnson Pond, displacing the fiction of architecture
In this rurality of purer being. Then both pond and brook
Retire into forest, mosquitos, and day dreams.

I have used the wide rails on either side of the bridge
For the sake of variety, for a writing desk,
Or just to sit on, pretend to meditate maybe
Or let my imagination dither like toes
In the clear water, searching idly for minnows.

So I was pretty deep into one of these preoccupations, quiet
To settle my inner tone for a poetry reading
When I heard a gentle tick on the wooden bridge surface.
I turned, and right there a spotted fawn stood frozen,
Startled I suppose, to see what couldn't possibly be its Mom.

We looked at each other a little time.
Then I suppose I must have twitched,
That minuscule shudder we can't escape
When we try to be as still as the fawn.
I think I saw the shutter-speed grace of spinning legs

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But the fawn was gone before I could really see it gather
Into panic and escape. Or I was gone. I guess
The reading went well, but I can never remember any of it
Until I hear that tick of the tiny hoof behind my memory.
Then I still don't remember anything else. Or care to.

Soliloquy by the Candle Light of Day
for Caedmon

I wake up again to clouds—
Clouds, dull linens of clouds
To lines, words of poems
Soft dull linens of words

Continued from page 78

On the fore and plowing edge of a determined
Raft of dream surging down some sleep powered wake.
I knew I could wake up—get up,
Fumble for one of the pencils on my bedside table

And one of the folded shirt-pocket size
Discarded memories of scarified paper
Write the words or the lines or
Once or twice

Lines of music whose delicacies I cannot notate
Nor ever learned how.
But I knew alerted by the clear spray of ideas now
That I would remember in the morning.

79

I never did. Did you? Ever?
But one night I dreamt some of those words again
Or lines or prisms of image in the foam or notes.
Then I dreamt that I got up

Got out of bed
Picked up a pencil
Found a folded paper
And then I dreamt that I wrote it all down.

All and beautiful—and all in a murky second gone into the foam.
I've never dreamt such dream again,
But some urge behind the surge of dream told me
To write for the fabric of dream, the linen shadows of clouds

Continued on page 80

Anything at all, anything away from my sullen old silence.
Though it is a grace of old age the dream has been good,
A faith in dreams of embers all these lights ago—the
“Highest candle lights in the dark,”

Which dark
Needs no more than a candle
And less
To read the wakening heaves of breath in a new old life.

Philoetius Redux

80 You mean cowboys still call them “Ace Me” boots?
Still, after all these years?
Goll! Tradition holds.

The cowboy Odysseus, late of the rodeo tour,
Defiantly anti, including Greek,
Knows how “Acme” sounds when he doesn’t wear it.

But he can’t, won’t say it.
He extols his ratty favorite old boots, Ace Mes:
“Yeah, they’re cheap, but they feel pretty good,

’Specially when they start to fall apart.
’Sides, when I ain’t ridin’, herdin’ touristas on barn-spoilt nags,
Lookit what I’m standin’ in!”

Yeah. Tradition. It's May, fifty-some years ago.
I stand in the middle of this unshaded corral,
My first paid job, eighty-five cents an hour,

Temperature in the high nineties over there in the shade
Of the stalls, where the horses are slurping water, and I'm not.
I'm shoveling tradition.

The sun steams horse piss fumes in my face, dust all around.
Three horses in their stalls look somewhere else, not at me.
They're embarrassed for me maybe. I know I am.

When I grow up I'll get me a good pair of Justins.
But Ace Mes are comfortable all right,
Holey sole strapped on with duct tape.

81

On the other hand, hell,
I could be standing here in Birkenstocks,
Like the old man there in the mesquite shade, rewriting us.

Epic and Hearth

Who knows who invented comedy?
A thrown spear wobbles harmlessly
Off the flank of a charging aurochs.
The aurochs narrowly misses
The spear thrower, who, avoiding
The aurochs' natural response,
Falls into the muddy fen, where
Instead of drowning, he flounders
Covered in mud. His mates laugh.
He stares at them. Then he laughs.
But it isn't comedy yet. At night,
Around the fire, meatless again,
They talk of the day. They work off
The day's frustrations talking.
The spear thrower, the man who
Is the cause of their hunger, tells again
What happened. The wobbly spear,
The prat-fall, the mud. He stands
As he tells the story and imitates the fall,
The sputtering, the image of mud.
That's where the comedy is made.

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Continued on page 83

The Greeks, we can be pretty sure,
Invented tragedy, by way of having
Invented the hero—Theseus, Perseus,
Jason, Heracles, Oedipus, Achilles.
Inventing the hero, they invented
Conscience, which the hero in his deeds,
Or after them, because of them, lacks.
But it is Homer, least tragic, most
Understanding of imaginations, who
Invented the Greeks. So what does that
make of the hero, of tragedy, of Greeks,
Of us? Penelope and Odysseus take
Each other to that sacred bed again,
Make love. In the morning they'll awaken,
Make love again, sleep a while longer.
After they finally rise, they'll say Good
Morning to Telemachus. All three
Will have breakfast. Talk. Plan the day.
Then they'll all go out and deal
With some legacies, handle the politics,
Plan a leisurely return to the underworld,
Buy some boating gear, an oar or two.
Sit back of an evening telling the old tales.
Always, someone is willing to listen.

Answer First, Then Question

1. My Father's Clarinet

He tried to get me to play the clarinet. Not teach—
Not teach. We save our teaching for less worthy
Mortals than sons. Otherwise how could we stand under
The fatal blows, the barrage of our failures.
I learned to play Twinkle, Twinkle, Little . . .

SCREECH!

And the room was attacked by the shrieking pterodactyl,
Greatly taloned leather-winged banshee
That ripped up, devoured the spinal cord
Like vultures at defiant Prometheus' innards.

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I have been my petty Prometheus.
Chained wrist and ankle, nailed hand, foot, and ears,
Especially ears, to the cliff wall of the tortured room,
I have refused to account for his graceful gestures
Up and down the black wand of clarinet,

Acknowledge the grace of his notes
As any force greater than magic.
In my father's honor, today I will stuff my raspberry tongue
Back into its wet socket, step away from the wall,
Uncover his ancient Underwood, and tap out

Continued on page 85

The word *star*, a signal of the private music he taught me anyway,
To resolve the silent poetry of our difference.
For it is a dishonor, I think now, to believe,
Through the gift of our ordinary failures,
The dark and common creed

That anyone's good skill is only magic or miracle,
Deserving of no more than the puny excuse of awe.
It is a craven way out, not even to emulate, more,
Not to challenge that skill with some resounding force,
At least enough to have offered as his target, my gut.

2. Forgiveness

The rhetorical question you ask—unrhetorically—
“Can forgiving move across generations?”
Well, if some members of the generations are alive,
Maybe, or not, maybe, but why?

Nothing in my poem suggests or hints
Of forgiveness of anyone's father, certainly not mine.
It is possible my father committed
Much that should be forgiven.

But what's the point? He's dead.
And he didn't intend to hurt.
We put the tin of his ashes up there
Behind the window frame,

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The “Celestial Seasonings” tin that honors him
With a joke that could have been his.
What we have now is still a relationship.
But the word I used is “resolve,”

And I have much that may be resolved,
But not by him. If I may be blunt,
And for you and your own father I will be,
I hope that my son fails to forgive me

The ills I have committed toward him—
Which I have; I am a father.
I prefer to go to my grave,
Or ashes in my coffee can—

“Chock Full-O-Nuts” would be nice—
Or sifted like flour-dust into the lake,
Having left no issue so awful
As to be forgivable.

But I hope I leave a host of issues
For the next generation to resolve,
Not for forgiveness, maybe not even for peace,
But for all I know of fathers’ love.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

I have tried to enter the conversation in a variety of voices, almost none of them the poet (“not me, not the poet,” John Berryman complained). Insofar as they all appear out of the shadowy interstices of my noggin, they are Arizona poems, save that the setting may be elsewhere or the imagination of a supposed poet preparing to appear before a scary public audience; or Philoetius’ imagination, somehow transported from Odysseus’ bunkhouse to an Arizona corral. As to Caedmon’s appearance, either he reflects a shared passion for barns, corrals, and the aroma of ruminants and equines or he reflects a long silence, a past of feckless stammering, long isolation that the poet might well share with Caedmon, if the poet were humble enough to admit to such a past and such an inclination (not this poet; some other poet ...).

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and Mexico and the North Woods of Minnesota. His book, “Fall Pictures on an Abandoned Road,” was released in 2009, “Disordinary Light,” in 2010, and “Folly, A Book of Last Summers,” in 2011. Sederstrom’s poems have appeared in *The Talking Stick*, *English Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *Big Muddy*, *Mother Earth Journal*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Memoir* (and), and *Ruminate*, among other journals and magazines. Fortunate to have retired from all respectable pursuits, especially teaching, he returns to the classroom as a visitor. Contact Richard at richard_sederstrom1221@q.com.

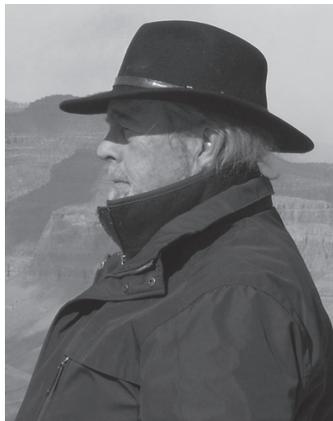


Photo courtesy of the author

Lilvia Soto

when a heart finds his voice

If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come.

– Chinese proverb

I was faithful
did my job
beat seventy-two times per minute
forty-two million times per year
kept him working, loving
being a good man.

For 59 years, I was faithful
then the accident.

I wanted to go with him.

I loved that man,
we took care of each other,
planned to leave together
when our job was done.

They didn't ask
just grabbed me—
hadn't said good-bye—
pulled me out
kept me in dry ice
put me in another chest,
a famous one, they said,
told me to keep beating.

Continued on page 89

They think I'm a dumb muscle
a machine that performs
regardless
just keep the blood flowing
keep the man alive
they said.

They don't understand.
I was happy to serve him
because we were in accord.
I murmured, he whispered.
I sang when he kissed his daughter
and danced when he threw a ball with his son.
I fluttered and soared.
He assented.
We had no discord
loved the same woman,

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for thirty years, we loved the same woman,
rejoiced when the bees returned to the zinnias and the hydrangeas
quivered the first time we saw the sun rise on the South Rim
went to a different place
when we listened to Plácido or Pavarotti
on Sunday afternoons
were wounded when his third child died.

His breath was my mainspring.
He loved,
and I, happy to love with him.

Now I beat in the chest of a stranger
one who ordered mass destruction
and knows no remorse.

I can't dance
to the beat of his resentment
can't soar
to his plots of revenge
can't sleep
when he dreams of his crimes
and wishes for more.

I murmur, he curls up his lip.
I spend my days pumping blood
heavy with cells of contempt
corpuscles of hatred
that poison his body
wither my song.

They call themselves men of science
but didn't ask why his first heart preferred to die.

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Lilvia Soto

An invitation to consecration

As most poets, I write for survival, for rescuing the sliver of freedom a human being needs to justify her time on this earth. My words are a lifeline of defense against the thanatic impulses of dictators, liberators, and predators who destroy and desecrate life out of their sense of separateness, out of their fear of being forsaken. In my dialogue with other artists, I am reminded of our common nakedness, our shared fragility, our need for asylum on this earth. Our words are a vindication of the human spirit that keeps us wandering and creating, a call to solidarity, an invitation to pay homage to the life force that grows the redbud, hovers the hummingbird, pollinates the zucchini, perfumes the freesia, flavors the raspberry, and pours forth the soul of the nightingale (John Keats), the erotic force we need to consecrate together. With each word we speak, sing, dance, paint, sculpt, weave, we open a window into empathy, moral imagination, and the sacralization of life.

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Photo courtesy of the author

Lilvia Soto was born in Chihuahua, México, in 1939. She has a Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literature from Stony Brook University in Long Island, N.Y. She has published poetry, short fiction, literary criticism, and literary translations in journals and anthologies in the U.S., Canada, Spain, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Venezuela. She has an English-language manuscript of poems about the American Iraq wars and another English-language collection of poems that dialogue with Iraqi poems. She has also completed an English-Spanish collection about language and her experience living in Spain. She is currently working on a bilingual collection about her return to Mexico in 2004, where she lived for six years, and the recovery of cultural and familial roots. Contact her at lilviasoto@hotmail.com.

Editor's Note

I have a vague recollection of writing my earliest poem as a 7-year-old in elementary school — it was a simple four-line stanza with each line rhyming. But the schoolmate who sat behind me, an inveterate copier, co-opted my lines. Frantic that I would be seen as the plagiarist and facing a deadline to turn it in, I quickly erased end words and subbed in new ones. Only now the poem didn't rhyme (a first foray into free verse?) ... and I got a red mark — but fortunately no lasting scars, just a discomfoting memory.

At that age, I was mostly writing little plays and mysteries. But by junior high, after reading a friend's contest-winning poem, and then in high school, seeing my own poem published in the school literary journal (it wasn't very good as I remember), something inside me took hold. I haven't been able to shake it off since.

92 Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, has long been a dream of mine. As a showcase for the wonderful works of our contributing poets, Unstrung is intended to add to the ongoing poetic dialogue and to create a new conversation with our readers.

None of this would be possible without a talented staff — Publisher Elena Thornton, Cover Artist Marjory Boyer and Production Editor Richard Dyer. To them, and to the lovers of poetry everywhere — readers and writers — this inaugural issue is lovingly dedicated.

Welcome and enjoy!

Rebecca “Becca” Dyer

Editor in chief

Editorial Staff

Editor in chief: *Rebecca Dyer*

Publisher: *Elena Thornton*

Production Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Artwork for front cover: *Marjory Boyer*

Open Mic: A celebration of the arts

Join us at our Monthly Open Mic Arts, Letters and Culture Events. They are a great opportunity for artists, writers and performers in all genres, spanning all disciplines and cultural representations, to get together, meet one another, read, present, share, learn and enjoy.

Where: Dog-Eared Pages Books, 16428 N. 32nd St., Suite 111 (just south of Bell Road), Phoenix, AZ 85032; (602) 283-5423.

When: Every last Sunday of each month, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

We also address key issues in contemporary art and culture, exchange ideas, learn new things through rigorous talks, conversations, debates and readings in an informal setting. Join us! Everyone is invited to bring a friend(s) and enjoy exciting conversations in the beautiful surroundings of the neighborhood bookstore. Meet new and old friends and enjoy. All programs are free and open to the public.

For more information, contact Elena Thornton — (602) 263-5373 or info@artizona.org.

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Coming Oct. 28: Save the date!

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' Annual Fall Festival of the Arts

Noon to 4 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 28

In the beautiful, huge courtyard of the
Arizona Historical Society Museum at Papago Park,
1300 N. College Ave., Tempe.

Admission is free!

For more details, visit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website,
www.artizona.org

A Call to Poets For Summer 2013

94 Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2013 Issue from June 1 through July 5, 2013. 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. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

For more information, e-mail Rebecca at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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

www.theblueguitarmagazine.org

and www.artizona.org

Unstrung • Summer 2012

Meet the staff of Unstrung magazine



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

Rebecca Dyer, editor: A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher now residing in Mesa with her husband, Richard, production editor for Unstrung and The Blue Guitar. Reach her at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.



Richard H. Dyer Jr., production editor: Richard is the managing editor for a monthly and three weekly newspapers in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor.

Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for Unstrung and 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.



UNSTRUNG

A magazine of
for and about
people



Unstrung will
return in
Summer 2013