

UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,
for and about
poetry



Summer 2014

The Poets

2

“In the Desert,” “Late March in the Desert,” “Lavender” – <i>Paula Ashley</i>	4-9
“A Human Kind,” “He Still Lives!” “Heart’s Winter,” “The Freedom Marchers” – <i>Ronald G. Auguste</i>	10-19
“Cold Draft,” “Battle Fatigue” – <i>Lollie Butler</i>	20-24
“Falling Away,” “Salvage Yard” – <i>Gari Crowley</i>	25-29
“After the Rain (Tucson July),” “Schubert” – <i>Mary Theresa Dietz</i>	30-33
“Climate Cha[ll]e[n]ge,” “It Might Be Nice If We Brought Flowers,” “An Experiment in Chemistry,” “A Visit to the Music Studio,” “Real Notes,” “Duet in Soft Shoe,” “We’re Behind,” “A Deceit of Old Weather” – <i>Richard Fenton Sederstrom</i>	34-49
“Norse and Gothic,” “Skirt faunteroy curls and velvet,” “That conscience and consciousness,” “The Six Classics” – <i>Michael Gregory</i>	50-61
“Sad House,” “Secret Hopes,” “Pennies” – <i>Andrew R. Jones</i>	62-67
“Lady,” “Self” – <i>Jennifer Jones</i>	68-71
“Central,” “Little Oaxaca,” “Summer Storm” – <i>Tracy Keller</i>	72-76



Ashley



Auguste



Butler



Crowley



Dietz



Sederstrom



Gregory



A. Jones



J. Jones



Keller

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The Poets



Louis

“The Reflection” – *Eva Louis*..... 77-79



Magee

“Tapping Our Twigs”– *Bridget Magee* 80-86

“road grader,” “let the rains come,” “marranitos,”



Mayaan

“bird who? (a found poem)” – *Deborah Mayaan* 87-94

“She: A Poem in Praise” – *Kaitlin Meadows* 95-102



Meadows

“Skimming Through the ’90s Garage Sale,” “Rail Tales”

– *Nicole Nixen*..... 103-109



Nixen

“Am I for Her Journey,” “Eulogy for a Rhyme,” “Freedom”

– *Holly Parsons* 110-115

“Julianne,” “Escape to Arizona,” “My Ching,”



Parsons

“The Cleansing” – *Howard Russell* 116-124

“Pruning,” “Seeing Red,” “The Committee,”



Russell

“Valentine’s Day” – *Esther Schnur-Berlot* 125-130

“The Stern-Faced Rock,” “The Pull,”



Schnur-Berlot

“Midnight in the Canyon” – *Carol Sletten* 131-135

“Unbidden”– *Elisabeth F. Venetiou* 136-138



Sletten

“A Computer Legacy,” “N O W,” “Suspension,”

“5:30 A.M.” – *Eva Willis* 139-146



Venetiou



Willis

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Paula Ashley

In the Desert

Between the scattered clouds of sunlit days
and yellow flowers
 dripping from palo verde trees

before the sun takes over
 before the heat rises from asphalt streets
 and red tile roofs

I go out in cool morning hours
or walk at dusk when the sun has lost its edge.

4
In the dry wash:
 rabbits scuttle under brittlebush
 Gambel's quail call to one another.

July comes.
Monsoons hover over time yet do not bring release of rain

while I sit in air-conditioned rooms
 feeling the shadows of those who died
 who left me alive in unrelenting summer.

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Paula Ashley

Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer. She lives in Arizona with her husband and an abundance of birds that hang out on the solar fountains in their backyard. Paula has had poems published in “Arizona: 100 Years, 100 Poems, 100 Poets”; Avocet; Merge; New Fraktur Arts Journal; The Blue Guitar Magazine; The Examined Life: A Literary Journal of the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine; and “Voices on the Wind.” She is the winner of the Best Poem Contest for OASIS Journal 2013 and has poems forthcoming in Four Chambers, Issue 2. Contact the poet at p.c.ashley@ieee.org.

5



Photo by Todd Jones

Paula Ashley

‘experiences suddenly appear’

6 The poet writes: “I wrote poetry throughout high school and college. When my babies were born, life took over and poetry fell away. Then, one hot summer day in August 1991, my oldest son died in a car accident on the Beeline. He was twenty-six. I turned to writing again as the only way I had to let out the pain. I could organize it on the page and achieve some much needed distance. Ten years of elder care followed before the death of my parents. Even today, I find these experiences suddenly appear again in my poems. ‘Lavender,’ in particular, is a poem of love and longing, of death and resurrection. It mixes my love of France which I got from my father, who was born in Paris, with my love for my mother and the Sonoran desert where I live. This is the fourth version of this poem. The original version was twice as long. The heat of the desert in the stillness before a monsoon storm is, for me, always a metaphor for death as both my son and my father died at this time of the year. My mother died in the midst of a monsoon which took out the power, the streetlights, and her final breath. The window of her room open. The blinds tapping on the sill. Lightning cracking across the Hedgpath Hills.”

Paula Ashley

Late March in the Desert

Mars glares red
high in the east
Saturn not seen

orchid bauhinia
blossoms forget
the winter freeze

penstemons scatter
across the rocky yard
behind my small house

in ashes my son
lies on distant limestone mesa
the wind blows

wandering cat
I peek out
my curtained windows

brittlebush climb
out of the dry creek
in yellow flurries

Jupiter and Venus
sliver of moon
low in western sky

7

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Paula Ashley

Lavender

My neighbors shake their heads
when they see me walking
where my lawn should be, where
purple flowers bend under my feet.

I tell them I saw fields of lavender
in a book. I ran my hands over
the pages but the lavender did not
yield to my touch & had no scent.

8 I tell them I sailed the Mediterranean
& stopped in ports along the shore where
sunflowers in vases adorned café tables.
I walked past the cafés, past all the houses

out into lavender fields but the lavender
was not mine & the time came to go home.
Then I bought lavender in pots: one
for my mother, one for myself.

But my lavender died when I forgot
to water it while I kept watch at
my mother's side. In time I brought
her lavender to my house but it died too.

Continued on page 9

The next spring there it was:
lavender sprouting from the rocks,
from the grass, between cracks in the sidewalk.
I quit mowing the grass. I did not pull
the sprouts out of the rocks, the cracks.
I walk in my lavender at dawn.
Let it crush on the hem of my skirt.
Cut it in swaths to strew in my bath.

Lavender oil seeps through my fingers,
races to my tongue where I taste forgiveness
for not saving my mother & know I can
never explain this to my neighbors.

9

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Ronald G. Auguste

A Human Kind

For Nelson Mandela

Made into Slaves against our will,
In freedom, we are shackled still!
But, like the Sun, which tells our story,
We humbled men shall rise ... in glory,
Above that sea of causeless rage,
To claim, with Love, our Heritage....

A Human Kind, we shall be free,
To walk this earth with dignity!
To live and love, like Sons of God,
Fearing, no more, the White man's rod.

Hearts full of love ... we shall arise!
Our joyful songs will rend the skies!
Our carefree laughter, and our mirth,
Will sanctify this bitter earth!

Humbled and shamed, we've suffered long.
Denied our Rights, we are deemed wrong
Because we strive to take our place,
As Humans ... in the Human Race....

Continued on page 11

We are received with wrath and scorn –
And ostracized! Were we not born,
Like you, White man, of woman's womb?
Like you, too, destined for the tomb?
Formed out of clay, and given breath,
Until we catch the cold of death?

With wicked might, you seized our land,
Subjecting us to harsh command! –
Since then, you gave us lowly fate;
Denying love, you feed us Hate!
You savage us with fang ... and claw!
You place your Sins beside our door....

A Human Kind, your kindness ceased
To the Black man ... but not to beast....
You treat us second to your dogs!
You house us in foul pens like hogs!
You sentenced us without a trial! –
You'll live to rue this base denial,
For God did not give you the right
To judge His Sons, though black as night!

Look to your souls, and mend your ways,
For few are your remaining days
Of rabid rule! Poor petty fools,
When will you learn? What use are schools
To you, if you just will not see
You rape your own humanity,
Because you've nurtured foolish fears
About us ... for too many years?

Without a care, you made us slaves –
You were less primitive in caves!
For you assumed a hideous role,
And laid siege to a People's soul.

12

Aren't you aware of your past deeds?
You're still enslaved to savage creeds
Which make you scorn a Race's blood! –
Dragging its pride through filth and mud!

White man, you are a Human Kind,
But one who's left pure good behind,
Becoming vain, unjust, and blind!
Oh look around! – It's not too late,
To feed us love, instead of hate!

We, whom you Humble, suffer now.
Sorrow is etched upon our brow.
But we shall triumph through Despair,
To be made Equal everywhere!

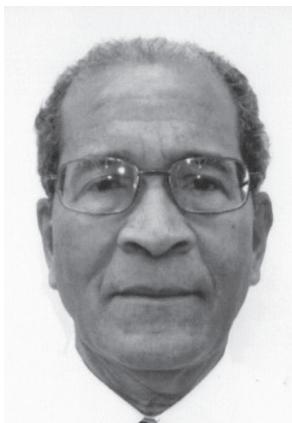
Yes! We shall rise above the flood
Of hatred ... to redeem our blood –
To right, with Love, each petty wrong,
Which make us bow, yet make us strong!

You made us Slaves, against our will....
You freed us ... but you bind us still....
You marred our fates, and smeared our story –
But lost! For we must rise in glory,
A Human Kind, forever free,
To walk this earth ... with dignity....

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Ronald G. Auguste

The poet writes: “I was born in Saint Lucia, in the West Indies. After spending many years in London, England, I emigrated to the USA in 1970, and became a citizen in 1975. I am the father of two sons – the second one deceased – and one daughter. In my early teens, strongly influenced by traditional poets such as Shakespeare, Byron, Longfellow, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and William Cullen Bryant, I started writing poetry. I’ve written hundreds of poems – quite likely more than a thousand – a great number of which are dedicated to family, friends, and public figures whom I admire and respect. In Phoenix, I have often read in public places – libraries, bookstores, coffee shops, and, occasionally, in schools. Some years ago, after a reading at Horizon High in the Paradise Valley School District, I was informed that some of my poems had been copied for circulation there. I’ve also read my poems at venues in London; in Santa Monica, Calif.; and at several schools in St. Lucia. I can be reached at RGAApoet@aol.com.”



Ronald G. Auguste

‘written with tears in my eyes’

The poet writes: “I wrote ‘A Human Kind’ in 1963, during the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, while I was living in London, England. This poem was written with tears in my eyes, and sorrow in my Soul, as were practically all the poems which I call My Civil Rights Poems. Since I seemed to be closer to the racial problems then current in South Africa, while I lived in London, where both the BBC and the newspapers seemed to lament the condition of Blacks in South Africa more regularly than they did the condition of Blacks in the USA, I dedicated ‘A Human Kind’ to Nelson Mandela. Many years ago, long after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I mailed a few of my poems to Mrs. Coretta King, with an apology that I had not done so sooner. Mrs. King’s response was warm, and heartfelt, and delightful. Some time afterwards, in 1997, I composed ‘He Still Lives!’ Owing to President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s grand and formidable action in signing The Civil Rights Act in 1964, I dedicated my Civil Rights poem, ‘Heart’s Winter,’ which I wrote in 1963, to him. Again, unfortunately, President Johnson had already passed away when I mailed ‘Heart’s Winter’ to his Texas home. Lady Bird Johnson’s response was very gracious. ‘The Freedom Marchers’: This poem just might be the very first that I wrote, of the collection of poems which I refer to as My Civil Rights Poems. Through the eyes of my mind and from the recesses of my memory, I can still see, in 1963, on BBC television, the endless, suffering lines. I wrote ‘The Freedom Marchers’ specifically for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”

15

Ronald G. Auguste

He Still Lives!

In Memoriam: The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

For Coretta Scott King

There was a man who walked not long ago,
Hated by other men who wished his soul
Eternal deprivation, and, for show,
Rigours of shame – But none could mar his role!

Even in death, gracious and grand, he forgives.
Vouched for by Noble mortals, he still lives!

16

Mostly we don't observe what he'd pursue,
Although some do assemble once a year –
Relish his name; extol him in review;
Take hope in all those truths that he made clear.

Instilled within our Minds – For Love and Peace –
None of his Soulful views should know surcease.

Let us keep on towards that mountain top,
Using his strength to guide us on the way.
There'll come the time we'll reach it – Let's not stop!
Heaven will help us celebrate that day!

Each forward footstep – Firm ... or otherwise –
Really promotes our journey to God's skies....

Continued on page 17

Continued from page 16

King, among lesser men, his righteous mind
Inspired those with open minds to see:
*Nothing but Equal Rights – Of Every Kind! –
Grant Truth to WHAT our Nation Claims to be.*

Just as you feel too tired to proceed,
Remember just One Step ... Extends his Deed....

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17

Ronald G. Auguste

Heart's Winter

For President Lyndon Baines Johnson

Sometimes, a season in the climate of the heart,
Quite like the Winter of Siberian zones,
Benumbs the senses,
Congealing to the marrow of the bone –
And cold winds sweep across the heartscape,
Where joy-fields,
Shrouded in deepening snows of sorrow,
Lie fallow in the cold glare of a dead Sun,
Beneath the sombre balefulness
Of a shrieking asbestos sky.

And in rare moments when remembered warmth
Converges with icy streams of grief,
Despair is born,
Appearing like the pall of a billion sad tomorrows
Over the pain-ravaged,
Sorrow-matted meadows of the pining heart.

Death, among other things, harbingers such a season –
But worse than death, is being hated without reason.

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Ronald G. Auguste

The Freedom Marchers

For Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Wrenching their roots from the cold loam of fear,
They march for freedom down long streets of hate.
They march for freedom, flaunting their despair
At faces ... rabid and dispassionate....
Straining against harsh tentacles of fate,
Which coil about them with a filthy slime
Of racial wrongs – Black strangers at the gate,
Of their own dwelling! – They shall rise in time,
In glory, proud as Eagles ... even more sublime!

They march in bondage with their hearts aflame!,
As all America becomes their stage....
They strive to reach a haven free from Shame,
While Hypocrites and Southern Demons rage!
Their Souls will surge to Freedom from the cage
Of Hate's Barbaric Evils ... to be Free! –
Stronger in Pride and Rich in Suffering's Wage!
Free! Lord, forever! – From Captivity! –
Purged clean of Sorrows, Shame, and Misery....

19

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Lollie Butler

Cold Draft

When my brother left for foreign fields
to insure world peace,
I died.

My body kept vigil by the mailbox,
flipping through bills, throwing ads
for The Reader's Digest in the trash can.

20 I learned to walk without bringing one blade
of grass to its knees;
carried spiders down flights of stairs
to freedom.

And when he returned with corpses
in the shallows of his eyes,
I fed him the broth of his lost years.

Now my young sons bring kindling
for the evening's fire,
we feed the blaze with news of foreign wars
till headlines crackle like gunshot.

The fire never quite warms the house.

© 2014

Lollie Butler

Lollie Butler bears the heat in Tucson, Arizona, where she earned a Master's Degree in Creative Writing while working in a rehab center for the seriously mentally ill. She has won several literary awards, including a presidential award from Texas A&M University, where her poem, "The One Free Woman in America" — dedicated to Rosa Parks — remains on view at the George H. Bush Sr. Presidential Library. Her other awards include one from The Robert Frost Foundation. Currently working as a volunteer for NAMI of Southern Arizona, she coordinates a mentoring program for the mentally ill.

21



Lollie Butler

‘inspiration is another
kind of hunger’

The poet writes: “I sometimes think inspiration lives in the stomach. My feelings seem to rise from that center and at times overtake me. When I look up at the star-studded sky at night or when I listen—really listen—to the last measure of a melody, my stomach says, ‘Look, you’ll never have this exact feeling again, so quick! Write it down.’ I suppose I could confuse those feeling with hunger pains because they are a bit like the craving for chocolate-mint ice cream but...no, inspiration is another kind of hunger, one that requires a pencil and paper.”

22

Lollie Butler

Battle Fatigue

I no longer blame the world
for bad dreams. I hear a thousand screams
from dispensable towns and awaken
to my heart pounding on the door.

If there are guns to blame, my arms are cocked
and loaded; fingers prepared to march
on sleeping cities. My brutal silence floats
like a searchlight over distant, disputed fields
taking body count. My lips are guilty

of crimes against humanity. And so
it has become that I am stripped of trust;

I do not trust the twitch
behind the president's smile;
colors his wife wears,
groups represented by letters
of anyone's alphabet;

heads of state, their welcoming bouquets,
medals on military uniforms or the politics
of neutralities and those who would cleanse, cleanse.

23

Continued on page 24

I wait for headlines to turn upside down
becoming footnotes; for armies of the world
to go marching off the edge,
for some smart-lipped business man to tell me
there is profit in all this.

Taking tea in genteel company,
I spread red and blue jam on bland, white bread
and eat till I choke.

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24

Gari Crowley

Falling Away

1.
His head was a
circuit of
jetsam and
flotsam and
seemingly lying
weightless and
drifting he
untethered from
the tangible
having slipped
from the
weakness of
her own
hand then
disappeared like
eyesight from
the ending
gifts of
their faces.

25

Continued on page 26

2.

The song of the old woman

keeps time to the

ticking of the clock.

She sits on the edge

of her side

of the bed

and carefully puts

her glasses on.

She peers into

the mirrored

door where

memories stay

within her sight.

In her heart there is

the gift of sad red roses

given to her

from love's hand.

A mortal season of

grieving keeps

its own time.

The lyrics of

three lost words

will be

sung until

the end.

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26

Gari Crowley

Gari is an Arizona native and has lived here his entire life. He is a lover and respecter of the desert. He lives in Sierra Vista with his wife, Linda, and their cat, Sam. He has been employed in the property management/development field as a landscaper and groundskeeper. He is now retired. Reach the poet at arroyo_verde@yahoo.com.

27

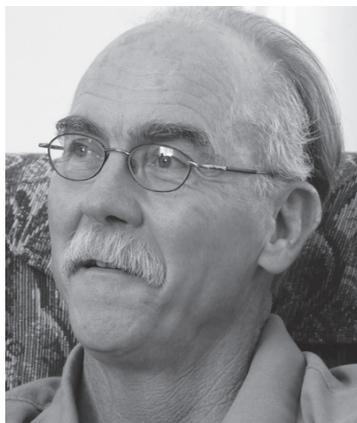


Photo by Linda Crowley

Gari Crowley

‘all about words and language’

The poet writes: “I do a lot of thinking. I sit at the table, then go for a walk or work in the yard, read or listen to music. Always up and down. It is the process of an idea that comes to me through reading and research, background or what is common to my backyard, so to speak. There is nothing spectacular, academic or ‘intellectual’ about it. It is all about words and language, though I do have a preference to be succinct. Most importantly, I get involved with the challenge.”

28

Gari Crowley

Salvage Yard

A scavenger of carcasses
walks the labyrinths
of time and entropy.
He walks through the extended family
and their convoluted histories
oxidized in memories and stillness.
Features have yielded
to the elements—
pigments and cosmetics and
empty bodies.
The auto-nostalgic
pining strikes an innocent
envy in the romantic eyes of
dreamers.
—of moth and rust—
Shattered glass, amethyst in cullet
and a strewnment of commodity—
the viscera is scribbled about like
graffiti in a field tagged
with inherent dysfunction.
So it is with the passage of age
when measured through cars—
the Plymouth, Willys, Corvair and on.
In retrospect,
never having engaged the holistic
approach,
there is the dubious distinction of
having made our own way
to the end of the road.

© 2014

29

Mary Theresa Dietz

After the Rain (Tucson July)

Standing on the earth,
Recently wet by a pounding rain
Of water so long held in heavy clouds,
Taut and pregnant with promise
Of sweet-smelling relief
From thirst and incessant sun,

Watching distant peaks of
Deep steely blue,
Dappled with warm dots of pink
And coral orange
From the latest rays of this day's sunshine,

The distant vista of vast sky
Stretched out wide with open arms
And painted with gorgeous grays
Put together of comforting rich thick reds
Of numerous shades
And slate blues of greatest complexity,

My spirit housed impossibly in such a small home,
Swells like the vapor in that sky,
Like the promise of the impossible joy.

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Mary Theresa Dietz

Mary Theresa Dietz writes: “I am a Tucson visual artist, but I’ve always loved to write too. I regularly have bits and pieces of writing going through my head as I go about my day. I think writing is like painting – in words. I go about it in a similar way. I choose words and phrases in writing, as I do colors and textures in painting. The way the piece sounds is akin to the composition of a painting. When I write, I just look up in my head and describe what I see. I am currently honing my writing chops by writing a first of the month story every first of the month and posting them on Facebook. These are usually combinations of truth and fantasy, and so far I have a year and a quarter of them under my belt.” Reach the poet at mtdietz@mac.com.

31



Photo by Jeff Panther

Mary Theresa Dietz

‘filled with joy at the beauty’

The poet writes: “ ‘Schubert’ is a poem about my cat. ‘After the Rain (Tucson July)’ is a poem I composed in my head while on a walk in east Tucson after a major summer storm. I was filled with joy at the beauty of the clouds and the mountains after the rain. It was only later, someone pointed out that this poem is actually one long sentence.”

Mary Theresa Dietz

Schubert

His habitual garb of striped pajamas
Speaks of his languid, carefree spirit.
With grace and total confidence,
A bit of humor too,
He glides from room to room
Seeking a bright patch of gold
On which to unfold.
With placid face upturned,
Slanted eyes shut tightly,
He dreams.
Rising now and then
To stretch in perfect luxury,
He ultimately abandons this spot
In favor of another,
His snaky tail floating behind his disappearing form.

33

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Climate Cha[ll]enge

The lake is green with
probabilities of pollen.

A clam concentrates downward
in its industry of not moving

save for so much occasion as to compact
time into original molecules.

Halves of small shells lie concave to the sun.
They reflect original light.

They wait for the next age of limestone
to mold old death into new Earth.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

In his fourth book, “Eumaeus Tends,” the poet admits: “By choice and necessity, I lead an eremitic life. I have not been educated in what is called ‘creative writing.’ I do not deserve to display the credentials of the MFA, and so I cannot be regarded as a professional poet. I like it that way. It is probable that I make many mistakes. I am inclined to allow the beginnings of my poems to wander in prosy fashion and let rhythm take over when it has a mind to. Still, my mistakes are my own. But if anything I say is worth saying, the worth is my own too. I’d like to think that those who look at the poems may gain from my mistakes and venture their own. We may learn together and enjoy together the adventure of making language and sharing it.” Contact the poet at richard_sederstrom1221@q.com.

35



Richard Fenton Sederstrom

‘You will detect a barb or two’

The poet writes: “I have attached what I think of as an introduction to a collection of poems about climate change. The climate I am thinking of is not that which we normally think of, but the climate of our culture, which will have to be changed if we are to control change for any other climate. The longer poems may be regarded as dedicated to some of the young people whose lives I have observed, and maybe sometimes altered, maybe sometimes for the better—theirs as well as mine. You will detect a barb or two, but these are not aimed in the direction of the people whose natures resound, I hope, in the poems, but toward those who, knowingly or not, would denature those people, as well as themselves.”

36

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

“It Might Be Nice If We Brought Flowers”

For Sophia

Can it be true about any life in any species
that the only good one is a dead one?

The “nice” scorpion from the terrarium, as you say, Sophia,

though dead by all reports, has not become nice
by virtue of death but by the nature of its relation
in re:

its un-lonely surviving partner in their glassed-in world.

The nice scorpion-who-has-been survives just enough to continue
as recorded *nice* in the primordial milieu of arthropod un-niceness.

37

But these comparisons dissolve with your expression of grief.

“It might be nice if we brought flowers.” Even slyly,
you care to regard the departed in your gentle mind

an impulse toward fragile memorial beauty
in deference to a perceived Ordovician decorum
offered this lonely survivor,

who, a scorpion after all, has never been lonely
in its non-company with its once-and-ever-nice companion,
nor now, in company no more or less tender or

nice than any company, save what your young soul endows,
than it had enjoyed by way of its primordial nature,
never noticed before your blossoming moment of grace.

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Unstrung • Summer 2014

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

An Experiment in Chemistry

1. The Problem

I hope you can understand, not having
the forming moments of my day at hand,
or I hope that, not understanding my morning
you may be willing to extrapolate the forming moments
of your own day so far and lend your benefit of doubt
and the benefit of your own experience, so much
vaster and so much more responsible than my own.

38 Or, I hope you will pretend to understand what fun,
sardonic as it may seem, I have been having today.
It's not so sardonic as the poem I drafted while
I was watching the innocents at work. It started
out as the humorous story about the chemistry teacher
who, fifty years ago at this very school, gathered
together too much of the constituents of black gun-powder
before he touched a lit match to it. Brimstone is
a wonderful evacuator of a chemistry lab. But:

then, and remember, I was watching the innocents
(but a capital *I* seems suddenly appropriate), and
somehow the story led to thoughts of what
those constituents and their descendants have done
to Innocents down these several bleeding centuries:

Continued on page 39

2. Action

A chemistry teacher demonstrates how to make that good old-fashioned black gun-powder. He is like the man in “To Build a Fire,” attentive to the details, but not to the repercussions.

And he’s going to build a fire.
He’s going to build a small second of fire with just a little bit of black gun-powder.

So he gathers the ingredients:

- a. The charcoal that burned in braziers to heat the Middle Ages, to warm the hands of inquisitors, the backs of heretics.
- b. The sulfur that heated the eschatological adventures in Genesis, or the parts that invented sardonic irony and whose yellow stench helped make the darkest spots of Milton’s darkness visible.
- c. The saltpeter that cooled the loins of boys at war (which we all know was a only gentling little lie, to focus the patriotic spirit and gestures of death).

Now he pours a little heap of heretics into a dish.
He adds a similar amount of cooled soldier
(He's done this often. Doesn't need to measure).
He covers the pile with those lively parts of Genesis.
But too much Genesis for the modern sensibility.
So he adds another soldier or two.
Too much, of course.
He adds more ancient scripture, a pinch of Sodom,
and some more heretics, a lingering Arian maybe. A Huguenot.

You know how this is going to continue.
You who know the difference
between the scientist and the technician,
know that the technician will follow the process
like the man in London's arctic forest.
You know what will happen
when he touches the mixture with a lit match.
But do you foresee the repercussion?

3. Reaction

A sharp flash and great gray *whoosh!* entertains
for almost a second. Part of the first awed *oooh*.
Then the smoke and the sewer stench.
All that rotting death in the meadow.

The students, blinded, gagging, gasp
like fallen cherubs in the darkness visible.
They grope (it's the only word: *grobe*)
for the door, the closed door in the hacking dark.

In the brimstone: the sewer, that rotting death,
in their blindness they grope for the door.
Someone gropes for the door handle.
Black panic slaps the hand away, back into the cloud.

Then, at last, the door is opened. But the students linger,
trapped in the narrow doorway by their own numbers.
Smoke sloughs out before them.
A film of old skin yellowing the day.

4. Resolution

At last one surviving Innocent emerges
into that demi-realm of Milton's cosmos
that we learn to know as ours.

41

They all grope through the expanding drift of sulfur and smoke
that lingers with the languorous grace
of history bleeding into the yellow air.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

A Visit to the Music Studio

1

Young sounds in naive blues, disharmonious
to my visiting ears, unharmonious to the players,
each in an ear-phoned world of isolate sound and isolate ears.
Sounds of an electric guitar in the next practice room
anti-chordant alto hum and twang.
I try to listen to a cacophony half-created, half-computerized
in the echoing nasal thrum of country chords.

2

42 A lone voice in a corner complains to her guitar
at a sound in its benign acoustics
the lament that she can't play this without a capo!
The blues are the blues wherever they come from
and I share the heavy joy of her grief.
I long now in my own half-created blues
for the mechanical relief of a piano,
the mediation smooth to my ear that can never quite produce
the chastening pain of the exquisite false note.

3

A group of young women in another practice room—
but how many do I hear?—
produces a long *yoooooooo-oooo*
that can only precede a taunting chaste ideal of sex.
Plea for love and love abandoned.
Yoooooooo-oooo slips right by the longing,
slides through any grief for
a whom and a where they don't know,
are only preparing for.

Continued on page 43

4

“They rejected my blood.”

A bland pain of finality in plain speech
that we turn into the eschatological
last ditch of all of us whose blood will,
and it will for all of us someday, be rejected.

Electric guitar and drum
strum and drum and dullness of practice.

Do you hear though the clarity of sound
that will precede someday its own graceful finality?

5

I hear and don't hear too
and I know how selective even the silent poet must be
trying to mirror sounds out of paper—

to prepare a wraith of promised noises
that will leave the paper and the poet,
become sound for the seconds of making sound

and return with the luck of lost children
to the original silence of
paper

once

more.

43

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Real Notes

For Jollene Murphy

“They’re real notes. Swear.”

This from the girl with the blue clarinet.

Real blue. “Swear.”

Her notes are blue.

No metaphor. Swear.

What sound it is cannot be written out and out

and out as real notes, no more than whale song,

the real and ecstatic whale,

not the human’s wishful echo of her ghost,

or a wolf in the night.

The soul searching owl. The soul tearing rapacious owl.

The osprey’s hard starving grief having missed the perch,

the death cry. The victory burble of the diving fish.

All notes. Swear.

Like the warning sound of a loon after midnight,

perfect sanity translated into madness by the wakened tourist,

the echo note of the nightmare shriek of the lunatic

who sings on the dreamed-limned rack

Continued on page 45

in the orchestra pit of refining flames, the song of flames.
The real note (Swear) that marches in perfect, perfect nothingness
before the first note of Beethoven's paeon to the final silence.

Real notes. Swear.

The exhausted lover pleading,
so so so far suspended beyond the demeaning notes of language.

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45

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Duet in Soft Shoe

My old pen-emy Heracleitus
claimed that you can't get there
from here

but that's neither here
nor there

since we're almost always
either in one place
or another

46 almost always in one time
or another

or always all ways
and any where.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

We're Behind

Another visit to another classroom

“We’re behind,” the teacher reminds you
almost every five minutes, sliding
farther behind by the length of behinding
she gains by saying it again.

It is another bland reminder to you
of the infelicitous mind of the professionalized teacher.
“I don’t do poetry. I’m into literature.”

The desperately regimented un-curiosity.
Raw expertise shoved breathlessly beyond wonder.
Pre-lesson, lesson-lesson, post-lesson, door.

47

Out there beyond the transparent opacity of picture
windows, out in the sun is no freedom either,
but light at least and eyes to lead me—

and while my eyes walk away
they will scale what they can of that
eucalyptus just off the limits of your campus,

or at least I will take into my willing old lungs
a little of its healing fragrance—
leads me back to the comfortable old shrine
of my father’s 1938 Underwood portable and a pencil.

Continued on page 48

and sentences which just now I am beginning to lack

We are expendable, children, you and I,
orphans in the electrical miasma,
and I admit that I feel reduced to the echo
of your collective whine, a poem of whining

left in mere pencil, threatened as we are
when we try to breathe gently on our words
just ahead of the pink eraser that creeps pacelessly
closer to the yellow boneyard of paper.

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48

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

A Deceit of Old Weather

Is déjà vu false déjà vu
when the flight of near memory
leads me back to the exact place
and the exact time of the incident vu?

Or is the vue of that time
and place out of the extraordinary
number of times and places deja?
Does inexactitude make

from false memory true vue?

49

© 2014

Michael Gregory

Norse and Gothic

Norse and Gothic, Slavonic, Basque and Greek,
Church and pig Latin, Occitan,
Arabic, Saxon, Erse, Franconian . . .
the tongues they spoke at Aachen were twisted
into Celtic knots tied and untied
like Chinese puzzles by the red-haired monks
the new emperor invited in
to teach his court how to read and write

so
strings of words laced into dispute
about the nature of reality
and worse the reality of nature
(how *did* that Universal Cat bear
so many and such particular kittens and how *were*
they all to be fed?) as less articulate brothers
more physical than metaphysical
were laced into plate and mail to defend the faith
or more often to settle property
disagreements and that vague thing honor
(pawning their castles first if they were smart)

Continued on page 51

joining the legal decrees chronicles
accounts and legends quickly filling the shelves
sententiae becoming *compendia*
compendia becoming *summae*
cloistered logical equivalents
to flying buttresses and soaring arches
populated with lifelike figures arranged
in perspective and tiered to illustrate
in stone both unity in diversity
and the strength of character manifest
in the proportions of divine reason

as it appears in the utmost human scale
not to prove true what the faithful knew
needed no rational demonstration
but to bring to light brick by brick
article by article the questions
raised in constructing monuments the options
available and choices made in order
to achieve concord among the elements
put in the lists by conflicting authorities.

51

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From “Pound Laundry”

Michael Gregory

Michael Gregory's "Mr. America Drives His Car," selected poems from roughly the last quarter of the last century and the first decade of this one, was published last year by Post-Soviet Depression Press. Since 1971, he has lived off-grid ten miles from the U.S.-Mexico border in the high desert grassland of southeast Arizona, the location of his 1975 book, "The Valley Floor."

52

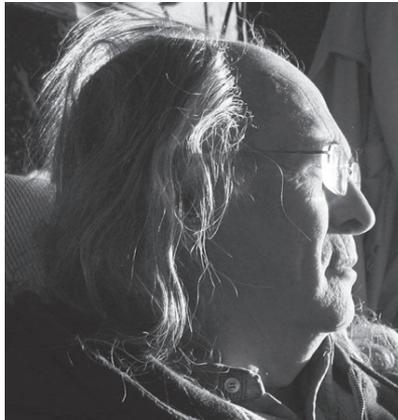


Photo by Heidi Dehncke-Fisher

Michael Gregory

‘Recurrent themes and images’

The poet writes: “ ‘Pound Laundry’ (forthcoming from Post-Soviet Depression Press) is a book-length poem based on the life and work of Ezra Pound, considered by many to be the point person for the invention of ‘high modernism’ in literature, and in recent years, considered to be in many ways a postmodernist. The poem consists of voices on a variety of topics that were or were likely to have been going through Pound’s head, voices from his wide and deep reading and from contemporary discourses, in the air at the time, an inter-discursive cross-fertilization—tales of the tribe, blab of the pave, etc. Recurrent themes and images play upon each other throughout the book, often in Pound’s words, or those of others being specifically referenced; involving, for example, concerns with medieval culture (he held a master’s degree in Romance Languages, specializing in troubadour poetry and its relation to medieval philosophers—Johannes Scotus Eriugena, in particular—to Dante, and to poetics in general). The four pieces included here touch on some of these themes—the Carolingian world of Eriugena and the high Middle Ages he influenced; Pound’s formative years in the progressive transcendentalist climate of the eastern seaboard; and Confucianism (here invoked in a near-transcription of a famous Taoist put-down of Confucius).”

53

Michael Gregory

Skirt faunteroy curls and velvet

Skirt faunteroy curls and velvet
to suit the polite conceit of the day
affected by presbyterian friends

next door to the city of brotherly love
where truth was assumed to be not merely
a gleam through opacities

but simple and obvious if not
obscured by human malevolence
corruptibility or chance

from schoolyard puns to honorifics
rabbinical and academic
identities public and personal

compounded annually
someone always taking his names
given and patronymic in vain

On the academy fencing team
in adolescence an art to be practiced
forever after with broomsticks

Continued on page 55

if necessary when for instance
locked up in Monte Cristo scenes
with green knights for Christmas presents

Siegfrieds and Fafnirs from Greece to Iceland
Camelot to Baghdad
dressed in high romantic attire

Terror Son of Fear
Balor of the Evil Eye
Grendel's dam and Perilous Beast

the manly art of self-defense
including as a matter of course
tactics for taking the offensive

SS

Self-reliance a second nature—
*nothing at the last sacred but
the integrity of one's own mind*

becoming what one is to others
an ethical production and what
one is to oneself a melding

through creed or inner light good works
or contemplation the *mens sana*
realized as living world

replete with imaginary friends
 recognized by their signatures
in otherwise natural objects

within the original harmony
 beneficence diversity
of visionary pastoral states

Idealistic agrarianism
 romantic nationalism mystic
personalism one's self

56

surely not to be confused
 with what used to be called the soul
yet of that selfsame energy

having within itself the prolific
 seminal infinitude
of the private self possessed

as private property is possessed
 not to be sure as transferable stock
but as inalienable goods

genteel proprietorship
 transfiguring materialism
spiritualizing the sensuous

Rousseau's contract a writ of bondage
to keep one from finding oneself in command
of one's own aptitude

the personal will given up
to the general will, private concerns
to the common interest, life

conceived as a problem to be solved
or self-improvement regimen,
said self a ragbag of throwaways

as if collective articulations
weren't merely provisional arrangements
for the single separate person

57

the individual weren't moved first
by individual conscience
only later by social concerns

© 2014

From "Pound Laundry"

Michael Gregory

That *conscience* and *consciousness*

That *conscience* and *consciousness* two words
in English are simply *conscience* in romance tongues,

that on the other hand *thinking* and *knowing*
—*meaning* and *knowledge*—aren't synonymous

intellect to collect sort and compile
reason to try to make sense of it all,

that metaphysics poetics and aesthetics
what makes sense to the mind at its best

are moral matters whereby the *mot juste*
is often enough a matter of life and death

wherein authority proceeds from reason
never the reverse—philosophy

approaching the godhead with reason, the godhead
philosophy with love, as tongue in cheek

with piety and humor Eriugena
instructed Charles the Bald beginning with

the nature of Nature defined at some length
by the Byzantine Greeks he'd been reading

58

Continued on page 59

(one of the few in those days of *Graeca
est non potest legi* who still could)

— Gregory Nazianzen Gregory
of Nyssa Pseudo-Dionysios

for all their devotion to personalities
neoplatonist pagans to a man—

beginning *All that is and all that is not*
and then the *symbolon / mysterium*

We may know not what but that God is
but coming to the belief as Grosseteste

59

half a millennium later put it rhyming
light and love *All that are are light*

skating thereby a little too close
to the pantheistic heresy

for which insight said Scot twice while alive
was condemned then for good measure

again four centuries after his untimely death
(stabbed to death so the metonymy goes

by the pens of some of his brightest students)
his *confrères*' bones dug up and scattered

for wagging the golden tongue of the troubadours
putting words in Albigensian mouths

seeing the dark alight with love's intention
en route to the final solution on Montségur.

© 2014

From "Pound Laundry"

60

Michael Gregory

The Six Classics

The Six Classics: *The Book of Poetry.*

The Book of History. The Book of Rites.

The Book of Music. The Philosophy

of Mutations. The Spring and Autumn Annals.

I've studied them all said Ch'iu and tried to teach

world leaders what I have learned

but no one wants to listen to my lessons.

Lucky for you said old Long Ears you met no ruler

who wanted to put the world in order.

The white hawks reproduce their kind

by not turning their eyes from one another.

Without losing oneself in humanity

how can one teach humanity?

Without the way one is lost wherever one goes.

61

© 2014

From "Pound Laundry"

Andrew R. Jones

Sad House

A white picket fence edged
The front yard of a gorgeous two-story home.

Colored with earth tones
A few steps leading to the front porch.

On a stone bench, a man sat and stared
The slide and swing occupied in the tall green grass.

Only the breeze moved the swings enough
To hear the creaking metal chains

Scattered leaves were the only things
Enjoying the tall slide.

The man wiped tears from his cheeks as a woman
Stood in the 2nd story window.

Holding a sweater close to her face
Catching the flood from her eyes.

The upper windows seemed to droop at the edges and the roof
Leaned forward as if bowing its head to pray.

This home of two, previously of three
Will never be the same.

© 2014

Andrew R. Jones

Andrew R. Jones is a Marine Corps combat Veteran of the Iraq War and is currently pursuing an English (Creative Writing) degree through ASU. He has been published in numerous journals and magazines, including *Outrageous Fortune*, *The Traveler*, *The Veteran's Writing Project* and *The Gila River Review*. He has also authored a collection of poetry and short stories titled "Healing the Warrior Heart" and recently published a Crown of Sonnets titled "A Warrior's Crown." When not competing in poetry slams, Andrew can be found at church and spending time with his beautiful wife and two children in Phoenix.

63



Andrew R. Jones

‘bring my readers into my world’

64 The poet writes: “After 9 years of battling Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, brought on by combat operations in Iraq 2003, I decided to transfer the thoughts and nightmares from my mind onto a sheet of paper. It began as journaling, then slowly became short non-fiction stories and eventually developed into poetry. My combat experiences and military service are the primary inspiration behind most of my work. My vision is to bring my readers into my world where they can experience and understand where I have been and what

I have been through. This has also developed into a way for other combat veterans to relate and to understand they are not alone in their struggles. Some of my work comes from challenging myself to relay certain emotions through describing a scene, as in ‘Sad House.’ The goal was to evoke certain emotions through the description of a house. Other pieces are influenced greatly by my strong faith in God and my relationship with Jesus. My faith has been monumental in my healing process, and I am sure to give praise to God every chance I have.”

Andrew R. Jones

Secret Hopes

He pushed a little red motorcycle
With secret hopes—
It would one day, take him away.

Chaos in the other room, he was confused.
How was he given blame for missing money
Which filled big brother's guitar case with
Marlboro Reds?

He pushed a little red motorcycle
With secret hopes—
It would one day, take him away.

65

Daddy comes home, yelling at Mommy.
She yelled back and things are broken,
Brother and Sister say,
“Let's go for a walk.”

All I want to do is
Push my little red motorcycle
With secret hopes—
It would one day, take me away.

© 2014

Andrew R. Jones

Pennies

After a penny for each of my thoughts, you're going to have to finance the two cents needed to give your opinion. My thoughts are like silver nickels, they're a dime a dozen and only a quarter of them make any kind of sense. Like a rolled-up dollar bill connecting a nose to a fine line of blow, we're all just a tool. If only Lincoln were alive today to see us fools, he would lead the strong until 10 became 20 and 20 became a century's worth of rebellion.

66 But like a child beaten by a stumbling father we just don't understand. Like a man with a python rope coiled around his neck we are just too tired. Like the mouse dropped in a bucket of water we're struggling to hold on to hope. We're ankle deep in shit and standing upside down.

But those rare moments when hope reaches in and saves us, we discover we are dogs in an alley. Hungry. Wrinkling noses and baring teeth to anything which opposes us. We discover the patience of a racing turtle. We take on the endurance and perseverance of an ant battling a beetle.

We discover a passion to inspire and the inspirational gift of passion which has belonged to the greatest minds of time. But will we use it appropriately? Like Martin Luther King Jr., who preached for black men to be treated equally and for all men to love one another? Or maybe like Mother Teresa who inspired a passion for pro-peace rallies instead of anti-war?

Continued on page 67

A passion to inspire is a gift and like any gift it can be misused. Like the child who tears apart his remote control race car in order to extract the engine so he can connect it to a battery and make a helicopter with the scrap pieces of the strobe light he was gifted the previous year which will then inspire him to attend a top ranked engineering school where he will use his passion to design a new age of attack helicopters...which destroy a village...where a child is gifted a paper airplane and inspired to open the folds to write a story...which will never be told.

So keep your pennies—'cus like our souls after Jesus died—my thoughts are free.

© 2014

67

Jennifer Jones

Lady

I looked in the mirror and I realized I am not the Maiden!
My eyes are older, they see more now than they used to.
My body is not as firm, it dances to the change of the seasons.
My spirit is vibrant and full with a deeper color than the spring.
Like my voice, it has changed and grown to encompass me.

I looked in the mirror and I realized I am not the Mother!
My heart breaks a little as each thought cascades over me...
I am not the Mother... I hear the whisper on the wind "this life..."
My soul is full with the knowledge I am meant to walk another path.
I am not the Mother, but I am not alone.

68
I looked in the mirror and I realized ...
I am the Warrior! I am full of life and vigor!
Battle scarred and shadowed with experience on my heavy brow!
The primal screams of battle on the very edge of my tongue...
I am the war goddess Morrigan! From my lips scores of souls will perish!
And yet, I hold them within, for they are not my words to speak.

I looked in the mirror and I realized I am not the Crone!
She is my Grandmother. She is my future!
Love and respect is what I feel for her... what I owe her!
She is the old woman on the bus waiting to get her groceries who smiles at me.
The eyes of the world contained in a small frail form.
She is the beginning and the end at the same moment in time.

I looked in the mirror and I saw the Goddess.

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Jennifer Jones

Jennifer Jones is a native of Arizona and lives in Phoenix with her husband and five cats who are worshiped like the miniature deities they truly are. She works in the field of Information Technology and holds a Master of Music in Opera Performance from Arizona State University. In addition to her day job, she sings with Arizona Opera and will be performing with them in the coming season. She has always been a fan of the written word and is an avid reader of sci-fi and fantasy. Poetry has always held a special place in her heart.

69



Photo by Nancy Hall/Still in Motion

Jennifer Jones

‘life and the journey’

70

The poet writes: “ ‘Self’ came about one night when I was sitting at the computer thinking about life and the journey we all take. I was reading some headlines on CNN and I remember thinking how ridiculous we are to each other and how repressed we can be. It made me think of a perfect butterfly in a glass case. Lovely to look at and ageless but without life — no magic to it. ‘Lady’ was inspired by the way we expect life to turn out. As women, we have predefined roles, and sometimes when we don’t fit into the notion of what we should be, it can cause a great deal of pain. I didn’t want to be lost in those feelings, so I started writing about the many stages of life and endeavored to celebrate where I was on this amazing journey.”

Jennifer Jones

Self

Imprisoned by society
Another faceless victim of conformity.

I sit in a sea of people...
Completely alone.

Drifting like a lost piece of cargo
No longer belonging to a certain place, or time.

My soul more faceted than the rarest jewel...
I look to uncover each surface and revel in the journey.

71

How often we are denied the adventure and discovery?
Told how we must act, believe, and even LOVE in a certain way.

Left with no chance to discover our true self...
Kept like butterflies under glass.

We sit...
So lovely... pristine...
and lifeless.

© 2014

Tracy Keller

Central

Downtown sleeps,
while the moon
peeks between
rising concrete and glass.
The expansiveness calms me –
long and lean,
binding around
like mother's arms.
The rounding streets,
with their emerald lights
and sapphire illuminations
dance in darkened sky.
Their golden light,
buttery,
coaxing me to follow.
Around me I see
the blackboards of daytime activity
empty with want,
calling on the summer heat
to warm the avenue's solitude,
to rise up,
kiss the air
where clips of lightning
expose like snapshots
the grandeur of this silent surrounding.
Its infinite space a place to rest
momentarily
until moving on
towards growing numbers
and budding life.

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Unstrung • Summer 2014

Tracy Keller

Tracy Keller is a political nerd by day and a poet by night. She earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in English from Northern Arizona University. She has worked for Arizona News Service – a political news service that covers state politics and government – as a coordinator of various political publications and online services since 2002. She's an aficionado of words and a passionate bibliophile, and enjoys finding ways to inspire and energize her creative side through writing, music and photography. She was born and raised in Phoenix, and has come to appreciate – if not worship – the perfect taco, vibrant sunsets, and tumultuous monsoons. To learn more about Tracy, visit her website at tracyjkeller.com or contact her at tracyjkeller@q.com.

73



Tracy Keller

‘unpredictable flashes of inspiration’

74

The poet writes: “My poetic craft usually begins with some kind of ‘ah-ha’ moment – a moment that sneaks up on me from an unforeseen corner in my life. It can be a word, a phrase, an image, or an eavesdropped conversation that pops up out of nowhere and taps me on the shoulder with a wonderful gift of a sound, a rhythmic line or a nugget of an idea. These unpredictable flashes of inspiration are what light up my mind and get me excited about where I can take a turn of a phrase, an alliterative sentence or a persistent feeling and construct something meaningful and melodic out of it. Those creative sparks come from all sorts of places: childhood memories, sensory experiences, visually stunning scenery, beautifully mundane objects or simply a stubborn thought that I can’t shake. Specifically, for the poems included in this issue – ‘Central,’ ‘Little Oaxaca,’ and ‘Summer Storm’ – Phoenix is at the heart of them all. It’s where I am most at home and where I am invigorated by images that capture the comforts of this city’s milieu, the vibrancy of its neighborhoods and the awe-inspiring visuals of its sky and land. Ultimately, my poetic craft – my desire to express these visions that arouse me – is best summed up by Ernest Hemingway: ‘All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.’ Simple, straightforward and true – that is my challenge and my purpose when writing poetry.”

Tracy Keller

Little Oaxaca

The day's flavors hang in the nighttime air.
Frying oil and toasted chili peppers
waft across chain-linked fences.
The scents mingle with red-green-white celebrations
sprayed, splashed on decaying brick walls.
Liquor store lights glimmer on the gangs
of short men loitering for an evening snack,
strolling across the barrio streets,
dancing to distant trumpets
and high-pitched barks of sandy Chihuahuas.

And there I am – blonde with red tint,
freckles of angel kisses speckling my milky white skin,
green-golden eyes lighting up like sparklers
as I drive slowly through this little paradise,
absorbing the harmony of family sounds vibrating at the surface.
The young and old sprouting from the desert soil
revealed to me like the saints they revere.
But I am merely a loose root at the surface,
trying to soak up this good Earth, these rich layers of life,
the sustenance of community and the plentiful joy
flourishing in this communion of culture.

75

© 2014

Tracy Keller

Summer Storm

Rolling dust dredges the late summer skies.
It stomps the earth as wild horses do
escaping the chase mighty men pursue
and pouring forth a bounty to baptize
land hungry with want – its thirst a surprise.
It climbs canyon walls and plunges through
conquering cautiously its point-of-view
until the wind shifts askew its goodbye.

76
Fear not the looming blues of this twilight –
the mire, the moans, the mystery of you.
Built up grand to make us shutter tonight,
you're purely a puzzle of God's delight.
And that which we wonder is ever true
will be laid to rest when we bid adieu.

© 2014

Eva Louis

The Reflection

I've been led to this land of burning soil and dry winds to find
the paintings in the canvas directed towards my soul and my creation.
With open eyes and open heart, the whispers that dance around
in my thoughts and in my dreams are true and deep
as they touch the energy that beckons me.
Intricate yet simple is the message that bleeds all around me.
We cannot change those who don't understand,
we can only live our true calling from the sand.
Our being is depicted in the solace and cool breezes
that come infrequent and from afar, not knowing
where they will end or where they will fall.

77

Reflecting on this journey to the sun and the boldness
that exists in the core directs us to know that there is more
and the universe is looking down to hold on to the purity that once was.
Waste not the opportunities that lay before you from the mountains to
the forests to the deserts to the sands of beaches,
for these windows are your liberty to transverse to the other side.
Commitments to be strong, and to wield that power
that belongs to no other is to have a love so deep
that it cannot be contained and must be set free.
As we rise from the ashes, the Phoenix is the new beginning and rebirth,
let us envelop ourselves and those around us with these gifts
as we are like no other and must reach beyond the border.

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Eva Louis

Eva Louis, originally from Texas and the Midwest, transplanted to Arizona in 2006 and found her home. From the earliest age, Eva has had a love for words and writing and literature. She is known for being involved with many aspects of art and works with artists on a regular basis. She has formed her career around her love for writing, edification of others, and promoting positively in everything she does. She is an inspired writer and produces articles and inspirational writings on a regular basis as part of her work every day. Eva Louis currently is president and founder of her own company, Chronic Behavior, and writes under her division of Film & Fashion Futures. She is a writer for Runway and Runway Teen magazines, as well as several other organizations covering a wide range of industries. In addition, she is a model, actress, and host for a talk show called “Talking the Five,” covering Film, Fashion, Arts, Music and Entertainment.



Photo by Stella Crowl / Style Image Studios

Eva Louis

‘a platform of inspiration’

The poet writes: “In my daily life, I am inspired by words and look to writers every day to find emotions and feelings that move me through their messaging. As a writer, I am affected by words and have made a conscious choice daily to never waste a word. I have learned the power in words, and as such poetry has been a selected format and way to create a platform of inspiration to others daily. I feel that you are oftentimes called to a craft by the nature of your journey and mission in life. For me this is true, as part of the work I pursue, the opportunity to present words and messages through writing and more specifically poetry has become an active part of what I do. Being an inspired writer is different from just being a writer as moments, situations, words, feelings, music, pictures, and so many things can move me to write. It is a very personal experience and one that comes from within and from the soul. I see this as actually one of my gifts that I am obligated to share with others to help and make a difference in others’ lives. There is no better feeling in the world than to know you have positively touched someone by the words you have written.”

79

Bridget Magee

Tapping Our Twigs

That school year I was pudgy.
Chubby.
Chunky.
Husky.

I lived inside my fat armor.
People stared at me.
Studied me.
Avoided me.

80 That school year there was a girl my size.
Every morning she had to squeeze to get through the opening.
The opening where the bushes ended and the fence began.
The opening that the other kids could scamper through.

When she arrived at school, jump ropes went limp.
Balls dribbled away from their dribblers.
Whoops and whistles quieted.

Everyone watched to see if she would make it through.
I stopped my lonely pastime.
I stopped tapping my willow twig against the chain link fence.
I watched, too.

Continued on page 81

She never looked up from the grass
to see our stares,
to see our glares.
She never looked up.

Once, when I was trying to squeeze through the opening
I heard her panting behind me.

“Wait up,” she said.

I pretended I didn’t hear.
I pretended the playground eyes weren’t watching her.
Weren’t watching me.

That school year I drifted in solitude.
Separate from everyone around me.
Except her.

81

When I turn the corner to go into my classroom,
we’d almost collide.

When I’d leave the bathroom,
she’d be there,
slurping at the drinking fountain.

When I’d go to the school nurse with my latest stomach ache,
there she’d be,
gazing at the floor,
panting on the cot next to mine.

I had a lot of stomach aches that year.
She had a lot of breathing problems.
When the school nurse left us alone,
that girl would try to catch my eye.
Try to communicate, *You know how it feels, don't you?*
I'd look away.

After fifteen minutes the nurse would say,
“If you're feeling worse after lunch, come back.”

I knew I'd be back.
Maybe, she did, too.
The nurse's office gave us a place to escape
the stares,
the glares.
For fifteen minutes, at least.

After a while, we did look at each other.
Glance.
Look away.
Peek.
Over and over.
Eventually, we held each other's gaze.
We both knew how it felt.

82

By the end of that school year
we looked the jump ropers,
the basketball players,
and the whistlers
straight in the eye
as we tapped on by.

No more stomach aches.
No more panting and wheezing.
No more stares.
No more glares.

We did our thing.
Everyone else did theirs.

84

That school year,
after the last bell,
on the last day,
she and I walked to the opening.
The opening where the bushes ended and the fence began.
The opening that the other kids could scamper through.

We looked at each other.
We smiled.
And we scampered through, too.
One after the other.

© 2014

Bridget Magee

creative, optimistic, goofy
who wonders why time passes faster the older she gets
who loves her Joe, Co, and Mo
who fears never being enough
who wants a quiet mind
Writer. Poet. Speaker. Teacher. Mom.
Website: www.bridgetmagee.com
Blog: www.weewordsforweeones.blogspot.com

85



Photo by Nick Henry

Bridget Magee

‘a personal poetry narrative’

The poet writes: “Using the universal feelings of loneliness and isolation, I created a personal poetry narrative about two overweight children finding friendship despite their ‘fat armor.’ ‘Tapping Our Twigs’ is not autobiographical, though I have felt profound loneliness and isolation at various points in my life.”

86

Deborah Mayaan

road grader

the road grader outside
bringing new dirt and stones
replacing
what erosion takes downhill

imagining many trucks
hauling loads of soil and sand
from the Sea of Cortez
to the top of our mountain

desperately trying
to not only correct
our erosion-creating ways
but to hold back
time itself
to keep these mountains
sharp
as the day they formed

87

© 2014

Deborah Mayaan

Deborah Mayaan is an energy work and flower essence practitioner who appreciates the healing power of words. Her articles on complementary medicine have appeared in a wide range of publications, from the Arizona Daily Star to Spirituality & Health Magazine. She loves teaching Write to Heal workshops and earned an MA in Educational Psychology. Contact her at www.deborahmayaan.com.

88



Photo by Amy Haskell

Deborah Mayaan

let the rains come

speaking with a dowser
I ask if fear
can hold back
the rain
if my fear of erosion
can stop the flow
I am told, that can be

I have attended
to this hillside
the water
will not take out
my little trailer

and my neighbors
who seem
more precariously balanced
I have been told
not to push
suggest gently only
let them learn
as they must

and I must think
of the greatest good
for all concerned
this area
so desperately
needs water
so those of us
who moved here for dryness
for our sinuses
who have roofs that leak
unprotected wood
that would warp
bare soil that
goes unplanted
who have placed
our trailers
too close to washes
must prepare

and I must
release fear
and sing
as best I can—

89

Continued on page 90

let the rains come
let the washes run
let the waters heal
heal me

let the rains come
let the washes run
let the waters heal
heal you

let the rains come
let the washes run
let the waters heal
heal our earth

let the rains come
let the washes run
let the waters heal
heal us all

© 2014

Poet's note: We have droughts here, but part of climate change is that other places have too much rain, so use discretion in praying for rain.

Deborah Mayaan

marranitos

this Cinco de Mayo
I learn a new word:
“They’re also called marranitos,”
the woman at the grocery says,
when I ask when there will be more cochitos
my mother really likes them, I say

little pigs, these cookies
perhaps sweetening
old taunts
marranos, they called the Jews who hid who they were
as a strategy to survive
like seeds buried deep in the earth
protected from the fierce heat of sun and fire
dormant, but not dead
storing the memories of how to sprout and grow
emerging when the time is right

91

Continued on page 92

maybe I'll call them
conversos, the softer word
those who converted

my mother needs to believe that I am a convert
to Judaism
it is the only truth she can accept
my own memories of her mother speaking Yiddish to me
and grumbling over how she dare not hang out the wash on Sunday
are not to be acknowledged
Achtung! Aviso! watch out!
to risk being the target
again
is too scary

92

tomorrow is Shabbat
and I will make no purchases
will only travel out past the city limits
to visit an old friend
and enjoy the desert in bloom
but on Sunday before starting work
and before hanging out laundry in the intense spring sun
I will again
ride my bike down to the grocery
and stand there like today in my traveler's gear
my helmet on, water bottle in hand
and my backpack to carry my purchases
whether it is this 10-minute ride in the early morning
or the tens of generations of wandering

picking up the languages and customs
of our neighbors
I now know I am safe
to blossom
into who
I am

and I only hope
that in this lifetime
my mother
may learn this as well

© 2014

93

Deborah Mayaan

bird who? (a found poem)

the bird who
goes
eeeeeee!

great-tailed
grackle
gregarious
makes a lotta noise

94
moves around
(not migratory)
neighborhood → hood

omnivore
bigger range
in summer

goes
where
the
food
is

© 2014

Poet's note: Found poem, from notes taken while talking to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum help line to identify this bird.

Unstrung • Summer 2014

Kaitlin Meadows

She: A Poem in Praise

1.

She is all metaphor,
No pained syntax studded with semicolons,
No exclamations uttered in surprise.
She is not neatly ledgered handwriting
Or the culmination of a list of sums.
She is an ampersand,
A tilde.
The accent is the sauce
She applies like a poultice
To your fevered limbs,
Mending the breaks with the adhesive
Of her resolve,
Binding the rents with the
Torn negligee of her longing.
Her heart is the bellows
That pumps low embers
Back into a flame that warms
Even as it consumes you.

95

Continued on page 96

2.

Her name is Rane
And she knows the names and temperaments
Of a hundred kinds of roses,
The history and idiosyncrasies of Corgi's
In an adoration of Tasha Tudor.
She loves her hens and calls them by name,
Identifying each by their eggs.
She lifts her glistening scarlet tomatoes
Like goblets of fine wine,
Marveling that from seed
Came this succulence
And from the barbed canes
That etch her arms like stigmata
Come blackberries so sweet.

96

Continued on page 97

3.

She is made of dust and bonfires,
The smell of orange blossoms
On hot summer nights.
She is made of grief and heart shatter
But her alliance is pledged every day
To the sacrament of happiness
Like a seizure
That grips her
And binds her to the day,
Exultant, expectant,
And full of gratitude.
Her face is like an almanac
Of weather and star travel,
Seasons and their tasks
Born onto a map
That is not geography.

97

Continued on page 98

4.

Her eyes are the color of copper
Gone verdigris,
Her imagination is capable,
Sturdy and well used,
There is an elegance in her
That roughens with drink,
Her heart is
Whetted and stropped
On a rough stone
Used for building an edge
On steel.
She lives in the thicket,
The hedgerow, the bramble,
The place of entanglements
And entwinings,
In the complexities
Of convolutions
Where safety lives
And she can observe the world of perils,
Rearing her
Hairless dreams
Without fear of hawks.

98

Continued on page 99

5.

Her life is a small creek
That occasionally spills
Its banks
Carrying away barns
Before it trickles to a damp spot
Guarded by dragonflies.
She speaks of the Carpathians
As though her homeland
But knows all the currents of the Vulgar River
And where it eddies,
Catching the scarlet leaves of autumn.
She is infinitely at home
Inside herself,
Only venturing out when
The moon has firmly
Sunk itself in a cleft
Between the thighs
Of two mountains
That she calls by their archaic name.

99

Continued on page 100

6.

She claims dawn as her own
Slipping up from whatever bed she's shared,
With whomever, wherever
In the world she is
To greet the moment
When the dark night opens its husk
To receive light like an eager lover
Stretching up to receive
The radiance of the Beloved.
She has known trouble
But not made it,
Been wounded
But refused to injure in kind,
Her blessings have been lavish,
Her sorrows lush.
She is saying at last
All that cannot be said,
Finally yielding to the
Darwinian urge to evolve
In the face of knowledge
That not to do so
Is to perish.

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Kaitlin Meadows

Kaitlin Meadows is the Mistress of Merriment at Kaitlin's Creative Cottage, an oasis of art and creativity where she also gathers a circle of women who love to write and share.

Word Weavers meets twice a month and offers a safe, nurturing place for women to share their writing and use interesting prompts to create new stories. Contact Kaitlin at paloma@dakotacom.net for more information, and check out her blog at www.thundermoonstudios.wordpress.com.

101



Kaitlin Meadows

‘I am driven to see and feel’

The poet writes: “ ‘She: A Poem in Praise’ was born from the deep frustration that stirs in me when someone casually asks at a party, ‘So, what do *you* do?’ and the inevitable next question they ask (if I have the courage to reply, ‘I am a poet,’ instead of ‘I’m a hospice nurse who practices archaeology as an avocation, runs a teaching art studio, and mentors ‘at risk’ young women from 7 to 12 years of age,’ which is equally true) – invariably, their next question is some variation of, ‘What makes someone want to be a *poet*?’ My answer *should be* ‘Because I have to, because I am called to, because I am driven to see and feel and communicate at a level of intensity that would burn you to the ground and scatter your ashes otherwise,’ but I fantasize the shorter reply could be, ‘Here, read this, I am Rane,’ as I hand them (and you) a copy of ‘She: A Poem in Praise.’ ”

102

Nicole Nixen

Skimming Through the '90s Garage Sale

I had not planned to go to the '90s garage sale.
After all, I'd spent the last 10 years or so de-cluttering possessions
I treasured as a teenager.
Holding the heavily copied handwritten flyer in hand,
I felt a slight lump in my throat as I remembered
A time that wasn't necessarily simpler
But seemed so as nostalgia trumped facts.
With better memories in mind, I skated on down to the '90s garage sale.

First thing I spotted at the '90s garage sale
Amidst slap bracelets, chokers and mood rings
Was a heart-shaped box, perfect for storing valuables.
Before I could buy it, it was snatched away by a wily wide-eyed blond
Who wasn't sure if she had the rights to sell it.

Instead I moved onto a fiery red rocking chair.
As I sat in it, an onlooker cautioned – “careful,
The rocking motion will make your stomach hurt.”
Miffed by such nosiness, I waved off the onlooker and said I didn't care.
But I did. This was only the second item I admired
And the previous owners were both deceased.
It was my cue to move on to another aisle at the '90s garage sale.

103

Continued on page 104

I got up and kept walking around until I came across
A “sonic” powered washing machine.
It held my curiosity for a minute,
Then I decided it was too experimental for my tastes.
I was then approached by a polite fellow
Who tried to sell me an “okay” computer.
He’d outgrown it, though he’d never forget it.
I said I remembered this model clearly; it was a one of a kind,
Though there had been many attempts to duplicate it.
Maybe he better hang onto it instead.

With that, I declared my exit from the ’90s garage sale.
“Oh my you can’t do that,” exclaimed the nosy onlooker.
“You’ve barely scratched the surface here.”
Oh but I can. Had I stayed any longer
It would be overwhelming to my senses.
I wanted to keep my original memories of the time intact.

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104

Nicole Nixen

Nicole Nixen is an Arizona native and ASU graduate. By day, Nicole is a business analyst who uses data and numbers to weave together information. However, storytelling through the written word has always been a passion for Nicole. One of her biggest accomplishments was using her writing skills for San Jose State University's Steinbeck in the Schools project, launched in 2011, <http://sits.sjsu.edu>. Nicole's poetry has also appeared in Zouch Magazine. Nicole can be reached at nnixen@gmail.com.

105



Nicole Nixen

‘inspired by her
everyday observations’

Nicole’s poems are inspired by her everyday observations, especially of life in Phoenix. “Rail Tales” is based on actual events while waiting at the Central Station light-rail stop.

“Skimming Through the ’90s Garage Sale” was inspired by the surge of ’90s nostalgia found in current pop culture and is littered with references to songs and bands who rose to fame in the ’90s.

106

Nicole Nixen

Rail Tales

July 2011, and the MLB All-Star Game
has downtown Phoenix putty in its hands.
Traffic, pedestrians and gridlock appear a welcome sight to business.
Not so much to commuters.
I wait at the light rail platform.
I know this is the best way home.

A booming electronic voice announces
“The next train is arriving in 5 minutes.”
I take notice of another passenger farther down the platform.
A man maybe pushing 50 dressed like it’s 1945.
The attire is foreign for the season, the location and the year.

107

Old-timey news reporter
Is the best descriptor I can muster.
Fedora with a piece of paper stuck in the band—
Complete with overcoat, lanyard, khaki slacks and tie.

I wasn’t the only passenger who took notice.
On my other side was a sports fan, with a bag of chips in hand.
“I know that guy,” he said to me.
“It’s Bert Sugar, it has to be.”

Continued on page 108

I looked back at the sports fan, cradling his bag of chips.
As sure as his hands were covered in yellow bits of salt and potato,
He was certain the man at the end of the platform
was none other than Bert Sugar.

“Who?” I questioned.
This incited sports fan laughter.
“You don’t know Bert Sugar?”
As a sports fan myself,
I felt smaller than the ant crawling in front of my shoe.
Should I know this man?

Sports fan would never believe
That I spend Sundays from August through January
Rooting for my football team.
All because I don’t know Bert Sugar.

Sports fan schools me on the spot.
Between chewing chips the way a cow chews cud—
He informs me that Bert Sugar
Was the greatest boxing commentator around.

The more he described Bert, the more sure he was
That Bert Sugar was within reach.
A fact he celebrated by slapping his knee.

Continued on page 109

I was never more grateful to see the train coming.
I stepped onto the light rail.
Bert, the sports fan and myself,
Forever separated by different cars.

Once home I was determined,
To prove sports fan wrong.
A quick search online
Made my case against sports fan strong.

At that time, Bert was 74 (or 75, depending on the source).
Now deceased but the months before his demise,
There was no way he had been waiting for light rail
In the heat of Phoenix's July.

109

The sports fan, I was convinced
Was having a spot of fun at my expense.
I never for a minute believed his claims.
But hey, it made a great story.

© 2014

Holly Parsons

Am I for Her Journey

My water and I fell in love with an island stream
We met her in placid grassy folds while bathing
And surrendered to her joyous invitation
Cutting through tundra to the place of her birth
Deep in the valley below Joshky's Thumb
On a mid-summer day in Fiji four decades past
Nude and captivated we dove into her being
We did not hang near her edge to grip escape
in fear of leech or water snake
We floated dead center where the channel flows
deep and swift and decisive
Flowers sprinkled succulent shoreline, waving us on
Above we faced a skyscape of wise wispy clouds telling our story
In unison with a clean, cool, totally alive spirit
Always fallin, talkin, gigglin and prayin
She spoke
When the moon beckons
All waters rise
Twice every day we rock the world
Perhaps...I am for Her journey...

© 2014

Holly Parsons

From the poet:

“To the writer: ‘Each Soul cries out to express,
yet perhaps no artist is as free as the Poet.

Poetry offers boundless creative expression.

Language arts simultaneously express metaphorically,
personally, universally, archetypically and allegorically.

Simply write the truth of life from your heart.’”

“When we lay words together like lovers, they become real
and live together forever as song.”

Contact the poet at www.HollyParsons.com.

111



This photo was
taken at 4 a.m.
after a night of
writing...

Holly Parsons

‘life’s endless dance’

The poet writes: “For me, poetry reflects the meter and cadence of life’s endless dance. Lyrical passion lays words as vibrant stones on a multiplicity of paths, reflecting an expressive mosaic. When asked about my experience writing, I describe ‘A sensual, musical flow of images that invite me to capture their spirit. It has been my great privilege to comply.’”

Holly Parsons

Eulogy for a Rhyme

The chandelier was barren
Less the jewels that make light sing
Now the glitter, garish, garnish
Vanquished the ceiling of its bling

It hung in stark remembrance
Of the late and breaking news
The old fella has expired
Kicked his bucket, caught the cruise

He never really knew me
I beyond his wildest thought
A child born of conquest raised
A child lost in thought

My life a stark reminder
That his power could not tame
Sheer and present essence
Despite attempts to shame

Finally, he weakened
Fissures and cracks began to form
Brutal reprehensives dissolved
As confusion became the norm

113

Continued on page 114

I let him clean the mess he made
Clear karma's certain fate
Left him with his dignity
Even though I shake

The sadness lingers elsewhere
Under foot and under mind
Searching for a resting place
Hidden in a rhyme

© 2014

114

Holly Parsons

Freedom

Creates vestibules of harmony
Rests on pages of purpose
Flies through caverns of consciousness
Answers only to truth

Transcends punitive postures
Protects perilous peace
Messaged in smoke from the outback
Design its rhythmic release

Stands within every nomad
Cries out within every heart
Wanders tween walls and wonders
What is fear all about

It spawns in ice on the mantle
Melts off dew in the breeze
Rains over cities of slavery
Drips into caverns of need

Sparkle its twinkling message
Power its ultimate fate
Music surrounds is enchanting
Beckons us into its wake

115

© 2014

Howard Russell

Julianne

Julianne, I saw the sunrise today, and I thought of you.
The monsoons are here. Their tear-drenched thunderheads
refract the sky into silky red strands,
the kind I loved to run my fingers through.

We liked to watch the lollipop palms explode
like cannon fire above a crystal lake.
I wondered if words could catch your vision.

To me, you were the sunrise; no syllables could bless my tongue
the way your seething eyes could penetrate my essence.
The sterile lights haunting distant clouds were no match
for the intense combustion of your embrace.

Now, my heart is still as the moon.
Colors drift past like corneal filaments,
and I am no longer moved by the subtle sounds of thunder.

You were real, so real!
I thought you heard me even when I was unable to speak;
saw me though I was lost in your unfathomable shadows.
How is it that you could choose indifference over me?

We spent that summer searching for the sugar, savoring
the salt. Then I learned there was another.
Soon the laughter evaporated on your desert winds, and died
the day I realized you lied to me in darkness.

Julianne, I saw the dawn appear again today,
and I thought of you.

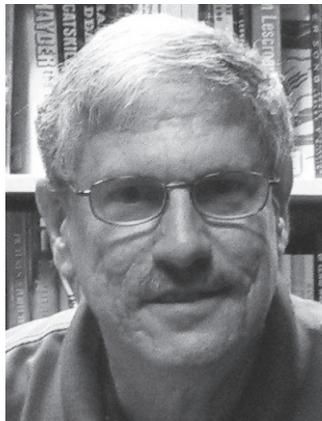
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Howard Russell

Howard Russell (a pseudonym) is 58, married (35 years) with one child (age 27) and has lived in Arizona since 1981. Maintaining a journal for most of his life, he's accumulated a significant amount of material about which to write. Whether from personal experience or observations of the human condition (particularly of family, friends, and co-workers who won't mind seeing themselves in print so long as the names are changed to protect the potentially embarrassed), his goal is to write and publish poetry and fiction that points out human folly through friction. To his credit thus far are two short stories and seven poems that have appeared in print. In addition, he has two novels in manuscript form, and is currently working on a book of short stories titled "The P.O. Box Mysteries." Reach the writer at rusel0630@gmail.com.

117



Howard Russell

‘direct observation or personal experience’

The poet writes: “Most of my poetry comes from direct observation or personal experience. I’ll sometimes pick something I see at the park, or at home and simply free write until something emerges. An example of that is ‘The Cleansing,’ which I literally created in the shower one morning (prompted by an assignment for class to write a limerick). ‘Julianne’ was similarly an assignment for a poetry class, but it was inspired by a monsoon I observed at Kiwanis Park one morning. ‘My Ching’ came about one day while studying the ‘I, Ching’ after reviewing some journal entries. The result was a poem, using 3 hexagrams, to describe my journey as a writer (youthful folly, stagnation, and finally balance).”

118

Howard Russell

Escape to Arizona

The gates of New York disappear in the distance.
Pennsylvania, Ohio, and a rust belt
full of factory smog that fades in the rear view;
cities deteriorating at the speed of blight.

The Arizona trail runs through Oklahoma City.
Before that, old St. Louis, and before that
a mid-west filled with wheat and boredom.

The desert presents with arid terrain;
surrounded by pine and snow,
mountain peak and artificial lake.

119

A numbing adherence to tradition
and tried and trite competition
dictated a change of scene.

A growing city, a phoenix, new and vibrant;
the chance to be someone
with no recounting of the past.

Tire tread deposits on post marked freeways
measure the distance from state to state to state,
the restrictive grip of custom finally abates.

Continued on page 120

Freedom is a stucco wall and orange tiled roof,
a sameness so different it emancipates the spirit
from red-bricked skyscraper silos.

A wall's a wall's a wall;
but redemption is a desert sunrise
at the end of this Arizona tale.

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120

Howard Russell

My Ching

1) Meng Youthful Folly

Choosing silver, choosing gold,
auctioned to the highest

bidder. Nirvana sacrificed in favor
of twelve hour days

121

whoring.

Forgotten writings never ring.
Unfinished chapters, open to the wind, lose their

carbonation.

Put them in a box; put them on a shelf.

Close the lid.

Close the door.

Say good-bye.

Say good-bye.

Continued on page 122

2) P'I
Stagnation

____ _
____ _
____ _

Standing on the corner,
Bethany and Central,
watching the parade pass by.
Tears flow like stripes down the sides of wrinkled uniforms.
Twenty years of accumulation

122 accumulated

while the music stayed silent.

A drum's stretched fabric
stoked rhythmically
by stinging wooden stakes.

Through a 7-year-old's wide eyes;
awaken.

Papers in a box.
Ink in a pen, begging for release.

Remember.

3) T'ai
Balance

When choosing, all choices are equal.
Gold is a word,
and words are gold.

Writing transforms loneliness;
memories transcribed.
A new

123

sharing.

To give is to own; to teach is to learn;
a lesson for a father,
a lesson for a son.

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Howard Russell

The Cleansing

A hot steamy fog
fills a four by eight ceramic cocoon.
Old skin and hair and attitudes
swirl in a vortex
draining away.
Chrysalis doors obscure the calcified image
on the mirror outside.
I think today I'll fly away, free.

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124

Esther Schnur-Berlot

Pruning

Constantly confronted
with howling winds of dissent.

Simple thoughts get trapped
in an outpour of sludge
while bloviated jargon
runs on into infinity.

In a state of flux
clever lines are heisted from
fashion ads and cereal boxes.

Trying to squish sense into
sentences

I'm left with a page of scattered
clichés
in need of pruning.

125

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Esther Schnur-Berlot

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." Esther also appears in "Desert Voices," 2nd anthology, just published by the Poetry Corner in Sun City. E-mail her at lberlot@q.com.

126



Photo by Christa Lubatkin

Esther Schnur-Berlot

‘past and present voices’

The poet writes: “I try to articulate the past and present voices
meandering through my sleep and waking moments, hoping
they will enlighten me.”

The poet wrote the triolet “Words” about this subject:

Words

Words invade thoughts to hold and to keep
Meander in dreams till they are yours
A metaphor arrives to jar you from sleep
Words invade thoughts to hold and to keep
Send instrument of language to loving few
To explain an uncommon point of view
Words invade thoughts to hold and to keep
Meander in dreams till they are yours

127

Esther Schnur-Berlot

Seeing Red

My morning groggy self
pulls open the fridge door
to find the last plump
blood orange.
Usually I slice the fruit
he measures coffee teaspoons.
My serrated knife punctures
the tawny magenta skin
tart red juice squirts onto my lips
sliver by sliver the succulent
blood orange overwhelms
my taste buds
as it slowly drips down
my throat and on to my chin.
Waiting for his share
he turns and sees
naked orange skin
disposed in the disposal.
Caught red faced
my juicy wet kisses
could not suppress
his seeing red.

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Esther Schnur-Berlot

The Committee

You thought
You'd have your say
You thought
You'd have your way
In the shadow
Big Dog's ego
Lies in wait
Waiting to pounce
To claw your say
To gnaw your way
In the end
You will sway –
Your say
Will fall
By the wayside

129

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Esther Schnur-Berlot

Valentine's Day

Tricky hot flashes
interrupt my odyssey
on Sinner's Row
where I thought
lust would last forever

Knowing yesterday's
passions are passing –
I relax
with chocolates
a greeting card
and a man
who still thinks
I'm fun to be with

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130

Carol Sletten

The Stern-Faced Rock

formed
before imagination
evolving endlessly
unfathomed
the silent seer
looking hard sees
nothing

© 2014

131

Carol Sletten

Carol Sletten is a writer and illustrator who lives in a cabin in Arizona's White Mountains. She is the author of "Story of the American West – Legends of Arizona"; "New York Freedom Trail"; and "Three Strong Western Women," a play and book by the same name. The inspiration for Carol's work comes mainly from her fascination with the history, people and landscapes of the American West. She is currently writing a novel based on the life of a powerful Apache religious leader. Carol may be reached through her website: www.CarolSletten.com.

132



Photo by Heather Flanders

Carol Sletten

‘a peek into the essence of things’

The poet writes: “Poetry is an important part of my life. I read at least one poem every day — not only for pleasure, but also because I think it helps me improve my skills as a storyteller, wordsmith and mood-shifter. Picasso said, ‘Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.’ He was probably referring to the visual arts, but his words could also have been written about poetry. To me, the most powerful poems are the ones that give us a peek into the essence of things, or come close to saying things that can’t be said. They are the ones that stick with me and whirl around in my mind while I’m walking in the woods, or doing dishes or nodding off to sleep. They inspire me to work harder on becoming a better writer. Though I spend most of my time writing plays and books about other people, I sometimes stop that work long enough to write a short poem about my own life and experiences. The most recent ones have been about my relationship with the natural world.”

133

Carol Sletten

The Pull

Have you felt the pull of each
 season's transient beauty gripping
your life and spinning you
 faster and faster toward infinity?
A death chant is the echo of my heart song—
 felt—but not heard as it
follows me through the seasons
 like an invisible shadow
looming and immense against the bright
 abundance of life.

134

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Carol Sletten

Midnight in the Canyon

The stars are too remote.

Mortal minds can't reach that far.

I'm surrounded by cliffs and rock formations
ancient enough to put me in my place if
my mind could delve that deep.

It can't...and yet, I'm no longer
the star of my own daydreams.

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135

Elisabeth F. Venetiou

Unbidden

Poems used to come to me
an image
a line
a word
like a flash,
lightning I had to catch.

Riding in the backseat of my mom's red VW beetle,
searching for a pen, piece of paper, napkin, back of a book.
Quick Quick Quick Quick Quick
before it fades and I am left behind,
another passenger hurtling down the turnpike.

Now I come to poetry,
a hopeful lover,
willing to court,
striking in a world I no longer understand.

Lightning passing through me
threw me,
and only I can describe
the colors behind my eyes
that come
with the jolt.

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Elisabeth F. Venetiou

Elisabeth F. Venetiou avidly pursues the writing life, producing short stories, essays, poems, plays and a novella. She graduated with distinction from Northern Arizona University with her Master's Degree in English and Creative Writing. A contributor to the Arizona Daily Sun and Northern Arizona's Mountain Living Magazine as well as a former English Instructor at NAU, she recently moved from Flagstaff to New England where she is at work on her second novel.

137



Photo by Greg Glau

Elisabeth F. Venetiou

‘untangle the evolution of my writing process’

The poet writes: “While my two children were under the age of six, I earned my graduate degree in Creative Writing at NAU. One of my favorite courses was a poetry workshop with Dr. Nicole Walker. It had been years since I had written poetry regularly and wasn’t sure where to start. One afternoon in my research carrel, a room no bigger than a closet in Cline Library, I attempted to untangle the evolution of my writing process. ‘Unbidden’ is the result of that quiet moment.”

138

Eva Willis

A Computer Legacy

In college, I was told by a visionary professor that computers would be the wave of the future and I should learn them. I enrolled in Fortran and found that keypunch cards were not my friend.

In the next decade, I walked into a store and was told there would be a computer in every home. “Yeah, right!” I said, laughed and walked out, without getting in on the ground floor as the salesman said I should.

Shortly thereafter I was introduced to Frogger on a two-person game console. I purchased an Atari so I could play Frogger at home, which was cumbersome and became boring when PAC-MAN and Dungeons and Dragons came out.

139

Continued on page 140

I was working for a semiconductor firm
and, after awhile, did my work with giant
multi-paged computer reports.

Then I was provided individual training
to learn to use a desk-top computer.
Soon those large reports were history.

By the 1990's, home computers
were obsolete shortly after you bought them.
We learned DOS, but DOS is history.
There were word programs and spreadsheet
programs for quite awhile and then
the list and type of programs expanded.

140

Now I tweet my thoughts since
brevity is the soul of wit.
I send e-mails to replace much snail mail.
I can stream movies, create playlists,
and play all manner of games.
I can Skype, IM, use a webcam.
I don't, but I can. It's a strange
new world with an app-app
here, and an app-app there,
here an app, there an app,
everywhere an app, app!

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Eva Willis

Eva Marie Willis (B.A. from ASU) is retired and lives in Ahwatukee (Phoenix), Arizona. Since retiring, she finds personal expression in her numerous poems, in dancing, and in her oil paintings. She is the author of “With All My Heart,” a collection of short stories and poems about relationships. It is available online from Lulu.com, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble. She is interested in politics, spirituality, dancing and living life to the fullest. You can follow her on Twitter under EvaTwits or contact her via e-mail at ejwillis42@cox.net.

141



Eva Willis

‘the spiritual and my joy’

The poet writes: “I am a sixty-something woman who is mildly computer literate, but who did not grow up with computers. I learned to use computers in the workplace and find some humor in how people would rather connect through computers, texting, pads, etc. than in person. I also find it interesting that people can be phone contract and app poor. I’ve been retired for some years and this point in my life allows time to be more creative. Until recently I was my father’s caregiver. Thus, many of my poems are touched by the spiritual and my joy in just ‘being.’”

142

Eva Willis

N O W

Man's mind rarely occupies
the space where he is.

It is either behind or ahead,
hurtling him on to next.
Now might be difficult or glorious
but he is often not present there.

Is he thinking about what to say
or saying?

Is he thinking about what to wear
or wearing?

143

Is he planning what to do
or doing and being?

Let us savor empty time.
We needn't pile activity onto activity
to fill the void.
With discretionary time,
let us embrace the quiet and
relish the freedom of empty-ness.

Continued on page 144

Are we so afraid of learning our true selves?
How could we be bored
when life is so rich and full?
Prepare if there is something
to prepare for, acting on the step needed now,
but don't live in suspended emotional animation.

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144

Eva Willis

Suspension

I stand exposed
on the precipice of life
daily with nary a thought
to creating the future I want.

Existence is crammed
with scheduled and discretionary
activities that move me through
my days as if suspended.

My employer or liege,
my loved ones and
my adversaries all
have demands on my days.

I am not angered.
I accept it in stride,
but comes the day when
my time will be my own.

Or will that just be
the result of loneliness?

145

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Eva Willis

5:30 A.M.

It's 5:30 A.M. and
I'm not ready to let go of the night
Soon enough it will be daylight
and I will have to start my chores

Time to turn the coffee pot on
and enjoy the aroma and taste
Could it drip, drip in haste
Got to get to those tile floors

146 Need to brush my teeth
and don my work clothes
Yogurt and granola I chose
to scare away the snores

Life is a series of acts
starring this single character
who is both amateur and poseur
opening and closing the doors

I look forward to the future
but hopefully live in the moment
which is artfully heaven sent
and I want many encores

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Editor's Note

This issue offers an eclectic mix of poetry, reflecting among the featured poets and their work a wide range of life experiences, subject matter, themes and, equally importantly, each poet's unique style. That's how it should be. To confine poetry, to attempt to constrict it or narrowly define it, would be its antithesis. Poetry is the right of all to follow the impulses of the heart, soul and mind.

Rebecca "Becca" Dyer
Editor

147

Editorial Staff

Editor: *Rebecca Dyer*

Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Publisher: *Elena Thornton*

Artwork for front cover: *Marjory Boyer*

Meet the staff of Unstrung magazine



Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder 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., 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.



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 Thursday of each month, from 5 p.m. to 7 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.

149

Coming Oct. 26: Save the date!

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

Noon to 4 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 26

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 Writers for the Fall 2014 Blue Guitar

150 The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2014 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 3. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. are nonprofit projects of the nonprofit start-up The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Poets For Summer 2015

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2015 Issue from June 1 through July 3, 2015. 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.

151

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

A magazine of
for and about
poetry



Unstrung will
return in
Summer 2015