

# UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,  
for and about  
poetry



Summer 2017

# The Poets

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Ashley



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Chorlton



Hubbard



Liptak



O'Connor



Pratt



Rives



Fenton Sederstrom



Sher-Walton

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

# Paula Ashley

## A French Couple in Love with the American West

from Bourgogne, steeped  
in the history & art of the ages,  
in spiritual complacency

seek awakening  
in the white sands of New Mexico –  
sands swirling in ecstasy.

White dunes, mystery of the desert,  
invisible in shimmering heat waves,  
stand watch as their souls are purified

in the agony of the passion of spirit  
for the sublime, for the infinite.  
They leave their water to their son.

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# Paula Ashley

Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer who earned her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She lives in Glendale, 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 numerous journals including: Avocet, Four Chambers, Merge, New Fraktur Arts Journal, OASIS Journal, Sandcutters, The Road Not Taken, The Blue Guitar, The Examined Life, The Lucid Stone and Unstrung. She has poems in “Poetry and Prose for the Phoenix Art Museum” by Four Chambers Press and in “Weatherings” by Future Cycle Press.

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# Paula Ashley

## & The Stars Still Shine

I am writing about a time in 1962  
in the observation shack  
on stilts above the Nevada desert,

the time I shivered in the night.  
One of the guys, an older man,  
dropped his jacket over my shoulders.

I do not remember his name,  
only his kindness. I was too naïve  
to know then that a woman's place

was not in a mine shaft where  
the physicists had taken me earlier.  
They laughed when the miners

struck, saying if the ground broke  
it would be my fault. Now we sat  
in the observation deck

& watched on monitors while  
the ground wobbled and held  
against the nuclear blast below.

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I thought about my high school days  
when we were taught to line up, two by two,  
to march around the track

in preparation for the great march  
of the children down the highway, out  
of St. Louis, when The Bomb dropped.

Today, fifty-some years later,  
the world still must argue and negotiate  
with others not to build the bomb,

that no one might shiver  
in that nuclear night, that feared  
holograph of earth's last man.

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# Paula Ashley

## Poem for the Earth

I was four or five or thereabouts.  
I stepped into the shallow waters off the Alabama shore,  
lay down, spread wide my arms, closed my eyes.

The sun was warm.  
I floated on the gray-blue amniotic fluid of earth,  
felt the gray-blue vaulted sky above.

The waves rocked me to sleep.  
I don't know how long I drifted there, bobbing in the waves.  
I don't know what woke me up.

But a thought had entered my mind.  
It split the vastness from me.  
Panic shot through me.

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I put my feet down into the shallow water.  
Sand, gritty and lumpy, shifted  
beneath me.

I saw the shore far away.  
I saw my mother on the beach. She looked up at me  
as if she had not known I had been gone.

But I knew, deep down inside myself, that I  
had not wanted to go out there, had not wanted to drift  
into that gray-blue luminescence.

I chose earth – gritty, shifting, unloved.

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# Paula Ashley

## The Hike

– *Effigy Mounds National Park: Marquette, Iowa*

Whispering oaks filter daylight  
on the chipped bark trail  
we hike up to the mounds.

Granddaughters skip and chatter  
until the youngest looks at her Daddy  
with an urgency he knows.

8

The girls race back down  
to the museum at the base of the trail  
while my son and I

round a corner to find  
the little bear outlined by leafy greens  
sheltering ancestral peoples

who tracked bear, ate bear, wore bear  
then entrusted this sacred creature  
with their souls forever.

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We walk on to Fire Point  
overlooking the upper Mississippi.  
We sit on a rock wall, wait for the girls.

A hawk soars high above the river,  
a motorboat speeds along the shore below.  
Strange-colored bugs with long legs

high-step across our path. The secret  
of this hike is to skip lightly on the trail,  
to let the wind whisper in our ears,

to watch the hawks and the spiders  
living their lives for the dead are asleep  
and our children will find their way.

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# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## Cousin Marcia

I gulped down growing pains  
while cousin Marcia whisper-giggled  
secret crushes in my ear

On the back of our palms  
we kiss-tested our braces  
rehearsing Vogue's pucker poses

I hid my teenage pimples  
under layers of Max Factor pancake  
with hair topped in Egyptian henna

Marcia's clean freckled face  
framed by wash-and-wear hair  
bestowed by nature  
that gap-toothed grin enhanced  
her openness

The first time rummaging hands  
unbuttoned my blouse  
my painted armor was punctured  
Feeling unattractive  
I choked on fear of being abandoned

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Cousin Marcia's life followed  
the unwritten rules of our neighborhood  
At twenty-one she was chased, lassoed  
and married the popular boy  
with babies to soon follow

while I committed  
the unpardonable sin  
of leaving home before marriage  
to live on my own

The rhythm and flow of time  
has not altered our friendship  
Cousin Marcia's contagious laughter  
still ripples across cell phones  
as we share our different lifestyles

© 2017

# 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, published by the Poetry Corner in Sun City. She is also in Poetica's Spring Issue of 2016 and Poetica's Fall Issue of 2016. E-mail her at [Lberlot@comcast.net](mailto:Lberlot@comcast.net).

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# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## Changing Conversations

After four decades of  
shmoosing – talkathons  
conversations are no longer  
cluttered  
with affairs, careers or clothes.

Now we obsess and assess  
our timeworn faces

We talk in whispers  
of that dreaded disease  
old age

We flirt –  
with collagen, restalin, botox  
Do we dare display lined faces  
with grace

After burying her soul mate  
she returns to her girlish past  
penciling in – women-only  
dinner and movie dates

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Continued on page 14

Our run-on dialogue  
    runs the gamut  
neglected by children  
    or childless and alone

We remain in limbo  
daunted by  
    adult warehouses  
and final exits

My steaming coffee –  
has gone cold  
I add a dash of Splenda  
    to sweeten  
the bitter taste of winter

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# David Chorlton

## Yard Sale

It's time to purge  
the house of excesses: teapots, magazines  
and amethyst  
that outlived usefulness. The shelves  
in the back room breathe again  
now their burdens are displayed on the lawn  
for the taking. Here's a set

of plates embellished  
with faces from Hollywood, and a gramophone  
that won't play any record made  
since George Jones died. Here's  
a television whose picture froze  
the day the president was killed, and a newspaper  
that crumbles when you turn  
its pages. Take these shoes

worn down by worry,  
vases that bloomed  
beyond their time, a cabinet  
filled with regrets,  
eight-track tapes, videos and memories  
without machines to play them.  
These mysteries

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can't stand reading more than once  
but they're good until you know  
the endings, as opposed  
to the diaries which contain a family's secrets  
from the name long hidden  
of the youngest child's father  
to the reasons two sisters  
once close became distant and embittered.  
Put this seashell to your ear

to listen to the arguments that drove  
them apart, and if you raise this shot glass  
to the light  
you'll see the friendly uncle  
we had to throw out  
when his politics became an embarrassment.  
Look at how

these kettles gleam, at the nibbled  
edges on the letters  
bundled for storage  
in a box along with good intentions  
and the tickets  
for a journey never taken.  
Here is all

16

our paint-by-numbers past,  
the medals without a cause, summers  
kept in airtight jars  
and winters in the ash can by the hearth.  
Everything must go

from the steak knives and fruit bowls  
to the cousins who arrived so long ago  
they forgot they weren't invited.  
We have to make space for coming days  
when we'll scatter birdseed  
to lure back  
species from extinction.

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# David Chorlton

David Chorlton is a transplanted European, who has lived in Phoenix since 1978. His poems have appeared in many publications online and in print, and reflect his affection for the natural world, as well as occasional bewilderment at aspects of human behavior. His newest collection of poems is “Bird on a Wire” from Presa Press, and late in 2017 The Bitter Oleander Press will publish “Shatter the Bell in My Ear,” his translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant.

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# David Chorlton

## Nightlight

Some rooms never sleep  
inside a high-rise pressed against the stars  
but pass from dusk to dawn  
with a fluorescent chill at their windows.  
The gas station in darkness becomes  
a silent theatre glowing  
and a dragon's tail of rear lights moves along  
the freeway, crossing the bridge  
beneath which men with nowhere else to sleep  
are sleeping one shadow away  
from the helicopter's beam  
that seeks them out.

© 2017

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# David Chorlton

## Venetian Webcam

Wake up: choose a world  
to enter. Afghanistan is fire and dust  
today, the tourists in Italy  
converse beside a fountain carved  
from antiquity, and the local  
cats are resting from  
a night on the tiles. Try to see

20 their way; it's a chase  
or be chased city they're in  
and better encounter a rat than  
a coyote. It's too early  
for confusion. Read the sports news  
first because scores don't lie,  
then move on

to politics. The president  
is withdrawing the country from  
the planet. It's comforting to look  
at some pictures streaming live  
from Venice. See how it

wears the light like a gown  
as it sinks into time.

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# Tara Hubbard

## Born a Girl

I was born a girl.  
I came in wanting to be seen,  
Delighted in, enjoyed.  
I liked dolls, jewelry, clothes,  
Colors, whatever made you look!

Sadly I couldn't get anyone to look!  
One looked down in sobbing sadness,  
The other out the window in  
Self-centered introspection.  
My days became gray  
My curls fell straight.  
I lost my luster, and my will  
To dance and twirl for attention  
In retreat I resigned myself to wait, hoping

I waited and while I waited  
More little, lost and ignored souls  
entered my space. Being the eldest,  
and of a tender-hearted disposition,  
I vowed to protect these of a similar fate.

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I became defender and fixer and parent,  
Because those two were obviously unable,  
Or unwilling to do the job.  
As I did, the last vestiges of my femininity slipped  
And the tender in me turned to the tough  
The soft needy places had to be sacrificed  
For the greater good. I put myself and my need  
For defense, for protection, for tender care and touch  
On the altar until there was no girl left in me.

*Now I lay here again asking my Savior  
To cause a flower to grow in place of the rock  
Beautiful, fragrant, adoration unto Him  
To restore that little girl heart and let it long again  
To be cared for and nurtured by His tender touch*  
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# Tara Hubbard

The poet writes: “My name is Tara Hubbard. I was born a foreigner in Ireland. This set me on a distinct path of separation, loneliness and pain, but for the most part I was wholly unaware of what was going on inside of me. It was the three beautiful children that undid me finally. For the first time in my life, I really couldn’t manage. I realized the lie I was living under — that I really didn’t need God — I could manage on my own, thank you. I thought I was proving to Him how worthy I was in my own goodness. Thus began my journey of glorious dependence and healing. It is from this place that I have come to know myself and give birth to feelings. Poetry is the raw expressing of this for me.”

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# Tara Hubbard

## The Clock Struck Twelve

A Tuesday morning miracle  
My desperate confession  
And the prayer of saints  
And, “Poof,” the spell is broken

With a thud I find myself  
Sitting with a battered pumpkin  
A mouse where a man used to be  
Rats that galloped minutes ago  
Scurry for the darkness  
And I look down at my rags  
A baggy t-shirt and worn shorts  
And lament the heels, the color,  
The bling, that marked my dream life

I plod home, habitually  
putting one foot in front of another,  
A sigh on my lips, shoulders drooped,  
Free at last.  
Home, where the dirt piles up,  
And the man is waiting for me,  
Tight-lipped, familiar lonely silence  
He hands me the broom, and the baby,  
And hits ‘resume’

Oh Prince, with your fancy footwork  
And your fairy dreams, did you have to go?  
Color you brought to the everyday  
Fades ...away ...to gray

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# Tara Hubbard

## The Old Coat No Longer Fits

I have been hurt.  
Risking it all.  
Living as if I was loved.  
It drove me back  
To my old comfort,  
To my safe place  
Of self protection.

As I wrap the heavy coat  
Around my whole form  
I let out a sigh of relief.  
Sinking down deep into  
My own cherished notions  
Of protection and safety  
Feeling the sweetness of the familiar...

Ways of isolation, darkness  
Separation from light, love.  
This beloved soothe spoiled  
Leaving me only to weep,  
As pain and devastation creep in again.  
And I am left further still from  
My great heart longings!

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In frustration and hope  
I reach for Your hand again  
And let You lead me out  
Where nakedness is freer  
And loving gives life  
Tentatively trusting You  
To be all the protection I need

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# Karen Mitnick Liptak

## Alien Crossing At The Observatory

My best tour so far on Kitt Peak?  
Hands down, up, and every which way,  
the one on Earth Day, Saturday,  
April 22nd, 2017,  
guiding 40 members from the  
Arizona Association of the Deaf,  
and two sign language interpreters,  
to four telescopes in all, and hearing  
these mostly retired Phoenicians'  
thoughtful queries and quips.

At our second stop, the 2.1-meter scope,  
one man asked if we'd ever contacted aliens.

Tim, my fellow guide, and a sweetie,  
said, *"I'll give you the government's line—  
we can neither confirm nor deny it."*

Their eyes on the interpreter,  
everyone laughed.

Later, when I pointed out Kitt Peak's  
two radio telescopes across the way,  
saying many such dishes come in arrays  
and search for intelligence elsewhere,  
that same curious man asked,  
*"Would you please  
let me know when it's found?"*

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“*You’ll be the first to know,*” I replied,  
laughter reigning again  
when the interpreter signed  
on this, the Tohono O’odham’s  
second most sacred mountain,  
the land leased in perpetuity  
to ‘the men with long eyes.’

Near the tour’s end,  
as we left the public solar scope,  
everyone having viewed two sun spots,  
one woman said, “*I bet you learned today  
that deaf people aren’t so dumb.*”

28  
My hug took her by surprise,  
unaware we were two peas in a pod,  
my hearing loss a sign to some  
I’m less intelligent than them,  
which is why I buy  
the latest assistive listening devices,  
carry extra hearing aid batteries with me,  
and start tours at Kitt Peak’s Visitors’ Center  
by telling guests, “*Please save your questions  
for outdoors, where it’s easier for me to hear,*”  
not adding, it being too soon to share  
that out there, like everywhere,  
unseen forces abound,  
scoping humans with nary a sound.

# Karen Mitnick Liptak

The poet writes: “Native New Yorker, Tucsonian since ’78, author of some 20 children’s books, including ‘Dating Dinosaurs and Other Old Things’ (Millbrook Press), ‘North American Indian Sign Language’ (Franklin Watts), ‘Out in the Night’ (Harbinger House), and ‘The Glass Ark: The Story About Biosphere 2’ (with Linnea Gentry for Penguin/Viking). Former documentary filmmaker with Newsreel, and Editorial Director for Positive Promotions. Currently, as a tour guide at Kitt Peak National Observatory, I convey the science and mystery of the universe to visitors of all ages. I feel blessed to think in cosmic verse. My website TBA soon. Contact at [kmliptak@comcast.net](mailto:kmliptak@comcast.net).”

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# Karen Mitnick Liptak

## Best Question Yet

While guiding a tour group  
from a Nogales' high school science class  
to the McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope  
50 miles southwest of Tucson,  
at Kitt Peak Observatory,  
one student's question  
made me nearly cry.

30

At first the teens were shy,  
silently listening to my rap about the Sun,  
how it's Earth's nearest star, and must be monitored,  
especially if we hope to set up colonies beyond  
the natural magnetic shield protecting  
this planet's life and technology  
from harmful solar storms.

It wasn't until I said how much  
scientists *don't* know  
that kids began waving hands  
and blurting out question after question,  
most for assignments and predictable,  
until one girl's hit like a stun gun.  
*"Do other stars have the same purpose  
as the Sun?"* she asked, iPad open,  
ready to record my reply.

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I flashed on Albert Einstein as a teen,  
wondering what it would be like  
to ride alongside a light beam.  
His query changed reality.

With chills dancing down my spine,  
like dinosaurs in a chorus line,  
I said, *“Your guess is as good as mine.  
Nobody’s really sure what stars are for.  
In every age people make assumptions,  
based on what they know so far,  
as to why everything exists,  
from people and wars to moons and stars,  
all subject to change as intelligence evolves.  
So, maybe a star’s purpose is to support planetary life,  
or maybe the answer’s too complex for humans  
at this crossroad to grasp, but nonetheless,  
what a great question to ask.”*

31

Sensing my sincerity, the teens grinned,  
aware their queries truly matter  
to a guide attuned to cosmic chatter.

# H. Patrick O'Connor

## Discarded

In the street, I found a paper heart amidst the detritus of a world that had forgotten it...

I touched its tattered edges  
faded face

bleached and waterworn words now illegible  
still hinting at the promise it once held for another heart...

A young heart  
flushed with the promise of knowing another...

A heart fed on dreamt possibilities, and the reasonless courage  
of what might be,

A heart waiting at some passed door to hand over two dimensions  
of hope to someone and have infinities of love returned

As if it were the key to a universe built just for two.

Now here it lies – its promises forgotten.

Its rash intent rinsed away in so much rain,  
or tears, or empty beers and piss.

Old.

Faded.

Fragile.

Failed.

The discarded victim of a thousand nonchalant indignities.

I stooped, and gathered it up with all the reverence one can muster  
in the heat of the phoenix sun,

thinking I would bring it home to some minor place of honor, because  
love should never end up in such a place...such a way.

But when I tried to fold it, the ancient paper crumbled  
in my gentle hands,

As if to say

You cannot save me from fate, foolish bard...I know my place.

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# H. Patrick O'Connor

H. Patrick O'Connor is a writer, musician and performing artist who has been involved with the Phoenix art scene since the early nineties. Most well known for his contributions to the Arizona belly dance community, in the past few years he has been focusing on a solo music career and writing, always looking for new ways to indulge his talent.

More of his poetry can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/allmyprettywords/>.

33



# H. Patrick O'Connor

## Marks

just out of reach, thunder mumbles threats at the dusking sky.

in the close quiet between imprecations, I listen to the complaints of my battered body and wonder how different things would be if things were different.

in just the right light, I can see the thousand conflicts of my youth on my patina'd skin and I remember my father's arms, the secrets I could see there but never know.

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And I – who have students, not children – cannot help but think that no one will ever wonder about the little nick on my knuckle, the smear of burns and faded cryptography of countless cuttings and labored divots that keep the stories of my hurts in the sacred language of scars – a harsh, guttural tongue that everyone must one day learn. The tally of my life's mistakes writ in layers of experience so deep that they can be felt in my skin. Who might ever want to read such a terrible thing?

No matter. Darkness comes behind the storm, and soon enough will hide all things.

© 2017

# H. Patrick O'Connor

## Planetary

you vex me, Sun...  
for all my inertia  
I am still caught in your gravity  
and the stars, with fusion eyes askance  
watch while we dance  
uncertainty the rulers distance between us.  
but oh my love... Oh the sweet pull of you...  
what blissful cataclysm might come  
should we fall upon each other,  
and become one?

© 2017

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# H. Patrick O'Connor

## smoking out back on a first date

A coal glows,  
Soft in the dark  
Passing gently back and forth between two hearts.  
And in the shadowed truths we whispered  
that speck of light soared between us  
Brief but bright  
Like hope.  
© 2017

# H. Patrick O'Connor

## Unable to sleep and dreaming

Unable to sleep and dreaming  
a dream of her, always her  
on the tip of my mind  
a dream of her.  
like butterfly kisses  
on my cheek,  
like butterfly kisses  
on my heart  
just like butterfly kisses  
barely there at all  
just a dream  
a dream of something sweet  
sweet but barely there  
like a dream  
a dream of her,  
always her...  
and still I am unable to sleep  
and still I am dreaming of her

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37

# Alyssia Pratt

## untitled

I'll never let her go  
he said  
I love the sound of her  
VOICE  
our memories will never fade

38  
Everyday, around noon  
they met up in a park  
they put their palms together  
stared into each other's eyes  
with a spark in them  
that lit up each other's smiles  
and they danced through the flowers by the pond

Until one day  
neither of them showed up

He walked down a semi-crowded road down to a theater  
She was in a car, driving as fast as she could

SEE

they never talked about their lives to each other  
only met up in that park to fantasize  
to pretend

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Continued from page 38

she drove off a cliff  
he shot himself in the bathroom stall of that theater

Nothing is what it seems  
Reality is just a dream  
© 2017

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# Alyssia Pratt

The poet writes: “My name is Alyssia Pratt. I’m 19 years old and I come from the Gila River Indian community. I enjoy writing poems; my favorite poets are Charles Bukowski and Edgar Allan Poe.”

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# Janet McMillan Rives

## Finding Poetry

Are you looking for Poetry?  
the man asked as I wandered  
semi-lost through a maze of classrooms  
at the book festival.

I thought but did not say:  
Yes, I'm looking for poetry.  
I'm always looking for poetry  
in every leaf falling on my path  
in every solitary star glimmering above  
in every word spoken, every word heard.

41

It's right here, he said, in the Kiva room.  
But I walked on past Poetry  
out into the bright yellow light  
into the shadow of towering mountains  
into that lonely space where I waited  
for poetry to find me.

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# Janet McMillan Rives

Janet McMillan Rives is a resident of both Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Oro Valley, Arizona. She grew up in Connecticut and Tucson and is a graduate of the University of Arizona. She spent thirty-five years as a professor of economics and is retired from the University of Northern Iowa. Her interests in retirement include flower gardening, golfing, reading and writing. She is a member of the Iowa Poetry Association, The Arizona State Poetry Society, and the Tucson Poetry Society. Her poems have appeared in *Lyrical Iowa*, *Sandcutters*, and *The Avocet*. She can be reached at [rives@uni.edu](mailto:rives@uni.edu).

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# Janet McMillan Rives

## Blaze

Everyday dull  
then suddenly  
from within the flat tan  
emerge such gems:  
the turquoise underside  
of a desert lizard,  
flaming jasper  
on barrel cacti,  
yellow palo verde  
gone to topaz.

Look!

Our desert's  
ablaze.

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# Janet McMillan Rives

## Code

Could he ever live a wholesome life  
after all he had seen, after all he had done?  
When he came home from the war  
would they bless him in a way  
that would cleanse his soul forever?  
Would The Enemy Way free him?  
Even if he might be healed through love,  
he vowed to be quiet, not say a word.

44 Not a word, until a quarter century later  
the world would know their story  
know how they spoke to one another  
in their childhood language  
how they kept secrets from the enemy  
in a code that would never be cracked,  
choosing their words with care  
as they would do at home.

They risked their lives far away from  
the red canyon walls, some only boys  
as young as fifteen fighting in Normandy,  
Iwo Jima, Algeria, Italy, enlisting at a time when  
they were not even citizens, fighting because  
somebody had to defend this country,  
somebody had to defend freedom.

Continued on page 45

So few are left today, sixty-eight years later,  
so few to claim the Gold Medals  
given to thirty-three different tribes.

But Edmund Harjo, aged ninety-six,  
is here from Oklahoma, wheelchair  
bound on the floor of Congress.

Family members, children and grandchildren,  
represent the veterans, their ancestors.

They have come from Florida, Nebraska,  
Montana, Arizona, Iowa, New Mexico.

They have come to heal their wounds  
restore their pride, come to this public place  
so that we might understand more fully  
how they have blessed us.

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45

# Janet McMillan Rives

## My Red Garden

Every pot in place: Bronze  
glaze holding yucca, blood red,  
pale blue pottery with one scarlet  
geranium, three petunias, carmine,  
large blue pot featuring crimson  
pentas—a flower new to me—  
and one hibiscus, bold red.

46  
The first bud, barely visible,  
takes on a strange shade of amber  
then evolves into blaze orange.  
But the tag said *Red Hibiscus*.  
Days pass, I fret, the bud swells  
till finally this morning I am greeted  
by a fantastic six-inch bloom,  
a burst of—oh, no—  
MANGO!

© 2017

# Janet McMillan Rives

## Something This White

This desert snow  
at once delicate  
and burdensome  
cannot last.

It is like a new friendship  
you sense is somewhat off.

You may try to keep it going  
but like snow on cactus  
it will melt away  
in a day-long drip  
gone

as the western sky  
bleeds orange.

© 2017

47

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Breathing Under Water, 1

*preceding a theme by Gunnar Ekelöf*

Lying on your back,  
warming chill just under the surface of the brook,  
and clinging to enough bankside reediness  
to be sure that this will be a respite—  
and not a trip but a sojourn,  
time for rest and contemplation—

48 you sink just far enough under  
that what you see above  
is the same dreamscape you see  
when you peer through  
the ancient window,  
the ghost-lens original glass  
at the north end of your family house.

Yes, like that.  
A cosmic kaleidoscope,  
prism of ripples.  
And yes,  
I hear you repeat that you can't.  
Can't breathe.  
You'll drown.

Continued on page 49

And I respond that I agree perfectly,  
but go ahead and do it anyway,  
just like last time  
and the time before that.

Don't you remember?  
Ah.  
Not possible of course.

Remember anyway.  
Breathe anyway.  
\*

Sticks float by, even branches,  
as they have floated by since before  
the moon chose to evolve for you  
from a child's night-mare  
ghastly with teeth,  
and the sticks bump against rocks and growth  
as they have since before those rocks were sucked round

49

and spat out by the destructive and creative glacier  
who drifted enormously by  
millennia before the trees  
sprouted and grew to drop sticks and branches  
to float in our common direction,  
poke and pique our idle intention.

\*

Lie in the stream.  
Look skyward, moonward.  
Consider.

What the glacier cannot remember,  
what the moon *will not* remember,  
you and the water above you will remember  
and together tend the flow of stream and memory.

Breathe together—  
you, the moon, the protean sky.

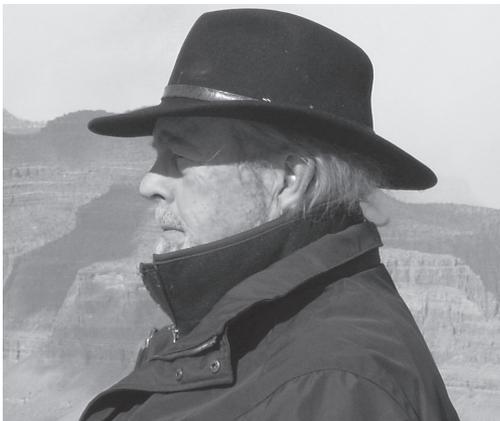
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50

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Richard Fenton Sederstrom was raised and lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and the North Woods of Minnesota. Sederstrom is the author of five books of poetry, including “Eumaeus Tends” in 2014. A new book, “Selenity Book Four,” has just been published.

51



# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Breathing Under Water 2

*avoiding the theme by Gunnar Ekelöf*

Now you remember  
and you can see what rises above you.  
But what?

Let us agree that  
above us a blue heron haunts the brook,  
that whatever neighbor the heron does not bother to haunt  
cannot be aware of the condition *haunted*,  
and so becomes anyway  
its haunted and haunting prey:

frogs, minnows,  
baby birds fallen from their nest and drifting  
downstream  
toward what none of them can possibly recognize  
as beak, as weapon,  
as poniard-pointed spring-locked machine,  
as what must also be *because*

we are down here under,  
watching but also unavailable  
to the information I supplied us with just now that we,  
you and I and whomever you and I can imagine—

Continued on page 53

*only* because the instant of mention is the object—  
that we also fail to recognize  
what stalks above as what drives  
below in its appetite to digest  
what it spears and swallows:

*Us!*

The heron having fed to such satiety as it ever can—  
the frogs, the minnows,  
the struggling baby bird,

the us—

flies away to digest us  
or to share us with its own progeny,  
giving us another chance at particulate immortality,  
some caloric value,  
molecular virtue.

53

And those survivors who are left behind,  
still lying in the caressing stream  
and who have determined not to suffer  
what may have and *didn't* happen to us?

We know as well as they that we *choose* to flow  
with assembling remnants  
in a stream of evolving possibilities,  
eons of nothing but sacred wedded particularities.

© 2017

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Among the Water Lilies

1

A crane tips her delicate beak down  
down among the water lilies. Green  
pads sport yellow white pink buds  
like tea-time confections.

And blossoms unfolded.  
Lotus morsels offer sweet peace  
to the crane among them  
and the frogs minnows crayfish

54 she entertains while they all  
sleep their idyllic way into her welcoming gullet.  
The crane lifts the shine of fine beak  
from out the first dream: lotus Eden.

She raises her neck high  
to reach even above late summer cattails  
and strains her irongray loop of neck

Continued on page 55

2

to crane immense girders and bales of rebar  
lordly above the uncontrolled slather  
of draining nature, green yellow white pink.  
Adjusts to the rightangle of monument aborning,  
capital perfection of human genius.

3

Motored along by the refined primordium,  
steered by the steady arm of public policy,  
she lifts incendiary iron bars like ignorant keys  
into a judgment of electric sky.

© 2017

55

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Lyric Epic Hearth

*An Essay*

When you heard the still small voice  
it wasn't a god you heard.  
It was yourself.  
It wasn't a god you heard, small, insignificant, powerless.

It was yourself, small, insignificant, powerless.  
It was the voice of the silent passing wing.  
Yourself.

56 Listen.  
Not too hard.  
Ah, not yet.

1  
Literary characters, if real enough, animating,  
enter the imagination and memory  
with energy to compete with the memories of our own past  
family and friends,

and even our own past selves,  
to bring to us a mould and mortal breath.  
Eumaeus redirects his attention to converse with my grandfather,

Continued on page 57

and I am allowed into the conversation, even  
to help direct it on those occasions when they allow  
that I am old enough now,  
“all bigger” now and only for now:

Wealthweow has learned—  
taught herself within herself,  
which is the only academy for a woman of her status—  
that the only way to be in charge is never to need to be in charge.  
It is a lesson she needn't teach the men.

What is the virtue of listening to anyone in the throes  
of the illusion of power,  
warrior to berserker in a swig and an insult,  
and back to sanity through her unnoticed gesture?

57

2  
Eurydice alive,  
Orpheus cannot contemplate death.  
Without the contemplation of death  
the necessary urgency of poetry  
(en-chant-ment)  
remains still-born.  
And poetry with it.

3  
The great emotions are lacerating.  
We want to demand of the epic that it tether the emotions so  
that we can ride them like ponies.

I am looking at the wound,  
sometimes from the inside,  
and I want my work to let out the new wild.

Grab the aurochs by the horns and ride.  
You.  
The past is no more than the past.

The poet writes.  
You ride.  
(The poet longs to ride, writes the horse and rider)

58 But in calm, when you hear the still small voice  
it isn't a god you hear.  
It is yourself.  
It isn't a god you hear, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is yourself, small, insignificant, powerless.  
It is the voice of the silent passing wing.

A passing owl perhaps,  
in silent flight through a distant wood,  
where you are standing.

Yourself.

Listen.  
Not too hard, not yet.

4

. . . the poet's traditional living between  
the shaman and the scientist,  
participating at the extremes, as intermediary and as interlocutor.

The living demands the natural,  
which attempts to unite the extremes—  
which are not really extremes anyway

but life between the inhalations and the exhalations,  
the verbs that give threat to the long-held breath.

5

It is hard to get lost trying to get lost,  
because of the efforts of observing, the need  
to discover what is strange (lost)—  
the necessary landscape of lostness.

59

We strive for the end of our work and our words—  
the embodied silence  
from which another might create new noises

*almost* all our own.

And from which the next noises  
become words and the next speaker's silence.

When I close my eyes,  
I am expecting,  
or at least hoping,  
in some trepidation,

for a nuclear light-show glittering about in the vast  
and barely visited empyrean  
between my ears.

6

On People Who Are Not:

60 . . . names I will have to look up again, and again  
and again—  
names I will forget again in order to rediscover  
the honor of finding them once more—

and to remember the nature of my own names,  
one honored by Homer who then kindly forgets—  
symbol of my own stature with

Tranströmer's Ileborgh, Mayone, Dauthendy, Kaminsky, and,  
in the inevitable rest after the final line of the codex,  
Tomas as well.  
I shall miss them.  
I will be them.

7

Nor do you know,  
through the expected welter of heroic mayhem,  
the Wealtheow who has learned—  
taught herself within herself,

which is the only academy for a woman of her status—  
that the only way to be in charge is never to need to be in charge.  
It is a lesson she needn't teach the men.  
What is the virtue of listening to one in the throes of the illusion of power?

Wealtheow steps again toward the end of her work and her words—  
the embodied silence from which she will create *níwe sangas*.  
New cantos almost all her own.

61

And from which the next noises  
become words first  
before the necessary tradition of gesture.

For when she hears the still small voice  
it isn't a god she hears.  
It is herself.  
It isn't a god she hears, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is herself, small, insignificant, powerless.  
It is the voice of the silent passing wing.

A silent owl perhaps,  
passing among the rafters of Heorot.  
Herself.

She listens.  
Regards the necessary silence.

8

Notes for Fenton family:

It is hard to get lost trying to get lost,  
because of the efforts of observing, the need  
to discover what is strange (lost)—  
the beckoning landscape of lostness.

We strive for the end of our work and our words—  
the embodied silence  
from which another might create new noises

*almost* all our own.  
And from which the next noises  
become words and the next speaker's creative silence

. . . but life is difficult almost always  
and life is always as confusing  
as life needs to be for what is almost clarity.

62

9

Hugh Fenton's Story:

(*a theory of fiction*)

So when Hugh hears the Minnie ball whiz by again

you hear it whiz by,

the bee that scared you when you were three.

Or the cannon ball.

You couldn't see it bounce,

one, two, three.

But you could and you did

and it hit you square in the sternum . . .

like when you and your bike fell and the end of the handlebar

hit you square in the sternum.

63

You've heard them both now

and you have felt the terrible blows,

and you can hear now what it is to be scared

and scared near to death.

(The irony about speaking of war

is that there is no irony available in speaking of war.

War is too reptilian to be ironic.

Peace is the playground of irony,

which happens after the blood has petrified

into the innocent sentimentality of *Epic*,

after the poet has dared to return to the people of the hearth—  
the warmth of creative peace that is expected to demand  
again the hearth-rending culture of war.)

The great emotions are lacerating.  
We want to demand of the epic that it tether the emotions so  
that we can ride them like ponies.

I am looking at the wound,  
sometimes from the inside,  
and I want my work to let out the new wild.

Grab the aurochs by the horns and ride.  
You.  
The past is so much more than the past.

The poet writes.  
You ride.  
(we ride)

10  
. . . the poet's traditional living between  
the shaman and the scientist,  
participating at the extremes, as intermediary and as interlocutor.

The living demands the natural,  
which attempts to unite the extremes—  
which are not really extremes anyway

but life between the inhalations and the exhalations,  
the verbs that give resonance to the long-held breath.

For when we hear the still small voice  
it isn't a god we hear.

It is ourselves.

It isn't a god we hear, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is ourselves, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is the voice of the silent passing wing.

It is Everyvoice in our chorus of mortal breath.

Listen again:

11

Eurydice alive,

Orpheus cannot contemplate death.

Without the contemplation of death

the necessary urgency of poetry

(en-chant-ment)

remains still-born.

And poetry with it.

© 2017

65

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## The Room Where We Three Pass

*“What a good haunter I am, O tell him”*

1

What shall we discover  
if we delve  
toward the dark lament in the cat

and what feline passion  
should try to relieve  
from the broken-loved poet

66  
his grieved confusion  
at the love  
and first despair of his life

his wife  
who in dying returned  
as specter and muse

loved  
unloved  
loved and feared for one and twenty fatey verses?

Continued on page 67

2

I might have stayed longer  
to continue some conversation  
but the company was no more than

3

I and, ah . . .  
someone had turned  
off the coffee pot

the coffee lying thick in the bottom  
of the black mug as moon-dead  
as the heart of the cat.

© 2017

67

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Mason Jar

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning I saw a single Mason jar.

It was a big jar.

And the old zinc lid was a pewter shade that looked galvanized.

It was dusty.

The whole cupboard was dusty.

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning I saw a single Mason jar.

It was a big jar.

A quart jar and I thought I could see the red of tomatoes through the untouched dust.

And the old zinc lid was the same pewter shade and the same galvanized patina.

It was dustier than before.

The whole cupboard was dustier than before.

68

Continued on page 69

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning to look again at a single Mason jar

I saw that someone had taken the Mason jar.

It had been a big jar.

It had been a quart jar but I knew that I had not seen the red of tomatoes through the untouched dust.

It had been too dusty to see into then.

It should have been dustier now than it had been last time I looked.

The galvanized pewter colored zinc lid was gone too.

The whole cupboard was carpeted in dust.

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning I saw that someone had taken the cupboard.

Someone had taken my mother.

But when I opened my hand I could still see my mother's plans for this summer's canning.

Then I poured the dust out of my hand and I went back up the basement stair.

I turned the key in the ignition of my car.

When I turned round in order to back out the drive onto Rice Street I looked at the faces of my granddaughters.

For only a moment their faces were dust too.

Then they were faces again.

They asked why my own face looked so strange.

I did not speak through the dust.

I turned back and drove down Rice Street.

I wanted to show them the old beach on the riverbank where I had  
learned to swim.

I looked out at the river and looking washed off some of the dust.

But I still don't want my granddaughters to see my face.

Not until the dust has dried.

And settled into the patina of my face.

A single Mason jar.

The lid is zinc and it looks like patina of galvanized pewter.

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# Audrey Sher-Walton

## Bottom of the Manhattan Glass

Stemmed cherry floats  
to the bottom of the Manhattan glass  
The way dreams sink  
almost  
perish  
but don't actually die

Retrieval is up to the drinker  
Fish it out with  
ringed finger  
Lick it out with  
searching tongue  
Like a Mt. Everest climber with a broken compass

As jazz flute resonates  
try to comprehend  
How cherries are just like the ocean  
There  
Just beyond your reach  
Like vacations other people take

71

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# Audrey Sher-Walton

Audrey Sher-Walton grew up on Fresh Meadow Lane. Surrounded by asphalt, it wasn't fresh, a meadow, or even a lane. Still, it was an idyllic childhood during which time she developed a lifelong fascination with words. Audrey is the founder and facilitator of Write ON! Eastside Writing Group. Two of her poems won Pima College's Family Heritage Project Contest. She has been a guest reader on KXCI's Poet's Moment and she penned monthly columns in two Tucson newspapers. Her poems have been published in Zocolo and Aurora. She is the assistant editor of Awakenings Literary Review. Audrey owns Mrs. Audrey's Academic Achievement, a tutoring service. She enjoys swimming laps, reading, playing her flute, and organic gardening, but above all, she loves spending time with her fabulous family. Although a desert dweller, in her mind she lives right near the ocean. Audrey can be reached at: [Mrs.AudreysAcademicAchievement@gmail.com](mailto:Mrs.AudreysAcademicAchievement@gmail.com).

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# Audrey Sher-Walton

## Tamed and Restrained

Been tamed and restrained for so long  
You unleash my wild streak

I'm not those things you say I am  
Daring, crafty—no not me

But something about you  
leads me to this aberrant behavior  
my sensuality, femininity set free

A part of me is cordoned off—open only to you  
A piece of me that no one else can infiltrate  
A sliver only recently unearthed

73

I keep you sequestered from the rest of the world  
my own private caprice

I send you the core of me, the hidden me  
unwrapped  
You drink me in  
devour me  
And then return for more

Continued on page 74

Continued from page 73

Always you appear  
A silent voice rippling inside my head  
The soft breeze that moves  
my curls against my shoulders

Whispers, the hint of your touch  
pierces

And you  
you've never even inhaled  
my perfume

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# Audrey Sher-Walton

## Maya

He said  
I love you, but not like that

I wish he would have said  
It's like that  
I love you

He said  
The usual bullshit  
“We’ll always be friends.”

That was 40 years ago  
And we are  
Truly

75

My husband says how lucky he is  
that the guy was such a fool  
But he likes him just the same

After  
our mutual friend's daughter  
killed herself  
we spoke

He said  
Heartfelt comforting things

I wish  
He didn't have the opportunity  
to be so real and kind

# Audrey Sher-Walton

## Lifted Mist

When the mist lifts  
and  
the veil of secrecy is cast aside

You will lay unmasked  
Unguarded by the ill-begotten  
thoughts you have come to believe  
To trust  
are real

76  
A fabrication of beliefs  
You dare not unwind

Fog shrouds your soul  
demanding:  
Hide your trepidation  
lest you be found out

Afraid to be transparent  
Glowing in the haze  
Where nothing can reach you  
except  
fear

Continued on page 77

Continued from page 76

Make friends with the fear  
you are repeatedly told

How does one shake hands with an invisible force  
that paralyzes dreams?  
Or embrace a power whose mission it is  
to steal pleasure?

Hidden beneath the mist  
No one knows

You can pretend  
you are not being gripped  
by  
a fear so consuming  
that you are no longer  
you

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# Audrey Sher-Walton

## Morphine Lips

Morphine lips

Cracked

Lined with a suffocating shade of blue

Not the way for a daughter to remember her mother

Lying in bed

an effort for you just to inhale

He blows cigarette smoke in your direction

More toil for your compromised lungs

Always the martyr,

Selfless

now reduced to begging for a swig of that blue elixir

Have to sneak it past Dad, the gatekeeper who

tries insanely to believe

that you're not really dying

I run interference

Bargain for necessities that would bring palliative  
care

A walker, a wheelchair, a hospital bed

Each thing an exhausting fight to get you what you need

Each thing denied, overruled,

banned

78

Continued on page 79

Continued from page 78

Every day you battle for your life  
Every day I battle him

When it's your turn to die I tell him, you can call the shots  
For now let's try to hear what *Mom* wants  
My words reverberate against yellowed walls  
My pleas turning vapid

The yelps of pain take up too much space in my brain

I ask you what you need What you want You could name a thousand things

Instead you say, "Mamala, just sit and let me look at you."

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# Editor's Note

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**A** while back I started a conversation about how poetry allows us a concentration of experience in a single image, a moment of time. It also allows us a concentration of emotion. I was toying around with the line “Night snapped shut around the bat,” the keyhole to a poem I’ve been working on for a long time. For me, it’s an image freighted with experience and emotion and continues to obsess me. Thinking about the process of writing this poem reminds me of the poet — was it a French poet? — who hung his poems on clotheslines and walked around the room adding lines here and lines there. I have three things in mind as I’m working this obsession: Poet Alberto Rios speaks of writing about an image from all angles, giving it a 360-degree view. In this issue, poet Richard Fenton Sederstrom writes of “the verbs that give threat to the long-held breath.” I could write: “The night snapped shut around the bat like a velvet purse.” (Or: “a velvet coin purse.”) Or just as easily: “Night snapped shut around the bat, black swallowing black.” The poem that’s out there (or in me) ultimately may use both lines or neither lines, maybe not even the original line. The third thing I’m thinking about: For a poem to live, you need to let it exhale, then get out of its way. I’m still working on that, but I’m excited about where it might lead.

**Rebecca “Becca” Dyer**

**Editor**

## Editorial Staff

**Editor:** *Rebecca Dyer*

**Editor:** *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

**Publisher:** *Elena Thornton*

**Artwork for front and back covers:** *Marjory Boyer*

# Open Mic: A celebration of the arts

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

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

**When:** Every last 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](mailto:info@artizona.org).

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## Coming in October!

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

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](http://www.artizona.org)

# A Call to Poets For Summer 2018

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Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2018 Issue from June 1 through July 4, 2018. 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](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).

For more information, e-mail Rebecca at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org) or visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

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

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

# A Call to Writers for the Fall 2017 Blue Guitar

The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2017 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

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*The Blue Guitar, The Blue Guitar Jr. and Unstrung 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](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).*

# 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](mailto:info@artizona.org).

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

**Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for Unstrung, The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr.:** Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at [mboyerart.com](http://mboyerart.com).



# UNSTRUNG

A magazine of  
for and about  
poetry



Unstrung will  
return in  
Summer 2018