

UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,
for and about
poetry



Summer 2020

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

The Poets



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

Paula Ashley

In the shadow

of lava hills
where those who wrote in pictures
carved their stories into stone

a kestrel
perches motionless on the fountain top.

Imaginary cedar flutes
call me to silence
to transcend desires of earth.

4

The sparrows
abandon their garrulous ways
in bougainvillea apartments

& the lizard
who no longer does push-ups on the boulder
hides, instead, in crevices.

Shadows deepen over trickling water
& humid air hangs heavy

as the kestrel
ancient omen of passage from this life
claims what I thought was mine.

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Paula Ashley



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Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer. She lives in Glendale, Arizona, with her husband and a colony of feral cats who sleep under their bougainvillea and sometimes honor them by following them around the yard. This sequence of poems was inspired by a kestrel who perched on the fountain in their backyard every evening at dusk. After a few days, her mate joined her at the fountain. Paula was enchanted with their beauty and researched their ancient references in Egyptian lore. p.c.ashley@ieee.org

Paula Ashley

At night

in my sleep
the kestrel that perched all day
on my garden wall

flies into my dream.
I catch the raptor
put it in a cage.

It bites my finger when I try to feed it,
squawks like a cockatiel,
then gives me the eye.

All-seeing, all-knowing,
it pins me to my chair
in ultra-violet light,

scans my scars, my pretensions,
all the wrong turns
of my life,

holds me in its talons
until I am a whisper
of what I was.

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Paula Ashley

A breeze

billows the curtains.
I perspire under the ceiling fan
& my gown clings to my body.

All night I hover at the edge of sleep.
At two I open one eye — the kestrel
perches on the post

at the foot of my bed.
Vanished sparrows & finches
float in my mind.

7

The kestrel's eye startles
me into wakefulness. Must I too
leave? Vanish into the night?

But no, its agile spirit circles
over me. I close my eye
& know my guide.

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Paula Ashley

One Eye Drags the Sun

below the horizon,
the other pulls up the moon.
The kestrel

perches on the fountain top
in my backyard —
erect & motionless.

Her mate flies in,
feathers painted by the setting sun —
colors of the desert
sand, rust, lava blue.

Together they fly north.
Dusk settles on the mountains
& in the valley.

My husband comes home
from work too late
to share

this daily sighting — this ritual
of their lifelong bond.

© 2020

Dario Beniquez

Who Will Save Us Now?

It is the beginning of the 21st century and things have gone awry. And from somewhere she jumped into our universe from where no one knew. Not even the state trooper with her wide-brim hat knew. The tree trimmer with his rattling chainsaw simply stared at her, puzzled as heck why she was standing in front of the Safeway with two shopping bags.

But there she was pulling out facemasks, handing them out to passers-by, shoppers, children, workers—an elderly woman with a hand-made sign, with dark blue printed letters, that read, “Free Mascaras, Masks, No Donations Necessary.”

Every day without fail, snow, rain, or hail, she handed them out, surgical masks. Who was this woman? Was she an apparition from another planet, another dimension? Perhaps, Lucifer knew, but I doubted it.

She persisted, day after day, 30, 60, 90 days, an eternal supply of masks until the whole city wore masks, including children—their toys wearing tiny makeshift bandannas and handkerchiefs.

Everywhere masks dominated, on the streets, in the park, inside the post office, even in the backyards, this went on until the malicious virus was no more, and the pandemic over. After that, the world was no longer the same and she was no more.

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Dario Beniquez



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Dario Beniquez was raised in Far Rockaway, NY. He is an Army veteran and lives in San Antonio, Texas. For over 19 years, he has facilitated the Gemini Ink Literary Arts Center Open Writers' Workshop, which is free to the San Antonio community. He also facilitates the Voices del la Luna Literary Magazine poetry workshop, which he recently established. He holds a BEIE from Pratt Institute, NY; an M.S. in Industrial Engineering, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM; and an MFA from Drew University, NJ. His latest poetry publications include "The Brave: A Collection of Poetry and Prose" (2019), TEJASCOVIDO Literary Journal (2020), San Antonio Express-News, "VIA Poetry on the Move Anthology," "30 Poems for the San Antonio Tricentennial Anthology," and elsewhere.

Dario Beniquez

Red Lobster

Those of us who grow
beyond
apple green with age

know the truth about our cells—
our hair gone.

Our heads sparkle in the sunshine
or painted blonde to cover our age.

It feels so dandy to wake up
to such a blind day.

11

Where have my shoes run to?
Where are my keys?

What unholy doors do they unlock?
Maybe they've eloped to *Tahiti*.

Then the truth slaps my forehead,
every moment yateky yaks
into dark matter.

Molecules juggle in my brain,
form compounds of embarrassment.

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Later,

I see strangers waving at me
at Red Lobster.

Who are these faces, my
brain asks?

Up close, I extend my hand,
smile in gladness, and say,

Long time no see.

12

Thinking,

Shoot, I never liked these people anyway.

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Dario Beniquez

Brooks Air Force Base, 9/11

Ed Custodio, a contract specialist, runs into my cubicle, “You’ve gotta watch this!” he says. So like two strangers escaping a wildfire we rush into the first available conference room. On a TV screen, we see a man on a rooftop; behind him, a commercial plane crashes into a tower. The video plays over and over again like an unwanted hypodermic needle into our flesh.

Within seconds, the room jams up with workers frozen in space. Straightaway, Major Nicholson breaks up the spell, “Everybody, go home! We’re evacuating the Base.” Hundreds of people pour out the building, hundreds more race out the compound. But inside the dark building, I sought refuge under a desk just as I was taught at Public School 61 to “Duck and Cover,” “Duck and Cover,” when the bomb comes for us.

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Dario Beniquez

A Day Like Sun at San Pedro Creek

Roberto, Cathy, and I are dumbstruck
by beauty, by the creek, by random raindrops.

We are soaked beyond recognition, huddled together
underneath Cathy's purple umbrella.

“Rain is good,” I'm told. “It recharges the springs,
the Edwards Aquifer.”

Yet we are wet, not so good until I think,
how water nurtures our bodies.

How San Pedro Creek fed all those people, eons ago.
A land coveted by westward migrants, yet known,
to native dwellers—a pristine haven.

No highways, no buildings, un campo, nourished
by the creek where the Tonkawa flourished and dreamt.

Nature is so forgiving, so green. So here we are
Cathy, Roberto, and me, as children once again,

astonished by the sun's warm arms. We hop, skip, jump,
run, and then stop to stare at the floating plants as if seen

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for the first time ever. We cannot stop staring
at nature's wonderment, become bedazzled

by the yellow water lilies. Then Cathy spins
around and looks at me and says,

“Look there, downstream! On a stepping-stone, there's
a lone Labrador sunning—it's a she!” And I jump to gladness,

and say, “So that's what happiness is all about, here, now.”
And we all start laughing at our own dizzy amazement.

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Dario Beniquez

Seekers

So I walk out into the universe
to test my existence.

Why does darkness preoccupy the city, the planet?

In the migrant station, I hand out a box lunch
to a little, coal-tinted, boy singing cartoon tunes.

A mother sits on the floor, bottle-feeds
a child. She looks up at me. I get her two box lunches.

16 People in a strange land, different space, a mortal time...

A man carries a canvas tote bag,
inside the bag, one short sleeve shirt and dungarees.

He comes up to me and says, “Tengo hambre.”
I reach for another box lunch.

The stench of God is everywhere in the water,
on the walls, in the air.

And the city jives on; people move on, the world spins on.
Folks, migrants, knock on our doors.

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Carmen A. Cisnadean

The Quiet Corner

Siloed in a quiet corner
Binding letters in a tide,
Whose meek
And peaceful drift
Quells the waves
That whack the bulwark
Of the vessel deep inside,
Toils the poetess, at night.

There the intellectual fillips
Cauterize her sentiments,
Whose catharsis
Of bold currents
Brace the wind
That yields the quivers
Of her literary sails,
Sailcloth's flutter in her chest.

There the storm surge
Takes precedence in her hands,
Whose pale
And restless fingers
Lucubrate at candlelight
In the corner where the letters
Paint a staircase towards God,
There her life is sacrosanct.

17

Carmen A. Cismadean



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Carmen A. Kraela, who writes under the pen name Carmen A. Cismadean, received a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and a Minor in Russian from the University of South Carolina, a school that graced her with cum laude honors. Carmen is the author of her first book of poetry, “A Poetess’ First Flight,” published in March of 2020, is the founder of the Facebook page “The Creative Visionary,” wrote and published several articles on Thrive Global, and was selected as a winning contestant of a writing competition involving Act IV of the opera “Andrea Chenier,” which took her to Milano, Italy, and Teatro Alla Scala in January of 2018. Carmen was born in northern Romania on the same month and date as Romania’s national poetic icon Mihai Eminescu (January 15th) except 131 years after his birth, a fact of which she is very fond. Her poetry writing is inspired by outstanding music and fantastic visual art. Some of her favorite artists include Van Gogh, Michael Cheval, John William Waterhouse, Degas, Boudin, to name a few. Carmen adores composers of classical music such as Dvorak, Wagner, Paganini, Rossini, Schubert, Vivaldi, Korsakov, Mozart, Saint-Saëns, and often listens to them play in the background while she pens away. Carmen is also a visual artist, an area she is exploring now more than ever before. Her first book ever to be published entitled “A Poetess’ First Flight” can be purchased on amazon.com as well as directly on the publisher’s website at bookstore.dorrancepublishing.com. You can follow Carmen on Facebook: @thecreativevisionary or on Instagram: @thecreativevisionarycc.

Carmen A. Cisnadean

Despite Not Having Fins

What I write down on paper
Is only but a fraction
Of what I know and dream of,
Is but the undulating foam
Of thousand waves
Before they're even born.

There are certain matters
A writer never tells
A certain happiness, despite that,
The bottom of the ocean
Knows not a lack of tumult
Even when currents rest.

I free my inner battles
Into the eerie dive
Before I greet your shore's eyes,
Truckling to the greedy fear
Before the emerging swim
Despite not having fins.

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Carmen A. Cisnadean

Light From Within

There is a light
Within each heart
That can turn clouds
In wondrous skies
All of the storms
That claim the earth
Can be turned calm
If we so want.

20 There is a strength
Within each man
That can turn feuds
In loving tales
All of the anguish
That scars existence
Can be turned peaceful
If we so choose.

There is a force
Within each soul
To fuse a world
That coexists
One which may paint
The future's stars
With brilliance strong
If we so aim.

Carmen A. Cisnadean

The Queen's Farewell

Advancing of the gallant bishops
Over the perfectly squared terrain proclaimed a checkerboard
The variable speed rushing across the player's mind
Demanding the creation of a landscape and design,
Painting forces of the intellectual combat expand
As silver armored knights prance around taxing actions
Glimmering eyes find themselves enthralled
By defining moments of claims, monumental leaps of thought
Commanded by stern fingertips
As pawns dance with small feet, forward then left and right,
Avoiding head to head bumps, the nearly useless rams,
As outer silence entwines with the fervid agitation inside.

21

As rooks put up defenses
A carnival of skills unleashes, a fine story to spill,
Above the alternating black and white
Lives take a bow between deep sighs
The player's scrutinizing gaze intensifies
While the poised queen bobs her curtsy in elegant style
Then throws a wink to the rivaling king, sitting troubled on the other side.
She knows, essentially, she is the greatly hunted one
Due to the invaluable faculty
The resolute power standing distinguished behind the roses in her crown
There is no time for eloquent prattle
In the eyes of the queen concerned with the welfare of her kin.

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It's really just a war of judgment
No need to upraise the smoking flames to a burning
Yet every master has his pride, righteous or blind,
His part to play, to great peaks to climb,
Safeguard to his best the dominion's limits of his precious mind
Clever efforts of survival that aim to fortify

The resistance of the king spellbound by the queen's charm
As he performs his hat tip, her loyal guardians
Plan and besiege the man!
Forget the castling, he cries, it's just too late for that
The queen brushes her lips against his cheek
And kisses him goodbye.

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Carmen A. Cisnadean

Let The Mermaids Be!

A boy love-sick with bibliomania
Woke up inside a dream where
Clouds resembling sailing clippers
Got flung away by the stubborn wind
Except for one that held a chair
Against whose silver spindles
The boy breathed in the saline air.

Beyond the sky's translucent mist
Swam disenchanted mermaids
Collecting stars inside their palms
Soft and pale as white as snowy owls
Yet nowhere near as free, captives
Forever separated from the sea
Their royal waves and regal corals.

A mermaid with eyes sapphire blue
Sagacious pearls that neared
The tenderhearted boy whose ears
Welcomed the mermaid's whisper
Until the atrocious awareness fell in
Within him, like an anchor's weight
Shudders the sea's inner tranquility.

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One silent night the lustrous moon
To punish humanity's ungrateful ways
Looted the waters of the sea
Snatching the mermaids by their fins
Coercing them to hide the stars
Those beaming since the dawn of man
Aiding mankind through darkness.

The boy with a sonorous, gutsy voice
Shouted across the wistful dark:
What gives you right to hurt
The innocent creatures of the world
Who never brought you harm?
Punish but those who are at fault
And let the mermaids be!

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Carmen A. Cisnadean

The Poetess' Love Note to The Composer

Dear royal cob, gliding above sound's loftiest timbre
Above the playful dive, the water's frolic
Warping the waves into keys, both high and low,
Stretching the chords from the somber moon above
To the hot sun of musical notes buried deep down under the ground
As you reach in and pull, by strings, the currents
Both boisterous and mild, violent and calm,
Then splash what you so love into a burst
Beyond the deep forest and its mournful oaks
Whose thirst you quench with all your tears, warm,
Whose flaws you crown with all your gestures, kind,
I seek to glorify you in my overspill of words
To wed your melodic transcendence to my poetic trials.

25

I praise your wings, how could I not
Even the blind can hear them, their sovereign flap
That gather the angels reluctant to forgive
The world's nature to notice all your feathers' blots
Pointing their cold fingers to your foibles, your scars,
Despite the aura of the melody, bright as the summer rays of sun,
Their tongues spill rocks that lacerate the artist's heart.
I urge you, don't you mind the poor acuity of the few
For it does not defer the resonating beauty
The galaxies to where you surpass to surge the sound

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The unfailing genius of your creations, your venerable mind,
I shall not cease to exalt you to your worth
To honor the creative pulse nested in the thumps of your diamond heart.

After all, I am the pen that understands your cry.

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26

Susan Cummins Miller

For Diana: On the Second Anniversary of Her Death

I rescued a gilded flicker
from your room of stone
and glass. Confused from crashing
into windowpanes she huddled
in a corner, beak pointing south.

You found a soft towel embroidered
with a smiling sun. Crawling under
the cherry-wood desk I wrapped
the flicker in a white cocoon, crooning
Hush, hush, now, I won't hurt you—

27

the same words I murmured
to my sons as I plucked cactus needles
from tiny fingers. The flicker quieted
in my scarred, weathered hands. As
you waited, barely breathing,

I carried her to the parapet, opened
the swaddling cloth and set her free.

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Susan Cummins Miller



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Tucson writer/geologist Susan Cummins Miller's award-winning poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including "What We Talk About When We Talk About It: Vols. I and II," "What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest," "More Voices of New Mexico," and "Roundup! Great Stories of the West from Today's Leading Western Writers." She compiled and edited "A Sweet, Separate Intimacy: Women Writers of the American Frontier, 1800-1922," and pens the "Frankie MacFarlane, Geologist," mysteries. Website: <http://www.susancumminsmiller.com>.

Susan Cummins Miller

On the Divide

How many times have I crossed
the Continental Divide? Two hundred? Three?

The Highway to the Sun at Waterton-Glacier.
Lolo Pass in the Bitterroots. Butte City, Yellowstone,
and ghostly South Pass City where the wind whistled
through sage and prairie bluestem, violent stories echoed
in narrow alleyways between weather-beaten
buildings, and somewhere a shutter banged
like the crack of a gunshot.

I remember a steep climb up and over
Wolf Creek Pass in the San Juans. And later,
driving the flatlands flanking the highway
west of Deming, New Mexico, a road sign
the only evidence I'd traversed the subtle rise
separating rivers flowing east from rivers
flowing west. Duality made manifest.
There is no east without west, no joy
without sorrow, no life without death, no
action without reaction.

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Here, on the Divide near Silver City, I park
on the crest of a switchback road. The wind soughs
softly through sapless pines. Dead trees talking.
The closed mine's silent trucks guard
a wasteland of disemboweled
earth. The raw wound gapes, exposed
as an open grave awaiting
the casket.

© 2020

Susan Cummins Miller

Fire on Friday

When night falls
in sheltered canyon, dizzying
landscape of alcoves, cliffs
and caves, trapped on a ledge
the vertical swallows us.
Below, calm waters hide
rippling crosscurrents.
No going back.
Not tonight.

We merge with the deep,
flowing darkness and clicking consonants
of bighorn sheep stepping daintily
down to the river. Sudden constellations
of eerie red glows resolve into headlamps
like light-shifts of stars
moving away
in time, in space.

Ceremony
provides perspective: Fire
on Friday from fiddlehead
tinder. Cedar-bark tea in a rock-
slab kitchen. Entrapped evolves
into enchanted. Sip.
Close down.
Let go.

31

Susan Cummins Miller

Limbo

Under the whimpering skies of June earth lolls
and licks parched lips. In the shadow
of Baboquivari, where I'toi dwells
in his cave, the Tohono O'odham harvest
saguaro fruit with elongated wooden crosses
while my children cry
for respite from the heat.

When will monsoon rains
end dry endless spring?

32

The wind slides restlessly
between the stunted cornstalks. A pale moon
yawns. Behind the granite mountain front
where black hawks dive and bears raid
Igloo coolers, male clouds lurk—building,
toning, bunching, flexing, thrusting,
breeding hail.

St. John's Day passes. The air-tide
turns. At dusk arroyos drown, white lightning
lances peaks, old women sing,
my brown feet dance.

© 2020

Susan Cummins Miller

To My Parents, with Gratitude

You made me
a child of the woods
and deserts, offered antidotes
to cleithrophobia and claustrophobia,
to the limits of stone blocks and brick, plastered
wood and asphalt, to formulaic
schoolroom texts.

You taught me to focus
on breathing, on light and distance.
You taught me to embrace space, to narrow vision
to a pinpoint aperture. From innumerable
starry nights and dusty trails, riverside
camps and granite tarns, from strikes
of trout and kokanee on hooks
and lures, from the smell of Baja grunion,
floured and seasoned, frying

in a cast-iron skillet, I absorbed
the rattlesnake truth, inspired
and inspiring, yet always requiring
groundwork: *Access it, identify it, name it,
shout it—*

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all sounds lost in the vastness
of Pacific swells, isolated beaches, gorges
deeper and larger than San Francisco
canyons, sound lost in mud-choked
virgin rivers, among arches and badlands,
red cliffs and yellow stone, grand
canyons and glaciers—sound muffled
by redwoods, sequoias, digger pines, cedars,
and Joshua trees.

Even now, so many years
later, a photograph, a snatch
of song, a snippet of poetry, a map
or a place name triggers
joy like the sustained warmth
of an embrace, like a tug
on the other end of time.

© 2020

Bob Eager

Wrong Way Weird

Compulsion, time wasted! — finger-waving gesture while yelling at screen ... Homeless person pulling a stroller with no clothes, no nothing, Baby carriage even has no baby ... Weird Wrong Way; no initiative for a direction, counterproductive actions taken ... A Reflex Compulsion ... Way Wrong Weird! On the Contrary, the correct focus on Weird for a reason! Art and Passion interlinked, Weird Way Wrong :) Many face the day with Creepy in mind with no direction ... Such a shame? Way Weird Wrong? Juxtapose that with us who Concentrate on things that matter, no obsession with superficial, repetitious all-day distraction, contemporary for the moment escapist pleasure; abstract strange but a purpose on point. Or face consequences of ... Coexisting with Wrong Way Weird ...

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Bob Eager



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“Mr. Authenticity” Bob Eager, also known as Edgar Rider, lives in Scottsdale and has been published in Oddball Magazine, Stray Branch literary magazine and Tuck Magazine to name a few. He has recently come up with a type of remedy called Trash Bag Therapy to help people release their emotions. He is the ringmaster of Claim The Space (the Tunnel Performance Society) where musicians, poets and dancers express themselves in an open environmental forum. The poet can be reached at bobeager123@outlook.com.

Robert Feldman

state of the union

pray for us
excuses melted down
we are lost
excuses melted away
in a country that once was a friend

pray for us
smoking cigarettes again
sitting in church pews
now filled with red hats
who once marched to songs of freedom

37

pray for us
vomiting hybrid pseudo tomatoes
this corporate earth has desecrated
left us prisoners
alone
in our room cells

in these streets
cynical eyes follow us
hesitancy in our steps
distrustful of colors

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Continued from page 37

in these streets
mountains erode after the flood
we may be buried alive
without a sound
but for silent rain
falling on a lake
hours drifting
pasting together back another day

pray for our release
from these gray streets
and we will come to you heads bowed
unashamed—
we are not a generation who fears the loneliness
the struggle to resist
this country that once was a friend

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Robert Feldman



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Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Robert Feldman was inspired early on by members of Paterson's literary tradition, most notably Louis and Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams. Later, while living in St. Louis, he organized poetry readings, produced and hosted a community-issues news hour and a biweekly bebop jazz radio program on KDNA-FM. There, his interest and admiration for the Beat Generation flourished. After relocating to Bisbee in the early '70s, Robert was instrumental in publishing some of Arizona's most influential writers such as Drummond Hadley and Michael Gregory, and in 1980, collaborated with Lawrence Ferlinghetti on his Bisbee publication, "Mule Mountain Dreams." Currently, Robert resides in greater Phoenix, continuing to write, paint, and play tabla, besides actively publishing in several online poetry magazines. "Hineni," a collection of 15 Hebraic photographic poetry, was published in spring 2018, and "Sunflowers, Sutras, Wheatfields, and Other ArtPoems" in summer 2019. The body of Robert Feldman's writing and painting can be accessed at albionmoonlight.net; he can be reached at rffeldman@gmail.com.

Robert Feldman

to be or not to bop

(for Dizzy Gillespie)

rider leapfroggin over the Union Square El
atop bent trumpet
fresh from decimat in the competition,
this angel rainin visions
strolls in from Philadelphia packin a struggle rhythm,
blowin by the skins in lightnin 64th notes
pickpocket in the soaked drummer,
destroyin February midnight Broadway's dashed lines,
headin north up the FDR
uptempo music forever movin
exaggeratin into the air of possibilities—
to be or not to bop,
absolutely no question

hushed snow fallin
white poppy round midnight February Harlem,
Dizzy never goin back,
he and Bird realizin long ago
the first time's always perfect, man,
brother deuces trumpet in and blowin down the East River,
annihilatin the gates clean off 52nd St,
mad fickle lovers removin dark glasses
decipherin naked notes—
composin one more Mr. Jones, their generational copilot

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and when Max and Monk's uptempo drive them further,
14 melodies at once
burst out Dizzy's parachuted cheeks
mergin into one silverthroated voice,
flatted fifths soar
speakin in whispers
the exact Minton's of harmony,
and those uptown streets
and those bedsheets go
rollin way back downtown,
to a place where unclothed cognac sunset waves
run crashin off Rockaway Beaches,
to a place where this giant heart lives on
forever touched by a child's artistry,
lives on laughin and blowin
forever dinin out on the Blues

41

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Robert Feldman

Treasure the Fool

(signature of surrender)

treasure the fool
shops the Chelsea Hotel
icy January Manhattan
\$1100 a month.

treasure the fool
waits to touch
the woman who brought him home,
shackled his will with fierce detachment,
danced with shadows laughing off walls.

treasure the fool
visits films alone,
refusing to exhaust
rivers of others.

treasure the fool
discovering sedate moons,
dreaming of yellow treasures
mango bearing trees,
glasses full of crushed red ice.

42

Continued on page 43

Continued from page 42

treasure the fool
dying each day,
wet sand rooting his sex,
white winter beach,
portrait of passion.

signature of surrender.

© 2020

43

Grace Fryberger

Coyote

Quaternary Extinction Events.

130,000 BC - noted.

Later, pulse extinctions

rate of survival and adaptation

in Afro-Eurasia

13,000-8,000 BC

followed by over-killing

human-caused, naturally.

Even then

a six-degree Celsius

increase in global temperatures.

The trickster adapted.

Riddled over centuries

with every disease

the gods are making still

bones are found in the Miocene, Pliocene and Pleistocene.

And for 1,000 years after each era

there was a bounce back.

In canyons, washouts, coulees

rock bluffs, grain bins and now

the mean streets.

In drainage pipes along railroad tracks

the strictly monogamous

dens in thickets.

44

Continued on page 45

Wandering our dark streets
each dog trots
in the freedom of his life
he lives large
on rolling seasons of intuition
lengths of mischief
water kindly set out
across asphalt failings

beyond chipped
windless cul-de-sacs
past hidden whinings
and metal whirs, to streak
between the moon's bisque
and gamble his legacy
full out in the open.

45

© 2020

Grace Fryberger



46

Grace Fryberger's recent work appeared in the Medical Literary Messenger Journal through the University of Virginia Commonwealth. She lives in Tucson, AZ. She is curious, reads, still dances, and will entertain any topic of conversation. The best assessments of her can be found in her poems and short narratives.

Grace Fryberger

How to Write a Poem - #2

A bit of scribble
from one to another
iteration swallowed whole
chewed rough, stripped, flake-shaked
spit, dumped out from a forgotten
hollow, maybe roadkill or
the hitchhiker appears in the backseat
can't find the flashlight, shit
cold neck now what, oh wait
I remember something
what's that tone? specter
of old shadow unbuttoned
or wrapped around? good for now
the fit seamless, or better with a zipper?
does it say or show? – where
is it complete or need to be
watch out for *that* hog-tie
where's the uplift?
and can I get out with it
hand over hand or
just leap!

47

© 2020

Grace Fryberger

the moon down in

reach toward the long dark edge that looms
its unfurled cloth of feathers dropping into this quiet
slick of glistening fields where dark grains of wheat
do not waver. listen to the clear stillness
beneath the mash of wet grasses
reveal a cacophony of clicking hairs
iridescent shells, the jewel-hardened wings noisy
among the splitting blades, where underbellies scrape
across the splash and crackle of small porous stones
their slow mulled minerals, clustered between clots
of pungent earth, wade reluctant into streams.

48
lusty, even in here, the long fall of light feasts on beauty
its distant star watches fragrant moonlight bloom into your open hands.

© 2020

Grace Fryberger

they bring all there is
to more than can be fathomed

before June
an evening breaks.

faint, sunset glimmers
already full of shadows.

wooded below trunks
roots dig down.

among this understory
they range, roped tight.

49

together around other roots
not even their own.

fine hairs sup waters
trapped in rich soils.

this circuits up-trunk
back-humped and squeezed.

a day and a half ride to the top
where bristles' couriers send messages:

Continued on page 50

*swarms have arrived, medicine is coming
though arms broken, cells captured.*

ready before dawn
life, rot, rebirth, communion.

sacrifice and perseverance
are timbered into their breathing.

© 2020

50

Grace Fryberger

They Will Yawn Up Their Arms

The darkness at midnight coiled
around star deaths.

It fell above clouds far below
where horizontals sensed their vertical.

Low complexities
moved to inch along
in ancient muds that churned
into shale and thickened.

Having left coarse ridges etched there
certain to be found, we see them.

Their movement memoirs
are chronicled there, we know this:

From ancient unarmed beginnings
soon teeth and eyes of a bastard other
will bristle upright

again.

© 2020

51

Grace Fryberger

Tracking

From edge to edge
the starry sky flames
its silver pinpoint of light
over the chance
of crisp grasses drinking
their silent mash from the sand.

Insect wings and hairs
pause against this stretch of time.

52

Wide arcs and smooth dips
shift forms in the blowing grit.

Gusting blind
caught in tiny clefts
angled down and trapped
among the embedded folds unwinding
arms of a once murk-bottomed sea
keep tracking.

© 2020

J. Gray

Best Cellar

Hungry Hippos
Were the better part of
My stout memory,

Squeezing dead fish,
Gold body,
Clear guts foaming
Down.

Wall and floor
Too green,
Too appetite for sickness.

The cult comes questioning
As birds build for their babies,

The irony as she drills
Trauma deep into me.
Titanic on repeat
with pig ear and okra,
Lemon juice,
Poison,
A basement fire.

Running wild at
The backyard apple tree
Where she burns me in a frown
With the novel again.

53

J. Gray



54

J. Gray was born and raised in the Midwest. She began writing in middle school, keeping an avid journal of her early life experiences growing up in the inner city. During high school, she accomplished her first poetry publication in *Timeless Voices*, an anthology for emerging writers. She went on to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature and now works as an artist and grant writer. In February 2020, she self-published a collection of poetry aptly named "Apocalypse Eyes." The book is sectioned into four parts which narrate her own personal experiences with gender roles, early childhood trauma and healing. As 2020 unfolds, she pushes her work forward to inspire change and growth.

J. Gray

Bad Apple

Here I am...

The gross paradox

The haunted anomaly

And haunting of posture

Where the reaching primate asks,

“What Is That?”

Dying in the clavicle crawl space.

Try hiding flat in full view

Like a high school mascot

McIntosh,

Soft.

55

Here I am...

In the paranoid fringes of June

Unfashionably hot and

Missing the world again.

Let's see what it costs her:

“What Is That?”

Embarrassment of moons, then.

With a half-cocked head

And a disembodied grin

Inside of the yolk like fetter.

Continued on page 56

Here I am...

Maybe it's personal to you,
An angling, strange averter
To painful standard dialogue
With my angles shining evil,
"What IS That?"

Calloused and androgyne.
I only want to clothe in fog
The freshmen year protrusion,
As he demands upheaval.

© 2020

56

J. Gray

Plunge

I plunge the depth for floating things,
Discard meaning in honorable ways,
 But a thought weighs a burial,
Dualistic and concave.

My, *alzheimer alchemist*,
Remembers the tear,
She is like December flailing
The heights of winter as a dare.

In unique probable Clause
In with the first cause of disaster,
Something inside of her
 Remains unspared.

57

Self diagnosis scavenges a grave web,
Finds ethereal hypothermia and such,
 Shallow breathing and shivers
In the recall hutch.

Symptoms swim with me now,
The audacious, arctic, palpable plea,
The pain parasite in the future back seat
 Of a non sleigh.

Continued on page 58

It is winter and I'm driving
The freezing plasma of a past life
Still just hoping
That it's not mine.

© 2020

58

J. Gray

Learned to Be

(A tribute)

I have heaved the identity
The sticky choice adhesion
Curdled and grinding in my teeth
Remaining reprimand of joy where
The mirror crashes into me
Again, the victim of a boy
I have learned to be

I have cried myself dizzy and mute
Admonished by silence and mirrors
Ran dying to my unkind grooves
The rest of me scared to go near her
But raising the song in my heart
I grew clever, became the seer
And learned to be

I have rearranged the bleeding bits
A pedestaled fallacy
Demanding flame to flood my wrist
To burn the phallic palaces
With air despite reflection
Again, the mother of my wits
I have learned to be

59

© 2020

J. Gray

The Girl

I learn to love the girl
In her favorite dry scene
At the Sun's personality
Where the sharps of botany speak

Going broke for adventure
Administer of birth daze
Compacted in ovens
And incubation covens

© 2020

60

J. Gray

My Manor

That sterilized chance craves me new
A Liz Catlett kind of woman,
 For optimism's precipice
 Over the pueblo garden.

Where would I go
but inward each time
To dominions familiar,
Warm, similar layer,
 Where coddling is a must?

What would I do
But defend my time and inception,
 My unsullied soul whisper?

I wouldn't talk anymore
In reverie of old hard reels
With my manners refined
And the view, far and clear.

It is the place where I have accumulated,
Coagulated in the scars of angels,
 Baptismal baphomets,
 And respiratory spores.

© 2020

61

J. Gray

Mercury Mart

As I unpack the cart
I look back in repetition
For a lost translation
Box or limb.

I look at that metal cart
As if bare, it will banter
 And I scavenge my mind
 For any answer.

62

The black murder waits
Curious and hopeful
As the pleasant conversation
Speaks back to my mind.

Him behind the counter,
Falling soft like cashews
Through my fingers
Made my day,
As the saying goes.

Continued on page 63

I feed the crows and think about
A deep swim in blue,
I look back at the cart
Just one more time.

It is empty of all possessions
Except for my confessions
Which cling to that cold little prospect
Of affection.

© 2020

J. Gray

Apocalyptic Slur

It occurred when man stood
Beneath a mourning sky
Shivering the creature sound
The morning Earth
In howling woods
Saw her very own ravines
Wash in blood as trees
Bent in fervent prayer.

64
Regret became the new
Currency of man
The flood of hind sight's try
As agony met their deaf stare
Watching the rows die.

Sweeping with their own tongue
An apocalyptic slur erupting
As she invoked the death drum.

© 2020

J. Gray

To Inquire

It's better to inquire
When the world goes blind,
When time is cannibalistic
 And upon you like a smile.

Weeping dials of desire
Find no god inside you,
Find you animalistic
 And keeping up with style.

It's better to inquire
Where the pain is confined,
Intrinsic in fire
 And running the mile.

So smile when you tire
In that break of a bind,
In gardens forensic
 And burning piles.

65

© 2020

Audrey Sher-Walton

No Turning Back

When I walked through the open door
a sudden blackness overtook me
Confined like an imprisoned innocent
No turning back
Walking on razor sharp burrs
Skin too tight against my bones

© 2020

66

Audrey Sher-Walton



67

Audrey Sher-Walton is the facilitator of Wordslingers Writing Group. Audrey is the founder of Write ON! Eastside Writing Group and was a member of Writers Lunch and Quiet Writing. Two of her poems won Pima’s Family Heritage Project Contest. She has been a guest reader on KXCI’s Poet’s Moment and at the University of Arizona. She penned monthly columns in two Tucson newspapers. Her poems have been published in Zocolo, Unstrung, Aurora, and in her own collection: “All the Colors of My Life Are Red,” which is part of the University of Arizona’s Poetry Center’s Archival Collection. She is the associate editor of Awakenings Literary Review and serves on the Board of Directors for The Awakenings Project — both support and promote creative outlets for those living with mental illness. Audrey owns Mrs. Audrey’s Academic Achievement, a tutoring service. Audrey can be reached at: Redwavepress@yahoo.com.

Audrey Sher-Walton

What I Didn't Know Was:

How purple the eggplant would turn so quickly
attached to such a spikey top
To pull the vegetable from its home was to have it fight me
No one likes to be uprooted

That socks from junior high can last through your 60's if
you treat them with kindness and a gentle touch
Much like love

That anxiety can last for 24 years after the trigger that set it off
Unlike a torn rotator cuff, it can't be fixed

How memories could be so vividly called up
And shared like chocolate, swirling on your tongue
The taste so comforting

That my uncle never finished high school
And blamed it on being poor
But his story just spoke of laziness
And nothing he says ever rings true

What I didn't know was
why you chose to shut us out
For all those silenced years

© 2020

68

Audrey Sher-Walton

Do Us All a Favor and Don't Sing

My voice as sour as a lemon

I remember being told how bad a singer I was rather
than being guided on how to wax melodic; joyful

in a desolate forest you will not hear me sing or even hum

Maybe that's why I write words on paper

They speak with wisdom and clarity,

The tone and rhythm so clear in my head

Spills out in ink

Staining the paper with who I really am

My voice not stifled or judged

69

© 2020

Audrey Sher-Walton

Good Little Player

I've got the whole world under my toes
No one knows

The ball keeps dancing to the rhythm in my head
I feel the numbers the way a mom feels her baby about to cry

The numbers appear as a feeling
Like a synesthesia acrobat going round

But no tightrope
Simple freeing of the body to take in the signal
Quieting of the mind to perceive

How crazy this all sounds

But look at who just had those neat stacks
Of chips pushed her way

It's me
The good little player
That's what they call me

© 2020

Audrey Sher-Walton

Looking to Leave

(38 Seats and 2 Slicing Machines)

Says he didn't cry or
Didn't bang his head against the wall

Knew

Shouldn't have asked

Knew

he'd probably get a no
wanting to go

She and her friends
Cloistered in that little enclave

71

Mention Montana, Texas, Arizona, North Dakota

Puzzling it through ...

Heard of it in geography class

“We live on Fountain Ave. This is where we live.

That's our world
right here.”

His father's world was
that deli

Continued on page 72

That store
with 38 seats
2 slicing machines
And a griddle
And a register
That was his world

Shouldn't have asked
To leave
Knew
He'd get a no

\$500 could have changed everything

NY, he thought
is not the beginning and the end
Knew
He'd never find out

© 2020

72

Jennifer J. Stewart

Haiku

I wash the dishes
With grace, careful and mindful
I would rather write

Starting a new book
Is like beginning a race
The end's not in sight

Nobody tells you
A pandemic is boring
Until it isn't

73

We lace up sneakers
The sunset glows behind us
Our sanity walk

Up into the sky
The plane floats then banks and climbs
Shadow kissing ground

Saguaro fruit bursts
Red flesh and tiny black seeds
Only one survives

Continued on page 74

It's not black and white
Our country is growing up
To confront its past

Someone pause reset
This pandemic life speeds by
Ever more slowly

A pottery shard
Its curve suggests a small bowl
Delicately striped

Unsavory savory toads
Devoured sometime last night
Spat out in disgust

© 2020

74

Jennifer J. Stewart



75

Jennifer J. Stewart is the Pima County Public Library's writer in residence, er, non-residence. She is known for her seriously funny books for children and serves on the board of Make Way for Books. She misses volunteering with Casa Alitas and the Flying Samaritans.

Vo Vera

Law of Intention

Look up. Ground down.

Lay intentions around you.

Set intentions within you.

Make intentions found you.

Surround you in the now you.

Surround you in the new you.

Surround you in the noun you.

You are the one who

can create the change you wish to see.

Reframe perspective. Change your seat.

Rearrange intent toward who you want to be.

Grab favored fragments of the conscious Self.

Stash them throughout your reality.

For pieces of peace can be picked up and pieced together.

Micro traumas stitch into a resolve that knows how to resist weather,

and how to surrender to whether or not you can

look out. Seek in.

Locate drought.

Water the soil.

Turn on spout.

Water your Self.

Let go of clouds.

Water your sun.

Light will not drown.

Water the soil.

Water it down.

Water your Self.

Water it now.

Surround your Self in the water's mood.

76

Continued on page 77

Surround your Self just to honor you.
Surround your Self in the ground.
Now you can instruct the heart to grow proper food.
Surround your Self in space where overcast does not arrive in bouts.
Because when impossible starts in the ethers,
it permeates into shades of doubt.
Good thoughts develop fevers, and die or they burn out.
Emotions follow the leader, however negative, short or stout.

Possibilities aren't safe either, when your focus isn't around.
Or consistently in the now.
Or persistent enough.
Need a vow that has risen to read aloud of your provisions.
To miss the clouds with your harvest
and fine tune around the point of interest.
To sow seeds down just to listen.

77

Ear to ground to close the distance
to the resounding and insistent
sunshine call of your bloom's vision.
Your why's and how's can learn to make noise
in the sound score you envision.
The depth, breadth, and range of your yield
reflect on intentions your garden has hidden.
Look in your garden.
Water inside.
Hear them smarten.
Here they lay.
Your yield starts in.
Green and growing.
Tend in your garden.
Intend your life.

Vo Vera



78

Vo Vera began his artist career as a B-boy in the streets of rural Arizona and Germany. Over the last two decades, he has moved with heart into various dance styles, having received formal dance training and several degrees from Arizona State University, and a RYT-200 Yoga Certificate from SWIHA. Instructor, choreographer, competitor, performance artist, poet and photographer, his pursuit of so many avenues speaks to the devotion of his creative engine. In 2021, he plans to release a long-planned project that culminates all of his modes of art into a single work. Instagram: @vospacevera.

Katherine Wei

Deserted

Tumbleweeds travel down the asphalt street
Like slender roadrunners with dark bills
The heat of the sun reigns over the sky
As even egg white cowers under their rule

© 2020

79

Katherine Wei



80

Katherine Wei is a Chinese-American writer from Arizona. Her poems have been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. Her work is published in the Rising Phoenix Press, Risen Zine, Life in 10 Magazine, and more. She typically writes about culture, nature, and memories from her childhood. During her free time, Katherine likes to skateboard, play volleyball with her friends, and paint acrylic portraits.

Editor's Note

This issue, we are blessed and thankful to be publishing a wide range of poets reflecting poetry's diversity.

That's how it should and needs to be: all styles, all voices, all life experiences — all inspiring and thought-provoking.

Ask each of this issue's poets what their spark is and you will get 12 different answers, I guarantee you. Thank goodness we have poetry — to celebrate each other's uniqueness.

These poets have inspired me to include a poem I wrote the other day after going through a prolonged dry spell, a spell that wasn't necessarily related to the pandemic. In fact, the pandemic might be spurring me to write. Life-changing events will do that.

This poem might still be a work in progress. Time will tell. But it felt good to finally be able to write, and the poem was definitely one of spontaneous combustion after a day spent adding up points for students' grades and paying the monthly bills.

Continued on page 82

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Editorial Staff

Editor: *Rebecca Dyer*

Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Publisher: *Elena Thornton*

Artwork for front and back covers: *Marjory Boyer*

Something — whatever it was — had to get out.

Numbers

10 tells 11

*We are buddies, we are brothers
we have each other's backs
we must stick together*

1 and 4, though, are not buddies
they are too far apart

they do not see eye to eye
they do not look like each other

they do not act like each other
they do not like each other

but together they need to know they make 5
they could learn from 2 and 3

they have it figured out
they are close, they are tight

12 and 13 are shapely
they are sisters

they will live a long time
together they will reach 25

5, 5 and 5 are triplets
no one can tell them apart

but they make it easy to count
5 and 9 will always be short of 15

Rebecca “Becca” Dyer

Co-editor

A Call to Poets

For Summer 2021

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2021 Issue from June 1 through July 4, 2021. 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.

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

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

www.theblueguitarmagazine.org

and www.artizona.org

Unstrung • Summer 2020

A Call to Writers for the Fall 2020 Blue Guitar

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The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2020 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. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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 and 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.

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



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Richard H. Dyer Jr., editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the news editor of two monthly newspapers with websites 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.



UNSTRINGING

A magazine of
for and about
poetry



Unstringing will
return in
Summer 2021