

# UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,  
for and about  
poetry



Summer 2021

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McMillan Rives

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# Shireen Arora

## Phoenix

The sun looks down through the clear blue sky  
deciding which city to heat  
reading and analyzing data  
it finally chooses Phoenix  
After all, the Phoenix emerges from the flames.

The sun looks down and channels all its energy  
to show its incredible powers  
waiting                    waiting for the people to show gratitude  
yet they do not  
they walk in the scorching heat  
kids play outside  
people amble on the curbside  
and under their breath  
mutter insults to the sun.

Not pleased with the people's reaction  
the sun turns to the plants hoping                    hoping for a "Thank you"  
the plants can't escape  
but instead of mourning as their friends and family wither  
they stay rooted  
fighting and finding new ways to spread their seeds.

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The sun, getting frustrated, turns to the animals  
it sees snakes  
and lizards  
crawling in the cracks  
slithering to find a cool spot  
birds flapping their wings  
trying to cool themselves  
it sees scorpions going into the bricks  
it sees animals trying to find water  
in every crack in the ground  
going about their day as if nothing had changed.

4 Disappointed by the response  
yet humbled by the resilience of Phoenix  
the sun turns away  
to heat someplace else.

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# Shireen Arora



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Shireen Arora is an Arizona resident. In her free time, she enjoys calligraphy, and various art forms such as playing piano, cello, quilling, and dancing.

# Shireen Arora

## ‘They become more hesitant to create poetry’

### What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

6 The poet writes: “In a matter of a couple of centuries, poetry went from being ubiquitous to not being commonplace. What happened? The main challenge facing poetry today is that it isn’t as popular as it once used to be. One of the reasons for this is that schools are not teaching poetry and are more focused on reading and writing stories. Because kids are not exposed to poetry rules like a rhyme scheme, rhythm, or patterns of syllables, they become more hesitant to create poetry. Another reason poetry is not very widespread is because stories are more engaging to readers as they build up slowly. On the other hand, a poem is short and doesn’t have a full build-up. Also, many people do not pursue a career in poetry because it is not very high-paying. Lastly, poems have a deeper meaning which you have to think about. This can frustrate kids and adults who like to know the exact meaning. I believe exposing children of all ages to poetry will make it more mainstream. We have taken the first step in this journey by establishing and celebrating Poetry Day and having role models such as Amanda Gorman.”

# Duann Black

## Rudderless Memories of Love

A rudderless course through memory maps giddy threads of discovery.  
The joy of searching memories is ever present.  
Smiles and tears intertwine with love.  
The ache of my heart triggers laughter sublime.  
Years of joy one moment at a time  
bring tender love steps closer to mind.  
Time and time again I revisit our love,  
never diminished, never complete.  
Forlorn memory notes tug at my heart.  
Imagination and memory are dreams away.  
Remembering the touch of your fingertips along my cheek.  
The tingle of memories never fades. 7  
Your lips tickle across my eyelid  
awakening the brightness of your love in my heart.  
Memories of your gentle caress bring goose bumps to my thoughts.  
Fondness energized by your hug continually fills my heart.  
First as my friend and last as my love, together we live always as one.  
My Love, forever am I yours.

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# Duann Black



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Duann Black is a writer, author, and poet with stories to tell and things to say. During a multi-year break from emptying ink pens onto paper, she strived diligently to spell “grammar” as chief editor for Alan Black, author of 20 books, including “Metal Boxes” and “A Planet with No Name.” She is a well-traveled military retiree always ready with a story to share.

# Duann Black

‘Poets have nothing  
new facing them’

**What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?**

The poet writes: “I can’t think of any great concern facing poetry today. I believe poets have nothing new facing them that generations have not already faced.”

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# Duann Black

## A Beach Forever Long

My smile is rosy and bright, though rough around the edges.  
Laughing is what I seek the most, but have the least these days.

Sadness came to fill my soul with pain and heartsick dread.  
Though my heart seeks daily for it, I can't return to then.  
I can't replay my life again, to love you more, my dear.

Once around this life we live, so make right this time.  
I'd kiss you more and hug again, before you're gone for good.  
For once is all we get to love, and live the life we live.

10 Share it well and love it now for never comes too soon.  
I'll never feel your kiss, my love, upon my cheek or lips,  
for you have gone, replaced by none, as I walk on alone.

My friend, my love, my partner still, alone is how I stand.  
When we parted broke my heart and broken it remains.  
Its contents spill into my thoughts, each day I'm always yours.

Till we meet upon the sand, a beach forever long,  
my heart is yours forever, Love, forever I remain.

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# Duann Black

## Spring Fell

Spring fell upon the earth, a tidal wave of wind and rain,  
tearing apart blossoms refusing to open.  
Riotous color assaults the landscape, tantalizing my eyes.  
Cactus and shrubs, trees and bushes, explode in florid greens  
covering naked shells, tenderly teasing my eyes.  
Winged intruders, their cacophony  
tickling my ears, prey upon the blossoms.  
Earth is designed for all to witness this season of change thrust upon it.  
I am designed with eyes to see, a nose to smell,  
and intellect to describe the scene.

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# KellyAnn Bonnell

## Remember

I remember you.

I remember me.

I

remember

us.

The Yellow Brick Road

The Crazy Train

The Flight of Icarus

Like fledgling eagles we took first steps and learned to fly

We felt invincible until we flew too high.

I remember the call.

Perhaps that was your fall.

The pain in your voice.

Your music of choice.

I remember your face.

Pain I couldn't erase.

How we said goodbye.

I remember.

R

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M

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R

?

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# KellyAnn Bonnell



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KellyAnn Bonnell is a teaching artist, arts education advocate and consultant supporting programs throughout the state of Arizona. KellyAnn defines herself first as a costume and fiber artist and second as a poet.

# KellyAnn Bonnell

## ‘I like rhythm and rhyme’

### What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

14 The poet writes: “One of the greatest concerns we face in poetry, and the arts in general, is the pretentiousness that comes from embracing the absurd. The idea that art, and by extension poetry, can exist for no purpose other than the aesthetic is patently absurd. And when we embrace the absurd, we risk becoming judgmental and exclusionary. Poetry has many iterations. No one is more poetic than another. I like rhythm and rhyme. Other poets prefer free verse or music and lyrics. The key is that the words are a panacea for deep emotion. At the time of its birth, I know the value of my creation. It is only after I receive the benefits of my cathartic experience that it is ready to engage in a relationship with someone else. As others engage with the piece, it is up to them individually to determine its value. It is a very democratic process that speaks to what fits and what doesn’t in the same manner as trying on shoes. The shoe isn’t bad because it doesn’t fit, it simply doesn’t fit.”



# KellyAnn Bonnell

## Warzone

*A poem for Kaity's Way*

A smile, a touch, a whispered word, a flutter, a flush, a sigh.  
A tear, a push, the cold hard floor...the punch... the bruise...the lies.  
So little it takes to fall in love  
So little it takes to die  
How easily strange fruit can grow from voluntary seeds  
As “war zone” overtakes “young love”  
Limbs and psyches bleed.

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# David Chorlton

## Red-tailed Time

Light and shadow balance  
on the ridgeline. A cloud tests the air  
behind it and drifts away.  
High in the leafless branches  
where a tree disentangles itself from the sky  
is a hawk whose heartbeat  
is all of him that moves.  
He's wild above  
the domesticated golf course grass  
with a razor eye  
that sees time passing  
as he waits to snatch his portion  
on the wing.

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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 often reflect his affection for the natural world, as well as occasional bewilderment at aspects of human behavior. The Bitter Oleander Press published “Shatter the Bell in My Ear,” his translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant. A new book, “Unmapped Worlds,” featuring older poems that had suffered neglect, is out from FutureCycle Press. He recently took up watercoloring again, after twenty dry years.

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# David Chorlton

## ‘Get on board!’

### What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

The poet writes: “Go to a concert, and you will find an audience consisting mostly of people who don’t play an instrument or sing. Go to a museum or art gallery and you will be among many who could never draw very well and who have no artistic ambitions of their own. Poetry readings are different, and reflecting on the fact that most of us who do go to readings or read poetry publications are involved in writing poems on one level or another. When poets become their own audience, the art form can become self-referential and fail to grasp the spirit of writing that has long been the reason for having poetry around in the first place, a mix of imagination, social consciousness, the pleasure in achieving language that is aesthetically pleasing and stimulates the emotions and the mind. We don’t have a high percentage of our fellow citizens who could name a poet outside of Amanda Gorman, or who show much curiosity about who is writing what and why. A broader audience would provide a stimulus for us to have our work communicate ideas and feelings and while delighting the reader’s ear, and make him or her aware of a way of perceiving our surroundings that would otherwise remain the poet’s secret. As a culture, we are stretched between a celebrity obsession that grants a sense of importance on nothing more than name or face recognition, and an often insufferable resume-building obsession allied with academic concerns that have meaning primarily to the person whose resume is being built. So how do you tell someone who is perfectly happy without ever having taken an interest in poetry that they really do need it? Maybe we spare ourselves the frustration, or we could go out on a limb and quote Lawrence Ferlinghetti: ‘Poetry is a paper boat on the flood of spiritual desolation.’ Get on board!”

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# David Chorlton

## Memory as a Hawk

Along the dark and tangled paths  
through Memory's Preserve  
datura light the way. Here are twisted  
boughs and fallen  
leaves, footprints leading back  
in time, and disused railroad tracks where  
once the wheels released  
a long and ghostly screech.  
Here are monsoon clouds

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muscling into the sky while  
grasses in the clearing bow  
to their will. Here is yesterday, here  
the flash  
of cool burning light  
by which the sun grants a clear view  
of the pale wings opening  
and the spreading tail

as the Gray Hawk's call parts  
the high leaves in a cottonwood.

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# David Chorlton

## Heat Songs

#1

A bead of sweat runs down the window.  
Light to the east is wrestling  
smoke from desert fires  
and a handful of wind goes away  
down the street and back  
to where it falls to ground and slides  
beneath a shadow. Doves  
peck degrees above one hundred and ten  
from the air as they rise.  
Today is a rehearsal  
for tomorrow  
and the sun can't sleep, even  
when it's gone  
to the far side of the mountain and settled  
down with the coyotes  
it never shuts an eye.

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#2

Inhale light, exhale darkness: it's eight  
p.m. in Arizona and always  
noon on the sun. There are landscapes  
here where heat  
turned to stone, mountains  
that call out for clouds to bring rain,

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and a smoky veil draped  
across the sky today,  
dressing for a wedding, invited  
to a wake.

#3

The rats wake up at twilight  
and pull their ragged souls out  
from the earth.

They are gymnasts  
on darkness' edge  
as they circle the lawn, scale  
a wall, and slip through  
the eye of the needle that sews  
fascination to fear.

Here is the moon  
to guide them, here  
the stars to sparkle in  
their hungry eyes, and here  
the first hour  
of a night whose dreams  
come burnt from the mind.

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# Robert Feldman

## image and the images

smoke exhales from underground streets,  
smoke that is the breath,  
City winter magnifying the image---

click.

image woman rode me,  
framed me under the Washington Square Archway,  
grabbing my reflection through her lens:  
an obscure frontier poem  
about a guy with shaggy sideburns and tall spurs  
sailing to Marseille to rendezvous with a dancer---

23

click.

her resolve:  
to untangle images while not sacrificing distance---  
to merge abstract forms with blessed Manhattan nights---

flash.

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Continued from page 23

a well sorted stranger paddling down Amsterdam Avenue  
like a drunken sailor fighting the undertow---

develop.

and prints capturing subway riders wearing flowery corsets  
steaming underneath uptown milky sidewalks,  
jaywalkers smoking the pretzel vender air,  
and untried portraits forever whizzing past her senses,  
while alone in the darkroom  
she ponders whether these images are necessary  
to surrender what these poems  
demand from these photographs.

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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](http://albionmoonlight.net); he can be reached at [rfeldman@gmail.com](mailto:rfeldman@gmail.com).

# Robert Feldman

## ‘The pervasiveness of scanning and the quick read’

### What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?

The poet writes: “My concern facing poetry today is the pervasiveness of scanning and the quick read that feeds into the apparent demise of intellectual and spiritual curiosity due to the lack of reading. Yes, reading: Sitting with a book minus some electronic device seems to have become somewhat antiquated, particularly among younger generations. Literacy has suffered since the onset of social media, texting, and ‘fast food.’ Ironically, it is true the essence of notable poetry occurs when the poet creates that compelling, yet profound, straight line, shedding excess words in order to clobber us between the eyes! But what misses this axiom is if the audience lacks the overall literary point of reference, shall I say hipness; much of the impact and beauty of the language and that gorgeous song gets lost among the crevasses of impatience, cynicism, cliché, and ultimately, avoidance.”

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# Robert Feldman

## All My Friends Are BackEast

winter, '79.  
snowing in Flagstaff.  
plows can't pull through the wet white sea.  
citizens now realize the six month nighttime.  
the western winds have shifted.

3:00 AM he paces the floor, caged,  
recounting backeast birthday presents:  
post cards, address books, a roll of stamps.

outside the parted curtains,  
a streetlight exposes the blizzard like a stripper.  
the porchlight beckons like a Yves Klein fire painting.  
he quickly tries to think in French.

27

distant, she lies across their frigid bed somewhere.  
a more profound destiny awaiting him.

5:00 AM the ambient voices of strangers return,  
shadows chained onto cave walls.  
he remains hostage,  
homeless, excised,  
and perpetually adrift  
with any hint of daylight fading,  
any point of reference numb, forsaken.

# Robert Feldman

## Lost and Old Rivers

we hustled a lot  
as old lovers do  
when squandered account of cheap highs,  
coughsyrup lows  
account of allnight nurse and doctor sessions,  
Prince and Miles at 16rpm's scratching along on the box,  
bleached lovers determined to remain less attached

28 we got off laughing  
at each other's exotic expensive weekend package deals  
all expenses paid  
with or without really ever being there

and we would voyage together dreaming of revivals,  
pitching orgiastic tents,  
craving hotspring breasts constantly swelling with desire,  
bragging about seducing strangers to survive

but old rivers  
eventually part for friendship sake,  
for we are sincere hip-weary travelers  
who have learned  
yearning for lost and old rivers cannot satisfy

Continued on page 29

Continued from page 28

we would nurture a solitary entity,  
ourselves a neurotic unit,  
two half notes  
residing within a breathless indigenous romantic interlude,  
perhaps something some people pray for,  
a home between ocean symphonies,  
so masterful this unit,  
this old river dividing our downtown dance  
into unbounded amatorial tantric performances

and so we remained silent  
conscious we had roughed it out once again,  
this unit,  
this old river  
lost, and we are lost  
and old rivers,  
and there is a place for river travelers  
who constantly seek oceans,  
because old rivers can become  
historic rivers  
where the light is gorgeous  
even here in this canyon wash  
where we drag along  
reclusive, adrift

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and so we have become old rivers,  
oldtime Mississippi tugboats,  
muddy waters that have swallowed so much seed  
(and swelled pregnant from the knowledge),  
waterways that have seen right through the promises,  
right through the onetimelet'sfeelgoodrightnow'stheonlytimethatmatters passion,  
old rivers that sweep along  
other voyagers like us,  
sliding,  
scraping, grasping at forsaken currents,  
those very rivers carrying lovers like us to some foreign port  
to be seduced  
incensesinged-oilrubbed-read the classics to,  
units like us  
drifting down lost and old rivers  
determined to withstand these tides, or just free ourselves  
and go under, conjoined,  
down the inevitable River Styx, where  
those stygian waters  
pool who we are,  
those very waters we will always be

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# Robert Feldman

## Ms. Yucca, why...

brown reclusive Chiricahua wilderness,  
waterless stucco shakedown,  
magnetic arid atmosphere of swerving dry lines  
becoming endless roads trailing everywhere

an infinite photograph perpetually procreating  
nested under this impossible sky,  
and this vast *azúcar agua* bowleg horizon  
hums her sweet old song,  
long after final footsteps ascend

Ms. Yucca, why meet here alone,  
apart from green treed city parks  
espresso and French pastries,  
sisters sharing their kindness heart to heart  
eyes showering sweet empathy?

Ms. Yucca, why does this ground ache around you,  
these thirsty feet somehow tolerating  
sun's searing abuse so worn from walking?

Ms. Yucca, why sit in these mountains,  
trusting more empty promises of better growing seasons,  
signed contracts solicited from feel good medicine men?

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Ms. Yucca, could we at last make our peace,  
resolve the heart mind suspicion  
that separates your kind and mine?

Ms. Yucca standing before me alive,  
leaves shooting skyward  
migrating familiar rhythms,  
sentient being so well poised with answers,  
your subtle richness  
imbedded within God's ageless prophecy:

“to endure here in Yuccaland,  
each single solitary mind  
must bend nightly  
to contritely drink from this cracked  
fearful historically resolute  
unrepentant earth”

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# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Flint Knapping

*Eumaeus, about to face the suitors,  
poorly armed, summons wisdom from Zhuangzi,  
an honorary distant grandson.*

*“Your left hand still bleeds.  
A deep cut too, where  
you held the flint.*

*You try hard to think  
out the next strike.*

*You strike.  
A shard flies.*

*It misses your eye. You  
will flinch the next strike.*

*After the decision,  
practice is the error. Or  
the decision was wrong.  
Or only ill-timed.*

\*

*Don't practice.*

*Don't practice knowingly.  
Do the thing for good.  
Don't practice unknowingly.  
Do the thing for good.*

*If you must do it over  
and over again—  
and you must—  
do it now, each try,  
and do it for forever*

*until the next time.”*

\*

*For some of us  
these are our nights.  
Surviving night  
never abides practice.*

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# 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 seven books of poetry; his newest book, "Icarus Rising, Misadventures in Ascension," published by Jackpine Writers' Bloc, was released last winter.

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## ‘The impulse toward evocative language’

**What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?**

The poet writes: “In an interview for *The Paris Review*, A.R. Ammons responded to a question about the future of poetry, which ‘has as much future as past — very little.’ But he added, ‘Poetry is everlasting. It isn’t going away. But it has never occupied a sizeable portion of the world’s business and probably never will.’ In a country where poetry has become a conglomerate in the industry of academia, the intimate energy that has made poetry ‘everlasting’ has been diminished. The poetic ruah remains the impulse toward evocative language. Some ancient time ago, I imagine a voice at the hearth uttering a meaningful sound divorced of utility, and she and someone else lost breath for a moment and were sent some-no-where entirely new and momentarily sublime. A vocal response made such moments in our future new and sublime as well. Poetry is, and should be, as Emily Dickinson challenges, an art that will ‘reduce no Human Spirit/To Disgrace of Price.’”

35

# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Green

*to, with, Carol*

We have been wed, you and I  
not only together but with and into and . . .  
and under now the leaf-kicked  
tracks of the generations  
we have longed again to re-create among the leaves.

We require no language outside our senses  
sharing as we all do—  
the two of us, the leaves,  
the memories and the remembered  
sound of yester-leaves crisp-crunching under foot.  
We trail along after the heels of our fellow yester-persons.

The sight of leaves fluttering in front of, above us  
and the dry smell of autumn  
that we would not help but re-create to share  
among us all—we, all who have  
“talked our extinction to death.”

But we can afford to treat the issue gently  
as our seemly gesture to Earth  
until all are finally buried and mulched  
under the last and heaviest soothing snow-and-footfall.

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Now, perhaps, it might be courteous to live it lastly,  
to learn to lie quiet, harmless  
among shades,  
brown and rust of oak leaves  
determined to remind us of our familiar contracts,  
or to abide by wisdom to restrain  
the exhaustion of our winter distances.

I do not remember promising to return  
to next year's falling shades.  
But I have had occasions of longing in my autumn folly  
to have kept an imagined promise of staying.

\*

From first consciousness  
we were brought to an edge of memory  
in our neglected summers until  
we learn out of time finally to enjoy among them  
the return from green to gold, red, brown, yellow.  
To green, like

\*

Penelope's live tree that found her way  
into our garden, by its seed self-planted. We remember,  
you and I wherever . . .

\*

Persephone's red blossoms, the gift of her leathery fruit,  
your shared beads of pomegranate,  
your gesture of our happy equality now  
and in our weathered seasons.

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# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## *à quelque point . . .*

1

It's about 10:48 by my grandfather's watch,  
but we don't take him seriously in matters of time.  
I said "him," my grandfather, Hugh Douglas Fenton.

When a friend asks for the time, he and I look sharp.  
We offer a brisk answer, "10:48,"  
with a tactful, decorous, unhurried "about."

The truth as we read it, undisguised as fact.

38

A passing stranger asks for the time, and the two of us,  
myself at the helm these many years past—  
for sure, only by default—are politely circumspect.

"O, yes, I beg your pardon, but I have, Oh, about  
ten minutes to eleven," spoken in words, not numbers.  
Time is elegant, like this clear lake, a grace for language.

Out of their time, we speak wraithsome slow.  
We pace ourselves in conversation,  
cadences angling toward poetry.

And to tell time accurately, or about,  
I wind his watch, the rectangular Hamilton,  
having looked at the heretical digital clock—

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static, songless figures that would regulate  
the asymmetric comfort of grain in pine paneling,  
generations of story and dream, ghosts on the wall.

Family ghost *pursuivant*, I set the dial of a watch  
that runs about a minute fast to keep me  
but not, I suspect, my grandfather, on my toes,

translating the wall clock's turgid demands  
into the slow, miniature sweep  
of the delicate millimeters of the minute hand.

2

One hour proceeds to nothing but another.  
We would prefer to live in the other.

39

The hour that precedes does,  
by something like definition, m o v e .

But in its office of preceding  
it can move nowhere. By definition? By intuition?

Perhaps the hour proceeds in time,  
but with no object for the one proceed to, time cannot move

so it cannot proceed.  
The next hour cannot come, cannot be,

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nor can the object we cannot obtain, out of any time  
that cannot be.

Something we want no more than to believe is “time.”  
But time is measured in static units, like the hour we search for.

If one hour proceeds, it maintains its own cell in time,  
forcing ahead and ahead the time we would prefer to occupy.

The tepid empty feeling of knowing when we are:  
we are in the only hour ever possible.

The next hour is no more than an idea.  
But it is not an unworthy one. If not worthy,

then no worthy idea can ever be.  
Still, with age

it becomes almost possible to bend,  
if not the joints, time. But sadly, never in time.

5  
It is only in summer, when Carol and I move  
into my grandparents’ old summer home  
gathering with descendants,

that Hugh Fenton and I separate,  
not far apart, and I get to listen  
as a grandson again,

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for in summer our Hamilton stops on us  
with significant regularity.  
I sit at the dock in my idle rowboat and hear

*Whatever do you need a wristwatch for in summertime?  
Anything pressing just now?*

*If I might make a small recommendation,  
I suggest that you leave the watch in the cabin,*

*take your boat out onto the lake and fish.  
And remember to hold your mouth right.*

I am willing to compromise, always have been.  
I keep the watch on my wrist, so as not to mislay it.

41

But instead, I find myself reminded of odd passing debts  
I may or may not owe somewhere to anyone, and I will pay

6  
gladly and alone for the pain of learning what I have been  
by struggling to adapt to what I may become.

So, weaned memory-long from præpotent faith,  
yet always gnawing septic self-chastisement,

to survive I inhale the least quantum  
of the breath I write to feel: in words I confront

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Continued from page 41

an infinity of possible Feynman diagrams.  
Ink-brushed characters sway in Blue Cliff Record

where kaon meets koan, nowhere.  
Looking back up, I step back down. *Sin proprio*,

I pause to look in the direction of a pine-shaded kaon  
cooling its feet in a sacred mountain stream, invisible in dao.

I rub the stubble of my beard to wake the rest of me  
and I wonder all about, inviting an apposite koan.

7

42

*for Bartleby, 167 years after his invention  
of Herman Melville*

But what's in all this for the poet? Ah.  
The Auction—*Disgrace of Price*.

I would prefer not to; I think,

time

following or,  
ocean permitting,

washed away

*à quelque point dernier qui le noie . . .*

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8

But not to drown, not just yet, and to keep  
the conversation going I do take the boat out onto the lake,

keep the old timepiece dry in my tackle box,  
plunk a lure of some sort idly into the clear water.

Admire the poetry of the sky. Then I wobble my lips  
and scrunch my face. My grandfather would tell me again to

9

“hold your mouth right,”  
and I will, or I will try, *à quelque point.*

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# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Leaflight

*for Carol*

We walk our road again  
with purpose-seeming steadiness  
until we reach the deeper ruts,  
the road-side windbreaks and obstacles—  
trodden crumbling emblems of the continents of time.

Hummocks and ruts serve to catch and hold  
the first wind-blown leaf-fall: maple, birch, aspen.

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We also catch at the falling leaves,  
as many as we can hold away from their fate.

We hold the leaves in the outside hands,  
the hands that aren't holding each other,  
children's hands again.

Then, children for only another vapor of breath,  
we toss leaves: maple, birch, aspen,  
until we are covered like Egyptian birds  
painted in titanium iridescence.

\*

Without feet leaving the path  
we rise in our sheen of leaves and fly  
into the freedom—

Continued on page 45

rarer, shorter each year now—leaves  
Claret and Rhenish, well-aged life  
in the colors of wine.

You gesture a silent trick of question  
and I ask where.  
You beckon to show me.

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# Janet McMillan Rives

## Charred

At night the mountainside explodes,  
each canyon its own neighborhood  
of party lights strung on backyard trees.  
Overnight explosions fade into the day  
as almost harmless fire  
smolders beyond foothills  
moves from grasses and brush  
to heavy chaparral, snakes its way  
toward Mount Lemmon  
nine thousand feet of rugged terrain.

46

Like an early arrival at a car wreck  
I can't take my eyes off the desert's carnage,  
land untouched by flames for over a century.  
Cars line Oracle Road, occupants titillated  
by a glimpse of the Bighorn Fire  
raging under the night sky.

Patches of hot pink retardant  
will soon wash away during weeks  
of thunderstorms so unlike the dry  
lightning that ignited this blaze,  
an inferno that kept us up all night  
piling irreplaceable items by the door  
just in case. In time our fear  
will disappear into the residue  
of dying embers.

# Janet McMillan Rives



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Janet McMillan Rives was born and raised in Connecticut. In high school, she moved to Tucson, Arizona, where she currently lives. She taught college economics for thirty-five years and retired as Professor Emerita of Economics from the University of Northern Iowa. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *The Avocet*, *Lyrical Iowa*, *Raw Art Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Heirlock*, *Sandcutters*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Unstrung*, and *Fine Lines* as well as in a number of anthologies, most recently “Voices from the Plains IV” and “The Very Edge.” Her first chapbook, “Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie,” was published in 2020.

# Janet McMillan Rives

## ‘I ask myself ‘What is This?’

### **What is the greatest concern facing poetry today?**

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The poet writes: “Some mornings when I check my in-box and open a message from The Poetry Foundation or Poem-A-Day or The Paris Review, I ask myself ‘What is This? What does it mean? What is the poet trying to tell me?’ Sometimes I just don’t get it. And I worry that no one else will ‘get it’ either and that poetry will be considered crazy, marginal, providing no pleasure for readers, no source of enjoyment, no guide for living. But soon I come across a poem by a favorite contemporary poet: James Crews’ ‘All I Want,’ Danusha Lameris’ ‘Cherries,’ Naomi Shihab Nye’s ‘The Shopper.’ Or I might open an e-mail from someone in my poetry writing group with a poem attached for me to review for our next meeting. I discover that I love the poem, it’s making me think and can’t wait to talk about it. That’s when I realize that poetry today is just fine, as good as I remember from childhood. To celebrate, I crack open Robert Frost’s ‘Complete Poems’ and make sure I can still recite ‘Nothing Gold Can Stay’ and let it move me to pleasure and contemplation.”

# Janet McMillan Rives

## Giver

A disheveled man stands along  
the frontage road holding a sign

*Homeless Vet  
please help.*

Inside the dark green beater  
stopped at the light is a woman  
dressed in maroon scrubs, ID badge,  
exhausted coming off the graveyard shift.  
She digs in her purse, pulls out a five,  
hands it to the begging man.

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# Janet McMillan Rives

## News of the New Year

In early January, crack of dawn,  
I first noticed him flit among  
the desert willow's bare branches.  
He stopped when he saw me,  
sat and looked as I stood and looked,  
he in his vermilion vestments  
me in black sweats and hoodie  
on my way home after taking  
yesterday's news to my neighbor.  
My flycatcher friend has been back  
each morning since to remind me  
in his charming voice that this year  
will be better than last.

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# Janet McMillan Rives

## El Miedo

Mama begged me not to go.

*Hija, por favor.*

Said she'd never see her daughter again  
never see her grandson.

I left anyway  
thinking about a better life ahead  
missing those I'd left behind  
those who loved me  
those I loved.

When we arrived  
they hated us  
locked me up  
took away my son.  
Will I ever see him again?  
*Hijo, what have I done?*  
*Mama, I need you.*

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# Editor's Note

52 For this issue, we asked the poets what they believe is the greatest concern facing poetry today. To their thought-provoking responses, I would add: fear of an authentic voice. And with that, fear of where our poems will take us. Too often, we look to see what's out there first. When we don't see that what we're writing is already existing, we hesitate, we alter, we abandon. Too often, we find safety in the collective voice. When we depend too much on what already exists, without committing to our own work, we risk losing our own voice as well as the crucial need for us to experiment and to take risks. We can't and shouldn't all sound the same. For its own sake, poetry must keep pushing forward, must keep creating anew. That's only going to happen if we believe in and follow through on our own generative impulses. We can't fear our own voices. And we can't fear where our poems take us.

\* \* \*

It is with immense sadness I report that my beautiful brother John M. Dean, poet, painter, and lover of the arts, passed away at age 63 in Tucson. In his memory we lovingly dedicate this issue. We lose everyone too soon.

**Rebecca "Becca" Dyer**

**Co-editor**

## Editorial Staff

**Editor:** *Rebecca Dyer*

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

**Publisher:** *Elena Thornton*

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

**Unstrung • Summer 2021**

# **Coming Nov. 7! The 12th Annual Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts!**

**Join us for an amazing showcase of the arts, with music,  
dance, cultural presentations, art activities for children  
and literary readings!**

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**Free admission!**

**When: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 7.**

**Where: Desert Ridge Marketplace,  
Loop 101 and Tatum Boulevard in north Phoenix.**

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

# A Call to Poets For Summer 2022

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Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2022 Issue from June 1 through July 4, 2022. 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 2021 Blue Guitar

The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2021 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).

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



**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](http://mboyerart.com).



# UNSTRUNG

A magazine  
for and about  
people



Unstrung will  
return in  
Summer 2022