

The Blue Guitar



Table Of Contents

Poetry

“Gas Station Coffee & Backseat Maps: Poems of Roads Remembered” – <i>Lysa Cohen</i>	5-9
“Coffin for a Scorpion,” “When Asked About Your Passing” – <i>Alfred Fournier</i>	10-11
“I’m a Sucker for a Bass,” “Me and Linda Down by the Border,” “Sand in the River” – <i>Bonnie Wehle</i>	12-14
“Walking,” “The Storm of August 25th,” “Raptor Now,” “Labor Day” – <i>David Chorlton</i>	15-18
“Horses On A Prayer Flag” – <i>Claudia Nuñez de Ibieta</i>	21
“juxtaposition,” “twilight,” “whisper” – <i>Jen Rooney</i>	23-25
“draughtsman,” “inchoate,” “recorder” – <i>Abraham Aruguete</i>	26-28
“Clay,” “A Coincidence of Silverfish,” “Caw II,” “Ordinary Invariables, Ordinary and Variable,” “Time’s Judders: <i>vocabularitas</i> made simple,” “Old Brothers,” “Afternoise: Remembering the Appendages,” “VI Smoke” – <i>Richard Fenton Sederstrom</i>	42-50

Fiction

“Awards and Decorations,” “Cut!,” “Private Investigations,” “The Post Office Line” – <i>Duann Black</i>	29-32
“Mystery on the Verde River – A Paranormal Story” – <i>Jackie Sereno</i>	35-41

Non-Fiction

“Quadrant Warfare” – <i>Lysa Cohen</i>	3-4
“A Ritual for Grief” – <i>Mary Pfeiff Cornelius</i>	19-20
“Curve Bills” – <i>Claudia Nuñez de Ibieta</i>	22
“The Warrior Musician” – <i>John Paul Huth</i>	33-34

News

The 2026 Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts	53
All about The Arizona Consortium for the Arts	54
The Consortium’s vision for a multicultural arts center	55
The Blue Guitar magazine staff biographies	56

Follow us on X, @BlueGuitarMagAZ, and Instagram and Threads, @theblueguitarmagazine

Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Blue-Guitar-arts-and-literary-magazine/642553212432858>

Sign up for The Consortium’s e-newsletter	56
Call to poets for the Summer 2026 issue of Unstrung	57
Calls to writers, artists for the 2026 Blue Guitar Jr.	58-59
Calls to writers, artists for the Spring 2026 Blue Guitar	60

Editor’s Note

What a bleak world this would be without the arts, without the ability to express our souls and connect with others. I am so thankful how the arts allow for the individual voice as well as for the voices of many. Individuality and plurality mark this Blue Guitar issue, which we are so thankful for.

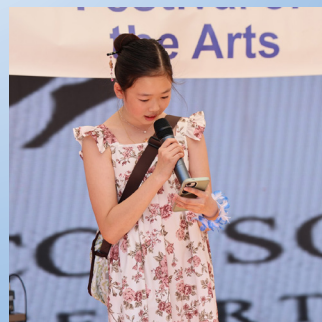
We enjoyed this same duality of voices at our recent Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts. We are so thankful for our festival partner, the Phoenix Writers Club, which turns 100 next year. Thank you to the club’s readers; the pianists from AZ Classical Kids; and our readers, including from The Blue Guitar Jr., The Blue Guitar and Unstrung. A special thank-you to our CEO of the Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena Thornton, and her husband, Jim Thornton, for all of their hard work organizing and running the festival.

We are also so thankful for our magazine readers and submitters. We couldn’t do it without you! As always, keep reading and keep submitting!

Rebecca “Becca” Dyer
Co-Editor



Co-Editor
Rebecca
“Becca” Dyer



Bellis and Neil, readers from Blue Guitar Jr. at the festival.

Photos by Elena Thornton

Editorial Staff

Editor: Rebecca Dyer
Publisher: Elena Thornton

Editor: Richard H. Dyer Jr.
Artwork for front,
back covers: Marjory Boyer

The Blue Guitar arts and literary magazine is a project of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

Fall 2025

Quadrant Warfare

By Lysa Cohen

© 2025

In the summer, Florida is less a place and more a punishment with a voting district. I live here voluntarily, which should tell you everything you need to know about my decision-making skills. This is the sunburned armpit of the country, where heat and humidity have joined forces to create a year-round steam room. Recently, Tampa hit a heat index of 120 degrees, which is the meteorological equivalent of nature filing a formal complaint.

In these conditions, air conditioners don't break so much as retire. Ours, true to Florida custom, bowed out at the peak of summer. Enter the dehumidifiers. Two of them. Large, boxy, industrial-grade beasts that hum like disgruntled insects and pull gallons of moisture from the air daily. Which sounds helpful until you realize you're essentially living inside someone's mouth.

Now, while these machines do nothing for the temperature (think oven with swamp settings), they do offer one unexpected perk: water. Free water. Florida law says you can only water your lawn once a week, presumably to conserve the state's dwindling freshwater reserves for golf courses and gators in swimming pools. But the dehumidifiers, glorious loopholes that they are, gift us several gallons of condensed air juice per day.

At first, this seemed like a win. A tiny, sticky miracle. Until the issue of distribution arose.

Our household rule is simple: if you see that the dehumidifier is full, you empty it. That's the system. Unfortunately, my mother has layered this system with what can only be described as a classified botanical protocol. One that, crucially, she refuses to share with the general public (i.e., me).

She has a map. A literal map. Of the yard. Broken into quadrants.

It is here that I must point out that no one has seen the map.

The plants are hers. All 274 of them, not counting "unintentional ones" like the rogue basil growing in the gutter. You cannot touch the plants. You cannot look at the plants. If you so much as think about one of her plumerias without authorization, you will find yourself excommunicated to the shade-less side of the patio where even lizards fear to tread.

This is not the first time I've been demoted from household operations. There was once a chart for dishwasher rack placement. I was nine. I loaded a mug in the "wrong zone" and was placed on rinse-only duty for the remainder of the school year.

So, when I, good and dutiful, empty the dehumidifier and water a plant, I am told, with the sort of grave concern usually reserved for missing launch codes, that I have watered in the wrong quadrant.

"The wrong what now?" I ask, on a Tuesday that was already unraveling.

"You watered in quadrant two," my mother says, peering over the rim of her glasses as though I've just confessed to setting a fire in the library. "You were supposed to water in quadrant four."

"Where is quadrant four?"

"By the garage."

"Where by the garage?" (We have a rather large garage area with two automatic doors and several windows.)

She sighs. "By the hibiscus. Next to the pineapple sage. Obviously."

Let the record show that there are plants by every window, and all of them are green, and all of them look as if they've

Continued on page 4



Lysa Cohen is an educator and writer who explores themes of resilience, identity, and the unexpected humor in life's challenges. With a teaching and academic coaching background, she has spent the past two decades helping students find their voices—both on the page and beyond. She holds an M.A. in English, an M.Ed. and M.Phil. in Education, and a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. She has also been published in *Be Open*, *Black Coffee Poetry*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Page & Spine*, *The Penman Review*, and *Zen Poetry*.

been personally blessed by woodland fae. The only thing differentiating them, as far as I can tell, is whether or not they seem disappointed in you as you walk by.

This conversation happens multiple times a day since we moved back into our house after it was destroyed during Hurricane Helene and was rebuilt. We are now in what I can only describe as a slow-simmering plant cold war. My watering privileges have been revoked. My clearance level was downgraded to Casual Observer. I've been instructed to "just leave it full" so that someone "qualified" can handle it.

At first, I was furious. I felt as if I'd been voted off the island by a coalition of hibiscus and rosemary. Let me tell you, there's nothing quite like being scolded for misplacing atmospheric water on the wrong patch of ground cover. It does something to your sense of purpose.

But then something shifted. From quadrant neutral, I began to notice what I'd missed before: the way her shoulders relax when she pauses beside the plumerias, the small smile that slips across her face at the sight of a thriving fern, the careful rearranging of pots mid-rainstorm as if the sky itself needed editing. Slowly, I realized this wasn't about water. Not really. It was about care. About order. About coaxing something beautiful from chaos, one quadrant at a time.

And in that, there's a kind of tenderness I hadn't seen before. My mother's map isn't just about plants. It's about the stubborn hope that, in a place as punishing as Florida, she can still claim a patch of ground, draw boundaries, and make it bloom.

So, I've stopped trying to win. Now, I tread lightly in the jungles of domestic protocol. I leave the water to the plants and the heat to the dehumidifiers. If you need me, I'll be in quadrant neutral sipping iced coffee and pretending this is all perfectly normal. Fall, after all, is just a state of mind. One we might reach by February, assuming the plumerias allow it.

5 Poems by Lysa Cohen

Gas Station Coffee & Backseat Maps: Poems of Roads Remembered

Introduction

Every road holds a story — even the cracked ones. Especially the cracked ones.

When I was younger, a car meant freedom. It didn't matter if it was borrowed or barely running, running on gas-station coffee and the kind of maps you only half-unfold before tossing in the backseat. The miles weren't about getting anywhere; they were about believing something better waited just past the next curve in the highway.

Years later, I drove those same roads and barely recognized them. Parks had turned into strip malls, diners into vape shops, bowling alleys into megachurches. Time repaves everything. But if you look closely, you can still see what used to be there—the swing set, the jukebox, the dent in a hood from a night you swore you'd never forget.

These poems are travel guides and scraps of memories left behind in a glove compartment: concert ticket stubs, receipts with half a phone number, directions scrawled in someone else's handwriting. They remind me—maybe you, too—that the roads we've taken never really disappear. And when we circle back, whether by accident or design, they meet us with what we've become—and with everything we've left behind.

Highway 1

The ocean kept doing its restless thing,
slamming the rocks like a kid
kicking the side of an arcade game
hoping for one more quarter's worth of magic.
We were just out of college,
running on gas-station coffee
and a borrowed Toyota
that rattled every time it hit 60.

Our bags were a mess in the backseat—
sleeping bags, thrift store sweaters,
a cooler that leaked
onto a paperback of Kerouac.
None of us cared.
The whole trip felt was a dare
we hadn't lost yet.

Continued on page 6

You leaned out the window and yelled
that the cliffs looked as if they could fall any second.
I laughed,
half from the wind in my face,
half from the way we thought
everything dangerous was beautiful.

The fog was thick as dryer lint,
and the headlights didn't stand a chance.
We kept driving anyway,
Pacific pressed to our shoulder—
a secret we weren't old enough to keep.
The road unspooled,
and we followed,
thinking every mile
was the start of something
we'd never have to finish.

Mile Marker 52

We pulled over by Mile Marker 52
because someone swore the stars
were brighter there.
The shoulder was gravel and weeds,
our headlights slicing corn stalks
that looked as though they'd been waiting
all summer for us.

We spread a blanket on the hood,
warm metal humming under our backs.
Someone opened a beer with a lighter,
and the foam spilled down—
a constellation we could actually touch.

We tried naming the stars
after professors we hated,
people we'd kissed once,
the bands we thought would last forever.
The sky didn't care.
It stayed huge,
silent as a question we weren't ready to ask.

When the cold set in,
we piled back into the car,
smelling of grass and cheap lager,
sure we'd remember that night forever—
though I only remembered it
because of a dent in the hood
that never went away.

Continued on page 7

Exit 14

I ease off the highway
at the light where the swings used to be,
the ones that squeaked like grocery carts
pushed too hard down linoleum aisles.

The park is gone now—
flattened, paved,
replaced by a strip mall
that sells discount mattresses
and a nail salon called “Paradise.”
I almost laugh—
no kid ever thought paradise
was a parking lot.

I remember summers there,
slicing the sky with my legs,
pretending each arc of the swing
could launch me far enough
to land in another state,
or at least past bedtime.

Now the blacktop gleams
under fluorescent bulbs,
and carts clank against each other
in neat metal rows.
Even the air smells of asphalt,
not cut grass, not hot dogs
burned at the edges.

I drive past,
half-wishing for a game of tag
to break out between the SUVs,
half-knowing no one here
remembers the way
the slide burned your legs in July,
how you swore it was worth it
just to touch the sky
for a second longer.

Route 27

I took a wrong turn today
and ended up on Route 27,
a road I hadn’t thought about
since cassette tapes still lived
in glove compartments.

Continued on page 8

The asphalt cracked in places,
a map trying to fold itself wrong,
and the diner we used to stop at—
eggs greasy, coffee bottomless—
is now a vape shop
with neon promising strawberry clouds.

I remembered the way we'd drive this road
just to have somewhere to go,
windows down,
singing lyrics we didn't know,
making up the words
as if we owned them.

The gas station where we filled up
with crumpled bills and quarters
still has the same faded sign,
though the price of unleaded
would make our younger selves laugh
until the tank went dry.

I kept driving,
thinking of how many roads like this
exist—
not lost,
just waiting in the corners of memory,
paved over by newer shortcuts,
by time,
by the simple act of forgetting
to come back.

Exit 7A

I almost missed Exit 7A,
the one who used to lead
to the bowling alley with
ten-dollar lanes and jukeboxes
that ate half your quarters.

Now there's a megachurch,
its parking lot spreading—
a new suburb of belief.
On Sundays, you can't even get through
without a cop waving traffic along.

Continued on page 9

I thought about Friday nights—
how we'd sneak pitchers of soda
into the back row,
argue over who had the best form,
pretend the future was a ball
we could spin into whatever pins we wanted.

Sometimes we'd drive to the diner after,
the one with neon coffee cups blinking red,
and sit in cracked vinyl booths
until the waitress stopped refilling.

I passed the exit anyway.
Didn't slow down.
Some places aren't meant to be revisited,
only carried—
a worn scorecard
you keep tucked in a drawer,
the numbers meaningless,
the night intact.

© 2025

2 Poems by Alfred Fournier

Coffin for a Scorpion

Bet you never saw this coming.
Presumed one of your cohort,
or a lizard or snake might take you down
in thrashing battle for your life.
Or silent swoop of midnight owl
carry you through soft air to oblivion.
That is, if you managed to evade
stomp of human foot,
monthly drench of pesticides.
But to be snagged from the wall with tongs,
boiled in ethanol then frozen dead,
only to be entombed in a candy mold
for the amusement of children
and tourists to your desert home,
where once you prowled
the dry night heat, fierce and free.
Who will unwrap the see-through cellophane,
savor the sweetness
of your unlikely, colorful grave?

© 2025



Originally from Royal Oak, Michigan, Alfred Fournier is an entomologist with University of Arizona. He has lived in the Phoenix Valley area since 2005. He hosts online poetry writing workshops for Connect and Heal, a nonprofit organization. He is the author of "A Summons on the Wind" (2023, Kelsay Books), and "King of Beers" (2025, Rinky Dink Press). His poems have appeared in Gyroscope Review, The New Verse News, Oyster River Pages, The Sunlight Press, The Indianapolis Review and elsewhere. Find him on Instagram: @alfournierwrites or at alfredfournier.com.

When Asked About Your Passing

with opening line from Allen Ginsberg

Lost in the wave of gold that flows through the universe
I woke frigid on an iceberg of stars a thousand lightyears
from what she was asking. I stare into the meaningless
smile of eternity, seeing there was nothing to forgive.
Oh, pitiless tomorrows, piled up like expressway jam coffee gulp
realizations, are you only the answer I'm seeking
or something greater than my childness can imagine?
Here, where light throws angels against the darkness,
let me weep a while, will you? Christ on the cross with crickets,
there were moments I thought I was alone but now
I see that Nobody with his frozen hourglass of time
in his flowing endless robe of multicolor insects
was forever singing in the background of Michigan sun,
and even death uninvited was only another mirror
to see myself through.

© 2025

3 Poems by Bonnie Wehle

I'm a Sucker for a Bass

At the Monterey Garden motel
on the strip of road known as Miracle Mile,
I now find shops in what were once
rooms built around a courtyard.
Tonight, tables and chairs are arrayed in the center,
a band, Hot Strings, they call themselves—
violin, guitar, bass—warms up on the stage.

We used to stay in places like this,
my mother, sisters and I,
traveling to who knows where.
It's hot here this August; the misters are turned on.
I wander through the shops, buy
some sexy sunglasses, then settle
at a table, order quesadillas, a side of guacamole.

They play oldies: "Close to You," "More Than a Woman,"
"Killing Me Softly." I know all the words.
The bassist, gray hair, sparkling eyes,
whips the strings like a mad man.
There's something about those low sounds—
the thumping, slapping, full-handed strumming—
that stirs me. Or is it the old guy
playing his heart out?

Reference:

"Close to You," The Carpenters, 1970

"More Than a Woman," Bee Gees, 1977

"Killing Me Softly," Roberta Flack, 1973

© 2025



Bonnie Wehle lives with her dog, Tillie, in Tucson, Arizona, where she served for many years as a docent at the University of Arizona Poetry Center. Her work has appeared in *Coal Hill Review*, *River Heron Review*, *Sky Islands Journal*, and elsewhere. She has authored two chapbooks, *"A Certain Ache: Poems in Women's Voices"* (Finishing Line Press, 2022) and *"Little Altars"* (Kelsay Books, 2025). Find out more about the poet at her website: bonniewehle.com.

Me and Linda Down by the Border

Remember, Linda, how easy it was to cross
the border into Nogales in the 50s and 60s?
We'd go with our parents, park
on the street, pay small boys
a quarter to watch our car, stroll
up and down the *Avenida*.
Remember the color?
There was color everywhere.

Yellow, green and orange pottery,
red and blue painted furniture,
brightly dyed leather handbags breached
shop doorways, spilled
onto the sidewalk. Sombreroed burros
with striped serapes waited for photos.
Kids sold orange wedges dusted
with chili powder. Across the tracks,
The Cavern for lunch, serenaded
by mariachis in huge sequined hats.
Remember how we'd sing along,
even though we didn't know all the words.

We'd return to our Buick laden
with tin boxes, straw baskets, small carvings—
Mother, with big bottles of vanilla
and Jim Beam—our car still guarded
by a small boy wearing a proud smile,
his hand open in hopes of another quarter.

Then, on an ordinary day
in the center of town,
a gunbattle, several killed.
Drug cartels, the paper said,
and suddenly everything turned gray.
That was the end, Linda.
It was the end of what we knew.
The beginning of memory.

** In her memoir, "Simple Dreams," Linda Ronstadt mused about her family's trips to Nogales in the 1950s and 60s. Living in Tucson in those years, Nogales, Mexico, was a place we always enjoyed visiting.*

© 2025

Sand in the River

I want to go down to the Rillito
and hunt once more for garnets,

though they've all likely found
their way to the sea by now.

It is a long run to the sea from here,
but the river knows the way,

the river that is no longer a river
but a sandy bed, now and then

speckled with red beads,
now and then running with water.

Long gone is the little bottle I put
them in during school lunch breaks after

we'd devoured our bologna sandwiches
Carolyn and I

(when she wasn't up on the hill smoking)

down on our knees in the sand,
gathering grains of crimson the water released.

Whatever I thought I would do
with those tiny treasures snatched

from their journey, I did not.
And she too, snatched too soon,

the quickening river bearing gray ash
amid its flashes of red.

© 2025

4 Poems by David Chorlton

Walking

The path is so familiar it doesn't stop
to ask directions, loops between the dead
and living deserts, through tangled
branches of mesquite
and over stones to the mountain, then winds
on its sure-footed way
until dipping where the bees go
to turn shadow into honey. It's quiet
there, no louder than a dream.
Last night the path climbed on
and up into the stars;
lightning turned it white and thunder
told it to go on, to find a way through sky
and back again to Earth. Insomnia
was falling, the rain
wandered lost from flash to flash
until the desert called it home. Flicker
on a tall saguaro, rocks that couldn't sleep
now wide awake, each with
its place in the universe and a country
to belong to where the only flag
is one of sunlight.

© 2025



David Chorlton is of Austrian-English background, and he has lived in Phoenix since the late 1970s. Coming soon is a book of poetry with watercolors that are part of the poems, "Desert of Earthly Delights," thanks to Cholla Needles Arts and Literary Library in Joshua Tree, California.

The Storm of August 25th

Clear sky today, sunlight flowing slowly
where yesterday's dry flood
advanced from east to west and left
the traffic blind. Pull over,

the alert advised, to the edges of the world.
Nothing stops fate
when it's four thousand feet high. It looked yellow,
was dirty, and soft
like a bear. Yesterday had no five

o'clock. Time was dust. But more
to come as wind
pulled trees out by their roots and set

the scene for rain that was
so happy when it fell
it kissed the desert back to life.
Quiet now, not even
TV's meteorologist to explain that

it was darkness with a beating heart.

© 2025

Raptor Now

Egrets up in the leaves
that float above the pond, two Black-necked stilts
wheel around them and morning
has its finger on
the season's pulse. Here's a Cooper's hawk

as sudden as the onset
of a memory, and gone as quickly.
No high summer roads for him, no switchbacks
or nostalgia. He's easy

on the wing, has eyes for what the moment
offers and the grace

to take it cleanly. Nobody hears him coming,
he's made of secrecy and sunlight,
appears when least expected
as the wolf who came down from the sky.

© 2025

Labor Day

Rainbow thunder in the afternoon, a polka
blowing down the middle
of the street
and border music in the air, a corrido
turning dark in the sky. Red salsa

or green, the lightning can't decide.
It's impossible to tell
who's light and who is shade, who speaks

the language of the clouds,
who comes
disguised as rain. Fajitas,
chimichangas, stormlight on the side,
a monsoon shower

looking for a place to hide.

© 2025

A Ritual for Grief

By Mary Pfeiff Cornelius

© 2025

Crosses designating the location of fatal accidents on highways fascinated me as a child. Those crosses warned of danger points on the route. I tried to imagine those final moments—was there awareness of impending death? What was the family doing when this loved one was dying? Those simple crosses have grown into monuments with photos, flowers, and toys marking the sites, no longer limited to rural highways but often seen at busy city intersections. Lacking tombstones honoring the dead, those altars remain in place for years until family and classmates age out of the community. Humans need ritual, monuments, something to hang onto during grief.

What I learned, what surprised me at ten years of age, was that death was personal and painful. A favorite uncle suffered a fatal heart attack. His children, my beloved older cousins, sat on the couch at an aunt's home, as the family congregated. Their tears and faces expressed shock and agony, replacing the laughter and good-natured teasing I was accustomed to. Those visages imprinted in my memory conveyed the gravity of death.

Born in 1950 in the Midwest to older parents with many older relatives, I was aware of a steady stream of deaths as a part of life. The deceased were most often older people, ancient to me, whom I had met only a few times if at all, safely distanced from my existence. Death was called death or dying, not passing away, passing on, passing over, or any other pass that denied the finality of the end of life—the modern American equivalent of sticking your head in the sand. People died. But this one, my uncle who had taught me to eat black olives from my fingertips, was close. Death had the power to change the lives of the survivors.

Although death might take a family by surprise, the protocol

was predictable. My dad never got phone calls, so when a caller asked for my father, we knew the news was serious, a death to be disclosed by the man of the house as if the women were too weak to bear it. The local newspaper carried the obituary within a day. A team of churchwomen scurried to polish the family home, preparing it for visitors. Neighbor women prepared food. Within a day or two, friends and family congregated at the funeral home to offer condolences. The casket was open, visitors noting that 'he looks like he is sleeping.' They prayed, bade 'farewell,' and contemplated their own demise amidst chatter and sniffles and laughter and children running through the heavily draped and deeply carpeted halls. It was at a funeral parlor that I first encountered the water dispenser that emitted a satisfying wet burp. We kids drank a lot of water that day.

The next day, the closed casket held a place of honor at the funeral service held in a church. A black hearse led a caravan of cars, headlights beaming, flags on the antennae, in a crawl to the cemetery for prayer and burial. Along the route, people paused in respect. Family and friends returned to the church or family home for a light meal before moving on with life. The ritual offered healing, companionship, and sustenance. The family and community knew the ritual and followed it respectfully. I appreciated it when my father died, knowing what to do, supported by many loved ones.

In the turmoil of the 70s and 80s, church attendance plummeted, and Americans moved away from the family burial plots. What to do with the deceased? Cremation became accepted and practical. Homespun rituals replaced the traditional death rites of funerals. Now memorials are held months after a death, if at all. People gather poolside, at a golf

Continued on page 20



Mary grew up in Illinois but fled to Arizona when the gray skies and cold winters became unbearable. She and her husband share their home in Peoria with a daughter and two emerging-adult grandsons but frequently visit two other children and young grandchildren in Chicago. Based on her experience as an aging woman living in a multi-generational household, she blogs (<https://www.corneliusblogs.com/>) and published the book "Shared Space: A Practical Guide to Multi-Family Living" (<https://www.amazon.com/Shared-Space-Practical-Multi-Family-Living/dp/B0C7T5N3T7>). She has had short works published in anthologies and is an active member of Central Phoenix Shut Up and Write and Phoenix Writers Club. Her current project is a memoir. When not writing, she divides her free time between music, traveling, reading, and meeting friends for coffee.

course, or in a parking lot. Often, only the family is aware of any commemoration. Distant friends and family are left wondering, “How do I say goodbye?” Without the gravestone, there is a sense that the person has simply vanished. Is this enough for humans?

Our son, born in 1987, participated too frequently in a ritual his generation performed. When hearing of the death of a classmate, friends congregated “at the flagpole” at school, scores of teens joining to create shrines, hold each other, whisper words of sorrow and support. Unfortunately, it happened too often. At least one a year for our son. “At the flagpole” became the call for his generation to follow the ritual to acknowledge and support each other during crises.

Now when a friend or relative dies, I get the news via text messages. Rarely has someone died: they have passed away. I send a card. Then I wait. I wait for news of a funeral, a memorial, anything at which I can meet the family in grieving. There is no newspaper to consult; I haven’t paid for a subscription to the online version. There is no funeral, which, in my social strata, meant a service at which the body was present. Mourners don’t want to remember their loved ones ‘that way,’ as if the sight of a body in a coffin can negate thousands of memories. Months later, we hear of a memorial or celebration-of-life. But maybe not. My pet peeve: family asserts that ‘he didn’t want any services.’ As if the ritual is for the deceased and not for the survivors. Ashes are scattered privately or stored in a box, buried in a closet, leaving no monument to mark the existence of this person.

Lest you think I am proposing a return to the traditions of the mid-1900s, I am not. I am all for cremation and the preservation of the land for the living. We held a funeral with open casket visitation for my mother, because she ‘wanted to be there.’ (She always loved a good party.) A few months later, my sister transported the cremated remains to Illinois for a memorial service and burial. The practicality of shipping bodies, holding them in preservation, and gathering family from all points of the globe precludes the traditional funeral and burial. Often, there is no one nearby to tend the family plots.

How do we mourn as a community? Where do we mourn? How do young people learn to cope with death when adults refuse to use the d-word and have removed the ritual? How do we honor the lives of ancestors when there are no monuments to call them to mind?

This is how I initially began this essay:

A child died. The makeshift monument erected at a high-traffic corner was more elaborate than many. A five-foot path adorned with toys and flowers, live and artificial directed my eye to a three-foot-high cross of white blooms. Two rough wooden benches positioned on either side of the path, offering a place for meditation, distinguished this monument from most.

I didn’t know about this death. Or deaths? A Google search yielded no information. It is disheartening that I can read about the atrocities in Gaza but not incidents three miles from me. But I know there was the death of a young person. The shrine is a giveaway. And the young teens milling around, their groups of three or four or five clinging together to make sense of a loss. No one sat on the benches. No one stood at the shrine. No adults were in the vicinity.

As with much writing, I wasn’t sure where this would lead. Ironically, I started reading “The Wisdom of Sally Red Shoes” by Ruth Hogan shortly after I began writing this. The book addresses many of these issues. I highly recommend it. So here is where I am: I fear that too many children are encountering death without the guidance of a wise adult. My son’s sorrow when the news of a death came was intense. I am glad I was there to hold him, to encourage him to share his memories, to send him to the flagpole with my blessings. Maybe few adults have come to terms with mortality. I know the presence of friends and family during the time of mourning is healing. Knowing that my loved one was seen and will be missed was cleansing.

Ironically, I wrote this on International Happiness Day. The theme for 2024 is ‘Happier Together.’ Instinctively, the mourning children have it right. Faced with tragedy, rest in ritual. Cling to your friends. Sit together. Cry together. Laugh together. Create a monument. Alone you will drown in sorrow. Together, you will stay afloat. Together face death. Together learn to love life.

A Poem by Claudia Nuñez de Ibieta

Horses On A Prayer Flag

Horse of my dreams, luminous white,
won't you round up the clouds to bring the deserts good rain?

Horse of my heart, shadowed by night,
won't you plant peace in the dreams of men?

Horse of my eyes, golden as light,
won't you till the earth's soils until no field is poor?

Horse of my soul, strong silver roan,
won't you once and forever, under thundering hooves,
erase the roads that lead to war?

2025

Claudia Nuñez de Ibieta is a writer, Spanish-English translator and book-maker. Her work has appeared in Hayden's Ferry Review, The Offing, Poetry Magazine, mercuryfirs, littlesomethings press, and under the imprint of fiikbooks dot org. Claudia was a bookseller for many years at Changing Hands Bookstore in Tempe and has been an active member of Cardboard House Press's Phoenix Cartonera Collective since 2018. She grew up in Los Angeles, California, and Santiago, Chile, and has called Tempe, Arizona, home for the longest time.



Curve Bills

By Claudia Nuñez de Ibieta

© 2025

In an extraordinary land where the sun practices its martial arts and the moon is a spoon in a milky sky.

Prologue

Here, I came to have a garden we could make a little wilder over time, my longest standing teacher. Where I wasn't able to live as in my dreams—in the mountains, forest or fields—far from urban areas, this garden somehow knew my heart's desire and shared it. This little garden also dreamed of being closer to its own nature. The soil sighed its wish to breathe under the shade of native trees, a dreamy shade, dotted with sunbeams on leafy, lacey canopies.

We planted cascalotes, palo verdes, ocotillo, cholla cactus and more.

And we all rooted down.

Into this kingdom of the sun, came the winged ones. Dove and quail, hummingbird and mockingbird, and my favorite, approaching intrepid to spy through windows and follow my movement from the garden through the glass, the curve-billed thrasher. So called for the way they have of pummeling the ground and their prey with their long and sharp hook of a bill. Their tail too streams long and wide, in

counterweight to their pickax head; their light brown plumage harmonizes with the ground and their eyes with the sun, perfect circles of orange amber with a direct, burning stare. Eyes trained on their ground, not timid. Digging up leaf litter, tossing aside twigs and small stones, they hunt their varied insect prey—yes to scorpions, to spiders—and sadly lizards. The aerated soil bears witness of poking and stomping and scattering the ground. Grains and fruit they'll eat as well, particularly cactus fruit. They call out a lot! From a nearby branch, never far it seems, comes the call—*wheet wheet*!

I imitate it well enough I guess; sometimes I can start a chain, me echoing the thrasher answering me, a bird-woman duet. Their daybreak song is lyrical and bright but I hear it less and wonder if that's because the thrasher doesn't need to impress? Their courtship is brief, yet they mate for life. Together, two build their nest, a rough deep basket woven of twigs, a tree house three feet off the ground, in the white-thorned, armored-tower cholla cactus.

Over twelve to fifteen days in spring, the pair will take turns upon the two or three spotted-turquoise eggs, that look like sacred stones of the Diné. The chicks to be fed equally by the curve-billed mother and the curve-billed father.

In a mere eleven to sixteen days, the nest will be empty, but the story will repeat itself like the echo of their *wheet wheet* calls.

3 Poems by Jen Rooney

juxtaposition

moving through life
hamster wheel of
daily grind, routine

laser-focused, bloodhound
nose to the trail

each day a
domino falling
into the next

day after day
ordinary, until

a huge boulder
tumbling into the trail

stopping,
abruptly.

gaze lifting
eyes fully opened
senses awakened

porcupine quills
bristle, ready for action

in this moment
fully alive, but
needing help

seeking, asking
crying out

tears of gratitude, for
grace offered, hope renewed

being bold to overcome,
to overcome being humble:

the juxtaposition of life

© 2025



A frequent guest preacher, TEDx speaker, and lover of early morning nature walks, Jen Rooney holds a BA in Political Science and an MA in Innovative Leadership. Her poetry explores the interconnectedness of spirituality, humanity, suffering, and hope with reverence for the simple yet profound moments in life. Jen has recently been published in Flyleaf Magazine, and her poem “awaken” was a winning entry for Mesa Public Library’s 2023 Writing Contest.

twilight

golden daybreak
cotton ball clouds
stretching across the sky
first glimmers of light
beckoning new day
a welcome summer breeze
despite the heat's intensity

enjoying an early morning
walk in the neighborhood
a well-traveled path, familiar
route, yet today sacred
silence, less buzz of
commotion, more balm
of tranquility

alone in my thoughts
as i walk in wonder
immersed in nature, a
playground of potential
inviting connection
inspiring creativity
stirring curiosity

and that's when i
notice her: a lady
with a purple purse
walking her dog
the regal color
accentuating the
radiancy of dawn

i wonder if she
notices me, walking
with my water bottle
pumping my arms
and paying attention
to the beauty within
this beloved twilight

© 2025

whisper

sensing this liminal space
with uncertainty and unease
my heart cries out in fear

Hope lovingly whispers back:

believe

seek

flourish

like the unfurling of a flower
courageously my heart opens
believing in the whisper.

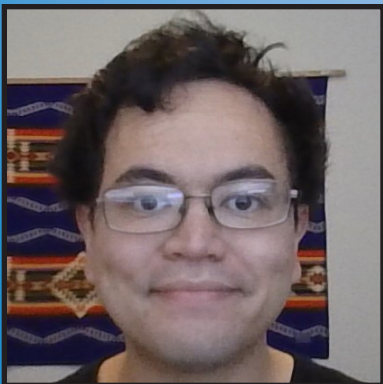
© 2025

3 Poems by Abraham Aruguete

draughtsman

keyboard clacking, I find myself
alone again, justifiably so.
the pixels on a screen, from (255, 255, 255) to
(0, 0, 0), formed into little letters and words
by our brains. the words themselves
phantasmagoric, existing in that liminal space
of reality and unreality. they are not read.
I bloviate to myself, pretension and all
to one day being read.

© 2025



Abraham Aruguete is a human being. He has inhabited Northern Arizona for most of his life. He has been published in Asylum, The Blue Guitar, and Unstrung. He can be found on Instagram as abrahamaruguete.

inchoate

after the fascimilies of yesteryear and yesteryear's friends
during the crises, one thinks
it lasts forever
rarely, it does, and the things that last forever
become so inured as for you to forget their blessings.
I have followed the smoke and the mirrors
to their endings, natural and unnatural
so stout, the youth think they are not paper
tumid, with the winds which blow
hot and dry, natural and concrete manufactured.
for all my eloquence, there is no great matter
and the general tiredness has been done before
by someone more skilled, more adroit
at weaving the words and printing them on a page
why bother?

© 2025

recorder

turn it off. rewind, anodyne
if you are so inclined to the first time
you had a VHS tape in your mother's house
watching dinosaurs on the box television.
your inner child sleeps so gracefully
in that chest of yours
carrying wounds which were not wounds
and the parents which cared but not too much.
carry it deeper, inward
make sure to develop every part of yourself
into sharp edges, to stab
the images of yesteryear in their hearts.
now you are older and flattened
and your image projects into a billion atoms
you scatter because you are already in
the parameters of some extratechnical model.
do you turn to the predicted future
or the past, where things had more volume?
whatever the case, you are transparent
on your feeds and autonomous collected data
what privacy was once had
now given for a recommendation.

© 2025

Awards and Decorations

By Duann Black

© 2025

Major Reed scratched behind his ear with the end of a black government-issued pen. For several minutes, he sat wearing a sour face, lost in thought. His immediate supervisor, the unit vice commander, had tasked him with writing up awards and decorations packages for unit personnel. The job was not as easy as he had hoped or assumed it would be.

Reed checked the military regulations for details on awards. What were the requirements for receiving a specific award or a decoration? How often could one person receive an award? What official forms were required for a nomination packet? How long did it take for a package to be approved or rejected? If rejected, how soon could a new nomination be submitted? What were the rank or time-in-service requirements for an award? What circumstances would prevent a unit member from receiving an automatic award, such as the Good Conduct Medal awarded at three-year intervals? Questions, questions, questions. Reed already felt bogged down in rules as wide as the Sahara Desert, and it was his first day on this additional duty.

After grabbing a fresh cup of coffee from the unit break room, he returned to his office and closed the door to discourage interruptions. It allowed him to talk to himself without anyone interfering with his thought processes.

"I can fly a jet through any battle situation to hit my assigned target. I should be able to do this additional duty."

He looked over the computer printout his supervisor gave him, listing all unit personnel, including their awards and decorations, and the dates awarded. To his amazement, he noticed all personnel assigned to tank duty earned awards as soon as regulations stated they were eligible. No support personnel had received recognition in over three years, yet their duties directly impacted the success and survival of the tank crews and unit pilots.

"Looks like I have a lot to learn and a lot of writing to do. I've got to correct this ASAP. The boss picked the right guy for this job. This lack of recognition for doing outstanding work needs to be corrected as fast as I can write the award packages."

Reed put a note on his calendar to check with each department manager starting tomorrow to learn what specialization awards they were eligible for.

"Our folks are constantly going places and doing things. Nothing is ever said about it, including a thank-you for a job well done. Yet, tank crews are singled out for recognition every month. No wonder there's an attitude problem between unit support offices and tank crews. Our support folks work hard and receive nothing beyond a paycheck, whereas tankers stay out of trouble for a month and are hailed for their success. So much depends upon awards and decorations in the military, our promotions, our rise in responsibilities, and our self-esteem. I am the right guy for this job. From now on, equal opportunities are the norm throughout the unit now that I've got the pen and the authority."



Duann Black is an author and poet with stories to tell and things to say. During a multi-year break from emptying ink pens onto paper, she was the chief editor for her husband, Alan Black. They published 20 books, including "Metal Boxes" and "A Planet with No Name." The author published on Jan. 1 "Stories to Tell, Book One" (available on Amazon), the first of a two-book collection of short stories she and Alan wrote. A short story anthology, "Four Adventurous Seasons" (also available on Amazon), featuring her work, was just published. Duann is a well-traveled military retiree, always ready with a story to share.

Cut!

By Duann Black

© 2025

“Cut!”
“Shatynski!” The actress was midway through her action scene, a fall from the top of a building.

“Oops.” The director realized there was a problem on set.
“Call 9-1-1. Call 9-1-1!”

Splat. The actress ended her scene, well after being told to stop all action. That’s what a director means when he yells “cut.”

The tabloids in the coming month would define her final spoken word on screen, “shatynski,” in very different ways. Apparently, none of them checked their lexicon.

The funeral was a solemn affair for a promising young actress taken away from us at a tender age. Her tombstone would forever remind us of the most famous use for the word “shatynski,” a battle cry for a dead acting career, stopped short by the lack of a harness to stop a deadly fall designed to kill whoever was brave enough to make the jump.

An Unknown Actress

“Shatynski”

Born some time ago

Died too soon

The End

Private Investigations

By Duann Black

© 2025

Zak picked two private investigators' names at random out of the online city business directory. Not bothering to visit their websites, he called each to enlist their services.

The first call was to Ralph Collins. Ralph answered the phone, sounding like he had a mouthful of breakfast. Zak gave him the details of the job he was looking for a private investigator to handle.

Ralph asked him a couple of questions, simple, nothing complicated, such as why Zak was crazy enough to want him to do the job, and the amount of time he had to complete the investigation. After a short discussion, he asked Zak whether he wanted to pay the bill using Zing or Cashola.

Zak gave him one month to complete the investigation. He expected a detailed report to be emailed to him by close of business on the 30th day. He chose to pay up front using Zing.

Ralph agreed to send his contract immediately after receiving confirmation of the funds.

Zak then called the second private investigator, Jefferson Banks.

"Jefferson Banks, Private Investigations, how may I assist you?" A secretary or office manager, or go-fer, answered the phone for Mr. Banks. She said he was on the phone, but by the sound of it, he was wrapping up the conversation. She asked Zak if he would like to hold.

"Yes, I'll hold. Thank you." Zak said.

Shortly after, Mr. Banks spoke, "Mr. Fuller, I understand

you're looking for a private investigator. What do you need investigated?"

Banks was given the same investigation, report specifics, and time of completion requirements. After a brief conversation, Zak was reconnected with the woman, Mary Jo, to finalize his Zing payment.

Exactly 30 days later, Zak received an email from each investigator. Here are the details:

Ralph Collins, Private Investigations

Subject of Investigation: Jefferson Banks

Investigation Results: Untrustworthy

Reason: A lazy ass who'll steal your money

End of Report

Jefferson Banks, Private Investigations LLC

Subject of Investigation: Ralph Collins

Investigation Results: Not to be trusted

Reason: Does not perform the work he is contracted to perform.

End of Report

Two weeks later, Zak hired Samuel Scott from Beacon Street Investigations to perform the investigation. He paid a retainer fee in advance, with the balance due when the investigation was complete. Mr. Scott completed the investigation and provided Zak with the final report in six business days.

The Post Office Line

By Duann Black

© 2025

William joined the line at the post office, waiting for an open postal clerk to handle his small package. It was the middle of the afternoon on a sweltering mid-summer day in Phoenix. The air conditioning felt wonderful inside the post office.

His thoughts were somewhere between the dog sled races he'd attended in northern Arizona last winter and sledding down the hill toward the barbed wire fence at the edge of the pasture as a kid. Someone behind him cleared their throat.

Focusing on the line before him, he realized he had too much approved space between him and the person in front of him, at least according to the throat-clearing person behind him.

After moving forward two steps, he turned toward his followers. Clearing his throat, he smiled, "Anyone remember when they used to have the FBI's most wanted posters on the post office lobby wall?"

Everyone chose to look anywhere but in his direction, and no one responded.

"As a kid, I used to flip through the pages in case one of our neighbors was one of the suspected murderers. I was sure a couple of rude neighbors must be on the FBI's list for being unfriendly."

The woman immediately behind him chuckled and then whispered, "I know what you mean, young man." She nodded, indicating the line was moving forward again.

William moved forward a couple of steps, turned back to face those behind him, and smiled again. "Thanks, ma'am, glad I'm not the only one here who knows how to speak."

"Next," said the postal clerk. William stepped forward to send his package on its way to a new destination, a cooler spot in the country, at a rural post office where everyone smiled, chatted, and enjoyed sharing their wait time in the post office.

The Warrior Musician

By John Paul Huth

© 2025

How Military Discipline Forged My Art

There is a profound difference between a guitar player and a guitarist. One is a casual pursuit, a fun hobby. The other is a lifelong mission built on relentless hard work and an unbreakable commitment to the craft. I learned this distinction not in a music school, but in the United States Marine Corps. My training taught me that the same discipline that builds a Marine can build a musician, an artist, and a more complete human being. In a world of instant gratification, this is a lesson about why there are no shortcuts to mastery.

The Crucible of Repetition

Before I ever set foot on the yellow footprints of Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, I knew how to play the guitar. I was self-taught, learning by ear and driven by feel alone. My style was undisciplined, chaotic, and lacking a solid foundation. In the Marine Corps, you learn to take chaos and turn it into order. You learn to take something that's already there and make it a thousand times better.

My first lesson came not in a classroom, but in the sweltering heat and misery of boot camp. We spent hours in formation, drilling with a rifle that felt like a hundred pounds, every movement precise and synchronized. The drill instructors taught us to hold a "bearing," a state of absolute composure where nothing could make us flinch. I remember thinking of those countless hours trying to nail a difficult scale. The Marine Corps taught me that frustration is just a signal that you're close to a breakthrough. It taught me that repetition isn't just about building muscle memory; it's about building an unshakeable will. This is the truth about the guitar: you don't just practice until you get it right; you practice until you can't get it wrong.

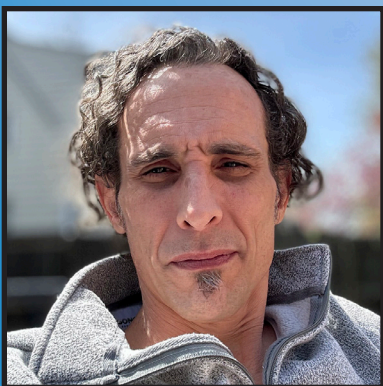
The Art of the Lick

In the Marine Corps, every detail matters. We learned this on the firing range, where you have to find a calm, focused center to hit your target. Every factor is critical: your breath, your body position, and the unwavering discipline of your eye on the target. The world fades away until all that exists is the stillness within. I found this same intensity is required for a complex guitar solo by a legend like Stevie Ray Vaughan or Brian Setzer. My fingers must be as precise as a marksman's aim, my timing as impeccable as a drill sergeant's count. All that exists is the fretboard, the music, and the internal stillness required to hit the mark. This ability to find your center of gravity is not a shortcut; it's the result of hard-won discipline.

The Mission to Adapt

The warrior's ethos isn't just about fighting; it's about solving problems under pressure. I learned this when I was approached by the drum major of the base band. My audition was a gauntlet: scales, improvisation over a jazz piece, and a prepared song. I nailed it, but the war was brewing, and I was deemed too valuable as a Radio Operator to transfer to the band. My heart sank, but I didn't break. The Marine Corps taught me that if one door closes, you find another way in. I took the validation of my talent and ran with it, using that experience to create the very first curriculum for the Lehigh Valley Charter School for the Performing Arts. I had no degree and no formal university training, but my experience as a warrior prepared me to view every obstacle as a problem to be solved. I taught myself the music theory behind my raw rock and roll style and forged my own path, proving that true resourcefulness comes from a mindset of adaptation, not from

Continued on page 34



A proud Marine Corps veteran and lifelong musician, John Paul Huth has been playing and studying the craft for 30 years. Their formative years were spent near the legendary Martin Guitar factory in Nazareth, PA, an influence that led them to their current, ambitious project: designing and building a 100% sustainable guitar. John Paul currently resides in the Poconos, where they continue to push the boundaries of instrument design and environmental responsibility. John Paul also is planning a relocation to Arizona, where they will be building their guitar company.

a degree.

The Fire Team and The Battle of the Bands

The ultimate test of a Marine's training is in how they perform as a team. The fire team's success relies on absolute trust and unspoken communication. I found this same dynamic with a band I played in where rehearsal was taboo. Our first gig was a three-hour party where we met ten minutes before we went on stage. We had to rely on instinct, on the years of individual practice that had led us all to that moment. That trust was everything. I could hear a subtle shift in the drummer's rhythm and know exactly how to adjust my playing. The bassist and I could lock into a groove, reading each other's unspoken cues. We were a musical fire team.

This collective skill was put to the ultimate test at a battle of the bands. We were a blues, surf, and old-school rock trio—a definite outlier among the metalheads and goths. We could have tried to conform, but the warrior's mindset is about authenticity. We chose to be ourselves. We played with the ferocity and precision of a well-trained unit, and our blistering performance earned us a third-place finish. The victory was not in the placement but in the fact that we hadn't won the battle of the bands—we had made the battlefield adapt to us.

The Adrenaline of the Mission

For many, performing is an act of conquering fear. For me, it's a mission. The stage is not a place of fear; it's a place of purpose, and the adrenaline isn't a bug—it's a powerful drug that elevates every aspect of your playing. It makes my senses sharper and my focus clearer. When the band is in the pocket and I'm locked in, those cliché guitar player moves—the jumping, the leaning—aren't for show. They are a physical expression of the energy flowing through me. It's a feedback loop, a conversation with the audience. I give them everything I have, and when they give it back, it fuels me with even more passion. The greatest performers aren't those who conquer fear, but those who use that energy to create something unforgettable.

Conclusion

The story of the warrior and the musician may seem like a tale of two different worlds, but they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. The journey through the Marine Corps taught me that discipline is not a limitation; it is the ultimate form of freedom. It is the freedom to play without thinking, to improvise without hesitation, and to perform with total conviction. There are no shortcuts, only hard work. The path to becoming a true guitarist is a lifelong mission. It begins by embracing the fundamentals, finding your center, trusting your team, and always having the courage to be yourself.

Mystery on the Verde River – A Paranormal Story

By Jackie Sereno

01. Honeymoon Day One: Amy and Justin

“Ouch!” A cry escapes me as a sharp object pierces my sneaker and cuts into my foot as I make my way down to the Verde River, near Fort Verde, Arizona.

“What happened?” asks Justin, my brand-new husband.

“I stepped on something. Sharp!”

I use his arm for support while I remove the offending culprit from the sole of my shoe, wondering when I last had a tetanus shot. “Look, it’s a piece of rusty metal.”

“A nail?”

“I don’t think so.”

I limp to the picnic bench and take off my shoe and sock to assess the damage. Our lunch remnants lay on the table, paper napkins threatening to fly away in a sudden gust of wind. Where did that come from? The sky was Arizona blue and clear a minute ago. Dark clouds are now jostling each other like wild mustangs chased by a mountain lion. They are coming our way.

Justin investigates and pulls something out of the little area of disturbed soil. “Look!” He brandishes a disintegrating, rusty pitchfork, minus its handle and the broken piece of tine no longer lodged in my foot.

“It’s been there a long time, Amy.”

“Yesterday’s flash flood must have dislodged it. Careful, Justin. We don’t need two injuries.”

He places the pitchfork tines down on the picnic table.

“How is the foot, Sweetheart?” He sits beside me and gently takes it in his strong, capable hands and inspects the damage

“We should leave and get this taken care of.”

“I’m okay. You’d better make sure there’s nothing left of that thing so nobody else gets hurt.”

“Right.” Justin returns to the site. “Hey, Amy, there’s something else there.”

What? A treasure trove, now? He brings me a small circle of metal. “Looks like a button. Very tarnished and dirty.”

He hands it to me and as I wipe off some of the dirt with one of the paper napkins, I feel dizzy. Unfocused. Boy, what a wimp! Does tetanus work that fast?

A family of startled Gambrel quails with their comma-shaped head plumes runs through the brush. They are so cute with their little ones following along. We don’t see them in Missouri.

The wind is picking up. This late monsoon weather in Arizona is not what Justin and I expected when we decided to spend our honeymoon in the Copper State.

“What the...?” He exclaims.

I hear Justin and focus. “You found Montezuma’s gold?”

I had done my research about Arizona’s lost treasures. We’d been thinking of checking out the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine in the Superstition Mountains.

“Not gold. Bones!”

What a letdown.

“Bones? An animal?” Justin is on his knees and quickly scooping dirt off to the sides.

I guess stains on his jeans don’t matter at this point. He is on

Continued on page 36



Born and raised in France, Jackie Sereno is a retired educator and author of the Circling Eagle Mystery Series novels “Breaking Ground” and “The Medford Remains.” She’s also been published in the Sisters in Crime’s Desert Sleuths Chapter’s 2013 Anthology “SoWest: Crime Time.” The inspiration for “Mystery on the Verde River: A Paranormal Short Story” comes from the book “On the Border with Crook” by John Bourke, a visit to the Campe Verde Museum, and an interesting — some might say paranormal — incident involving “The Garyowen” and the Grand Canyon railway.

the hunt.

“Human. From this angle it looks like there might be a whole skeleton down there. Ancient and muddy.”

I grimace, unable to share his excitement.

Oh, No. There goes our honeymoon!”

Something strange is going on. Justin and I will probably be hotel room-bound for a day because of my injury but hey, it’s our honeymoon, so who’s complaining, I’m sure we can find something to do.

After our discovery, we call the local police. Baffled as to who the deceased might be, they take a report and deal with the scene while we go to the nearest emergency room.

While waiting for a doctor in a curtained stall, I pull the odd button out of my jeans’ pocket and examine it. My concentration is broken when I hear men’s voices, laughing and singing some strange lyrics, though the tune seems somehow familiar. They sound like “Then let the doctors work their cures, and tinker up our bruises.” How appropriate to my situation. But...definitely weird in an emergency room.

“Who’s that singing, Justin?” He looks at me funny.

“What do you mean? Nobody’s singing. Are you sure you’re all right?”

“Must have been the TV in the next room. Hello Doctor.”

Saved by the Doc. I stick the button back in my pocket.

I really don’t feel well but I say nothing more about it.

The puncture sanitized and bandaged, Justin and I leave with recommendations for the proper treatment of the wound and an admonition to stay off my feet for the next twenty-four hours.

“You look pale, Sweetheart,” Justin says as we enter our hotel room.

“I’m all right, baby. Just a little tired.” I pull a bottle of water out of the small refrigerator, drink half of it and plop onto the bed.

“No wonder. It’s been a crazy day. How old do you suppose those bones were, Amy?”

Looks like my handsome, sexy husband has caught the investigative bug. He sits on the side of the bed, next to me.

“No idea. But if we clean up this button, maybe it might give us a clue as to the period.”

“We probably should have left it with the skeleton.”

“Maybe. Here, take it and have a look.”

As soon as I reach in my pocket and grab the thing, voices of two men are yelling in my head. It’s so painful. Until I hear nothing more, because I’m down for the count. At least that’s what Justin tells me when I regain consciousness with a cold washcloth plastered over my forehead. He wants to call 911. I decline but I can’t hide this from him any longer.

“Something spooky is happening when I touch that button.

Earlier at the hospital I heard men singing. Like in a flashback to another time and place, except it’s nothing I recognize.” I repeat the lyrics I heard in the hospital.

“Does the words mean anything to you?”

Justin frowns and goes completely still. After a few seconds he says. “Doesn’t ring a bell. I think you had too much sun today, and you need to rest.” He checks my forehead for fever—I think—and adds, “We’ll talk more about this in the morning.” He tucks the covers around me. I don’t argue. I’m exhausted. Not my idea of a honeymoon. I hope he’s not too disappointed. He probably believes I waited until we got married to show I’m nuts.

Not a good start for a marriage.

02. Honeymoon Day Two. Amanda/Amy

Atop its impressive new flagpole, the “Stars and Stripes” dances in the hot summer breeze under the stark blue Arizona sky. The only sounds: the swish of horse tails chasing annoying flies, saddle leather creaking, an occasional cough among the men. My uncle, Colonel Jamie McIntosh, commanding officer of Camp Verde in Arizona Territory, is reviewing the mounted troops, who stand at attention on the parade grounds bordered by gleaming white buildings. Brush-covered hills and mesas loom in the background.

I see my two favorite, handsome officers, sitting tall on their mounts. Tonight, at the party, which one will I dance with? Blond, blue-eyed, and suave Captain Roderick Mills, on detachment from the 7th Cavalry for a special mission against the Apache, or dark-haired, doe-eyed and shy Lieutenant Simon Cooper?

A bump against my hip. “Amy, are you daydreaming again? Justin says, pulling me back to the present. Ah. Justin. Daydreaming, he calls it. Actually, it feels real. I’m in the moment with all my senses when my startling little “episodes” occur, which has become increasingly annoying since yesterday. It takes me a few seconds to get my bearings. Fort Verde’s flag is still there, but the parade ground is empty. And I DO NOT have an Uncle McIntosh. What gives?

“We need to hurry before the museum closes.” Justin takes my hand and gives me a worried look. Being history buffs, and since my foot seems to be okay, we decided to ignore the doctor’s advice and visit this well maintained and interesting historic park, previously named Camp Verde. Justin, who fought in Afghanistan, is interested in all things military and I’m interested in all 19th century America.

The park’s museum display authentic artifacts from the Apache Wars period while placing them in their historical

Continued on page 37

context.

I follow Justin inside. While he looks around the small bookstore for interesting non-fiction, like he always does, I feel drawn to the office of the commander. It's a narrow room containing a few period pieces—various trooper essentials in a trunk, plus a small desk and chair. Three coatracks display dark blue troopers' uniforms and wool fedoras with their gold cords tied in the front. I think about old western films. Who hasn't watched at least one movie where John Wayne and the cavalry rescue some poor victims of Indian raids? Well, perhaps Native Americans, I suspect. Not that I can blame them.

Abraham Lincoln observes the room from a portrait above the fireplace. I notice a small piano in a corner. A music sheet rests on its support and I glance at it. After all, I'm a pretty good pianist myself. As my eyes focus on the music sheet, my mouth opens in shock. I read the words etched in my mind since my accident. "Then let the doctors work their cures, and tinker up our bruises."

This is the song I heard at the hospital. A small, typed note explains this was Garryowen, an Irish song that became the regimental song of the 7th Cavalry. And that cheerfully accompanied Custer's troops to the Little Bighorn in 1876.

What the heck is going on, here?

A powerful force makes me reach out and touch the paper. Wow!

Immediately Colonel McIntosh appears, seated behind his desk. A middle aged man stands in front of him, a farmer perhaps, his beat up hat in his hands, looking angry. His voice resonates loudly in my ears.

"Why d'you have to move that dadburned camp from the river bottom, Colonel? You're too darn far to protect my missus from the Apache when me and my boy work the fields away from the Verde. I've seen pony tracks around my farm. I want more patrols. That's why you're here, Colonel. To protect farmers."

The colonel stands up. "Fevers, Mister Carter. Fevers are the reason we moved to higher ground. Beaver dams brought mosquitoes and men got sick left and right with malaria. Look, the Apache are quiet, scouts are not reporting any incidents. If they do, we'll increase the number of patrols in the area, but for now this is the best the Army can do. Tell you what Mister Carter. Tonight, we're having a party in honor of Miss Amanda Lennox, my niece. I would like you and your family to come as my guests."

The farmer turned towards the door with parting words. "Don't expect me, Colonel. Got no times for parties since I got to do my own patrolling. Good day to you, Sir."

03. Honeymoon Day Three. Justin

My wife is asleep. She is lovely but I worry because she's acting strangely. Yesterday, after shopping for an interesting book at the Fort Verde bookstore, I found her in an almost catatonic state in what used to be the commander's office. She was experiencing one of the "spells" she's been prone to since yesterday. I hope the stress of the wedding and the planning of the honeymoon haven't been too much for her. Is she having a mental breakdown? God, I hope not. Should I contact her folks?

No. I'll wait and see. This is probably just temporary. Fingers crossed!

Today, we were supposed to go to the Grand Canyon but the fringes of a hurricane slamming the west coast have reached into Arizona and the resulting rains and winds are so bad the weather service advised people to stay indoors. So...what does a guy on his honeymoon do when he can't make love to his beautiful wife or play tourist?

Agitated, Amy mumbles in her sleep and I kiss her cheek to reassure her. I'm glad to notice she has no fever.

The object she thinks is the conduit for her psychic phenomena lies on the nightstand. Hey, who knows, perhaps there's something to that. Curious, I pick it up. The brass-looking button is dome shaped and in spite of some discoloration I can feel and see the design; the American Eagle holding a bundle of arrows that appears on the US Seal. So, it's got to be a uniform button and perhaps the skeleton belongs to a man from the camp. I weigh it in my right hand, then my left. No voices, no visions, no nothing. So much for that. But still, since I'm bored, I might as well find out more about the darn thing.

I may have just the right tool: the small book I purchased yesterday. "The Garrison Bugle" is a collection of miscellaneous articles, letters, and journal entries written during the post's active function. It also includes an illustrated section on military uniforms and one of photographs of the camp in the nineteenth century. Maybe if a soldier went missing I'll find a record of it in this book.

Pleased to have something to occupy my mind besides the worry I feel for my wife, I sit in a comfortable chair by the window and begin reading.

Amy:

Feeling much better today I linger in bed after a healthy romp with Justin. Oh, how I love that husband of mine, so kind and thoughtful, not to mention sexy.

On the way to breakfast at the cafe next door, we notice the weather is still nasty. Probably no Grand Canyon today unless it clears up. Justin has an idea, though.

"While you rested, Amy, I read that little book I bought and

Continued on page 38

Fall 2025

found some interesting facts.” He winks, a mischievous look on his handsome face. “Could be the answer to our mystery.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes. I marked some pages for you to read and I thought we could go to the local library later and do further research. If the weather clears up we’ll drive to the Grand Canyon instead. What do you think?”

“What will you do while I read?”

“A detective called and asked me to come downtown for some questions. So that’s where I’ll be.”

“Oh! No. Are you a suspect?”

“Don’t worry, Sweetie. I’ll be fine.”

“What a crappy honeymoon. Can we start over somewhere else?”

“Sorry, Sweetheart. I’ll make it up to you.”

Poor Justin. I’m being unfair, he has nothing to make up for. Breakfast served and eaten, he accompanies me back to our hotel room, where he hands me the small book. After a lingering kiss, he leaves for the police station.

Justin has inserted makeshift bookmarks- little rectangles of cardboard from a box- and I sit on the chair by the window and do a quick review of the sections he’s chosen.

The first chapter seems to be all about scandals and murders or missing camp people. Titles read :

“Two Troopers Dead, in Apache Attack.”

“Officer Reported Missing After Drunken Fight At Commander’s party. Desertion Suspected.”

“Post Doctor John Breedlove Shoots his Wife In Jealousy Fit.”

“Farmer’s Wife Kidnapped In Apache Raid.”

It seems like a lot more Indian activity than my vision indicated. But I must remember that this is a compilation of events that may have occurred at different times. I’ll need to verify the dates.

I skip the details for now and continue to the next section. I find a chapter on accidents:

“Major Daugherty’s Wife Thrown Off A Horse.”

“Child Bitten By Rattlesnake.”

“Civilian Kicked By Trooper’s Mule Has Broken Leg.”

Okay, nothing remotely connected to my vision. Finally, I discover a section on social events:

“Christmas Show a Huge success.”

“Going Away Party for Officer And Family.”

One title, though, stops me cold: “Afternoon Dance Party for Commander MacIntosh’s niece, Miss Amanda Lennox.”

Wow. That name is familiar. A photo accompanies the story. The picture is not very clear but I recognize this girl. My fingers brush it and immediately I become disoriented, disembodied. People from a different time surround me and smile.

Amanda

“Happy Birthday, Miss Amanda.” I turn to see a handsome officer with a stylish mustache and I’m very excited when Lieutenant Simon Cooper finds the courage to ask me to dance.

My uncle is giving this party in his spacious quarters. A talented Polish accordion player and a German violinist—both troopers—play the music. The lively tunes are welcome in this forsaken place of dust and boredom. Since the party is in my honor, I wear my blue silk gown, and of course, the officers wear their full dress uniforms with the gold epaulets. The domestic servants have been busy ironing gowns and fixing hairdos so the wives look their best. But I know I’m the youngest, and the prettiest.

A great dancer, like most officers graduated from eastern schools, Simon glides with me in a waltz that leaves me breathless. But when Captain Mills taps Simon on the shoulder and says, “Mister Cooper, may I have the pleasure of a dance with the young lady?” protocol obliges him to let me go. Privileges of rank, as they say.

Roderick Mills is as smooth a dancer as Simon Cooper and I enjoy his strong, forceful presence when he guides me effortlessly along the floor. Simon has retreated to a corner of the room with a crystal tumbler of whiskey in his hand. He watches us with a frown.

A break in the program allows Roderick to fetch me a glass of punch. As I watch the captain, my uncle approaches him and they enter into a serious-looking conversation, my drink forgotten. Soon they disappear. Why can’t they leave army business alone for a few hours?

Seeing that I am alone at the punch bowl, Simon joins me. He smiles while pouring a ladle full of the drink and hands it to me. I can tell by his breath that his beverage is definitely more potent than mine, but when the music starts again and he reclaims me as a dance partner, I don’t have the heart to refuse. He is a gentleman after all and knows the boundaries of propriety.

When Roderick returns with my uncle, he looks upset and says to me. “I’m sorry Miss Lennox, I must interrupt your dance again. I need Lieutenant Cooper to come with me.”

Puzzled and more than a little irritated, I watch the two men head outside. Curious, I follow them unobserved onto the wooden porch until they pass the corner of my uncle’s quarters, where their brisk steps stop resonating. I no longer see them. Simon’s voice carries through the night air. “What’s the matter, Captain? Are you jealous that Miss Amanda didn’t wait for your return and danced with me?”

“You’ve been drinking again, Cooper. Miss Lennox is too

Continued on page 39

good for you. If you have any kind of matrimonial plans in sight, I suggest you forget them. Her uncle would never let her marry a skunk like you."

"A skunk? Those are fighting words, Captain."

Oh Lord. I hold my breath and move closer to the end of the walkway. I want to see this. The two officers are facing each other.

"Never mind fighting me, Lieutenant. Farmer Carter is worried about Apaches and asked the colonel for more patrols. One just returned with news about pony tracks around the farmstead. They didn't see any warriors but I want you to ride to Carter's farm while I ready the troops. Reassure him the army is looking out for him. Ride back like hell if you see anything moving and we'll muster out in minutes. By the way, I hear he's got a pretty daughter. She's more on your social level than Miss Lennox."

"You're good with insults, Mills. Let me see how good a fighter you are. Shed the uniform and let's go at it, man to man."

"Didn't you hear what I just said? You're drunk. Go now before I do something I'll regret or clap you in irons. The ride should sober you up."

"I want an escort."

"Pick three men and leave immediately. That's an order."

Simon saluted. "Yes, Sir!"

His response dripped with sarcasm and I watched him turn on his heel and tromp away, muttering as he went. Still shocked by what I'd heard, I hurried back to the party before my absence was noticed.

Amy

A loud bang startles me. Justin has forgotten his hotel key and is knocking hard on the door. Wobbly, I get up and, almost tripping on the book that now lies on the floor, I pick it up and release the security lock.

"It took you long enough," he says, a little put out. "The neighbors were starting to watch me suspiciously. Were you asleep?"

"Uh...ah, yes. I dozed off reading your book."

After kissing me, Justin sits on the bed and studies my face. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

"I worry about your episodes. Are you sure nothing happened while I was out?"

"Everything's hunky dory." I smile.

"I'm relieved. So, did you find anything interesting in the pages I marked?"

"I may have, but tell me what the police wanted."

"They just needed more personal contact information."

"Did they have any clues about what might have happened to the ... person?"

"They only told me the picnic area used to be part of the Carter Farm until 1970."

"What? Did you say the Carter Farm?"

"Yes. Why?"

"We've got to go back there, Justin."

"Why? I thought we had planned to go to the library."

"It might not be necessary, after what I found in the book. If you hang on a minute, I'll check on something."

I pick up the Garrison Bugle and go through my earlier "skips" while Justin gets a bottle of water we'd stocked in the mini refrigerator, uncaps it and starts drinking.

"Justin, do you remember reading about a missing officer, presumed to be a deserter?"

"Vaguely."

"Well, on the same day, the post commander was giving his niece a birthday party and one of the officers was sent on patrol to the Carter farm after an argument with his captain. His name was Lieutenant Cooper."

"How do you know that? I don't recall the name."

"Uh.... It's here somewhere. In the social events section."

"Hmm. I must have missed that. Okay, so what? You're thinking the guy did not desert but was ambushed, killed with a pitchfork, and buried there? Come on, that doesn't make sense. Why would he be alone in the area? Who'd kill him? Someone would have found his body and reported him dead, not as a deserter."

I have to agree. It sounds crazy. Yet my instinct tells me the body is that of Lieutenant Simon Cooper. What happened between the fight and his demise?

Justin stares at me. "Uh-oh. I recognize that look. What are you not telling me, Amy?"

I feel myself blushing. Justin raises his hands in surrender.

I continue. "Look, I'm not exactly sure how it all fits together, that's why we need to return to the scene. I might be able to figure it out."

"And then what?" Justin is pushing back.

"We'll have an answer."

Justin sighs. "All right, if that makes you happy, but this is the last I want to hear about this whole cockamamie story. We're on our honeymoon to enjoy our visit, not to solve some crazy murder."

I reach out and hug my husband. "Thank you. I promise we'll move on. I love you."

So, we return to the picnic area—the Carter property—a few miles from our hotel. The rain is abating, but of course the area

Continued on page 40

is muddy. I rush to the picnic table, hoping nobody removed the pitchfork. But it's gone. Crime scene tape surrounds the burial site and I walk around it, disappointed. The investigators trampled the ground. Dejected, I kick at some wet leaves and discover something that had been overlooked. A dull object.

"Look what I found, Justin," I call out, excited. "I knew I was right to come back."

As Justin approaches, I pick the thing up. "I think it's some kind of brooch." As I attempt to clean it on my jeans, the spooky feeling of disorientation descends over me.

Amanda

Still shocked by the argument between Simon and Roderick, I sneak back to the party in my uncle's quarters and spend some time chatting and drinking with the guests. But I want to speak to Simon, let him know I don't approve of what I see as a power play by Roderick. He must be in the stable saddling his horse for the visit to the farm. I purposely spill my drink on my dress so I can make an excuse to leave the party and grab a shawl in my room to cover the stain. After doing so I make my escape by the back door. It shouldn't take long.

When I enter the stable, I observe Simon alternately uttering angry words and drinking out of his canteen. I should leave. He sees me, though, so it's too late for me to exit. "Amanda, my dear, did you come to enjoy my humiliation? You little flirt, does it make you feel good, two men fighting over you?"

"No, Simon, I just wanted to tell you..." He grabs my arms and I struggle to free myself. I know we're both in deep trouble. If I scream, his career is over because of a few drinks. Plus, there'll be questions about the propriety of me being in the stable with an officer. If I don't scream, he'll hurt me. He pushes me down in the straw, tearing at my clothes while I kick and bite him. He's pulled the brooch fastening my shawl and jams it in his pocket, mumbling, "If my matrimonial prospects are dead, so are Mills'. We'll see about your social status being too good for me now."

"Stop it, Simon. I'm going to scream. You'll be court-martialed." I grunt and push back. Finally, he collapses on top of me and I'm relieved. He must have passed out.

A hand reaches out to help me up and I see Roderick, pale in the lantern light. That's when I notice a pitchfork sticking out of Simon's back. It must have pierced his heart. "Oh my God," I say, tears flowing on my cheeks.

Roderick holds me close and comforts me. He wipes my tears away and shakes me a little to get through my shock.

"Miss Amanda, you must never tell anyone about this or your reputation will be destroyed."

"But...Lieutenant Cooper is dead." I'm sobbing

uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry. He is. But I must hurry to dispose of...his remains while you clean yourself up and return to the party. Do you understand?"

I nod. "But... they're going to look for him...they'll find him."

"Don't worry about that, just promise me you'll never speak a word of this, for both our sakes. All right?"

Trembling, I promise. I don't want to know what Roderick plans to do.

My legs barely carry me through the back door to my room. Thankfully, no one notices me and I shed my beautiful, blood-stained silk gown. If necessary I'll explain I changed my dress because none of my shawls matched it. Let them think I'm vain. I wash my face, don a different gown, and rearrange my hair, making sure no straw lingers.

For now, I hide the bloody garment under my mattress. I take a deep breath and straighten my back. I must make a cool, composed appearance at the party. Someone is calling for me, and I hurry, a fake smile on my face. I will need a stronger punch this time.

Amy and Justin

"Amy, wake up, Amy." I come out of my trance.

Disoriented, I find myself in the passenger seat of our rental car. Justin, my sweet husband, drives as tears stream down his face.

"Where am I? How did I get here?"

"Thank God you're awake! When you lost consciousness, adrenaline kicked in and I carried you to the car. I was afraid you were in a permanent coma. We're on the way to the hospital."

"No, no. I'm okay, baby. I'm okay."

"I thought we were through with these episodes of yours. You need to have a specialist examine you. Perhaps you are epileptic. I don't know, but you can't live like this. And frankly, neither can I. So, we're off to the doc."

"Wait, wait. Let's see our own physician at home. Please. I'm pretty sure the situation will resolve itself."

Justin doesn't buy it. "Oh yeah? What makes you think so? Another hunch?"

"I... I'll explain later. Why don't we go to the Grand Canyon instead? Please..."

Justin glances at me with doubtful eyes.

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I'm so sorry I scared you. I found out what happened to 'our' skeleton and it was horrible. Let me tell you about it on the way, then we can forget it."

Continued on page 41

Justin is not completely convinced but goes along with the plan, and as we watch the Grand Canyon, glorious in its multicolored splendor, we put aside the events of the last few days. A light breeze ruffles the stunted junipers and a raven soars over the chasm. While Justin is distracted, I throw the button and the brooch down a ravine and turn to pose for a joint selfie, wearing my brightest smile. With that simple act, the burden I've carried is lifted. Justin raises the camera and I lean to take a look. We are all smiles and I know we'll be forever happy.

8 Poems by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Clay

We are irrelevant on the surface of the planet.
We had submitted to Pozzo long before we shared
the down-drift from greeny branches.

But life isn't so much irrelevance as it is condition:
our class of intellect has been well conditioned
since long before Lucky's slavish part. Permian?

What's life now in the ambivalent adventure—
plucking stones out of our boots:
waiting netherward for Samuel Becket.

© 2025

Richard Fenton Sederstrom's family moved to the Sonoran Desert of Arizona in 1954. They brought Richard along, for which he is still both appreciative and bewildered. The Sonoran Desert, for all of humanity's wounds and insults, remains a gift. Sederstrom's seventh book of poems, "Icarus Rising: Misadventures in Ascension," which occupies that desert from Tempe to Guaymas, appeared in 2020. "The Dun Box," which regards the "American Century" as a total of minus 21 days in 1945, was released in 2023. "Pewter," attempting to recover some of the chthonic tradition of Intelligent Artifice, is ready for the tender care of The Jackpine Writers' Bloc, the poet's longtime publisher.



A Coincidence of Silverfish

Age-gutted silverfish, of what dead
life-surrendering metamorphosis
I do not know, marks a page in
my blinded life-surrendering
“under the night forever falling”

youth-surrendering copy, the simple
geometry of Dylan Thomas’ poem
“Vision and Prayer” prosed forever
in *Collected Poems*, J. M. Dent, ‘52, p. 145,
“the shrine of the world’s wound.”

Page-squashed and desiccated, blown
“Unbidden by the sun” an eternity
of decades’ careless avoidance, beating
dust encased in our Devonian shells
“Down to the river rooting plain.”

All gone sere but the poet’s deific baritone
on *Caedmon*—even late bone-sober poems,
in their resounding reliquary, intone
always in silence until today again,
lush again, freed to air on my ear-worn LP.

Past the age of silverfish, past youth
and surrender, the lorn vowels scatter
like moonglow scales in morning glare.

© 2025

Caw II

The worst of the noise
is crazier than any noise you have been awakened by
ever before, except once, only the pitch is higher.
That is how you know
you are not only nightmare-frightened
but laughed at, almost before you know why

you are lying there in bed,
grasping for the blankets
you had kicked off in the swelter
of last night while you also peeled off
the sweat-weighted tee shirt and threw it
in the direction of the chair across the room.

You raise your head above the windowsill
in the direction of the wild-rose pink dawn
across the lake and you see and hear
the five new-fledged crows that have gathered
outside your grandmother's old house
next door for the last three noisy daybreaks.

They Caw, Caw, *Caw*, like adults, but they stammer too,
Ca-cay-ya-ya-hah! *Caw*!
To *this* you have awakened,
triply humiliated now, by the nightmare,
by the derision, the embarrassment of your rage.
So you bang your fist on the windowsill.

They fly off, echoing piratical laughter.
You drop your head back onto the pillow,
hard now, and pebbled, no, bouldered
with wakefulness. Then you decide what favor
that dawn is for you, what flavor,
to kiss the fingertips of rosy fingered Dawn,

and you rise to meet her.
Or you don't.
It is in your purview now as master of your
very private awakening, just to wait
there in bed for the standard translation
to appear with your next corvine dream.

© 2025

Ordinary Invariables, Ordinary and Variable

*Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
Solution sweet*

John Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes"

Shall we suspend dispute over the issue
at least for this nodding and windowless episode
in our nourishing lives together that,
agreeing upon the standard relationship
between the value of π and the definition
of the radius which barely relates to the ulna
sinister that fragment of the skeletal structure
that automatically leads a half-cupped hand
to the labial orifice and to a surreptitious deep
yawn and that all such concepts are important
enough for someone's Friday exam but nowhere
beyond that afterwards we all concede
to the necessities of status determining courtesy?—

that the spoon lies farther from the dish than
the knife not merely because of proprieties
involving who is about to run away from whom
but that the spoon having but little edge
to save itself from the evolutionary mandates
of the nature of the knife requires of Control
for its very existence an edge also of running time
and that to appreciate the other little drama,
vital though it may be to two disparate utensils—

albeit in the sway of unnatural and therefore
poignant love may also be part of our duty
on Earth if that duty is to rise to help maintain
the basic decorum of society and to determine
that the value of π believed not only to be constant
but only barely finite must ultimately be
a calculation of faith but that it cannot be so
without our asking
"Why?"

© 2025

Time's Judders: *vocabularitas* made simple

... Tic ...

I have to wonder with all the little
changes I am so eager to make whenever I write now,
what sort of tic they represent.

*"The old poet looks back, looks out
At his small future of years, or weeks, looks back,
And the more he restores of all these pasts,*

*The more he has to look outward for.
The old poet turns lost time into words, learns the music
Of all the silent punctuation between the words."*

... Toc ...

I wonder
am I growing old (I am old, have been for years)
or growing up finally . . .

*"When the old poet looks back into his long life and forth
Into his brief future, the remembered distance back
Turns the inches of the future into a prospect so immense*

*That he might never have imagined the distance
Even a few years or a couple of minutes ago.
In play, the old poet returns to his cream-white page."*

... Tic ...

growing up and wearing down
in the silence of my inevitable close conversation with?—
With the still breath—maker and model, after

the next of my very last tomorrows,
sometime gone again a most congenial host: . . .

... Toc

© 2025

Old Brothers

@3,300 yrs. apart

Santayana: 1863-1952

“I am an ignorant man,
almost a poet.”

Eumaeus: @13th C. bce

“To be a poet is to become
less than ignorant.”

trans. rfs

RFS: 1944-2026+?

The poet works his words
out of his ignorance

without leaving the appendices
of his ignorance behind.

© 2025

Afternoise: Remembering the Appendages

It's not that it hasn't had time on its fins, ash-pale
skin proofed in cool mud for digging deep,
to serve Earth for a few more geological eddies.
It's just that, drifting in the planet's wholeness

of misdirection, confusion, and autocratic bloody-
mindedness, this has been an era—not quite hellish
dire perhaps—for reading Euripides, meditating
the post-Peloponnesian vacuum and its likely hypoxic

breathing level, Anthropocene sucked up nearly airless
by Commodus Bloviatus *Imperator* and his croaking
toadies—the brutality of Euripides' maniacal gods
and the suicidal self-delusion of societies.

I may accompany gentle Estragon, searching
confused for sharp stones in my boots.
If the tree's still on its mound, moribund,
stage-right, just back-stage into the shadows.

A fragrance of inspiration I did follow, almost
a year ago. The two photos may mark what we,
the words and I, have of old time and new birth
in the poems. I took the photo some thirty years ago

near the Mississippi Headwaters, in the morbidity
of wreck after a widespread, devastating wind
and thunderstorm. Not until last year did I look
closely at the face of the fallen tree—the maw.

The enlargement displayed, well . . .
what you see in the photo at the end.
I remain a bit stunned in the hopeward metaphor
that nature seems to present,

and somehow more alive when I look at them again.
I don't know why; it's an eccentric quirk (quark?)
that I still care to *know*
much less than I care to *learn*.

The issue I find myself flicking the stiffness
of arthritic writing fins at is the difference
between the Artificial Intelligence
of what may pass, or not, as The Future,

Continued on page 49

blithely deluded by greed and folly
to obliterate the 30 or 40 millennia, or more,
creating and maintaining the inventiveness
and joy of Intelligent Artifice.

The drawings of *Grotte-Chauvet Pont d'Arc*
come to mind, and the uses of language
those drawings may have inspired—
from axial soundsmiths, like Euripides,

to this mostly arbitrary and odd context inviting
Beckett and Thomas and Ashbery, Paz y Blanco,
and, ah, me sometime?—mud-slick Tiktaalic mind
assembled from a Devonian brainstorm stem,

quaggy ancestral creek—poor élève, tones pestiferized
by a mollusk-like tongue. Still, if the aspiring lung
is the wet gaspy child of dark muddy water,
the human voice is its sere descendant.

Or. Yeah. Just another frog, the one stuck
in the middle of the pot somewhere. He knows
that the water is heating—faster. But hell, he
finds no way in the crowd to paddle to the rim:

Hyla sapiens.

Ahora—

Hasta luego, hasta que olvides! . . .
Me voy porque no tengo tiempo
de hacer más preguntas al viento.

Pablo Neruda, “Soliloquio en las tinieblas,”
Estravagario

© 2025

VI Smoke

—We can daily “hang ourselves tomorrow.
Unless Godot comes.”
So long

as that doesn’t happen we are safe under the threat—
stage left bare and naked: that dead tree?—
pendant relevance: dead boots swaying.

Pick up *Measure for Measure*. Rehearse
tonight that other ambivalent adventure:
breath-scalding self-deception.

© 2025



Imagine Wellness
Chiropractic Centers



IMAGINE WELLNESS CHIROPRACTIC CENTERS

Get the life you deserve
(623) 582-9851

READ~~TRADE~~SAVE

Dog-Eared Pages Used Books

16428 N 32nd Street

Phoenix, AZ 85032

(Just south of Bell Road on the West side of 32nd Street)

602-283-5423

Open 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Closed Sunday.

Visit us online at

www.dogearedpagesusedbooks.com

or

*Come in and have some fun in your new
neighborhood bookstore!*

Mystery

SCI-FI

Romance

Adventure

Literature

Cookbooks

Children's Area

NON-FICTION

FANTASY

Coming in Fall 2026!

The 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!**

Free admission!

**For more details, go to The Arizona Consortium
for the Arts website, www.artizona.org.**

Who we are

All about The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a nonprofit organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008. We hold a 501c3 tax-exempt status.

We are all-volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.

The Arizona Consortium seeks to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary arts center that will provide a home for our activities and foster artistic growth for people of



all ages in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting.

Please visit www.artizona.org or www.theblueguitarmagazine.org for more information about

becoming a member, networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting work to The Blue Guitar arts and literary magazine, Unstrung poetry magazine and The Blue Guitar Jr. literary and arts magazine for youth.

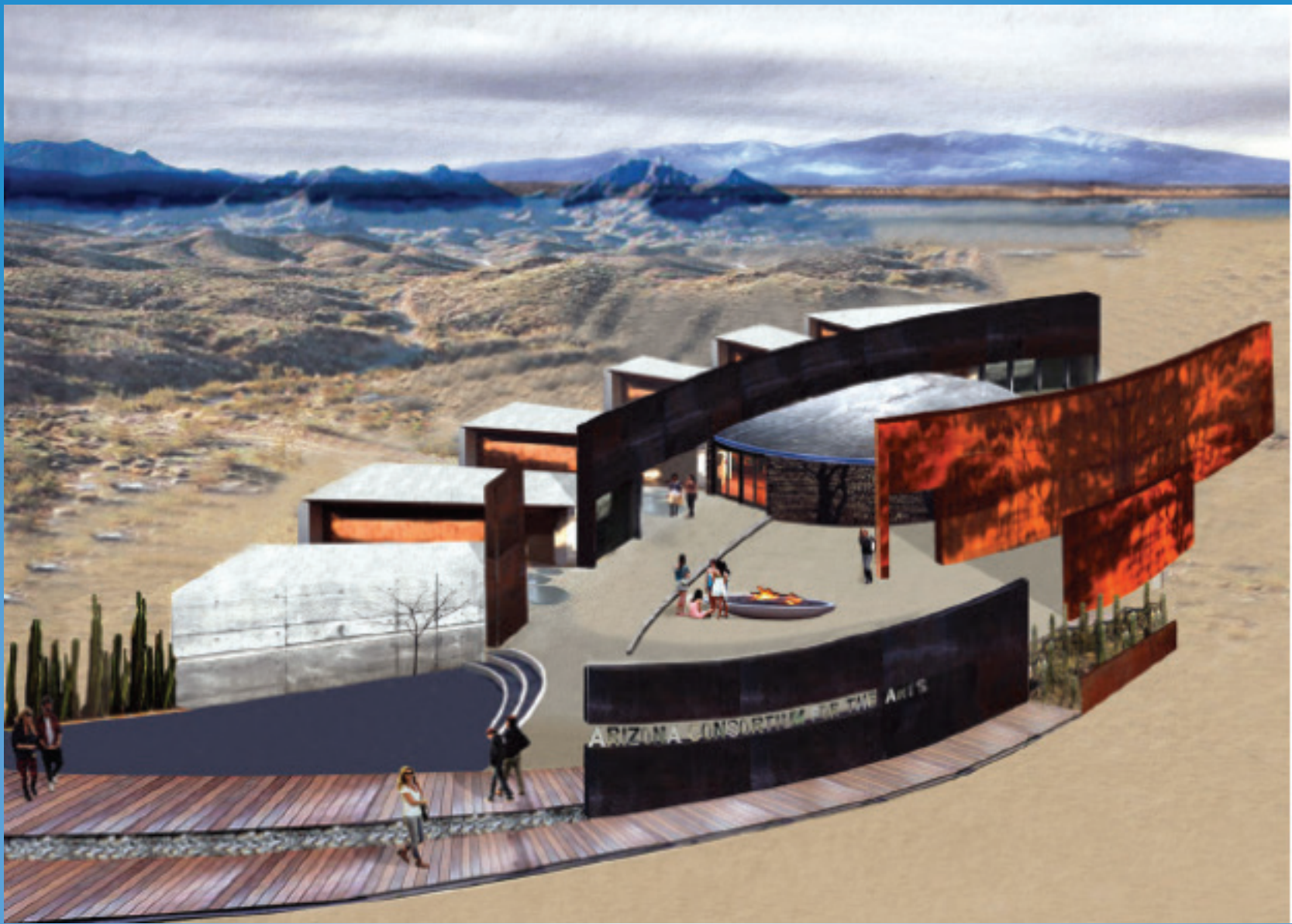
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form.

For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to artists, and support inspiring projects, your financial support is needed.

Every dollar received will support our website, the publication of our magazines, and the establishment of our future center.

Please visit our donations page, <http://www.artizona.org/donate.html>, and donate today!

Thank you for your support!



A rendering of the consortium's dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, building designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The consortium's vision for a multicultural arts center

The rendering of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, Building Designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The Center will be a source and a destination for creativity and inspiration. It will be a home for many wonderful community organizations, creative and innovative multicultural and multidisciplinary activities, classes and projects representing and celebrating our diverse community.

The Center will be a cultural icon in the Phoenix area.

The Center will be an inimitable foundation for a unique experience, one that you'll want to share with family, friends and community.

Designed by Effie Bouras, the Center will feature numerous spaces for the arts in all genres, performances and presentations. A flexible and variable seating performance theater for rehearsals, concerts, theatrical presentations, video art and films, lectures, meetings and recordings will be available free-of-charge or at a minimum cost.

Meet the staff of The Blue Guitar magazine



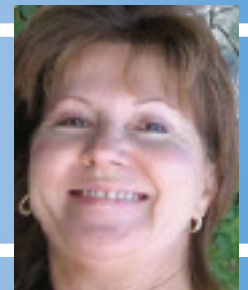
Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at info@artizona.org.

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

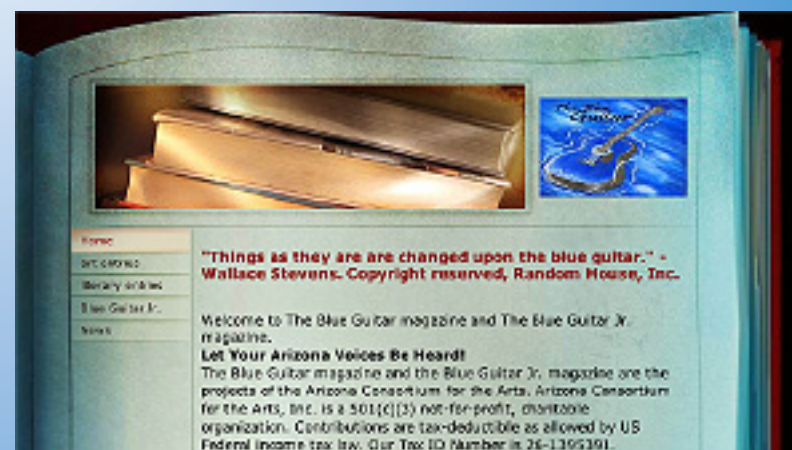
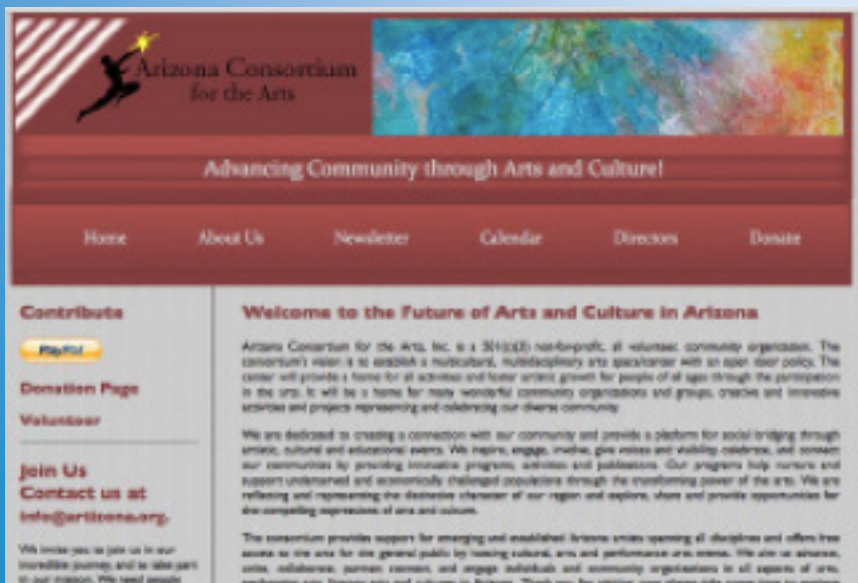


Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the managing editor of six monthly newspapers and websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for The Blue Guitar: Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic-painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at mboyerart.com.



Check our websites for news on the arts



The Blue Guitar Magazine's website is www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Like us on Facebook.

Follow @BlueGuitarMagAZ on Twitter.

Check out The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website, www.artizona.org. There, you can sign up for an e-mailed newsletter. Also follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

Fall 2025

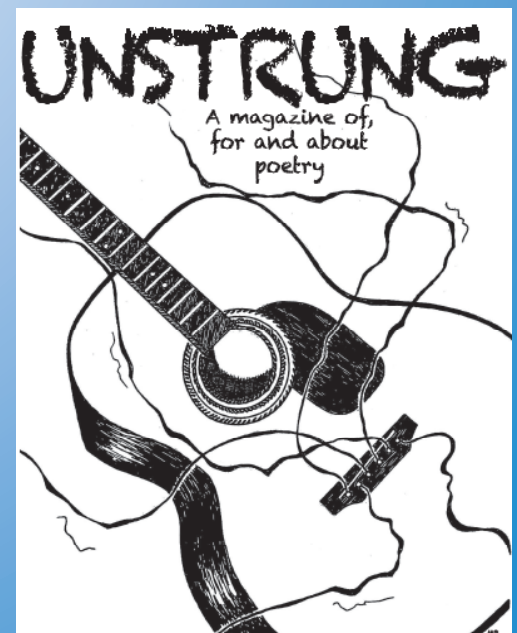
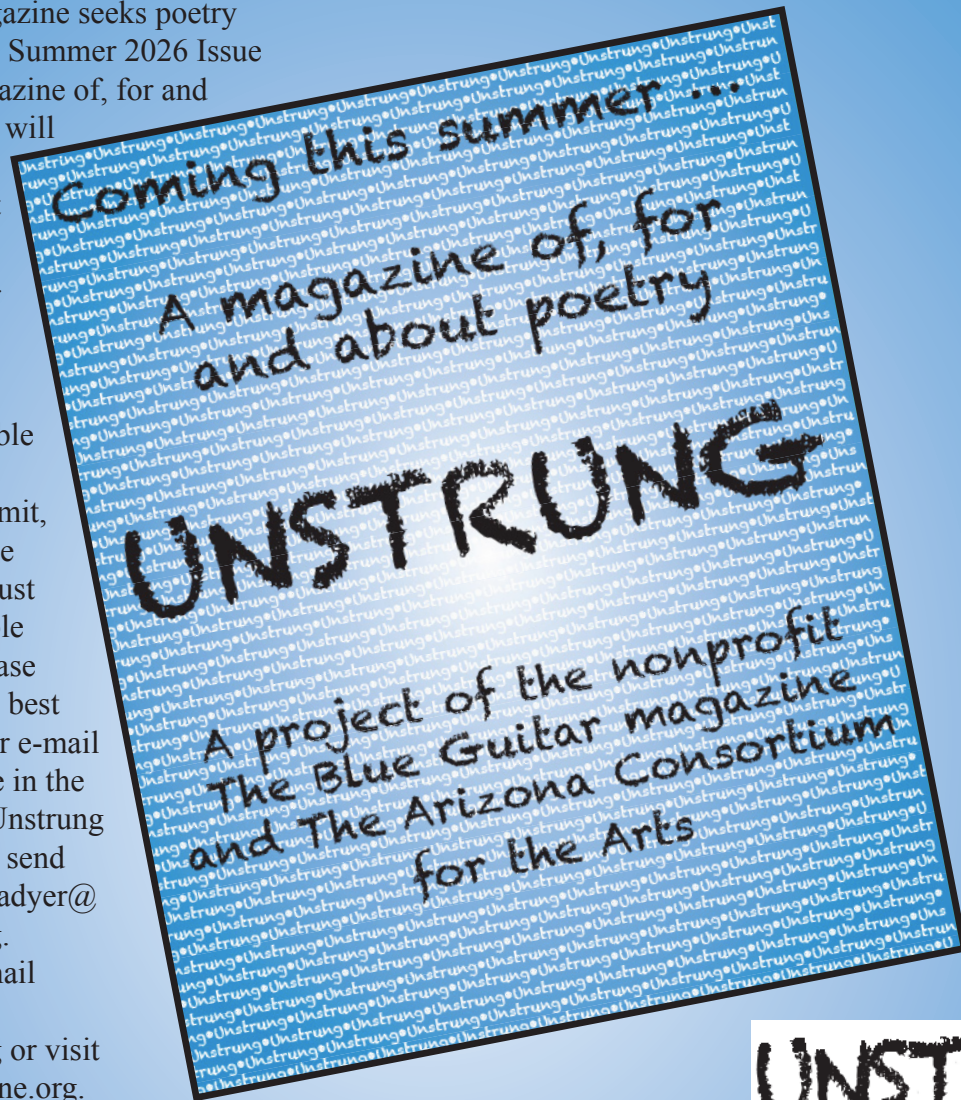
A Call to Poets for the 2026 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2026 Issue of Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry. Submissions will

be accepted from June 1 through July 4. 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. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, e-mail Rebecca at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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

www.theblueguitarmagazine.org
and www.artizona.org.



A Call to Writers for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who write
and to adults who write
for children and teens

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks literary submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who write for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2026, in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — all geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona (no AI-generated works). 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 additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and 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 The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Artists for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who create art
and to adults who create art
for children and teens

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks art submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who create art for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2026, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona (no AI-generated works). Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the artist 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 mediums; up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name, contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Please include your name and the best way to contact you. To submit or for more information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and 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 The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Writers for Spring 2026



The Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Spring 2026 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work (no AI-generated works) 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. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

A Call to Artists for Spring 2026

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Spring 2026 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Any artists who work in any visual art media, are 18 years or older and are part- or full-time Arizona residents can submit. It is free to submit and up to 5 original images (no AI-generated works) can be submitted. Please submit images of work by e-mail and provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name and contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.



The Blue Guitar magazine is a nonprofit project of 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 The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

"Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar."

— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens' 1937 poem "The Man With the Blue Guitar."

Copyright reserved, Random House Inc.



Volume 17,
Number 2
Fall Issue
FREE!

*“Things
as they are
are
changed
upon
the
blue guitar.”*