

# A Wreath of Golden Laurels

An Anthology of Poetry  
by 100 Poets Laureate

Edited by  
James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

A Wreath of Golden Laurels

Copyright © 2022 by Local Gems Press

[www.localgemspoetrypress.com](http://www.localgemspoetrypress.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the authors.

*Dedicated to the Poets Laureate of the past who have influenced the  
Poets Laureate of the present.*

*And to the Poets Laureate of the present who will inspire the  
Laureates of the future!*



## Foreword

What is a Poet Laureate? The two words certainly invoke something when heard. Perhaps it means something different to different people. But there is just something about that term, similar to the idea of Knighthood, that captures something in the imagination.

Like Knights, Poets Laureate come in all shapes and sizes, metaphorically of course. Some Laureates, have huge followings and can muster incredible crowds to their readings, others, people have only ever read on the page and never had a chance to hear live.

What exactly IS a Poet Laureate?

In the strictest of terms, a Poet Laureate is appointed by a governing body, or institution, usually for the purpose of composing poems for special occasions, celebrations, events, historic moments, etc. So, by this definition, is the Poet Laureate the supreme poet, that other poets as well as the public should look to for philosophical thoughts and poetic verse that capture the mind and the heart?

Of course, many Poets Laureate I have known have gone beyond the confines of simply writing verse themselves. Many have been college professors, teachers, workshop leaders, event organizers, publishers, editors, anthology compilers, and much more. Indeed, a large number of the Laureates I've seen have been builders of communities of poetry and beyond. Is that, then, the modern Poet Laureate's aim?

In ancient Greece, the Poets Laureate were crowned with a wreath made of laurels, in the same way they crowned those they considered champions. So, obviously, the title was held in great esteem to be put on the same pedestal as the likes of the heroes many poets were writing tales about!

We've come a long way from those days, or even the era where Petrarch was similarly crowned with a wreath many years later in the classical era in Italy. But many poets and literary fans have attended ceremonies, small and large, for the appointment of a Poet Laureate, and listened to the verse they had to offer.

This volume has poetry from over 100 Poets Laureate. We have Laureates appointed by towns, libraries, cities, counties, states, organizations, institutions, and more. The poets in this huge volume have different styles, different backgrounds, and come from different states and even different countries. But they are all Laureates. All of them have been appointed, by others, to share their work, their words, and their wisdom.

So we know the definition, but still, what exactly IS a Poet Laureate? The mystique of the title is something that has kept it relevant for thousands of years. Whatever magic the title brings, this volume is full to the brim with it. So turn the pages of this hefty volume, and step into a several thousand year tradition of poetic laurels.

~ James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

*National Beat Poet Laureate of the United States 2020-2021*

*Long Island, New York Beat Poet Laureate 2017-2019*

## Table of Contents

Malaika King Albrecht.....	1
<u><i>Heart of Pamlico, North Carolina Poet Laureate 2018-2021</i></u> .....	1
J. Joy "Sistah Joy" Matthews Alford.....	4
<u><i>Prince George's County, Maryland, Inaugural Poet Laureate</i></u> .....	4
Donna Anne Allard .....	6
<u><i>International Beat Poet Laureate for Canada</i></u> .....	6
Michael Amitin .....	10
<u><i>International Beat Poet Laureate 2020-2021</i></u> .....	10
David B. Axelrod .....	12
<u><i>Suffolk County, NY Poet Laureate Emeritus</i></u> <u><i>Volusia County, Florida's, Poet Laureate 2015-2023</i></u> .....	12
JoAnn Balingit .....	14
<u><i>Delaware's Poet Laureate 2008 to 2015</i></u> .....	14
Randy Barnes .....	18
<u><i>Lifetime Honored Historian Beat Poet Laureate</i></u> .....	18
Joseph Bathanti .....	20
<u><i>Poet Laureate of North Carolina 2012 to 2014</i></u> .....	20
Alan Birkelbach .....	26
<u><i>Texas Poet Laureate, 2005</i></u> .....	26

Bengt O Björklund.....	28
<u>Lifetime Sweden Beat Poet Laureate</u> .....	28
Joyce Brinkman .....	30
<u>Indiana Poet Laureate 2002-2008</u> .....	30
Richard Bronson .....	34
<u>Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2021-2023</u> .....	34
Douglas Powell / Roscoe Burnems .....	36
<u>Richmond, Virginia, Inaugural Poet Laureate</u> .....	36
John B. Burroughs .....	40
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate 2022-2023</u>	
<u>Ohio Beat Poet Laureate 2019-2021</u> .....	40
Terry E. Carter .....	44
<u>Medford's (MA) Inaugural Poet Laureate 2021-2023</u> .....	44
Grace Cavalieri .....	47
<u>Maryland Poet Laureate Emeritus</u> .....	47
Kalamu Chaché.....	50
<u>East Palo Alto Poet Laureate</u> .....	50
Liz Chang.....	52
<u>Montgomery County, Pennsylvania Poet Laureate 2012</u> .....	52
Teresa Mei Chuc .....	56
<u>Poet Laureate Altadena, California 2018 to 2020</u> .....	56



Lorraine Conlin .....	59
<u>Nassau County Poet Laureate Emeritus 2015-2017</u> .....	59
Paula Curci .....	63
<u>Nassau County, New York Poet Laureate 2022-2024</u> .....	63
Lori Desrosiers .....	65
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States, 2016-2017</u> .....	65
William F. DeVault .....	68
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2017</u> .....	68
Rosemarie Dombrowski .....	70
<u>Phoenix, Arizona, Inaugural Poet Laureate</u> .....	70
Carlos Raúl Dufflar .....	73
<u>New York City, Beat Poet Laureate, 2020-2022</u> .....	73
Peter V. Dugan .....	75
<u>Nassau County, New York, Poet Laureate 2017-2019</u> .....	75
Joe Engel .....	79
<u>Kenosha, Wisconsin, Poet Laureate</u> .....	79
Katherine Hahn Falk .....	81
<u>Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate 2017</u> .....	81
Sandra Feen .....	85
<u>Ohio Beat Poet Laureate 2022-2024</u> .....	85
Doris Ferleger .....	87
<u>Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate</u> .....	87

Alice B Fogel .....	92
<u>New Hampshire Poet Laureate 2014-2019</u> .....	92
Rich Follett.....	97
<u>Poet Laureate of Strasburg, Virginia</u> .....	97
Chad Frame.....	100
<u>Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate Emeritus</u> .....	100
Michael S. Glaser.....	106
<u>Maryland Poet Laureate, 2004-2009</u> .....	106
Bill Glose .....	109
<u>Daily Press Poet Laureate, 2011</u> .....	109
Gabor G Gyukics .....	113
<u>Lifetime Beat Poet Laureate, Hungary</u> .....	113
Alexandra “Zan” Delaine Hailey .....	115
<u>Prince William County, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2014-2016</u> .....	115
Debra Hall.....	119
<u>Racine, Wisconsin, Poet Laureate</u> .....	119
Hazel Clayton Harrison.....	123
<u>Altadena Public Library, California, Poet Laureate, 2018-2020</u> .....	123
Bill Hayden .....	127
<u>Norwalk, Connecticut, Poet Laureate 2019</u> .....	127
Sam Hazo .....	129
<u>Pennsylvania Poet Laureate, Emeritus</u> .....	129

Gladys Henderson .....	131
<u>Poet Laureate of Suffolk County 2017-2019</u> .....	131
Ngoma Hill.....	135
<u>Beat Poet Laureate, New York State, 2017-2019</u> .....	135
Joan Hoffman.....	137
<u>Poet Laureate of Canton, Connecticut</u> .....	137
Larry Jaffe .....	139
<u>Florida Beat Poet Laureate</u> .....	139
Doc Janning.....	142
<u>South Euclid, Ohio, Poet Laureate</u> .....	142
Chuck Joy.....	144
<u>Erie County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate 2018-2020</u> .....	144
Evelyn Kandel.....	148
<u>Nassau County, New York Poet Laureate 2019-2022</u> .....	148
Wendi R. Kaplan.....	151
<u>Alexandria, Virginia, Poet Laureate, 2016-2019</u> .....	151
Tori Lane Kovarik.....	155
<u>Alexandria, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2013-2016</u> .....	155
Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda.....	159
<u>Poet Laureate of Virginia, 2006-2008</u> .....	159
Jim Landwehr.....	163
<u>Village of Wales, Wisconsin, Poet Laureate</u> .....	163

Sydney Lea.....	166
<u><i>Vermont Poet Laureate, 2011 - 2015</i></u> .....	166
David K. Leff.....	170
<u><i>New England Beat Poet Laureate</i></u> .....	170
Elline Lipkin.....	174
<u><i>Poet Laureate of Altadena, California, 2016-2018</i></u> .....	174
Maria Lisella.....	176
<u><i>Queens, New York Poet Laureate</i></u> .....	176
Radomir Vojtech Luza.....	178
<u><i>Poet Laureate of North Hollywood, California</i></u> .....	178
Mary McElveen.....	180
<u><i>Poet Laureate for Alexandria, Virginia 2007-2010</i></u> .....	180
John F. McMullen.....	184
<u><i>Poet Laureate of the Town of Yorktown, New York</i></u> .....	184
Daniel McTaggart.....	186
<u><i>West Virginia Beat Poet Laureate, 2017 - 2019</i></u> .....	186
Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg.....	188
<u><i>Kansas Poet Laureate, 2009-2013</i></u> .....	188
karla k. morton.....	191
<u><i>Texas Poet Laureate, 2010</i></u> .....	191
Tom Murphy.....	193
<u><i>Corpus Christi, Texas, Poet Laureate 2021-2022</i></u> .....	193

Abby E. Murray .....	195
<u>Tacoma, Washington, Poet Laureate 2019-2021</u> .....	195
Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan.....	199
<u>Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2009-2011</u> .....	199
Linda Opyr .....	202
<u>Nassau County, New York, Poet Laureate, 2011-2013</u> .....	202
Carlo Parcelli.....	204
<u>Maryland Beat Poet Laureate Emeritus</u> .....	204
Linda Pastan .....	207
<u>Maryland Poet Laureate, Emeritus</u> .....	207
Alexandria Peary .....	209
<u>New Hampshire Poet Laureate</u> .....	209
Tony Pena .....	211
<u>Beacon, New York ,Poet Laureate 2017-2018</u> .....	211
Juan Manuel Pérez .....	214
<u>Corpus Christi, Texas, Poet Laureate 2019-2020</u> .....	214
Octavio Quintanilla .....	216
<u>San Antonio, Texas, Poet Laureate 2018-2020</u> .....	216
Kevin Rabis.....	219
<u>Poet Laureate of Kansas 2017-2019</u> .....	219
Sam Ragan .....	221
<u>North Carolina Poet Laureate, Emeritus</u> .....	221

Thelma T. Reyna.....	223
<u>Altadena, California Poet Laureate 2014-2016</u> .....	223
Paul Richmond.....	225
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2019 – 2020</u>	
<u>Beat Poet Laureate, Massachusetts 2017 - 2019</u> .....	225
Luis J. Rodriguez .....	228
<u>Los Angeles, California Poet Laureate 2014-2016</u> .....	228
Margaret Rozga.....	230
<u>Wisconsin Poet Laureate 2019-2020</u> .....	230
Raúl Sánchez.....	232
<u>Redmond, Washington Poet Laureate</u> .....	232
Hayden Saunier.....	234
<u>Bucks County, Pennsylvania Poet Laureate Emeritus</u> .....	234
Annie Petrie Sauter .....	238
<u>Colorado Beat Poet Laureate 2017-2019</u> .....	238
Robert Savino.....	240
<u>Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2015-2017</u>	
<u>Bards Laureate 2019-2021</u> .....	240
Robert Scott .....	244
<u>Prince William County, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2014 - 2016</u> .....	244
Betsy Sholl.....	246
<u>Poet Laureate of Maine 2006 - 2011</u> .....	246

Virginia Shreve .....	251
<u>Connecticut Beat Poet Laureate, 2020-2022</u> .....	251
Ron Smith .....	257
<u>Poet Laureate of Virginia 2014-2016</u> .....	257
Barbara Southard.....	259
<u>Suffolk County, New York, Poet Laureate 2019-2021</u> .....	259
William Sovern .....	263
<u>Indiana Beat Poet Laureate, 2019-2021</u> .....	263
Kim Stafford.....	265
<u>Oregon Poet Laureate, Emeritus</u> .....	265
Sofia M. Starnes.....	268
<u>Virginia Poet Laureate, 2012 - 2014</u> .....	268
Shelby Stephenson .....	272
<u>North Carolina Poet Laureate, 2015-2018</u> .....	272
Ed Stever .....	274
<u>Suffolk County, New York, Poet Laureate 2011-2013</u>	
<u>Bards Laureate 2015-2017</u> .....	274
Priscilla Celina Suarez .....	276
<u>McAllen, Texas Poet Laureate 2015-2017</u> .....	276
Gayl Teller .....	280
<u>Nassau County, New York Poet Laureate 2009-2011</u> .....	280

Larry D. Thomas .....	285
<u>Texas Poet Laureate, 2008</u> .....	285
Mary Langer Thompson.....	287
<u>Senior Poet Laureate, California 2012</u> .....	287
Tammi Truax .....	290
<u>Portsmouth, New Hampshire Poet Laureate 2019-2021</u>	
<u>Maine Beat Poet Laureate 2018-2020</u> .....	290
Chris Vannoy .....	292
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2019</u>	
<u>Beat Poet Laureate, California 2017-2019</u> .....	292
Angie Trudell Vasquez .....	294
<u>Madison, Wisconsin Poet Laureate</u> .....	294
Chryssa Velissariou .....	297
<u>Greece Beat Poet Laureate, Lifetime</u>	
<u>International Beat Poet Laureate, 2017-2018</u> .....	297
Pramila Venkateswaran.....	302
<u>Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2013-2015</u> .....	302
Edward Vidaurre .....	305
<u>McAllen, Texas Poet Laureate 2018-2019</u> .....	305
Daniela Voicu .....	309
<u>Romanian Beat Poet Laureate, Lifetime</u> .....	309



James P. Wagner (Ishwa).....	311
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States, 2020-2021</u>	
<u>Beat Poet Laureate Long Island, New York 2017-2019</u> .....	311
George Wallace.....	315
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2015</u>	
<u>Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate LI NY 2003-2005</u> .....	315
Marjory Wentworth.....	320
<u>South Carolina Poet Laureate 2003-2020</u> .....	320
Ron Whitehead.....	325
<u>National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2021-2022</u>	
<u>Beat Poet Laureate, Kentucky 2019-2021</u> .....	325
Thom Woodruff.....	328
<u>Texas Beat Poet Laureate, 2020-2022</u> .....	328
Katherine E. Young.....	332
<u>Arlington, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2016-2018</u> .....	332
Aprilia Zank.....	336
<u>Beat Poet Laureate, Germany</u> .....	336



Malaika King Albrecht

*Heart of Pamlico, North Carolina Poet Laureate 2018-2021*

**The Way Desire Touches**

Honeysuckle vines  
slip blossoms  
into the nests of herons.  
We lose our shadows  
in the widening dark,  
and the sound of wings  
is the wind shaking  
radiance from the air.  
Notice how vibration moves  
through bodies like water,  
how your fingertips  
on my throat  
make humming palpable.

## **Praise Song for What Is**

Praise the frozen rain, the icicles daggering  
the trees, the gray snow sludge. Praise  
the shiver, the wet wind cutting through clothes,  
the frozen water troughs. Blessed be  
the hard frost, the frozen pond,  
the apple sapling snapped in half.

Praise autumn and spring, the hot then cold  
then hot again. Praise the corn mazes,  
the haystacks, the reaping what we've sown.  
Blessed be the fig tree, the honeycomb, the hive.  
Praise the kudzu, the poison ivy,  
the forsythia shouting yellow at a fence.

Praise the mosquito, the itch,  
the scratch. Praise the heat waves,  
the asphalt, the stopped  
highway traffic. Blessed be  
the dusty, the wilted, the dry  
husks of corn in summer drought.

Praise the possum lumbering  
into the chicken coop,  
the fox slinking the wood's edge.  
The owl, the hawk, blessed be  
their swift descent to prey.  
Praise the failures, the losses. Blessed be  
the broken path that brought me here.

---

Malaika King Albrecht is serving as the inaugural Heart of Pamlico Poet Laureate. She's the author of four poetry books. Her most recent book is *The Stumble Fields* (Main Street Rag, 2020). She's the founding editor of *Red-headed Stepchild*, an online magazine that only accepts poems that have been rejected elsewhere.

J. Joy "Sistah Joy" Matthews Alford

*Prince George's County, Maryland, Inaugural Poet Laureate*

**In Praise of Bridges**

We honor bridges  
And thank God for them  
Created for such times as these  
When firm footing is key  
Allowing us to overcome obstacles  
Avoid difficulties and disappointments

Each built and strengthened by ancestors  
Elders, visionaries who predicted  
And knew of our need

Together we build breath-taking  
Awe-inspiring bridges  
To carry our gifts  
Even our burdens  
As we lift more than our fists  
To strengthen both builder and traveler

Short or long, fragile or strong  
Bridges transport us  
From that which has ended  
To new plateaus and possibilities  
That dwell, resonate and grow

Within our spirit, mind, and soul

Some will remain  
Others will be  
Carelessly or vengefully  
Burned to the ground

So we build and cross bridges  
That lift, guide, and empower us  
Enabling both the anxious and the weary  
To avoid stumbling block and valley  
Offering safe passage  
While deciphering signals  
And warnings from yesterday's  
Builders and travelers

So is our way directed  
By these crossings cleared long ago  
Showing us tried and tested ways  
Toward our new and waiting tomorrow

---

J. Joy “Sistah Joy” Matthews Alford is the Inaugural Poet Laureate of Prince George's County, Maryland, and has authored three collections of poetry. She has hosted and produced the nationally recognized poetry cable television program, *Sojourn with Words*, since its inception in 2005. She has served as president of the Poetry Ministry of Ebenezer A.M.E. Church in Fort Washington, Maryland since 2003. She is the founder of *Collective Voices*, an ensemble of native Washington, DC poets known for their poems of social consciousness, empowerment, and spirituality. She lives in Maryland.

Donna Anne Allard

*International Beat Poet Laureate for Canada*

**war musket grasses**

*(Bay of Fundy NB Canada)*

i see no soldier's uniform  
as i walk along these shores,  
but fresh-blood cliffs, musket grasses,  
& a labyrinth of our relics;  
the unfolding of this puzzle,  
to figure out a broader picture,  
where rose clashed with fleur-de-lys  
– an arcane coat-of-arms shared  
by a friend. said to follow water-trails  
like a pirate in search of a chest, as  
magnet speaks closer to sand, he said  
many have found treasures under the  
*sheet of their own graves.* yet i favour  
its peaceful clay to dyed denim & origin,  
connecting with those who fell for their  
flower, who sleep in this bay of mud. hooves  
flirt in Fundy sun today, safe before my  
watchful eyes, & I wonder if they passed  
on the story to their offspring, when historic man  
warred saddle to saddle. come walk with me,  
sense the memories dancing in the tide like a



reverberating oratory along red cliffs & grassy  
shores. then let us retreat from time & fog. i fear  
ghosts & bell-walkers – they swear the land  
still smells of powder.

**go as a river**

go as a river  
be the keeper of the fallen limb  
sea-dance, sun-worship  
in O'Keeffe fluidity  
dancing bones  
loving bones  
bones of love  
root into short-lived tides  
where even beach-faced inland spume  
cannot break down a river's bones  
as they resurface bygone lives  
with unborn ones  
rhythmic birth ripple...

go as a river

---

Donna Allard is a professional poet, member of the League of Canadian Poets, Writers Union of Canada, Canadian Authors Association, Ohio Poetry Association, and in 2019 she was awarded 'International Beat Poet Laureate for Canada' by the National Beat Poetry Foundation Inc. CT USA. She was a three term former President of The Canadian Poetry Association and is a former member of the Writer's Federation of NB. In 2014 Donna was given a position as Honorary Member in the CCLA (Canada Cuban Literary Alliance) by President Poet Laureate Richard Grove. After thirty years of being published across Canada and Internationally her writing has been translated into Greek, French, Shetlandic and Bengali. 'From Shore to Shoormal', Donna's first book by a trade publisher, co-authored with Shetland Island poet Natalie Hall (Brokenjaw Press, 2013), is in English, French and the nearly lost Old Scot/Shetland dialect. She resides down a long dirt road and lives in a 1909 homestead where muses fill her world with flowing visual poetry. Her official website is <https://canadianbeatscene.wixsite.com/donnaallardpoet>

Michael Amitin

*International Beat Poet Laureate 2020-2021*

**Boatman's Elegy**

Her hand cold with the death of romance  
obligatory touch  
we watched the chill settle like a mountain  
chipped away by cheap time-square watch winds  
irretrievably sad-

Still the flowers roll out, the cards keep turning  
quick peck kisses, morning mist goodbyes  
red heart valentine needle- shooting shared history  
through warm nostalgic veins as  
dark radio rains threw branches  
against the Chopin windowpanes

Forever stuck in this merry, soul-mate long-play quick-riff affair  
nightfall- sleep cascades.  
Death Valley molten cliffs  
Mr Fantasy stands stroking his quiff  
barking carnival noise  
into the oceans of space and joy that undulate between us  
in our king size ruby-eyed forgotten sunken ship bed

So bake that candlelight dinner  
toss that last-ditch lingerie  
we're old war buddies now  
purple contented hearts

---

Poet and musician, Michael D. Amitin travelled the roads of the American West from California- east through the smoky burls and train depot diners of Western Colorado, where he lived before moving to Paris, France. Recently named International Beat Poet Laureate 2020-2021, Amitin's poems have been published in California Quarterly, Poetry Pacific, North of Oxford, PoetryontheLake, Love Love Magazine and others. A current collaboration with Parisian photographer Julie Peiffer has given rise to the "Riverlights" project. and can be found at [Riverlights.art](http://Riverlights.art)

David B. Axelrod

*Suffolk County, NY Poet Laureate Emeritus*

*Volusia County, Florida's, Poet Laureate 2015-2023*

### **The Fabric**

The fabric of the universe is  
a silken cloth but it protects us.

Some wear it as sackcloth,  
rend their shirt to mourn.

Others pull tight the hooded  
string hiding their ethnicity.

Only, DNA differs so little  
between us, we are universal.

The fabric is tightly woven  
though tiny threads pull bare.

Our politics, religions are  
hardly wrinkles in space-time.

As if skin color or the right church  
makes us a better tailor.

From the fabric of the universe  
no flag need be woven.

## Spring Chickens

*On their 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.*

1.

He hovers over her, a rooster  
not afraid to be a mother hen.  
At their age, you'd think  
they'd be walking on egg shells,  
but there's nothing chicken  
about them, though they both  
admit, "aging is not for the meek."

2.

After sixty-five years together  
they still live free-range lives,  
out on the town. See them walking  
arm and arm, kissing publicly,  
cracking jokes, tickling each  
other's fancy. No egg on these  
faces. No one can coop up this love.

---

Dr. David B. Axelrod, was Suffolk County Long Island's and is now Volusia County, Florida's, Poet Laureate appointed for 2015-2023. For his third Fulbright, he was the first Poet Laureate in the People's Republic of China. His twenty-third book of poetry—is *Mother Tongue*. Read more at his website: [www.poetrydoctor.org](http://www.poetrydoctor.org).

JoAnn Balingit

Delaware's Poet Laureate 2008 to 2015

**History Textbook, America**

I'd search for Philippines in History class.  
The index gave one page, moved on to Pierce.  
*The Making of America* marched past  
my enigmatic father's place of birth.  
The week he died some man we didn't know  
called up. *This is his brother*, one more shock,  
*phoning for him*. "He died three days ago."  
The leaden black receiver did not talk.  
My uncle never gave his name or town,  
we never heard from him. Was it a dream?  
The earpiece roar dissolved to crackling sounds,  
a dial tone erased the Philippines.  
And yet my world grows huge with maps, crisscrossed,  
my history alive with all I've lost.

from *Words for House Story* (WordTech Editions, 2013) by JoAnn Balingit



## Words for House Story

*after Li-Young Lee*

So another word for mother is *narrate*.

Listen, thinks Narrate, as she sweeps  
light into corners. She sees that  
the windows are open. Narrate  
likes to nest her hands  
at the kitchen window for comfort.  
She likes the bird that rings like a telephone.

Narrate needs the wind to feel at ease  
again. She decides to leave the sand  
on the floor. She looks high and low,  
helps curtains relax, doors  
to swing open. Lays hands on  
their shoulders. Says, "Breathe."

*Sashay* is another word for child. *Sashay*  
darts around a corner. Narrate holds  
some underwear. Books are falling.  
*Sashay* is tumbling head first  
down stairs and yells, "It's fun!"

Narrate says, "Listen, this is driving me crazy!"  
Another word for listen is *I-don't-have-time*.  
Her secret word for husband is also *listen*,  
yet again, *I-do-not-understand*.

Sashay persuades the neighbor dog to ride  
the bucket of his mini-backhoe. Dares  
the sweet turtle into sleeping on the roof!  
Sashay does a slow, inscrutable dance  
round the bare corners of *karate chop*

another way of saying *a-daughter's-empty-room*.  
“What happened in karate chop?” Sashay wants to know.  
Narrate leaves the vacuum in the middle  
of karate chop, tapes a lavender story  
of paint chips down the center of one wall.

But it’s hard for her in karate chop. Depressions  
left in the carpet hit like fists. Suddenly, Listen  
is downstairs saying, “I should change my name  
to *Emphasize*. Do you know every light  
in this house is on? I just don’t understand.”

Oh, Narrate knows: Listen spells out *decoy*  
when he means the words for *need-you*.  
But she worries. Some days, she cries  
“Decoy!” when she stumbles on his love.

from *Words for House Story* (WordTech Editions, 2013) by JoAnn Balingit

---

JoAnn Balingit grew up in Florida and lives in northern Delaware. She is the author of *Words for House Story* (2013) and two poetry chapbooks, as well as poems and essays at *The Rumpus*, *The Academy of American Poets*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *About Place Journal*, *The Common*, *Asian American Literary Review* and *Poetry Magazine*. A 2019 Hedgebrook alumna, she is at work on a memoir. Dr. Balingit served as Delaware's poet laureate from 2008 to 2015.

Randy Barnes

*Lifetime Honored Historian Beat Poet Laureate*

**Who Do You Love**

It was Charley Patton on the beltway  
told of Robert J howling like an agitated wolf  
among peanut shells and cheap liquor death  
all the fine suits and battered guitars  
Highway 61 lifeblood escape route  
and the late Roosevelt Barnes in gold accouterment  
his throaty epistle causing backflow along the Mississip  
like an 1811 dream  
when the hills waved like sheets in a windstorm  
and fields covered in snow shellac cotton in August  
air so buggy birds topple in mid-flight  
their bellies so full of protein they sink like stones  
in quicksand  
this in the backyard of a southern showdown  
where a hot-oven sun becomes one with limestone  
and locals gather to turn up the heat  
gods and goddesses of slide and shimmy  
gut-bucket mambo in ankle-deep mud  
whiskey-eyed moonrise over the flats.

## **Insomniac City**

Evaporation syndrome in the brain-pan  
a collective of sugar scarfers on wheels  
room for the armaments close to the vest  
corn liquor flatulence under the heat lamps  
a troupe of fly smackers and toad stompers  
all professionals right down to their plastic clogs  
get a grip there's commies in the trees  
run a tremble through the maze and see who fades  
lapdogs and goobers for the meth score  
newsboys banging their flatteries into hand-helds  
a grand evening of vitriol on a global stage  
O how the Americanos can dance the duck'n'run  
it's hunting season in insomniac city no license  
required.

---

Randy Barnes is a poet who lives on an island in the Salish Sea. He is the Lifetime Honored Historian Beat Poet Laureate, Washington State.

Joseph Bathanti

*Poet Laureate of North Carolina 2012 to 2014*

**Brooks Brothers Shirts**

Ten hours a day,  
my mother hunched downtown  
in Brooks Brothers tailor shop – fretting  
cuffs and belt loops, pleats, vents,

button-holes, lapels into ruthless  
wool suits, unthinkably expensive,  
for men who spent their days unsoiled,  
whose soft hands never raised a callous.

After she punched out,  
caught the streetcar, and high-heeled home  
two icy downhill blocks  
from the Callowhill stop,

she often breezed in with packages:  
icy broadcloth shirts she'd monogrammed  
with my initials,  
swathed in smoky silvery tissue.

The deep navy boxes piped in gold,  
the gold band that bound them,  
and in their centers  
the Brooks Brothers coat of arms:

a golden ewe lowered on a sling  
into a sacrificial grail –  
the *Agnus Dei*.  
My mother dressed me like a prince.

“Apparel oft proclaims the man,”  
I’d one day read in *Hamlet*.  
Those luscious shirts:  
the forbidden glory of plenty

(of too much, really).  
Every day with neckties and blazers,  
oxblood penny loafers, the Princeton  
wave that swooped my yearning brow,

I wore them to school: yellow, blue,  
pink, charcoal and burgundy pin-stripe,  
tattersall, blinding  
ecclesiastical white.

I wore them to church.  
I adored those shirts,  
my immaculate patrician destiny.  
My mother washed them by hand,

hung to dry in the winter sun,  
spritzed with water from an Iron City pony,  
then shelved them in plastic bags  
overnight in the freezer.

She loved them as much as I did.  
My father, a steelworker, a crane-climber –  
he loved them too.  
He didn't want me to get my hands dirty.

He wanted me to work for myself.  
My mother ironed in the cellar  
where my father shaved  
out of an enamel basin with hot water

from the washtub, a small mirror  
on a nail pounded into the block wall  
he whitewashed every year.  
On his work bench she stationed

a sleeve board for the long tedium  
of the crease, true as a plumb line,  
dabs of starch at collar and cuff,  
shots of steam from the iron's black button.

Mother's needle-hand steered  
the hissing wedge just shy of scorching  
the frozen fabric (which is the charm).  
My shirts were sharp enough to bring blood.

Monday through Friday school,  
then Sunday, High Mass,  
the shirts awaited me, dangling on hangers  
from the cellar's copper ceiling pipes,



the six of them in a skirmish,  
nudging one another in the darkness,  
complicit in my certain future,  
swaying slightly,

like a slow dance,  
in the heat vent's tepid whisper –  
at their throats the oval writ:  
*Brooks Brothers Makers Est 1818.*

## Boar

He preys over the carcass of a doe,  
left in the autumn windrows.  
Once, climbing Agnes Ridge,  
I'd come across him in the blackberry:  
abiding, carnal –  
matted, shaggy coat,  
stupendous head.  
He could have had me.  
He let me know as much:  
ancient face, haunted leer –  
near smile.  
There would be no mercy.  
Today he see-saws on his haunches,  
as he strips the doe:  
his bestial gorge and groan,  
tugging her up like taffy.  
Finished, he rears and faces me –  
safe, in mid-air, watching  
from the balcony.  
Cold columns of vapor writhe.  
Solstice clouds,  
from Johnson County, Tennessee,  
storm Snake Den Mountain.  
What's wrought in this valley's beyond our ken.  
This creature – charged out of Shakespeare,  
tusk-sharpened sneer,  
gut-string pig-tail, on his chest  
a white pentagonal smear –  
kin to werewolves.

---

Joseph Bathanti is former Poet Laureate of North Carolina (2012-14) and recipient of the 2016 North Carolina Award for Literature. He is the author of ten books of poetry, including *This Metal*, nominated for the National Book Award, and winner of the Oscar Arnold Young Award; *Restoring Sacred Art*, winner of the 2010 Roanoke Chowan Prize, awarded annually by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association for best book of poetry in a given year; *Concertina*, winner of the 2014 Roanoke Chowan Prize; and *The 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*, released by Louisiana State University Press in 2016. His novel, *East Liberty*, won the 2001 Carolina Novel Award. His novel, *Covenry*, won the 2006 Novello Literary Award. His book of stories, *The High Heart*, won the 2006 Spokane Prize. His book of personal essays, *Half of What I Say Is Meaningless*, is the winner of the 2014 Will D. Campbell Award for Creative Nonfiction. His novel, *The Life of the World to Come*, was released from University of South Carolina Press in late 2014. Two new volumes of poems are forthcoming: *Rising Meadow*, in collaboration with photographer, Houck Medford, from Horse and Buggy Press (Durham, NC), in 2021; and *Light at the Seam*, from LSU Press, in 2022. Bathanti is Professor of English and McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Education & Writer-in-Residence of Appalachian State University's Watauga Residential College in Boone, NC. He served as the 2016 Charles George VA Medical Center Writer-in-Residence in Asheville, NC, and is the co-founder of the Medical Center's Creative Writing Program.

Alan Birkelbach

*Texas Poet Laureate, 2005*

**The Former Poet Laureate Said**

that he had finally just had enough  
of admirers puttering their way down the sidewalk

onesey, twosy, like lost flagellants,  
with copies of his books in their hands.

They were always mewling and whiney,  
waiting for him to appear on his stoop

to “Bless You, Bless You All.”  
He admitted he was too accessible.

When he was younger inspiration  
was as common as meatloaf.

He could pretty much rub two sticks together  
and make a poem out of it.

But the reality was that one day his Muse  
died inside him and he was left to try and hold

his reputation together on momentum alone.  
It wasn't, he said so much a matter of losing control

as if control getting up and taking a flight  
one-way to Bolivia or some other god-forsaken place

where it's probably struggling right now  
inside some mustached coffee-picker

who owns one shirt and two goats  
and whose entire vocabulary rhymes with sangria.

But I noticed that even as the laureate talked  
he worked the chicken on his grill,

and between the turning of each breast  
there was an unspoken counted pause,

and the lines were laid in regular rows  
that he would constantly write and rewrite.

---

Alan Birkelbach, a Texas native, is the 2005 Texas State Poet Laureate. He is a member of the Texas Institute of Letters, Western Writers of America, National Park Foundation, and The Academy of American Poets. He is a Spur Award Winner, two-time international Indie Book Award Finalist, winner of North Texas Book Festival Award, Pushcart Prize Nominee, editor for several editions of the TCU Press Texas Poet Laureate Series, winner of the Pat Stodghill Book Publication Award and winner of the Edwin M. Eakin Memorial Book Publication Award. His twelfth book, "The National Parks: A Century of Grace", with fellow Texas Poet Laureate karla k. morton, was published by TCU Press in November of 2020. They visited all 62 National Parks, wrote poetry and took photos, with a percentage of the sales from the book going back to the Parks System. This is to help culturally preserve our greatest treasures – our National Parks-- for the next 100 years.

# Bengt O Björklund

## *Lifetime Sweden Beat Poet Laureate*

this very moment I fall  
with my heavy breath ticking  
in the old memory basket  
is since long overdue

the sun is mere light  
to the old man  
moving his brittle bones  
in the shadows

the sharp light  
that meets his eye  
squander  
in old echoes

so many steps to contemplate  
jigsaw puzzles  
in need of more pieces  
call for him to ponder

a certain ceremony  
of greeting the wounded earth  
finds him lost in a struggle  
to count for more than one

solemnity is his hideout  
behind the shed of all fear gone  
listening to the gossip  
of the rolling emptiness at sea

there are birds in the aftermath  
stoic men attempting  
what no man has achieved  
lonely women singing in the surf

old man by the pint  
downs severity with hot futility  
rendering night a glow  
that will be gone by morning

---

Bengt O Björklund wrote his first poem in a Turkish jail in 1970. He wrote it in English because no one spoke Swedish. Since then he has five published poetry collections written in English and five in his native language Swedish. Bengt is also an artist, a percussionist and a photographer. In 2018 he became Sweden Beat Poet Laureate - lifetime.

Joyce Brinkman

*Indiana Poet Laureate 2002-2008*

**Apology from the Poetry Judge**

Guilt churns my restless sleep.  
I didn't pick your poem.  
I should have known  
it was yours. It began  
with drinking beer.

You drink beer, lots of beer,  
but me, the teetotaler, well  
I don't like beer, and  
I don't like poems that  
talk about drinking beer,  
about making beer, about  
growing a certain kind of  
hops, about dark amber color  
or stout, beer venders, or green  
bottles vs. silver cans.

But you like beer, and you  
write poems about beer, and I  
should have known  
that the poem about beer  
was yours.



But, in my defense,  
at least half of the poems  
in the contest were  
about beer.

## Poetry Bugs

I write poems in my head  
as I sweep the kitchen floor  
living the answer to that question  
people always ask when  
they find you are a poet.

Poetic ideas scurry through the mind  
like the countless black ants bombarding  
the calico cat's dried tilapia crumbs  
scattered across the chestnut-colored floor.

For my German mother  
sweeping the floor paired with  
brushing your teeth:  
    you eat,  
    you sweep,  
    you brush!

Never the housekeeper she was,  
I often leave crumbs for ants  
to feed on, until the cleaning girl  
comes to end the banquet.

I dislike killing ants  
even more than I detest  
sweeping floors. It's  
always easier to let  
someone else do your killing.

If I were a Jain, I would

carefully sweep them from  
my path. Instead I, unintentionally,  
lure them to their deaths with  
treats until she sucks them up  
into the black hole of her vacuum.

I sweep on, ignoring the calls to pen poems  
coming from the insects of ideas scratching  
at the floor of my brain. They never stop  
arriving, but giving them a plate.  
would be less messy.

---

Joyce Brinkman, Indiana Poet Laureate 2002-2008, believes in poetry as public art. She creates public-poetry projects involving her poetry and the poetry of others. Her poetry is on permanent display in a twenty-five-foot stained-glass window in an airport, in lighted-glass artwork at a library, and on a wall in the town square of Quezaltepeque, El Salvador. Her printed works include two chapbooks, *Tiempo Español*, and *Nine Poems In Form Nine*, and two books with fellow "airpoets" Ruthelen Burns, Joe Heithaus, and Norbert Krapf, *Rivers, Rails and Runways*, and *Airmail from the Airpoets*. Her recent books include the multinational, multilingual book *Seasons of Sharing A Kasen Renku Collaboration*, from Leapfrog Press and *Urban Voices: 51 Poems from 51 American Poets* from San Francisco Bay Press, which she co-edited with Dr. Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda. Joyce has received fellowships from the Mary Anderson Center for the Arts, the Vermont Studio, and the Indianapolis Arts Council. She is a graduate of Hanover College and lives in Zionsville, Indiana, with her husband and a cantankerous cat. She is a founding board member of Brick Street Poetry Inc, the producer of the poetry podcast "Off the Bricks" which can be heard on Spotify, Apple Podcast, and other podcast platforms and found through the Bricks Street Poetry website <http://www.brickstreetpoetry.org/>.

Richard Bronson

*Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2021-2023*

**Threnody for Charles Weidman**

*I have been shown...that you are the mother of five sons  
who have died gloriously on the field of battle.*

*~ Abraham Lincoln*

A West Side loft,  
Hardwood floor –  
Your studio, divided  
By a gray curtain  
Hung loosely on a rod.

We sat in rows  
Of metal folding chairs,  
A small audience.

Your troupe had withered,  
Your name familiar now  
Only to aficionados  
Of the dance.

In a white T-shirt, black tights,  
A wiry body, steel gray hair,  
You spoke softly of your art.

What god  
Possessed you

At the moment  
An old man stepped behind  
The curtain, returned  
Transformed?

And as your voice rang out  
From a reel to reel recorder  
Reading Mr. Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby,  
Your silent body told us  
Of his grief—  
The death of her sons,  
Sacrifice of war,  
Its need.

---

Richard Bronson is on the faculty in the Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology and the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care & Bioethics of the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University and a member of the Board of the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association. He has won the Poem of the Year Award of the American College of Physicians and was recipient of the *Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award*. Dr. Bronson is currently the Poet Laureate of Suffolk County for 2021-2023.

Douglas Powell / Roscoe Burnems

*Richmond, Virginia, Inaugural Poet Laureate*

**My Son, The Monarch**

my son flutters  
floats through the kitchen  
arms out and no direction  
Like a butterfly playing tag with its own shadow

This halloween a butterfly is what he asked to be  
  
unprompted

he knows nothing of what society associates  
with fancy colors and flutter  
he just loves butterflies

do you know how hard it is to find a "boy"  
butterfly costume  
there isn't one (they're all meant for girls)  
they are all flowy dresses          monarch gowns  
fairy's turned, multi-colored insect.  
but we bought one  
satin orange and black  
frilly bottom and  
wingspan bright as summer

my son is three

doesn't know what a dress is  
doesn't think it's girly  
only daydreams himself under the sun  
and free from his chrysalis

my childhood,  
boys couldn't be butterflies  
boys sting  
boys are wasps  
i learned to wound or to be wounded  
but never chrysalis

chrysalis hardens but births a rainbow  
a chrysalis allows what's inside to become new  
I was taught boys don't rainbow they scab  
scabs harden but birth a scar  
like boys can look healed but are always scarred

He was so fascinated by butterflies  
I learned things like some wings are poisonous  
ain't that a metaphor for a boy born into toxic  
carrying it on his body  
on his back  
dangerous                      when he just wants to be beautiful  
wants to stop and smell the roses  
my son always stops mid stride  
admiring a flower  
or sky,  
or the beauty in just being alive  
He is a kaleidoscope of emotions and always breaking free  
But butterflies are easy to break

That is what scares me most  
That some person will rip his angelic innocence  
I learned when a human touches a butterfly's wing  
it damages a million tiny scales  
but, if you stay perfectly still long enough  
a butterfly will rest on you

i am trying to soften my primitive hands  
so he lives like a butterfly and doesn't die like a man  
i admire his dance in his butterfly costume  
As he twirl and boast,  
plays with trucks and trains and little boy things

sometimes he will rest his face on my palm  
as is if to tell me " thank you for giving me wings"  
and all this happens while I'm still in my own shell  
learning from him                      how to be free.



---

Richmond Virginia native, Douglas Powell/Roscoe Burnems is a poet, published author, spoken-word artist, comedian, educator, father, and Richmond, VA's inaugural poet laureate, who has dedicated his craft to entertaining and educating. Performance poetry has afforded him the opportunity to enlighten and entertain crowds across the country; he's been seen everywhere from coffee shops, schools and universities, theaters, and arenas. In 2019 he added a TEDx Talk to his list of accomplishments, speaking at a TEDxYouth event in November of 2019. He is no stranger to community and youth engagement. He has been a staple in the Arts Education scene for years and highlighted arts integration as a host for Emmy Nominated VPM's The Art Scene. As a "slam poet" he has been a three-time southern regional finalist (2009, 2014, 2022), National Poetry Slam Champion (2014), NPS Group Piece Finalist (2018), two-time consecutive NUPIC/Underground Slam Champion (2019, 2022), ScreenTime Poetry Slam Season 1 Champion (2020), and Lake Eden Arts Festival Slam Champion (2021). He is the founder and member of The Writer's Den Poetry Slam team and collective. With Roscoe as a coach The Writer's Den has been consistently ranked third in the country (2022). As a poetry slam coach he also took the VCU poetry slam team to be ranked 3rd in the world (2018). In addition to the putting on poetry-based events and poetry slams, the collective -consisting of mostly poets, but also songwriters, bloggers, and visual artists- conducts writing and performance workshops for youth and adults. Douglas hasn't limited his passion to competitions. He is the author of three published works: *Fighting Demons*, *Chrysalis Under Fire*, and *God, Love, Death and Other Synonyms*. He has also been published in many literary magazines and journals, including: *Freeze Ray Magazine*, *Flypaper Magazine*, *Scene & Heard*, *Into Quarterly*, *Beltway Quarterly*, *Drunk in a Midnight Choir*, and *Rise Up Review*.

John B. Burroughs

*National Beat Poet Laureate 2022-2023*

*Ohio Beat Poet Laureate 2019-2021*

**I Am Not Ready to Die**

yet.

I am not ready to go gently  
into Dylan's "good" night  
while wannabe Blackwater  
thugs crush kinfolk for cash in Portland  
and maybe soon Cleveland.

I am not ready to die  
before there is justice  
for Sandra Bland  
and Breonna Taylor.

I am not ready to let go  
while white would-be masters  
and their whelps  
so wary of wearing masks  
seem rapt with delight  
at the thought of regurgitating  
yesterday's noose in their fight  
against Black lives mattering.

Oh the splattering!

I am not ready to rest on my laurels  
worthless as they may be  
while there is work to do  
and while not a word  
the President says is true  
is true.

Believe me.

I am not ready to watch  
my loved ones be ground  
down into the Cleveland blacktop  
by blackguards and blackshirts  
issued forth from Washington  
by the liar, cheat and  
black heart in chief  
who believes the police force  
that killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice  
the same Cleveland police force  
that shot 137 bullets into unarmed  
Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams  
might need a little extra firepower  
to carry out their black work.

I am not ready to die, friends  
unless it is by your side in the fight  
for fairness, for right  
and for equal justice.

## **Why Not**

I've wanted  
to write you  
another poem, but  
all that's come  
out is a list  
of things I should  
tell you before  
you decide whether  
to love me back  
as though love  
is a decision,  
as though I chose  
to feel this way,  
as though you'd  
love me even  
without my list  
of reasons  
why not

---

John B. Burroughs of Cleveland is the U.S. National Beat Poet Laureate for 2022-2023 and previously served for two years as the Ohio Beat Poet Laureate. He is the author more than a dozen books including *Rattle and Numb: Selected Poems, 1992-2019* (2019, Venetian Spider Press). A dynamic performer who has wowed audiences from Oakland to New York City and myriad points in between, John has hosted numerous poetry events in the Greater Cleveland area and maintains the Cleveland Poetics blog and Northeast Ohio literary calendar at [www.clevelandpoetry.com](http://www.clevelandpoetry.com). Since 2008, has served as the founding editor for Crisis Chronicles Press, publishing over one hundred books by esteemed writers from around the world. Find him on Facebook, Twitter (@jesuscrisis) and at [www.crisischronicles.com](http://www.crisischronicles.com).

Terry E. Carter

*Medford's (MA) Inaugural Poet Laureate 2021-2023*

**Fireside Chat**

Standing in the middle of misery street  
mournfully regarding a pile of charred wood,  
ash, and damp soot.

My home was here...

my memories and my things,  
my comfort and my peace.

There is nothing to grab hold of.

The fire was all consuming.

The devastation was absolute.

The aftermath is yet unfolding.

My heart was here...

my letters and my books,  
my compass and true north.

Standing in the middle of smoldering ruins...

blocks and blocks of scorched earth,  
wreckage and ruins.

Five-hundred year old oak and elm trees,  
reduced to blackened bits of charcoal.

There are no smiling faces to kiss.

no kittens to cuddle,

no babies to tickle,

no neighbors we know by name and need.

Not numbers, not statistics...

community.

I can't find a hug that feels right.

The story has no happy endings.

My heaven was here...

my lesser angels and my faith,

my roots and my piece of the sky.

Standing with my daughters and my dog,  
in a high school gym three counties away.

We are the lucky ones.

We heard the reports and made haste...

choked down the smoke and made haste,

saw the blazing menace and made haste.

Couldn't gather much more

than the clothes on our backs,

some stuffies and a tablet.

Crazy that I just digitized all the pictures,

our lives on a thumb drive,

on a key chain

in my pocket.

Standing for the lost and the fallen.

There was no fighting this.

Containment simply meant, on to the next inferno.

Rescue has become recover and identify.

Hope has become compassion and sympathy.

Tears are the only water in abundant supply.

Our friends suffered too.

Good friends that won't ever come home...

even if there was a home to come to.

There was no escape.

only rebar, rope lines, and resistance.

Despite the heroic efforts of

gallant legions,  
Hell came, saw, and conquered.  
The rains came only to mock us.

Standing at the corner of burnt visions and broken dreams...  
nothing that we built remains...  
Not. One. Thing.  
Million dollar mini-mansions and modest capes, incinerated.  
The observers come to assess and plan,  
then leave, shaking their heads,  
and wringing their hands.  
Only the true servants stay.  
They pray with us.  
They hold us tight.  
They help us to grieve.  
This was their place too.

Neighborhood is in the heart.  
We are still standing.  
We are still standing.



Grace Cavalieri

*Maryland Poet Laureate Emeritus*

**Can I Count On You**

If I were lying in a boat in a wedding gown would you see me floating by  
If I named a star after you would you lie in the grass looking up  
If I lived in a white house would you come sit on my front porch  
If I were caught in a bad dream would you please wake me up  
If I had a plaid blouse would you help me button it  
If I could jitterbug would you do the double dip  
If I were a red cardinal would you hold out a sunflower seed  
If I caught all the fireflies in the world would you give me a big jar  
If the night nurse forgets to come would you bring me a glass of water  
If I have only minutes to look at the silky moon will you come get me

## **Athena Tells the Truth**

Athena tells the Truth  
She does not know any better  
That's the good thing about being mythological  
She does not encounter or counter  
She is smart— says  
No one ever solved a problem by being dumb

Everyone forgets her but B+ students

Athena was not what they expected  
tilting away from the back story of Greece  
But if parallels must be drawn  
then lift her out of sleep

Bring her back in 4 inch heels  
And purple fingernails  
Put her in my body  
I'm not afraid to be forgotten

She needed everyone who ever died  
So give her new feelings to feel –  
Do not attack because she wins at archery  
And let us forgive her for still wanting romance—

---

Grace Cavalieri is Maryland's tenth Poet Laureate. She founded, and produces, "The Poet and The Poem" now from the Library of Congress, celebrating 45 years on-air. These podcasts are going to the moon in the "Lunar Codex" launch via NASA. Her 26th book, forthcoming 2023 (The Word Works) is "The Long Game: Poems Selected and New."

# Kalamu Chaché

## East Palo Alto Poet Laureate

### **Always Cherish The Moments**

A loved one dies.  
The heart cries.  
Living in sorrow,  
You can't think about tomorrow.  
Life has come to a standstill.  
Sadness is all that you can feel.  
A life that once shined bright  
Has faded into the darkness of the night.  
You feel that it will be hard to live again.  
But, live is what you will do again  
Because we are all made of a Spirit  
That must serve a purpose of a greater benefit.  
The departure of a loved one helps us to know  
That death is how life must go.  
Death, in the truest sense of reality,  
Is a way for the Soul to be free.  
So, always cherish the moments you got to share  
With your loved one who is no longer here.

---

Poetess Kalamu Chaché came to live in East Palo Alto with her family from Brooklyn, New York in the mid-1960s. After graduating from high school in East Palo Alto and pursuing a college education in Forest Grove, Oregon, she returned to her community and earned an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts from Nairobi College in East Palo Alto, California. Chaché has been serving the City of East Palo Alto, Belle Haven community of Menlo Park, the greater San Francisco Bay Area, and beyond in numerous professional, executive, administrative, advocacy, and artistic areas of employment and volunteer services. A strong advocate and practitioner of activism, advocacy, and volunteerism, specializing in the areas of youth development and the Literary/Music/Performing Arts, Chaché works tirelessly for many causes, events, and programs to help bring The Arts closer to people's hearts. Chaché has been serving as the East Palo Alto Poet Laureate since her community became the twentieth incorporated city in San Mateo County. She is the Author of three volumes of poems: *Survival Tactics*; *A Change Of Interest*; and *Survival Interest: A Collection Of Poems Revisited*. Additionally, as a long-time and noted Cultural Arts Activist/Advocate, Educator, Event Organizer, Performing Artist, Producer, Promoter, Publisher, Songwriter, Vocalist, and Writer, Chaché is also a Vocal Recording Artist who appears on a total of six record projects with the Sons and Daughters of Lite and Daughters of Lite for Ubiquity Records and as a Solo Artist for Undercurrent Records and SONWA Records. Most recently, she founded and is offering an annual WordSlam Youth Poetry Contest in an effort to get more young Poets in her community seated at the Poetry table.

Liz Chang

**Montgomery County. Pennsylvania Poet Laureate 2012**

**A Herd of Elephants is Sometimes Called a Memory**

*for A, who once alleged I remember too much of him*

If our knowing of each other  
were an earthly thing, it would be

dappled elephant hide,  
ancient pachyderm's skin

stretched taut across  
mud-cured foot pads

to receive tiny seismic  
seizures like tender pen-taps—

calls to rejoin the herd  
so low, they rumble

unheard past any human. I know  
that your marriage is dying. I wish

to have language strong enough  
to carve away the sorrow,

to mourn together and so low  
that only we can hear it.

[previously published in Chang's chapbook *Animal Nocturne*, 2018]

## Sighting the Rare Suburban Hyena

One afterlight car ride in my childhood,  
we passed a roughened, mangy beast—  
an apparition loosely draped in dog's clothing.

My mother, who was driving  
and had a better view of the world,  
declared our specimen "hyena."

I knew that wasn't right,  
but she believed, hunted radio news  
of cavorting zoo animals,

circus fugitives. The absence  
of easy explanation cooked  
a marrow-filled bone for storytelling.

If I brush that afternoon one way,  
I see wildness stepping through  
a clawed tear in our routine—

intentional, once she chose the path  
that drove us there, recklessly  
opposing her parents'

proffered name for me: "mongrel."  
That wildness exposed  
furtive ways of being in the world

a mother might not understand,  
since the miracle of urban coyotes  
is that they exist at all.



If I brush this scene back the other way,  
the fine hairs of my hackles curl.  
So much of my youth

wrongly christened,  
and my mother, steering,  
giving name to only her experience.

[previously published in Chang's chapbook *Animal Nocturne*, 2018]

---

Liz Chang was 2012 Montgomery County Poet Laureate in Pennsylvania. Her 2018 chapbook *Animal Nocturne* is available from Moonstone Press. Chang's poems have appeared in *Verse Daily*, *Rock & Sling*, *Origins Journal*, *Breakwater Review* and *Stoneboat Literary Journal*, among others. Her translations from French appeared in *The Adirondack Review*. She is the Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at Moravian University.

# Teresa Mei Chuc

## Poet Laureate Altadena, California 2018 to 2020

### Names

I am tired of having five different names;  
Having to change them when I enter

A new country or take on a new life. My  
First name is my truest, I suppose, but I

Never use it and nobody calls me by this Vietnamese  
Name though it is on my birth certificate –

Tue My Chuc. It makes the sound of a twang of a  
String pulled. My parents tell me my name in Cantonese

is Chuc Mei Wai. Three soft bird chirps and they call  
me Ah Wai. Shortly after I moved to the U.S., I became

Teresa My Chuc, then Teresa Mei Chuc. “Teresa” is the sound  
Water makes when one is washing one’s hands. After my first

Marriage, my name was Teresa Chuc Prokopiev.  
After my second marriage, my name was Teresa Chuc Dowell.

Now I am back to Teresa Mei Chuc, but I want to go way back.  
Reclaim that name once given and lost so quickly in its attempt

to become someone that would fit in. Who is Tue My Chuc?  
I don't really know. I was never really her and her birthday

on March 16, I never celebrate because it's not my real birthday  
though it is on my birth certificate. My birthday is on January 26,

really, but I have to pretend that it's on March 16  
because my mother was late registering me after the war.

Or it's in December, the date changing every year according to  
the lunar calendar – this is the one my parents celebrate

because it's my Chinese birthday. All these names  
and birthdays make me dizzy. Sometimes I just don't feel like a

Teresa anymore; Tue (pronounced Twe) isn't so embarrassing.  
A fruit learns to love its juice. Anyways, I'd like to be string...

resonating. Pulled back tensely like a bow

Then reverberate in the arrow's release straight for the heart.

“Names” appears in *Keeper of the Winds* (Foothills Publishing, 2014)

---

Former Poet Laureate Editor-in-Chief of Altadena, California (2018 to 2020), Teresa Mei Chuc is the author of three full-length collections of poetry, *Red Thread* (Fithian Press, 2012), *Keeper of the Winds* (FootHills Publishing, 2014) and *Invisible Light* (Many Voices Press, 2018). She was born in Saigon, Vietnam and immigrated to the U.S. under political asylum with her mother and brother shortly after the Vietnam War while her father remained in a Vietcong "reeducation" prison camp for nine years. Her poetry appears in journals such as *Consequence Magazine*, *EarthSpeak Magazine*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Rattle* and in anthologies such as *New Poets of the American West* (Many Voices Press, 2010), *With Our Eyes Wide Open: Poems of the New American Century* (West End Press, 2014), *Truth to Power* (Cutthroat, 2017), *Inheriting the War: Poetry and Prose by Descendants of Vietnam Veterans and Refugees* (W.W. Norton, 2017) and *California Fire & Water: A Climate Crisis Anthology* (Story Street Press, 2020). Teresa is a graduate of the Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing program (Poetry) at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont and teaches literature and writing at a public high school in Los Angeles.

Lorraine Conlin

*Nassau County Poet Laureate Emeritus 2015-2017*

**First Stroking**

How will you pose me  
a warm intimate scene  
evocative, demure,  
silk robed or nude  
lying on a bed of desire  
between candlelight and dawn

Will you capture the  
small curves of my back  
nubile breasts,  
my Rubenesque belly

Stroke me with charcoals  
portray feelings of shape  
a sculptural quality,  
statuesque

Will you shade me with pastels  
give me lean expressive lines  
soft tones, solid shading  
stroke shadows across my body  
hatched reflections, rugged realism

or touch my form with sensuous lines  
until I come to life

Will I be all you want me to be, *Mon Artiste*  
*Mon Amour*

## **We Never Made It to Nova Scotia**

Extreme weather cancelled the Blue Nose ferry,  
washed out roads across the of Bay of Fundy  
altering his well-planned journey,  
the maiden voyage in our 1970 VW camper.

I mapped out a new destination  
chose only blue roads,  
those less-traveled back roads,  
local highways and byways.

Storm warnings overnight at the wilderness campground,  
arguing in the morning where to go for breakfast,  
his choice a bakery nearby.  
He went in to get coffee and sweet rolls  
I fled across the rocky bluff  
to view the Bay from the smooth shore.

As I firmly planted my bare feet in the shifting sand  
I was surrounded by remains of the outgoing tide,  
tiny creatures and crustaceans stranded in crevices.

Now an incoming tide changing everything again  
leaving no trace of what was  
reached my knees swiftly and silently  
in just minutes.

In the vastness of sea, sky and shrinking shore  
I began to drown in tininess  
wondering where I would go from here.

---

Lorraine Conlin is the Nassau County Poet Laureate Emeritus (2015-2017) Vice-president of the NCPLS and Events Coordinator for PPA. She hosts weekly Zoom poetry workshops poems have been published nationally and internationally in anthologies and literary reviews.



Paula Curci

*Nassau County, New York Poet Laureate 2022-2024*

**I Choose NOW**

I choose NOW!  
Where my voice can speak without a fine.  
Wherever, my body is still all mine.  
Where I can travel in my own car.  
Wherever, the Sentiments are.

I choose this moment!  
Because yesterday we had no voice,  
and woman starved to vote for choice,  
and NOW our tomorrow can be taken from us.

I choose NOW!  
Where I am not done yet.  
Wherever, I can roam without a threat.  
Where I can share equal space.  
Wherever, I can plead our case.

I choose to be here,  
but fear, that forevermore  
the world before  
will become now,  
before our eyes, somehow.

When, is the end of NOW?  
The minute we feel that feeling  
thinking we've broken the glass ceiling  
only to find - we've fallen through the floor  
• after the dance.

---

Paula Curci is the Nassau County Poet Laureate (2022-2024). She produces Calliope's Corner - The Place Where Poets and Songwriters Meet & What's the Buzz ® on WRHU.ORG. She co-founded The Acoustic Poets Network™ and is a retired counselor. Her Posics™ style poetry is found on streaming services.

Lori Desrosiers

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States, 2016-2017*

**All we need is music**

I try to be still  
but my body won't let me.  
First my shoulders  
shimmy to the beat  
then my arms let go  
the chair and my hips  
propel me to movement  
on a rug, a supermarket aisle  
or a dance floor.

Doesn't matter  
what kind of music,  
Latin, Zydeco, R & B,  
all of us move together  
every race, religion,  
political affiliation  
You can't tell  
what's on our minds  
when bodies are in motion,  
when the drums  
carry us away.

The beat  
is our deepest instinct.  
To change the world,  
all we need is music, really.

## City People

We used to walk the streets of love, find bodies couched in sunless basements and ratty lofts, there in the city of the 1950's when I was a small child and the incinerators burned day and night, blackening socks and starched white shirts of men with families on their way to work. Downtown the bums on the bowery pissed in the same cobblestoned streets where Whitman used to walk, and the warehouses still spewed smoke, the workers on Wall Street smoked all day and the buildings seethed with cigarette ash and sweat. In alleyways sex workers and lovers snuck a kiss or a fuck, vendors laid out blankets along the dirty sidewalks, hawking hats, bangles and worthless watches to tourists who would spend the day looking up at the skyscrapers. One day around 1968 I went to Chelsea and stood looking up on purpose, watched while first one at a time, then in small groups, people looked up. I left them there, heads craning to see nothing of significance, just the October sky and overhangs of ornate stone, the wrought iron balconies of downtown brownstones.

---

Lori Desrosiers' books are *The Philosopher's Daughter*, Salmon Poetry, 2013, *Sometimes I Hear the Clock Speak*, Salmon Poetry, 2016 and *Keeping Planes in the Air*, Salmon 2020. Two chapbooks, *Inner Sky* and *typing with e.e. cummings*, are from Glass Lyre Press. Poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Publisher of *Naugatuck River Review*, a journal of narrative poetry and *Wordpeace.co*, an online literary journal of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and art in response to world events. United States Beat Poet Laureate 2016-2017.

William F. DeVault

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2017*

**Xochiquetzal**

your breath is intoxicating evidence that you are alive  
and as it quickens it amplifies life to a sacred mystery  
to be untangled as we tangle like writhing lithe liars  
speaking the truth only with flesh and inner spirits  
released in the task caskets of our transfigurations.  
veils sail away in a shower of flowers, butterflies  
and the manifold marigolds strewn in your path.

ruby blue and true, blood floods and courses,  
forces we cannot deny try as we might to fight the surrender,  
pretender to a false immodesty. transcendent precedents  
swept from the table as soon as we are able  
to catch our breaths and affirm our deaths  
in a celebration of a thickening taste we placed  
like communion wafers of an intimate religion.

leave no stone unturned, our band and brand is burned  
into the cracked and sacked altars stacked high in our inquiry,  
our diet of wyrms wherein we throw down our theocraticide  
ride our preferred angels into the heavens  
on until morning becomes another charade parade  
of the pretense of civilization we shed last night.

---

William F. DeVault is the author of over 32,000 poems extant (he throws away the ones he does not like) and was called “the Romantic Poet of the Internet” by Yahoo! in 1996 as well as being the US National Beat Poet Laureate for 2017-2018. He has currently 28 books to his credit, including his massive *The Compleat Panther Cycles* (643 poems), numerous anthologies, and 5 CDs of his performances, as well as being occasional lyricist for European industrial artist Ophidian. He tours the United States from Boston to Los Angeles, from New Orleans to Detroit. In 2015 he was authorized to record Allen Ginsberg’s legendary “Howl” by Ginsberg’s estate, which can be found in his podcast for August 16, 2015. He has 2 ex-wives and three magnificent children.

Rosemarie Dombrowski

*Phoenix, Arizona, Inaugural Poet Laureate*

**Prison Blues**

Twenty weeks later  
and I've lost another man.

The train cars are poems  
moving across the delta.

I can't stop thinking  
about the fact that  
7 out of 1000 people  
are incarcerated.

I can't stop loving them  
despite the risk.



## **Breast Cancer Blues**

What physical bodies  
have we ever really owned,  
land or otherwise?

My friend's sister is dead.  
My friend's breasts have been  
sliced from her body.  
The poets write poems  
on the eve of lumpectomies,  
in the hours following surgery,  
in the days after returning to work.

I skip my mammogram  
for the twelfth time  
because radiation is a plague  
and I'd rather meditate.

---

Rosemarie Dombrowski (RD) is the inaugural Poet Laureate of Phoenix, AZ, the founding editor of rinky dink press (a publisher of micro-poetry collections), and the founding director of Revisionary Arts, a nonprofit that facilitates therapeutic poetry workshops for vulnerable populations and the community at large. RD has published three collections of poetry to date and was the winner of the 2017 Split Rock Review chapbook competition. She's the recipient of an Arts Hero award (2017), a Fellowship from the Academy of American Poets (2020), a Great 48 award (*Phoenix Magazine*, 2020), and the Arizona Humanities Outstanding Speaker Award (2022). In April 2022, she gave a TEDx talk entitled "The Medicinal Power of Poetry." Currently, she's an Assistant Professor of Practice at U of A Biomedical (Phoenix) and a Principal Lecturer at Arizona State University, where she specializes in medical humanism/medical poetry, literature of the marginalized, and journal editing/production.

Carlos Raúl Dufflar

*New York City, Beat Poet Laureate, 2020-2022*

**Sitting Besides the Summit**

The footpath into the woods  
The trees were tall as I pass  
besides tree trunks that have fallen  
when the wind was speaking  
The air is sweet and not far but near  
The grass is green  
And embracing Pachamama  
The sounds of life of sunshine beams  
While the lake lays still  
Far below the chipmunks  
run wild over the rocks  
and the squirrels are not far behind  
With laughter and a smile  
A space which is a hidden beauty  
Sunflowers are growing wild  
so close to you  
while the water drops and flows  
from the waterfall  
And today on this hour  
We must remember Jimi Hendrix  
and that funky guitar  
Stone Free 52 years ago  
from the Puget Sound  
from a Band of Gypsies

The Beat Poet waits for the sunlight  
To shine at every corner  
Laying beneath Inti is a native sun

---

Carlos Raúl Dufflar is the New York City Beat Poet Laureate 2020-2022. He is a member of the Academy of American Poets and the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore.

Peter V. Dugan

*Nassau County, New York, Poet Laureate 2017-2019*

**Beatification**

I am one of those lost souls, the last generation destroyed by madness, pent-up frustration and teenage angst. I sauntered down sleepy suburban streets to hang out at strip-malls, shopping centers, burger joints, and pizza parlors. Bar hopping, bike riding and park jumping from Ally Pond to Forest Park just looking for a buzz or something better to do. I made a great escape into the city. Shuffled down to Union Square got high, caught rock & roll shows at the Palladium, and drank at Max's Kansas City. I became a barbarian on barbiturates, drowning in shots of bourbon and bottles of beer, stumbling down the road to Washington Square. Dealing with the cock-slingers, cocksuckers, and mother-fuckers who sell snow to Eskimos. Popping pills for thrills, coke, crack, smoke and smack, mounted the great white horse a black knight chasing the dragon for nights on end. With an unconditional surrender, I gave up the quest to nowhere and found serenity on St Marks Place. A sense of spirituality tempered by reality, science and psychology, shunned organized religion, a mixture of fact, fiction and fantasy, pseudo-intellectual mythology that passes as absolute truth. I trucked on down to W 12<sup>th</sup> Street, spent a couple of years at my old school learning something new. Reading, writing and listening evoked my words to flow on to paper, stories and tales, views and vistas, prose and poetry. Words became my salvation, a metamorphosis of

being. Now I stand on the corner of Joey Ramone Place down the block and across from the Bowery Poetry Club. CBGBs is gone, replaced by a clothing store. Joey is rolling over in his grave or is he laughing on how things have changed, but remain the same. I cross the street, notice my name scrawled on the chalkboard outside the Poetry Club, a feature for the Beat Hour. Inside the picture of Allen Ginsberg with bushy black hair, beard, glasses and Uncle Sam top hat looks down smiling. It's all cool and I'm finally here.

## **Modern Americana**

This is the land of freedom of choice:  
Coke or Pepsi,  
light beer or dark,  
less filling, tastes great,  
Republican or Democrat,  
horse manure, cow manure,  
different crap,  
same smell.

America is now a pie  
divided into eight slices,  
but, there are twelve at the table,  
and three of them want seconds.

It's all a game.  
George and Martha never had a son.  
Truth and illusion;  
it doesn't make a difference,  
we still sit in the waiting room  
expecting delivery.

Money is the new Messiah,  
greed is the national creed,  
"In G-O-D (gold, oil & dollars) we trust,"  
but, credit cards are accepted.  
The government of the people  
has been bought and sold.  
It's strictly business,  
nothing personal.

The heart of America  
stopped beating,  
the blood clotted,  
no longer red,  
now medi-ochre,  
and pumped  
by the pacemaker  
of public opinion.

And still there are those that believe  
that the only real American patriots  
are true blue and white  
or least act white,  
and all the stars  
are in Hollywood.

---

Peter V. Dugan is former Nassau County Poet Laureate, NY (2017-19). He has published seven collections of poetry and co-edited four poetry anthologies. He has many awards most notably, being twice nominated for Pushcart Prizes 2016 for his poems: *Jesus Never Rode a Harley & Mile 0*, an Honorable Mention by The American Academy of Poets, for *Hey Bobby* (1994), The North Sea Poetry Scene Service Award (2008), and The Long Island Bards Mentor Award (2014). He has been a poetry judge for Long Island Fair 2019 and a regional judge for Poets Out Loud 2018-19-20. Mr. Dugan hosts the Celebrate Poetry reading series at Oceanside Library, Oceanside NY and is the co-founder of Words With Wings Press a non-profit poetry publishing company.



Joe Engel

*Kenosha, Wisconsin, Poet Laureate*

**Your Turn**

Light catches the coins on the floor  
by the vending machines  
in the corridor, don't look around  
before you take them, before you slide them  
down the dark throat of your pocket.

Remember, when the slot machine  
swallows them, they were not yours.  
If you win, it's not money earned.  
It's just gold dust, deserved.  
Call your wallet pollinated.

This might be your day.  
Rewarded now for how you don't  
betray peoples secrets,  
or ever call in sick. Trust me,  
we see your smile

as the man at the dice table  
wearing the Yankees hat loses a grand.  
That's okay. And listen, on your lazy  
ride home, do not gape at the sight  
of someone's car burning.

Pass the smoke pluming from rubber  
hoses without looking; those flames  
want more than air and night. Do not  
slow to watch like everyone else.  
Who knows what luck is.

When you arrive at your flat  
by the harbor and see  
your land lord's half sunk dinghy,  
remember the ten dollar bill  
you almost chased into January waves;

how you could see it, twenty yards out  
riding a slab of ice, rising and falling,  
up and down in the water, and think,  
before you call about the boat,  
how you had to let it go.

---

Joe Engel is currently the Kenosha, WI poet laureate. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin La Crosse with a bachelors degree in English. He works as a custodian at Gateway Technical College so he can pay his student loans among other things. He has been writing most of his life and has learned to leap back and forth between fiction and verse. He is extremely honored to represent his city and county as poet laureate. Kenosha has seen recent strife and adversity, like much of the U.S. in 2020. He believes that anything can be turned into poetry. And believes that is necessary.

Katherine Hahn Falk

*Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate 2017*

### **Hungry Ghosts**

Ghosts may not be mentioned around Lily.  
She is emphatic about that. She does not want to know  
about anything she can't see.

After my friend Laurie's mother died,  
her Tibetan Buddhist brother-in-law, Kunga,  
said he was cooking for her mother so Laurie asked

"why? She's dead." "Ghosts get hungry too", he said.  
Thankfully, every Buddhist Temple sets a place at the table  
for the Hungry Ghost. Are there enough places

set for the number of ghosts? Do they share the offerings?  
How much food and drink do ghosts want or need?  
How do they use it? Where does it go? Do they drink tea?

I will cook for you if you go first. Day and night.  
I will say the mantra three times, sit at the table with you  
in case you're there during that bardo stage,

in between the day you leave your body  
and when you go to begin your next life 49 days later.  
Buddhist monks know where a person's next life will be.

They told Laurie that her mother would be the middle boy in a family of three sons. It's said people choose parents by the lessons they each need to learn.

Once only, in a big silent voice, I issued an invitation, "Calling all souls. If there is a soul out there that needs a body, come on in" . . . and Lily did.

## **For You**

I cover my eyes with my right arm, a log  
across water, a path to look for you,

in clear darkness that calms my breath,  
that in its evenness shimmers.

Almost instantaneously, you appear  
with an impish smile and classic white garb.

You're in a horizontal posture  
not dissimilar to your position in the body bag

I asked be opened beyond the fraction of your face  
they thought would do, your handsome face,

your beautiful hair, but your whole self,  
lying there beyond sleep.

With my arm removed from its stance across  
my eyes and us together back in the morgue, I cannot

help but wail in our bed, wail after you in the abyss  
till I retreat back to your angel self, your wink,

the pucker of your lips as if for a camera  
to say, "Come ahead, remember this."

Darkness overlaid with mottled threads of white film:  
Your image no longer there. Your healthy hands

the way they looked in life now only in my mind (as I stress  
and fight the image of your right hand after death),

your hands that could do almost anything  
measure, construct, repair, doggedly, determinedly,

lovingly play guitar, knowingly lovingly play me.  
I stand on a speck of space dust and look out on the vastness,

moments, seeming caverns, space refuge for you,  
for you to suddenly re-appear.

---

Katherine Hahn Falk's poems have been recognized through publications and awards including an upcoming book, (Moonstone Press, 2021) and event commissions. She was Pennsylvania Poet Laureate for Bucks County in 2017. Recently, Katherine was one of four poets for *Radical Freedom: Poets on the Life and Work of H.D.* and she was an editor for *Fire Up The Poems*, an anthology of poetry prompts for HS teachers. Her work is also featured in the just published anthology, *Carry Us To The Next Well*. She loves working with students on their poetry.

Sandra Feen

*Ohio Beat Poet Laureate 2022-2024*

**Not Buried**

A tree thrives despite its narrow space  
between the gray wooden fence, ending  
the square purse of a backyard  
on Woodette Road, and the still  
bright-ugly chain link manacle  
pocketing Columbus's new I-270.

A girl crouches under the tree in a spot  
just large enough for ten-year old legs to fold,  
knees propping a deep rust diary,  
back pressed against metalwork.

She writes, brushes long braids that interrupt her  
blue-lined small page, loves the outdoor secrecy  
of a passion already unyielding, in this  
her fourth-grade year.

Every sense of her lives, breathes scrupulous:  
she is aware and not bothered by sticky skin,  
a lady bug on forefinger, bees prompting.

She thinks she hears the sudden creak  
of the back-screen door,  
peers through her pretend barricade; a mother's  
auburn head strains to see hers.

The mother calls for her. She must drop

this narrow-expansive corner of day  
and unravel braids, make tight pin curls  
wear purple gingham to sister's play.  
She buries diary in a shallow grave  
eager to retrieve it the next morning, drink  
now quick momentum of family.

She knows she is different, so young  
to relish writing as gift and enjoy  
a sister's evening art.  
This canvas paints contentment, but a flash  
of dismal sky foreshadows.  
She looks back at treasure's ghost under maple,  
wistfully knows soul already too well,  
wonders about decades of disruptions ahead--  
ones that will not foster.  
She reruns her course, climbs quick  
over the intractable fence,  
squeezes back to spot still word-warm,  
erases leaves, clumps of dirt from  
a vinyl cover marked with a red "top secret" sticker  
and burgundy peace signs.  
It could rain overnight.

---

Retired teacher Sandra Feen is a photographer and the 2022-2024 Ohio Beat Poet Laureate. She won *Heavy Feather Review's* 2021 Zachary Doss Friends in Letters Fellowship for her collaborative work with Rikki Santer, titled *Emotion Bus*. She has published three books: *Evidence of Starving*, *Meat and Bone*, and *Fragile Capacities: School Poems*. *Fragile Capacities: School Poems* was nominated for an Ohioana Book Award, and the poem "Palms Monday," a Pushcart Prize.



Doris Ferleger

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate

**Love Letter from Time**

I love the word *emergency*.

Its redness, its lack of eventuality, its flash  
and crime. Its brothers—burn and rope.

I love the way humans startle,  
the jerk back of the body, the lunge forward.  
No sideways movements

come with emergency. No rhythmic beat or brush  
of drum begins it.

Always the rigid riot.

Sometimes a pall of silence  
covers the body  
so it looks like the silvery sheet,

tissue light, tissue thin, is far less  
than volcanic.

*Emergency—*

I like the evenness of its four syllables,  
how it takes too long  
to say it. By the time you say fire,

the house is rubble.

By the time you say smoke,  
the sparrow, the tit-willow—

are hollowed out, featherless.

## Crusts of Our Afflictions

We agree to meet on the footbridge  
after you've run and sweated for miles.

You place on your head  
the sky-blue *kipa* I've stolen

from synagogue this morning  
and the two of us tear,

into uneven bits,  
the ritual bread I've brought,

toss into the creek the crusts  
of our afflictions,

a year's worth  
of what some call sins.

Creek waters course, carry  
our regrets downstream

over sticks and stones.  
(I used to worry as a child

the fish might eat my sins  
and die.)

We recite the prayer of penance  
we each know, heart by heart,

year by year. This year you close

your amber eyes for a long time,

then look intently into mine—your deepest way  
of speaking

sorrow for the slight  
dent in the hood

over the stove that doesn't look like much—  
doesn't resemble a history—

except sometimes  
when the night winds blow terribly,

and moonlight leaks between roof planks,  
and a thousand crickets call—

I imagine we live in a ruined house.  
Afraid I have said or done one too many

*mother things*  
that have dented your heart.

As a child you used to sing:  
*Sticks and stones*

*may break my bones, but words*  
*will always hurt me.*

Today, on the footbridge  
on the first day of the Jewish New Year,

you say *September*

*is a grieving month,*

and I say perhaps it is  
grief that causes all discord—

grief left ungrieved—  
or is it a fear

of weeping—  
or a shame

of needing  
to know we are loved?

---

Doris Ferleger, former poet laureate of Montgomery County, and winner of the *New Letters Poetry Prize*, *Songs of Eretz Poetry Prize*, *New Millennium Poetry Prize*, and the *AROH Creative Non-Fiction Prize*, among others, is the author of three full volumes of poetry, *Big Silences in a Year of Rain*, (finalist for the *Alice James Books Beatrice Hawley Award*), *As the Moon Has Breath*, and *Leavened*, and a chapbook entitled *When You Become Snow*. Her work has been published in numerous journals including *Cimarron Review*, *L.A. Review*, and *Poet Lore*. Alik Barnestone writes of her work: *Ferleger's memorable poems keep singing with their insistent beauty.*

Alice B Fogel

*New Hampshire Poet Laureate 2014-2019*

**The flowering**

begins with fern and fungi      slow-growing palms  
with gymnosperms spread

flowerless over the earth      begins  
with the needle      fir spike      gingko      a seed

borne naked on cone scales and hatched  
like the eggs of a lizard or bird      the flowering begins

long after the exoskeletons of conifers  
the armor of spruce and yew

cedar and juniper      begins  
beyond eons of bristlecone pine present

before Siddhartha      tall before Jesus or Muhammed  
through millennia      evergreen      wombless

grew nearly eternal without flowers      for still none  
scented or surprised shadows under redwood      liana

or ephedra      yet somehow the flower  
by chance or by design did arrive and then the holy ones

said *this is beauty for beholding*            *a practice*  
*a better self to contemplate like a navel*            said

*we must be like this lily*    *neither toil nor spin*    *we must be*  
*a like becoming from within*

and so they beheld and became and saw in the flower pure  
being without purpose

even young Buddha in wonder misunderstood  
the flower            cupped with his small fingers like stems

magnolia petals in his palm and said *peace*            and *love*  
and in the sun the flower suffered

fools and went on opening            saying nothing  
men could hear            but the whole world

after the flowering began  
shifted

while pollen sifted over oceans to land  
and xylem and phloem

fluted their solar and soiled blood            and sporophytes  
from new ovaries of apple            hibiscus            and papaya

in their amniotic fluid like the embryos of mothered  
mammals who now finally would flourish from this food

blew across distances on birdwing  
and water and wind            pivotal            calamitous

blossoming fomented its revolution of fruit  
tea and spices and opium and from these the crucial root

of desire began to grow like a rose  
that is how it begins

the true bloom of human endeavor      wistfulness      war  
trade and invasion      all civilization      and because

what flowers dies      the flowering  
is how we began      to end

[previously appeared in Green Mountains Review and in Archaeopteryx]



## Georgic

“This is what the soil teaches: If you want to be remembered, give yourself away.”

—William Bryant Logan, *Dirt*

Soil is—romantically or not, as you wish—stardust. Everything on earth is stardust. Earth itself is spun stardust, and all dirt is an immigrant. Its flotation through the universe traces the shapes of the forcefields—gravitational, magnetic, kinetic—sphere, spiral, web—dust is taken by. First—the rains, the sea, salt, minerals. Then bacteria, color—then fungi and molds crusting into a skin—envelopes of land and life containing sea, setting creatures free. Dirt performs its own forces too: in the delta, the flocculated benthic soils seethe in a teaspoon with a greater diversity of organisms—more than 7 billion—than people number here on earth. These and the land growing food for the masses store 3 times the carbon dioxide than the atmosphere can. Dirt is communal. Dirt is the soul and the body of the earth. Soil is global: winds carry loess upward and drop it 1000 miles away. Africa moves to South America, Israel to Iran. Soil turns prairie into forest, writing its name in the four elements on its profile and in its substrates and transforms material into organic life and death. Nowhere is there not the teeming, industrious, symbiotic machinations of the living—or the finished dead, the buried bodies—collaged from decay and the stillness that descends to dirt. Made of maple leaves, of antelope bones, of your house one day, of you—dirt will organize itself into a memorial, a source, alluvium, strata. Volcanoes spewed minerals in lava and ash

to the surface—and that was more dust. Glaciers  
migrating and melting powdered mountainsides—more dust.  
And now after this dust of so much has decomposed for millenia,  
we step over its buried treasure, breathing in  
the timeless perfume of cosmic rock and stars. When it loses  
the forest, the broken structure of silt and clay washes away  
in one mere human lifetime. Interplanetary, hospitable, willing—  
if only we were too—hundreds of millions of acres  
of horizon—dirt—deep or shallow—could  
store our poison and alchemize it into layers of lime  
that support themselves, and us, before we are dust that flies, falls,  
surrenders and finally gives ourselves away.

---

Alice B Fogel was New Hampshire poet laureate from 2014 through 2019. She is the author of 5 poetry collections, including *A Doubtful House; Interval: Poems Based on Bach's "Goldberg Variations"* which won the Nicholas Schaffner Award for Music in Literature and the New Hampshire Literary Award; and *Be That Empty*, a national bestseller. Another poetry book, *Nothing But*, inspired by Abstract Expressionist art, is forthcoming in fall of 2021, and she is also the author of *Strange Terrain*, a guide to appreciating poetry without necessarily “getting” it. As poet laureate, Alice ran a number of programs, worked with immigrants and refugees, edited an anthology of NH poets' writings, and initiated a youth poet laureate position. Among other awards, Alice has been given a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and a residency at the Carl Sandburg National Historic Site, and her poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry* and *Best of the Web*. Based in Walpole, NH, she teaches reading and writing workshops in a wide range of areas, works one-on-one with students with learning differences at Landmark College, and hikes mountains whenever possible.

Rich Follett

*Poet Laureate of Strasburg, Virginia*

**Sonnet I**

From time to time, 'tis human to reflect  
On years gone by, and which we might relive,  
Sweet reminiscence, pure and circumspect  
Entreats of Time what Time will never give:  
But when I contemplate the years we've shared,  
There's not one treasured hour I would repeat,  
Each moment is a perfect jewel most rare,  
Without which life could never be replete:  
Imagined riches gained by cheating age  
Would pale, compared to these—our golden years—  
Our loving book, embossed on every page  
With wrinkles, silver'd hair, and conquered fears:  
Seen thus, remembered youth a folly seems—  
Tomorrows spent with you are all my dreams.

## Generations

My grandfather was born in gaslight,  
Forged boyhood dreams on the Wright Brothers' flight,  
Flew a Sopwith Camel in World War I,  
Graduated from Princeton under incandescent lights,  
And died a wealthy man three weeks shy of his one-hundred-and-first birthday,  
Having wisely invested in a startup company called International Business Machines  
Some thirty years before.

My father was born at the start of The Great Depression,  
Watched in awe-turned-to-horror as the Hindenburg fell from the sky in flames,  
Listened in disbelief to reports of Hiroshima and Nagasaki  
On a crystal radio he built from a kit as a boy  
(he saved and mailed box tops to claim the treasure),  
Lived for a chance to tell the story of talking his mother-in-law into buying a color TV  
When she was convinced that it would cause her to go blind,  
Taught himself to write code to customize his desktop Dell,  
Marveled at the world-wide web,  
And kept his beloved flip-phone close at hand  
Long after the rest of the world had gone digital.

In the third grade, I went on a field trip with my classmates  
To a local airport control tower, where we watched the controllers at work.  
Later, we were led to the basement, where we saw twelve enormous blue boxes.  
We had to wear earphones to protect ourselves from the roar and  
The room was kept at a constant fifty-five degrees  
To keep the supercomputers from overheating.

Today I own an iPhone, roughly three inches by four,  
Which exceeds by five the capacity  
Of those twelve childhood blue monoliths taken together.  
Today, I teach adolescents who have never known a day of life without  
Personal digital technology in the palm of their hand.

Scientists have determined that the human eyeball  
Grows slightly larger with each successive generation.  
Humans will have eyes the size of golf balls  
One hundred thousand years from now!  
That, I will never see, but still I am amazed:  
at the crossroads of technology and anatomy,  
We are evolving every time we check our e-mail.

Darwin meets the Digital Age—  
Hologram at eleven.

---

Rich Follett is the Poet Laureate of Strasburg, VA. He has published four collections of poetry: *Responsorials* (2009), *Silence*, *Inhabited* (2011), and *Human &c.* (2013) through NeoPoesis Press, and an ekphrastic collection, *Photo-Ku* (2016) through NightWing Publications. Rich is featured in the Virginia Poets Database through ODU at <https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/virginiapoets>.

Chad Frame

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate Emeritus

**Feeding My Father Pudding While Watching *Bonanza***

All any relationship boils down to  
is *are you willing to do this for me*  
or *aren't you?* Hoss and tapioca

and what remains of your life all balanced  
precariously on a plastic spoon.  
Every week, the grown Cartwright boys learn

another life lesson from their father  
who has *seen some things* in his day, who knows  
*better*. And maybe all death really is

is gradual unlearning, the pudding  
crusting in your beard like infant spit-up.  
I have driven two hundred miles each day

for two weeks to be here to watch old shows,  
nurses prodding, your chest rising, falling,  
but these are the distances that matter—

spoon to mouth, screen to face, son to father,  
father to grave. Your thousand-yard stare's fixed  
vaguely on the wall-arm television

where Michael Landon is falling in love  
with Bonnie Bedelia, and we know  
(half-century old spoiler) that Hoss dies

offscreen because Dan Blocker dies offscreen  
from botched surgery. But it is enough  
to know the twangy theme is still playing,

galloping into and out of the room,  
even when the spoon scrapes an empty cup,  
even when we pull the sheets all the way up.

## Ghost in the Machine

Six months after you're gone, I'm out driving  
your red pickup to your house—both mine, now.

I feel butch in this, raised up and revving  
the V6 in this fortress of old smoke,

your ratty, zigzag Mexican blanket  
draped over the seats, resin sea turtle

staring wide-eyed from its perch on the dash,  
brown dreamcatcher swinging from the rearview.

I'm thankful to be on country backroads  
when the truck trundles to ten miles an hour

down from forty and won't speed up again  
no matter how hard I stomp the pedal.

Two frustrating miles of this, hazard lights  
clicking, my arm out the window waving

cars around—then all at once it speeds up  
and I'm squealing sixty around a curve

with no warning and the brakes won't listen  
and the horn's blaring and cows flicker by

in quick chiaroscuro and the trees  
are just green streaks and the brakes still won't *work*

and then I stop, quickly.      Or almost stop,



back to my ten-mile handicap, inching

forward, and then the speed pattern repeats  
in sequence—faster, slower, faster still.

I don't believe in ghosts, yet I still shout  
*Stop it, dad*, my eyes wide, my knuckles white

on the sticky wheel. Somehow, I make it  
to a dealership and lurch to a halt,

toss the bewildered valet boy the keys,  
muttering *I don't know what the hell's wrong*,

*but figure it out.* I'm across the street,  
fork scraping a figure eight in egg yolk

on a scratched Denny's plate when my phone rings.  
*This is weird*, a rough voice, no preamble.

It's the mechanic. *You ready for this?*  
I answer, *Ready as I'm going to be.*

Back in the shop, he shows me a photo  
on his phone—a mouse lodged in the throttle.

He's dead and wadded up, a dried hairball  
lodged in an aluminum ring, black streak

down his white back where the engine scorched him.  
*So, when it sped up or slowed down...?* I prompt.

*Yes*, he says. *That was the mouse opening*

*the throttle. You're lucky to be alive,*

*You're telling me, I ask him, that this mouse  
was driving my car? He laughs, the harsh grind*

*of a worn-out clutch. Pretty much, he says.  
He shares the photo, an urban legend*

*in the making. Get a load of this shit,  
other mechanics say. What are the odds?*

*Starting the truck, I think of a photo  
I remember someone sharing online*

*of a dead pike lodged in a tree, small birds  
nesting in its jaws. All we need in life*

*is a safe place to gnaw our way into,  
to curl up for warmth. We're only one chomp,*

*one burning engine, one telephone pole  
away from dying at any moment.*

*What does it say about me, I wonder,  
that I would rather believe in your ghost?*

Feeding My Father Pudding While Watching Bonanza was originally published in *Philadelphia Stories*.

Ghost in the Machine was originally published in *Schuylkill Valley Journal*.

---

Chad Frame's work appears in *Rattle*, *Pedestal*, *Rust+Moth*, *Barrelhouse*, and in other journals and anthologies, as well as on iTunes from the Library of Congress. He is the Director of the Montgomery County Poet Laureate Program and a Poet Laureate Emeritus of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, the Poetry Editor of *Ovunque Siamo: New Italian-American Writing*, a founding member of the No River Twice poetry improv and performance troupe, and the founder of the Caesura Poetry Festival and Retreat. His collection, *Little Black Book*, is forthcoming in 2022 from Finishing Line Press.

Michael S. Glaser

*Maryland Poet Laureate, 2004-2009*

**In the Hospital**

*(5 years old)*

I didn't want her to stick me  
and I was going to tell her

she couldn't give me that shot  
unless she'd put my toy train

back together again  
so that I could pretend

it was taking me away.

But she approached briskly,  
told me to roll over

pulled down my bottoms  
stuck me and left.

I didn't even whimper. I was too sad,  
thinking about my train

and how I didn't know a way  
to insist on myself in the world

didn't even know I could.

## Elemental Things

*"The world today is sick to its thin blood  
for elemental things."*

*. . . Henry Beston*

Gridlocked on the freeway, what I know  
is the future framed in a window  
that looks out at a sea of concrete  
and dangerous machines.

I move from here to there and back again,  
commute long distances, listen to the news,  
music, talk radio. I become impatient,  
angry, do foolish things

curse my fellow travelers  
commuting like me back and forth,  
back and forth  
week after week after week.

If someone were to knock on my door  
and invite me into elemental things –  
earth, air, fire before the hands  
water welling from the earth--

what would I answer?  
How would I know to respond?

---

Michael S. Glaser is a Professor Emeritus at St. Mary's College of Maryland and served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 2004-2009. The recipient of the Homer Dodge Endowed Award for Excellence in Teaching, the Columbia Merit Award for service to poetry, Loyola College's Andrew White Medal for contributions to the intellectual and artistic life in Maryland, he recently completed two terms as a member of the Board of Directors of the Maryland Humanities Council. Glaser has edited three anthologies of poetry, co-edited the Complete Poems of Lucille Clifton for BOA Editions, and published several award winning volumes of his own work, most recently Threshold of Light with Bright Hill Publishing (2019). More at [www.michaelsglaser.com](http://www.michaelsglaser.com)

Bill Glose

*Daily Press Poet Laureate, 2011*

**Harbinger**

On the welcome mat  
outside Dawn's back door,

her cat has been leaving gifts,  
Carolina wrens with broken necks,

moles with velvet fur  
and star-shaped noses,

now limp as a failed notion.  
She wonders what it means.

All I can offer is knowledge—  
my belief in science and formulas,

probabilities and statistics,  
tensile strengths of materials.

I can appreciate the beauty  
of a bell curve and the likelihood

of multiple outcomes, skills  
as unhelpful as unwanted.

So I hold the ladder in Dawn's foyer  
as she climbs its rubberized steps

to water plants on the ledge, their vines  
trailing down the faux brick façade,

my hands on her calves as I look up,  
hoping she won't fall.



## **Dark Matter**

Nights when black swallows the moon,  
gulps down crescent-bit remainders  
reflecting another continent's sun,

emptiness of space yawns into lungs  
like comets cresting event horizons,  
streaking tails stretching as they slip

into black holes. Copernicus once spurned  
religious doctrine to proclaim Earth  
spun round the sun, not the other way around.

Now he ponders whether dark matter exists,  
an all-encompassing power  
impossible to scoop up and study in a lab.

A kind of faith, the way minds fill in  
what eyes can't see or hands grasp.  
The heart believing that invisible energy

rules our world, spins its axis,  
pushes its orbit round a star  
we hope will rise again tomorrow.

---

A former paratrooper and combat veteran, Bill Glose writes poetry for catharsis and to pick at the many things he doesn't understand. His current work reflects upon the dread-filled months after his girlfriend was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer and the stunned relief when her tumor shrank and disappeared. The author of five poetry collections and hundreds of magazine articles, Glose was named the *Daily Press* Poet Laureate in 2011 and featured by NPR on *The Writer's Almanac* in 2017. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Rattle*, *Poet Lore*, *Narrative Magazine*, and *The Sun*. He maintains a page of helpful information for writers on his website at [www.billglose.com](http://www.billglose.com).

# Gabor G Gyukics

## *Lifetime Beat Poet Laureate, Hungary*

### **creating your own music**

the early troglodytes might have dispised the shindig of birds  
especially the cawing of crows  
to beguile the tedium of watching a blunt pointed angle  
they chopped wood after wood to pieces  
chased thousands of mantis and cockroach from the greens of their caves  
tried avoiding to hear the footfall of ghosts  
by entering someone elses's thoughts  
parted the meadow covered with fiddlehead ferns  
the surface of their long built path across the hills  
which was shaped by roots of every tree they had known  
around the crevasses of earth  
emitting particles of previously inhaled fog of density  
when the thunders slept  
they decorated long narrow sticks with tales heard from wild horses  
carved violins out of split wood  
glued the pieces together with resin  
used the intestines of a fallen once hungrywolf for strings  
lifted all to their shoulders  
and began to play

## volumetric analysis

the perfect pronunciation may seem unnatural  
in this ostensibly reprimanded formless morning cavalcade  
turning into a shapeless day of an awkward evening  
lost in a mute doorframe  
leading to a private cloud of a colorful sky  
full with goshawks calling each other  
pointing out the plummeting temperature  
in the surrounding cities where people  
live off the grid due to introvert  
blindsided authorities ostentatiously lurking around  
protected by their frozen shells  
without explicable reason that would make them  
taintless before the spirits  
and their invented gods  
with thin-lipped smiles

---

Gabor G Gyukics, Budapest born poet, translator, author of 11 books of poetry in five languages, 1 book of prose and 16 books of translations including *A Transparent Lion*, selected poetry of Attila József, *They'll Be Good for Seed*, an anthology of contemporary Hungarian poetry in English and an anthology of North American Indigenous poets in Hungarian titled *Medvefelhő a város felett*. He's writing poetry in English and Hungarian.

Alexandra "Zan" Delaine Hailey

Prince William County, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2014-2016

**Around the Yellow House**

The train passes—a heavy  
heart—beating down the tracks.

A U-turning rickety pick-up,  
matte black finish—brings dogs  
to a bark across the block.

Afternoon planes fly—streaking contrails,  
connecting cumulonimbus clouds.

A letter from an uncensored inmate  
was left in my mailbox while I was out  
walking a fuchsia petaled path,

where wild Dogwoods fade pink  
with the gold of magnolias,

leaving a perfume alley trail.

A squirrel bats its tail like a duster  
on a bookshelf—take in the day.

Open it slow—pocketknife blade  
soundly tearing a slit—*Dear Wonderful*.

Previously published in *The Northern Virginia Review: Volume No. 33-  
Spring 2019*.

**Vincent, *Out of Doors***

—Looking at *Bedroom in Arles*—

Away from Paris, farther south,  
the sun beats stronger tangerine  
strokes on white lilac—scoring  
*colours of the prism, veiled*

*in mist*; before western skies  
flower red. *I take revenge*  
*on my bedroom* with tilted brushes.  
A wicker-backed chair, unsittable

against the closed door embedded  
in royal washed plaster, facing  
its wooden partner, who sits patiently  
beneath an out-bent window,

lit by Number Two Chrome  
that brightens a small collection  
of polished sketches—bowed copper  
wire, dangling silhouettes—above

my periscoped bed frame, where  
sleep fractures vibrant oils  
on blank canvas. Think, more  
Japanese. *A single blade*

*of grass*; verdant concave, veins  
scaffolding a rooted spine. *Simple*  
*as buttoning your waistcoat.*  
Rays horizontal blue

brazing cobblestone streets,  
where violet figures pattern *a host*  
*of new subjects—night prowlers—*  
with indigo strolling shadows.

Italicized words borrowed from Vincent Van Gogh's letters written to his brother Theo.

---

Alexandra “Zan” Delaine Hailey was an inaugural poet laureate in Prince William County, VA, 2014-2016. Her poetry and nonfiction have been published in *The Northern Virginia Review*, *Written in Arlington*, *Prince William Living*, Virginia Commonwealth University's Focused Inquiry Textbook, *Bristow Beat*, and *New Departures: Write By The Rails Anthology*. Poetry is forthcoming in *The Poetry Society of Virginia Centennial Anthology* and in her chapbook, *Intrastate Lines*.



Debra Hall

*Racine, Wisconsin, Poet Laureate*

**Flight Risk**

I am a foreigner  
suspended at the terminal  
sent back to the embassy.  
To exchange all that I own  
at the turnstile  
to meet my agent.  
I count the holes that penetrate  
the glass between us  
try to pull her words through  
ask her to repeat what she said  
it will be awhile  
until you are free to leave this country.  
I am far from home  
the man on the corner sees my fear  
leers at me  
the man behind me  
at the deli  
asks for money  
He pinches my sleeve  
behind loaves of bread  
gestures his hand to mouth  
per favore, vorrei mangiare  
"please, I want to eat"  
I linger at the meat counter

The butcher tells the man  
lasciala da sola "leave her alone".  
I recount euros  
then raise my eyes to the urgent man  
let him know  
I will keep what's mine.

## **Un terremoto - An earthquake**

I touched down  
in a village  
high in the mountains  
of Costa Rica  
a place to remarry  
ears and tongue  
with a second  
language.  
My cheeks blushed  
when my host family told jokes.  
I stumbled to catch  
the punch line  
and laughed too late.  
My sister gave me  
the joke book so I  
could follow along.

Late at night an earthquake  
shook the house.  
My sister said  
it was just a temblor,  
an aftershock from a bigger quake  
in Panama  
el primero respiro de un niño tan genial como un terremoto  
"the first breath of a child as awesome as an earthquake"  
My sister said  
ten years ago  
a bigger quake hit the village.  
Part of the mountain  
came down like a  
dull, heavy knife

on people and animals  
asleep in houses and fields

After breakfast we walked  
to the place where  
the rock touched down  
a mile from the house.  
The rock now a leg  
bent at the knee  
like a large child skiing  
down the mountain.

We drove to a cloud forest  
with air as thin as thread.  
As we stood on the edge  
of a soft white sea,  
my sister said this was where the  
earthquake split the mother from her child  
for the breath of the village below...  
el primero respiro de un niño tan genial como un terremoto.

---

Debra Hall, a Wisconsin native who loves Romance languages, international travel and close proximity to Lake Michigan. During the school year, she is a high school Spanish teacher and during summer, she practices beach yoga with her dog, Salma. Her poems have been published in anthologies and magazines. She is currently working on a chapbook on resilience. She is the current Poet Laureate of Racine, Wisconsin.

Hazel Clayton Harrison

*Altadena Public Library, California, Poet Laureate, 2018-2020*

**Love Letter To My Dad**

Dear Dad,

From the day I was born, you were my steady rock, my mighty oak, my shining star. I remember how you used to carry me on your shoulders, and bounce me on your knee. Though you were tired after working all day at the mill, you'd climb the stairs at night to tell me a bedtime story.

Watching you get down on your knees at night, I learned how to pray. When I became a rebellious teenager and your rules I refused to obey you lectured me, but never gave up hope. I guess you knew that sooner or later I'd come to my senses. You'd always send me a check when I went away to school and needed help paying my college expenses.

I'll never forget the day your doctor delivered the sad news. He said you had only months to live. Unable to bear that thought of you leaving me behind, I cried my eyes out. But on your journey through the valley you taught me how to face death with humility, grace, and dignity.

You're gone now, but not a single day goes by that I don't thank God for giving me

you as a father. I'm still trying to follow in your footsteps. Sometimes I stumble and fall, but I still feel your hand reaching down to lift me up. I love you Dad.

And in my heart you'll always be my steady rock, my mighty oak, my shining star.

## **Bird Watching**

Have you noticed lately that not even birds  
congregate on phone wires anymore?

Remember how they used to flock together  
singing their wild love songs?

Now they perch in pairs standing feet a part  
It's been months since we were told to stay

inside and distance ourselves when taking walks  
The last time I saw my daughter I wanted to hug

her so badly. With tears in my eyes, I watched her  
walk away

No one knows when the quarantine will end  
No one knows when we'll be able to congregate  
in churches and schools

Or dance holding hands. In the meantime  
I'll look to the skies, keeping my eyes on the birds.

---

Hazel Clayton Harrison served as Poet Laureate, Community Events 2018-2020 for the Altadena Public Library. Her poetry has been widely anthologized in literary journals, including the *When the Virus Came Calling*, *Altadena Literary Review 2020*, *Coiled Serpent*, *Grandfathers*, and *A Rock Against the Wind*. She is the author of, *Down Freedom Road*, a collection of poetry and prose, and a memoir, *Crossing the River Ohio*. Her books are available at [jahlightmedia.com](http://jahlightmedia.com), [shabdapress.com](http://shabdapress.com) and Amazon.



Bill Hayden

*Norwalk, Connecticut, Poet Laureate 2019*

**Ferry Crossing**

Fog lapse grin throb  
put rich tones in store  
(I hear)  
Relentless motor needing  
Passage to wild steel acres of the gods'  
Own making music to the motor-laden ears  
(as if)  
Our voices needed underlines  
Of rotten churning pistons, so that  
An aging, flexible box of voice, could  
(deaf to its owner's ears)  
Reveal the tortuous trail that took it over,  
Confess to the chains its owner's body wore  
And count the weight of every suffered link  
That kept him near forgiving motor needs  
Precisely where the engine calls for oil,  
See how he forces out the gun  
Its sacred petrol tears  
See the thanks he's giving now  
To beautiful gears

---

Bill Hayden grew up on a fresh water lake in Northern Westchester County, New York and developed a love for and a rapport with nature while stretching his imagination and experiencing a feeling of being connected with the natural world. He started writing poems in his teenage years and pursued it some during college, but it wasn't until attending some poetry workshops in the Fairfield County, Connecticut area near his home in Norwalk that he began writing more regularly. He was the assistant editor of *The Little Apple*, a literary and arts magazine based in Norwalk, working along with fellow poet and editor Henry Lyman, they produced four issues over a 2 year period in the early 1980's. In April of 2019, Bill was selected to become Norwalk's 2nd Poet Laureate, following in the footsteps of Laurel Peterson, who held the position for 3 years. His twice-monthly Norwalk Poetry Workshop has been held since June 2019, first at the main branch of the Norwalk Public Library, and lately on Zoom since the pandemic hit. The group of poets have taken part in a couple of ekphrastic poetry writing workshops held at local art galleries, and members of the group have been featured on the online Poetry Page of the library. Bill has had a couple of his poems published in local anthologies in the past couple of years, and hopes to be able to host poetry readings in the future, featuring published poets from around the region.

Sam Hazo

*Pennsylvania Poet Laureate, Emeritus*

**No Option But One**

Whatever could have been  
or still might be comes  
without warning in our sleep.  
The days of pain that never  
happened happen.  
Dreams  
of bounty or misjudgment differ  
only in degree and outcome  
from nausea to guilt.  
Excess  
breeds regret.  
Soldiers  
rise legless or armless or both  
from ranks of identical graves,  
accusing, accusing, accusing.  
We struggle not to listen.  
Titles like Mr. President,  
Your Royal Highness,  
You Holiness, Your Honor,  
Your Grace or anyone who holds  
the office of citizen mean nothing.  
The bitter truth of nightmares

comes without our wiling it.  
Waking wiser or spared,  
our last defense is gratitude.

---

The author of books of poetry, fiction, essays and plays, Samuel Hazo is the founder and director of the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is also McAnulty Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus at Duquesne University, where he taught for forty-three years. From 1950 until 1957 he served in the United States Marine Corps, completing his tour as a captain. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree *magna cum laude* from the University of Notre Dame, a Master of Arts degree from Duquesne University and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh.

# Gladys Henderson

## Poet Laureate of Suffolk County 2017-2019

### Memorial Day at Short Beach

1.

Sun shakes its stars on the Nissequogue, a lone kayaker paddles against its current; the drop tide carries everything with it that does not resist. Marsh flats exposed appear as main lands of some foreign shore. Gulls fish their umber skins, the work easier now, that spring has arrived.

The kayaker has decided to surrender, his ample arms not strong enough to go against the tide. The river plays with his intent, but in time he glides in front of me, making swift his way towards shore.

*This morning a child's face on the news returns to haunt me,  
he screams in his father's arms as they race out of their village.*

2.

Above the light fixture an osprey nest, parents tending a hungry chick. Devoted guardians, I watch as they plunge into the currents, bodies under water, lungs without air, and rise up from the cobalt ribbon like Lazarus, talons clenching their offspring's meal.

*There were no other faces, only backs, legs, shoulders of stampeding humans, death mushrooms rising from the horizon, hysteria carrying all of them. No mother, perhaps she was ahead of them or maybe dead. His arms reached out; they reached out for me to save him.*

## Mourning Dove

She struggled off her legs, only to sit down again.  
Eyes closed, nodding off, mid afternoon,  
she wanted to sleep, to rest her head beneath  
her wing. He looked down at her, fluffed his neck,  
cooed his love, circled her sleeping body  
but she would not move. I rose from my rocker,  
left my voyeur's seat. Startled, the male flew  
into the pines, watched as I touched the female  
with my finger. I was God touching Adam,  
but I felt death in the stillness of her body, not life.

I returned to my chair not wanting to believe  
she was dead. The male rushed back to her side,  
began to preen her head. Around her still body  
he cooed and danced, feathers iridescent  
in the afternoon sun; his throat fluffed with air.  
I wanted it to be over, his attention to her so tender,  
painful for me to watch. I brought out my shovel  
from the shed, a plastic bag to guard my hand,  
and dug her grave. I saw him watch as I picked  
her up and placed her into the hole, covering  
her with earth. From out of the pines, the male  
flew to the loose soil above her grave. In gestures  
both foreign and familiar, he began to coo and dance  
above her body. Throat feathers extended from  
his song breath, beak pecking the earth in a frantic  
heat, he looked up at me as if to say,  
*What have you done? Where have you taken her?*

Having no answers, I spoke to him about you.  
How still you lay in your coffin, the painted rose  
on your cheeks making you look alive. How I touched  
your hand before they closed the lid, how I watched  
the doves in the trees while they shoveled dirt  
on your body, the sound unbearable to my ears,  
the vision of your covered face too agonizing.  
He circled the ground above her once more  
and with one long coooo, escaped into the late afternoon  
haze, the stillness of the air trembling with death.

---

Gladys Henderson's poems are widely published and have been featured on PBS Channel 21 in their production, *Shoreline Sonata*. Her work has appeared in several journals and anthologies including: *A Taste of Poetry*, *Avocet*, *Bard's Annual*, *Block Island Poetry Project*, *For Loving Precious Beast*, *Great Neck Plaza Public Poetry Project*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Long Island Sounds*, *Long Island Quarterly*, *Mason's Road*, *Oberon*, *Paumanok*, *Paumanok: Performance Poets Association Literary Review*, *Interwoven*, *Poetry Bay*, *Presence*, *Primal Sanities*, *Songs of Seasoned Women*, *String Poetry Journal*, *Suffolk County Poetry Review*, *The Light of City and Sea*, *Towards Forgiveness*, *Whispers and Shouts*, *Xanadu*, as well as many other publications. She was co-editor of the anthology *Leaves of me...* published by Early Lilacs Press, 2019. Nationally she was a finalist for the Paumanok Poetry Prize 2006, has received recognition in the Writer's Digest Poetry Competitions 2008, 2009, 2012. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, *Eclipse of Heaven* in 2009. She was named the Walt Whitman Birthplace Poet of the Year in 2010, and was chosen Poet Laureate of Suffolk County 2017-2019.



# Ngoma Hill

## Beat Poet Laureate, New York State, 2017-2019

### **Pestilence**

This aint the first pestilence  
the Holy Babble even gave warning  
it may not be the last  
it's another chapter  
payment of karmic debt  
a time to look at all the history  
you want me to forget  
but the statues of Confederacy  
are still standing on my chest  
and the knee of killer kops  
remain on my neck  
and I'm trying to figure out  
why we ain't figured out  
that we're standing at the  
cross road  
at the intersection of Corona Blvd, Gun Ave  
and Killa Kops  
so tell Becky don't throw a Karen  
the pimple of poverty is about to burst  
and it's gonna take more than skin cream  
this acne been building  
since the "Good Ship Jesus"  
everything is everything  
and all things are connected

seems like the septic tank of life  
is backed up  
while the resident in the white's house  
continues to play golf  
in some altered state of reality  
blind to the fact that  
the truth in bold yellow letters  
has been painted on the Ave  
of his Luxury Bldg  
telling the whole damned world that  
"Black Lives Matter"

---

Ngoma is a performance poet, multi-instrumentalist, singer / songwriter, Artist and paradigm shifter, who for over 50 years has used culture as a tool to raise socio-political and spiritual consciousness through work that encourages critical thought. A former member of Amiri Baraka's "The Spirit House Movers and Players" and the contemporary freedom song duo "Serious Bizness", Ngoma weaves poetry and song that raises contradictions and searches for a solution to a just and peaceful world. Ngoma was the Prop Slam Winner of the 1997 National Poetry Slam Competition in Middletown, CT and has been published in African Voices Magazine, Long Shot Anthology, The Underwood Review, Signifyin' Harlem Review, Bum Rush the Page/Def Poetry Jam Anthology, Poems on the Road to Peace-(Volumes 1,2,and 3) Yale Press and Let Loose On the World-Amiri Baraka at 75. The Understanding Between Foxes and Light-Great Weather For Media and New Rain/Blind Beggar Press 35th Anniversary Issue. He was featured in the P.B.S spoken word documentary The Apropoets with Allen Ginsburg Ngoma was selected as the Beat Poet Laureate of New York for 2017 by The National Beat Poetry Poetry Foundatio.n

Joan Hoffman

*Poet Laureate of Canton, Connecticut*

**Good Morning**

Loosely knotted our bodies recline within each other  
and I feel your spine, not stiff like your voice

when you reprimanded yourself for forgetting  
to close the door to the hen house, rather soft

like peach as I thumbed up and down to unleash  
a trigger of muscle from a firmness of flesh recumbent

while you absorb each press's insistence that you give up  
whatever resistance you hold dear. All living things

breathe in one form or another. Your concave goes with  
my convex against the angle of hip. Bone carved into

the mattress after so many years, the vine of your leg,  
shoulder resting against my breast while I tongue your lobe

you whimper gently, widen your neck for pleasure, lift  
your chin before you thrust it into my chest your palms

cradling my cheeks nostrils to nostrils to breath the luxury  
of warmness, a vault of heaven's affection in a morning

harvest, delicate eggs newly hardened from roosting hens.

---

Joan Hofmann, Professor Emerita at the University of Saint Joseph, serves on the Riverwood Poetry Board, and was the inaugural Poet Laureate of Canton, CT. Author of three chapbooks: *Coming Back, Alive*, and *Alive, Too*, her poems are published or forthcoming in anthologies and journals, including: *Forgotten Women*, *Waking Up to the Earth*, *Concho River Review*, *Tiger Moth Review*, *Wild Word*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Bird's Thumb*, *The Wayfarer*, *Dillydoun Review*, *Canary*, *SLANT*, and *Plainsongs*.

Larry Jaffe

*Florida Beat Poet Laureate*

**Running The Human Race**

Running the human race  
is like seeking god  
at a hotdog stand  
when not every stand  
has a good dog

Running the human race  
is like being on a treadmill  
to nowhere  
and where you are  
is nowhere you wanted to be

I stopped running the human race

I stopped running the human race  
it was too much like competition  
and relationships became estranged  
scattered to the elements  
friends became enemies  
and enemies stayed that way

I stopped running the human race  
and went for a walk on the wild side  
gesturing to Lou Reed  
he gave me a silent wave

and secret handshake  
I knew it was the right thing to do

I stopped running the human race  
because it was stunting my growth  
and caused my creativity to cancel itself  
I had been broadcasting senility  
and disingenuity was becoming my brainchild  
I could not write if I could not be at peace

I stopped running the human race  
and went to a place where  
we did not vote for governors  
we governed ourselves  
gender was irrelevant  
and color only added to the beauty

## **Ars Poetica**

She found the crucible  
of broken fate  
a divine aesthetic  
of ribboned notes

From the rubbish  
she formed  
a musical seascape  
a symphony of color  
a tapestry of sound

I beseech you  
to call my name  
in poetry  
speak to me in verse  
allow me entrance  
to the sculpture

---

For his entire professional career, Larry Jaffe has been using his art to promote human rights. He was Poet-In-Residence at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, a featured poet in Chrysler's Spirit in the Words poetry program, co-founder of Poets for Peace (now Poets without Borders), helped spearhead the United Nations Dialogue among Civilizations through Poetry project with hundreds of readings globally using the aesthetic power of poetry to bring understanding to the world, former Poet Laureate Youth for Human Rights and the Florida Beat Poet Laureate. He was the recipient of the Saint Hill Art Festival's Lifetime of Creativity Award. . He has six books of poetry: *Unprotected Poetry*, *Anguish of the Blacksmith's Forge*, *One Child Sold*, *In Plain View*, *30 Aught 4*, *Sirens* and *Man without Borders*.

Doc Janning

*South Euclid, Ohio, Poet Laureate*

**A Thousand Billion Stars**

Evening softly draws  
Sun into dusk  
(ghost of the day)  
as secret voice  
of infinite night  
calls in eldritch tones  
through warrens of time  
and darkness rushes  
on fey silent wings  
infusing magick  
into echoing cavern  
of ageless black sky  
melding and blending  
with lambent shine  
of a thousand billion stars.



---

“Doc” Janning, the 77-year-old Inaugural Poet Laureate of South Euclid, Ohio, is a poet, author, educator, longtime Scout Leader, and retired Podiatrist. He has created Ekphrastic Poetry for Heights Arts in Cleveland Heights, OH, and for Cleveland Photo Fest. He has been a Writer-in-the-Window at Appletree Books for National Novel Writers’ Month. He is Creator-Moderator of Second Sunday Poets, a poetry open mic sponsored by the William N. Skirball Writers’ Center at the South Euclid - Lyndhurst Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, which has published some of his work, and Creator-Moderator of Awenites, a biweekly online poetry event. One of his poems has also been published in Lyndhurst (OH) Life Magazine for June 2020, another appears on PoemHunter.com, and a recent piece is to appear in an anthology to be published by the Wick Poetry Center of Kent State University (OH).

Chuck Joy

*Erie County, Pennsylvania, Poet Laureate 2018-2020*

**Pine Hill Summit**

Pennsylvania's filled with clouds today  
only the highest elevations have escaped them

Where we are, and the air is clear  
warm for this time of year

The mountains are red with the October forest  
hillsides mad hides to make an impossible suede

When we turn down the music in the dashboard  
our words turn into poetry before we speak them

\* \* \*

At a trailhead near a railroad bridge  
we park and leave our car forever

Abandoning our families and their dreams  
our exercise routines and every other thing

The path is soft with moss and not too steep  
it climbs beside a black and rocky creek

Until we reach the meadow at the top  
where the bear and the deer are, and the hawk

And a cabin with firewood stacked next to it  
where we could choose to live

## The Minarets of Erie

talking keeps us together  
framing specific configurations of sound with tongue and lips  
words, the process well-polished, just below consciousness  
it's a trip

no trumpet between us and it  
no reed or row of metal holes  
just muscles and spit and spirit, an intention  
then voice, clear and sweet or hoarse or sharp

\* \* \*

always talking, always in English  
occasional accents in pidgin Spanish  
rarely that schtick of pretend German gibberish  
*achtgemeinerleiberfrunkenmitcha dankeshoen*

language phrased with wit  
powerful medicine, balm to the ills that plague us  
me at least, the fever of anger, the chills of despair  
heart failure, all the pathologies  
every affliction, traumatic accident, anxiety, addiction  
every perturbation of consciousness threatening us, dimming our vision

the source of life, breath  
the sum of all philosophy all religion, breathing  
breath brings us meaning  
and next to breathing, speech

*The Minarets of Erie, is published under the title Speaking Words in Vol. XVII, No. 4, Winter 2021-22 in Pratik, A Magazine of Contemporary Writing from Nepal.*

---

Chuck Joy, Poet Laureate Erie County Pennsylvania 2018-2020. Author, *Said the Growling Dog, Percussive, Fun Poetry, Theme of Line, Every Tiger Wants To Sing*. Recent magazines: *Red Fez, Pratik*. Host, Poetry Night. Member, Italian-American Writers Association. Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist (University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine 1978).

Evelyn Kandel

*Nassau County, New York Poet Laureate 2019-2022*

**Thoughts On Being Poet Laureate During a Pandemic.**

Poet Laureate, an honor practically no one except poets care about; no one knows what it is or who you are, don't know that Ancient Greeks and Romans picked leaves of a Laurel tree to weave them around heads of poets proclaiming their fame.

Background stories like that aren't exactly on the current best-seller list or on the web that everyone knows and *likes*. So where does being poet laureate leave me in the popularity contest? Will what I have written live on in literary journals?

Perhaps not, but I am proud to explain it all to puzzled people. Writing my poems gives me pleasure, having them published too. I like introducing myself as laureate and reading my poems aloud. So I bid *adieu* and wave *good-by* with a little smile of satisfaction.

**How It Is Now**

*There is turbulence in the river now  
Where once the stream flowed slowly*

You have slipped away my dear  
You have gone away

This river we call life is flowing  
As you slipped away, my own

I am standing here on the dock  
Watching alone

You are on a ship on this mighty river  
Sailing away

I am here on the shore  
Destined to stay

And all the clever rhymes  
Or lovely phrases

Do not alter this leaving  
Or make more bearable

How it is now.

---

Evelyn Kandel was Nassau County Poet Laureate, 2019-22. She teaches poetry classes to adults at Great Neck Community Center, Glen Cove Library, LIU's Hutton House and this fall will teach her zoom class privately. Author of 5 books of poetry, her latest **Let There Be Clouds** contains poems illustrated by her own sky photos. Her recent poems are in **Corona** edited by Gayl Teller and **Paumonauk, Transitions** edited by Kathy Donnelly. She is also a proud Marine Corps veteran.



Wendi R. Kaplan

*Alexandria, Virginia, Poet Laureate, 2016-2019*

**Knowing**

You were ten  
and knew  
somehow.  
The principal called,  
asked me to join you  
in her office,  
as you were not speaking.

I entered and saw you slouched,  
planted in the big chair,  
your blonde bangs hiding your eyes...  
“What’s going on?” I ask gently and  
you begin to cry,  
tears and words cascade,  
bursting through your carefully placed dam...  
“Keanu got in trouble for talking  
and teacher sent him to the principal, but I  
was talking too and she didn't send me  
because I have blue eyes; she sent Keanu  
because he is dark black and...and  
it’s not fair.”

My tears and the principal’s tears  
have joined yours.

I kneel in front of you,  
take your hands,  
“You did the right thing son,  
you did the right thing.”

You knew.  
And you, a boy of few words,  
a friend of silence,  
an observer of the world,

You knew.  
And reminded us  
that we know.  
We do.

To observe is to learn,  
is to know,  
and, if we can,  
to do.

## To Poets Every One

To all of the poets,  
each one of you  
willing to look lovingly, boldly,  
at the moments of the day,  
the landscapes of our lives,  
as well as the dust  
in the eyes of the child  
after the bombs pour down,  
at the leathered bark of the  
elephants' skin,  
at the brilliant blue  
of the startled blue jay  
that has visited the lilac bush.

To all of you,  
poets every one —  
willing to listen  
to the November wind  
and the crumple of falling leaves,  
to the hushed quiet of falling  
snowflakes,  
to the surprise gasps of hope  
as violets emerge in early spring,  
and to the fiesta music of summer,  
alive with zucchini and zinnias  
popping in percussive color.

To all of the poets  
who teach us to pause,  
to observe, to wonder,

to be amazed—  
by the miracles  
that lay in each drop  
of each day,  
whether bleak and grey,  
whether quiet,  
or a colorful display—  
that open us  
to the common, yellow onion,  
to the peacock proud  
bird of paradise,  
to the quiver in the dog's nose,  
the squirrel on the sunny branch  
in quiet repose.

To all of you,  
poets every one,  
poets,  
everyone.

---

*Wendi R. Kaplan* was the Poet Laureate of Alexandria Virginia (2016-2019). Her self-defined mission during her term was to Build Bridges and Create Community. She believes that poetry illuminates life and that we are all poets. She knows that poetry can give people a voice, even when they feel they have none. Wendi has been an Alexandria resident and community activist since 1982. She has been writing and reading poetry as long as she can remember. Wendi's poetry reflects her observations of the world, of nature, of people and of the exquisite awareness of the extraordinary in the present moment. Wendi is a clinical social worker and certified poetry therapist. She has taught at The American University and at The George Washington University School of Medicine. She is also a long-time meditator which colors her work and writing. Poetry threads through all of her life.

Tori Lane Kovarik

*Alexandria, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2013-2016*

**Art is Order**

Dividing the paved street from the dust and dirt of unfinished road,  
there are concrete dividers sitting under the stop light,  
perpetually flashing red, which is under the new bridge I like to fly over.  
On the concrete dividers, people I'll never meet have doodled with spray cans,  
graffiti I cannot decipher save for the one bold statement in black,  
articulated clearly, precisely, atop the rest.

*Art is Order* the black paint unequivocally declares,  
the statement mimicked in strength of letter and line.

Art is order to the one who denied the ordering law  
and shook the can, maybe danced to created beat,  
painted on the concrete under flashing red lights  
that separate the paved roads of completion  
from the dust and dirt of the yet to be constructed.

Art is order in the way a heart thumps steadily,  
until the day it bows out of the ballroom dance,  
the day when it refuses to so much as even sway,  
moved by rhythmic melody while standing against the wall.

Art is order in the way snow falls,  
wavering between flickering flurries and  
large white chunks of molting angels wings falling to earth.

Art is order in the way I've known someone for years  
and yesterday was the first time I nearly choked on the blue of his eyes.

Art is order in the way red wine sits majestically in a glass  
and the way it looks like blood,

so blood too must look beautiful in a glass,  
swirling out of a bottle into the deathlike stillness of my glass  
before being swallowed down to dance with hot, living blood,  
the red wine beauty of my veins.

Art is order in the way people pray to an unseen God  
but know, they know, they know that unseen divine thing  
is more real than any wind turned air they suck into despairing lungs.  
Art is order in the way I, preschool teacher, seminary student, dancer, poet,  
want to be dressed all in black under the star sprayed sky,  
dancing to the created beats of a shaking spray paint can,  
making bold statements on concrete,  
which is firmer than the paper of notebooks  
and all the air I've thrown words upon,  
dancing in the red glow of flashing lights  
under the new bridge I like to fly over.

## **The First Nights of Autumn**

Snap the spine of the paperback book,  
flick the ash from the cigarette,  
the sun will dip behind the moon  
and give away the evening hours  
with a cup of coffee, leather jacket,  
and notes tucked into the margins.  
The umbrella protects from the falling stars  
and collects the smoky breath of poetry  
exhaled on the air of change.  
This is the time of transformation,  
of the alteration of persons,  
the reclamation of all beautiful things.  
The night is impressionable,  
scarred with the memories of its day,  
tattooed with hopes for the dark of its mystery  
and the dawn it so graciously precedes.  
Grief is cradled in the words of her hand,  
healing murmured in the lines of constellations,  
sought, not always seen,  
ever present in the darkened heavens  
which dare the smoke to join it  
in watching over the transitioning world.  
The poet settles in to decipher the graffiti  
of the smoke and stars sprayed overhead,  
reading of history and God in the grey moon  
and the white spaces of broken backed literature.

---

Tori Lane Kovarik is a poet and visual artist living in northern Virginia. She served as Poet Laureate of the City of Alexandria from 2013-2016. Tori has published two poetry collections, done numerous readings and performances in northern Virginia, as well as shown her visual art in Virginia, Maryland, Vermont, and North Carolina. Tori writes about a wide variety of topics, including teaching, the writing process, community, faith and spiritual crisis, trauma and healing, and motherhood. Her writing is full of colorful observations, brutal honesty, and flashes of whimsy. Tori's aim in writing and performing poetry is to speak the unspeakable, highlight the seemingly mundane, and give voice to the voiceless.



Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda

*Poet Laureate of Virginia, 2006-2008*

**Overlooking the City, I Reminisce**

about women in homeless  
shelters who have nothing  
to do but imagine their fate:  
overdose, a gun, a husband  
who demands his wife  
heed his dicey commands.

In a split second, a woman  
begging on a street corner  
falls to the pavement.  
Epileptic seizures shake  
her limbs with the force  
of a tempestuous wind.  
In flashing streetlights her dark  
skin glistens. Her front teeth  
tumble onto the sidewalk.  
I call out to drivers to dial 9-1-1,  
their slapdash haste, egregious.

I tell myself, *Don't dwell  
on the madness, the insane  
chatter of hurried drivers,  
the headstrong haste  
of pedestrians.* I pillow

the fallen woman's head  
in my lap, place a sweater  
beneath her neck, thank  
a passerby for calling  
an ambulance, a siren's  
shrill wail in the distance.

I dwell on this craziness,  
on humanity's self-absorption,  
wonder why it took over an hour  
for someone to seek help,  
wonder if the woman will live,  
if she'll end up in the shelter  
where I read poetry to pregnant  
Hope while she clapped, danced,  
beat the blues on tin cans,  
where Gwendolyn stood tall  
and chanted, where a woman  
like the one I sought to save  
crouched in a corner, extended  
her hand, begged for a quarter.

“Overlooking the City, I Reminisce” was published in *Artemis 2020*, Volume XXVII.

## Christmas in Bolivia

On the streets of Cochabamba, Indian women sell miniatures of Mary, Joseph, the three kings. My husband holds up a four-foot pine, bargains the price down, then smiles, boyhood all over his face, good to be home where he can decorate the tree in the native reds, greens, and blues of this fertile pampa. Hot, the streets of this city, close to the sun. I look up at the fabled god *Inti* showering the cathedral, its tower of bells and clock marking the hour: noon, the stone condor aloft its perch in the plaza *Catorce de Septiembre*, mythical bird lifting its wings brought alive by *Inti*'s fire and the trick of midday glare.

My husband drops *bolivianos* into the cup of a blind woman seated by the cathedral doors. Her face, furrowed and browned, softens in the protective shadows as if she senses the sparrow skittering toward her. Flapping its wings, it lifts, then touches down on the woman's cup, tipping it over, causing her to jump and grab the tin vessel as if to avoid a robber. My husband leans down and rights the container. Speaking in soothing tones, he pours the coins from the cup into her hands so she can count them, their size and weight familiar to her fingers.

I lower my head and ask for the sparrow to bless this Indian woman. In the square someone plays the *quena* as though he has swallowed the wind.

“Christmas in Bolivia” was originally published in *Hispanic Culture Review* and was reprinted in *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature* and in the author's books, *Gathering Light* and *These Flecks of Color: New and Selected Poems*.

---

Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Virginia Poet Laureate Emerita, has co-edited four anthologies, co-authored a poem-play, and published nine books of poetry, including *The Embrace: Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo*, winner of the international Art in Literature: The Mary Lynn Kotz Award. She is the recipient of five grants from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and has won the Ellen Anderson Award, multiple first place awards from the Chesapeake Bay Branch of the National League of American Pen Women, a resolution of appreciation from the Virginia Board of Education for her service as poet laureate, an Edgar Allan Poe Poetry Award, six Pushcart Prize nominations, as well as other awards. Her poems appear in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Mid-American Review*, *Best of Literary Journals*, *Poet Lore*, and *World Poetry Yearbook*.

<https://www.carolynforonda.com>

Jim Landwehr

*Village of Wales, Wisconsin, Poet Laureate*

**July Heat**

The cat sees a fly it cannot reach  
taunting her from high on the wall  
like a mountaineering fly  
it rappels down the face of the wall  
using its sticky dogshit feet  
as the cat stalks it from base camp #2

When the alpine fly takes to the wing  
in search of a higher wall or maybe a roadkill  
the cat changes her focus to her tail  
which she forgets is hers and mistakes  
for a threatening, elusive weasel  
that has somehow fused to her torso

The alleged owner of the cat  
- alleged because the cat's not  
all onboard with the idea as yet -  
observes like he's watching a  
black and white movie in  
a smoky theater in Terra Haute

Minutes later the cat has lost interest  
in everything but her next nap  
she sleeps like the queen of Glasgow

oblivious to the pending asteroid shower  
and the double rainbow in Seattle  
she dreams of the one that got away.

## Amusement

We ride them in pursuit of something far  
outside our average daily experience  
these ten-story death wheels  
these perilous whirling vomitoriums  
these four-person runaway trains  
without an engineer or pilot in sight  
assembled in haste by carnies battling  
hangovers from last night's trailer blowout.  
We ride them to shake up our routine  
put a good scare in us, make us scream  
make our heart come up into our throat  
grip the safety bar like it means something  
through loops and turns at breakneck speed  
holding on in hopes that we make it through  
this horribly fantastic window of amusement.

---

Jim has three memoirs, *Cretin Boy*, *Dirty Shirt* and *The Portland House*. He also has five poetry collections, *Thoughts from a Line at the DMV*, *Genetically Speaking*, *On a Road*, *Written Life* and *Reciting from Memory*. Jim is a past Poet Laureate for the Village of Wales, WI. Visit:

<https://sites.google.com/view/jimlandwehr/home>

# Sydney Lea

## Vermont Poet Laureate, 2011 - 2015

### **My Wife's Back**

All naked but for a strap, it traps my gaze  
As we paddle: the dear familiar nubs  
Of spine-bone punctuating that sun-warmed swath,

The slender muscles that trouble the same sweet surface.  
We've watched and smiled as green herons flushed  
And hopped ahead at every bend, and we've looked up

At a redtail tracing open script on a sky  
So clear and deep we might believe  
It's autumn, no matter it's August still. Another fall

Will be on us before we know it. Of course we adore  
That commotion of color, but it seems to come  
Again as soon as it's gone away. They all do now.

We're neither young anymore, to put matters plainly.  
My love for you over thirty years  
Extends in all directions, but now to your back as we drift

And paddle down the tranquil Connecticut River.  
We've seen a mink scratch fleas on a mudflat.  
We've seen an osprey start to dive but seeing us,



Think better of it. Two phoebes wagged on an ash limb.  
Your torso is long. I can't see your legs  
But they're longer, I know. Phoebe, osprey, heron, hawk:

Marvels under Black Mountain, but I am fixed  
On your back, indifferent to other wonders:  
Bright minnows that flared in the shallows,

the gleam off that poor mink's coat,  
even the fleas in its fur, the various birds  
—the lust of creatures just to survive.

But I watch your back. Never have I wished more not to die.

## On the Other Hand (1968)

Aretha's "Natural Woman," andante-funky,  
spilled from every window

in town that summer.

The weather and people's moods got so bad-ass hot  
you dreamed cinematic lagoons and palm trees bowing  
to evening's cool sand. You imagined parrot-chatter  
in the hills would turn tuneful as you sipped iced drinks with umbrellas.

With your amour. Of course. The lyrical breezes  
were soft as the lady's touch.

On the other hand,

o, puny Lothario, dime-store virtuoso  
of tango, mangler of first-year classroom Spanish,  
duty called: there were things that depended on you!  
Like tearing the social fabric to pieces, re-weaving

the whole into what in your dotage you understand—  
— when you get right down to facts—

was your own sorry image.

What's left of hope in this blighted nation is owing  
in part to your failures and those of your smug little cohort.  
And baby, I don't mean maybe. You knew jack-shit.  
You remained romantic imagination's ragdoll.

You'd merely changed your clothes. And now you needed,  
you thought, what you thought  
was ordeal by fire, duress. Solidarity  
with the colorful oppressed— that's what defined you.

What a laugh and a half looking back. You wanted great change  
and you changed nothing. And so, poor narcissist,  
your big question's still what it was in those days of ferment:

if your *soul was in the lost and found*, what role  
would be the next that *came along to claim it*?

---

A former Pulitzer finalist, Sydney Lea served as founding editor of *New England Review*. Vermont's Poet Laureate from 2011 to 2015, in 2021, he was presented with his home state of Vermont's most prestigious artist's distinction: the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts.

David K. Leff

*New England Beat Poet Laureate*

**Found Ferlinghetti at 100: A Birthday Souvenir**

You were a pocket poet in my backpack  
at sixteen as I thumbed coast-to-coast  
to find *the secret meaning of things*,  
daring to cross *all the obscene boundaries*.

Suffering many *unfair arguments*  
*with existence*, for years afterward  
I struggled for an *open eye, open heart*.

Decades passed before I knew *how to paint*  
*sunlight*, find a *Buddha in the woodpile*  
and keep a *journal for the protection of all beings*.

My Brooklyn-bred dad died in a *Coney*  
*Island of the mind*, teasing me with rhythmic  
sea sounds and a scent of fries and salt,  
mere *pictures of the gone world*.

I learned that growing older births  
*landscapes of living and dying* that steal  
my time and take a bit of world from me.

So I found that *these are my rivers*  
—Farmington to Connecticut to sea—

and discovered *poetry as an insurgent art*.

It took too long to know that *love*  
*is no stone on the moon*, but the wet, soft,  
warmth of my lover's kiss, and the open  
road of your poems that led me there.

## At the Spam Museum

Pass a boy in bronze walking a pig,  
and enter a shrine to American  
invention and marketing

in a suburban style shopping plaza  
where hallowed historical site  
meets glitzy carnival cheer.

Celebrity in a can becomes nutrition  
in a feelgood film with upbeat  
commercial clips. Antique

containers and old-time ads  
are sacred relics beside the founder's  
words engraved in glass.

As much metaphor as meat,  
it's a worthless email, survivalist shelter  
staple, punchline searching for a joke,

weapon of mass consumption  
that won the big war for Ike, and Scout  
campfire ritual on a stick.

Every bite is what you need it to be,  
for a dozen cans a second can't lie.  
We are what we eat. Spam I am.

---

David K. Leff is an award-winning poet and essayist, poet laureate of Canton, Connecticut, and former deputy commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. He was honored as New England Beat Poet Laureate by the National Beat Poetry Foundation in 2018. By appointment of the National Park Service, David served as poet-in-residence for the New England National Scenic Trail (NET) for 2016-17. The author of six nonfiction books, three volumes of poetry, and two novels in verse, he is poetry editor of *Connecticut Woodlands*, the quarterly of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. David is a trustee of Great Mountain Forest in Norfolk, Connecticut, a non-profit working forest, and deputy town historian and town meeting moderator of Canton, Connecticut where he also served 26 years as a volunteer firefighter. His papers are located at the Special Collections and University Archives, UMass/Amherst <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umar-mot/?s=leff> View his work at [www.davidkleff.com](http://www.davidkleff.com)

Elline Lipkin

*Poet Laureate of Altadena, California, 2016-2018*

**O. L.A.**

Lost in your maze  
of 5s and 10s,  
my car is a bead  
stringing itself  
across your necklace  
of highways, curved  
and twisting against  
your throat, then zippering  
up and down the coast.

5, 10, 105, 110,  
a thread spins out.  
Then 710, 405, 210,  
I reel back home.

You have not always  
been easy to love:  
strip malls and billboards,  
a heat that rises off  
concrete and clings.

Seasons of no season,  
in summer you keep us  
locked in. In winter,



exhale us along the beach  
to walk the sand's balmy cool.

At dusk, I climb up  
into light pink skies,  
past the purple trees  
shedding spring while  
palm trees line the street  
crowned against the blue.

You sprawl, parched by sun,  
yet pocked with backyard pools,  
lounging into sunset and lower  
your mirrored sunglasses  
to peer above their edge.  
Quick flip them up,  
again, a mystery.

---

Elline Lipkin is a poet, academic, and nonfiction writer. Her first book of poems, *The Errant Thread*, was chosen by Eavan Boland for the Kore Press First Book Award. Her second book, *Girls' Studies*, was published by Seal Press. Her poems have been published in various contemporary journals and she has been a resident at Yaddo, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Dorland Mountain Arts Colony. From 2016-2018, she served as Poet Laureate of Altadena and co-edited the *Altadena Poetry Review*. Currently a Research Scholar with UCLA's Center for the Study of Women, she has taught poetry workshops for Writing Workshops Los Angeles, Chapman University, Scripps College, and worked online and in the classroom with a variety of writers.

# Maria Lisella

## Queens, New York Poet Laureate

### **Our Date**

My stepson spent  
the afternoon in detention  
for lying to a nun.  
*I told them my name means  
pheasants in Italian,  
but no one believed me.*  
Half white, half Puerto Rican,  
Italian last name, nappy hair,  
said otherwise.  
At the perfect age of 10,  
my stepson and I  
had a date one afternoon.  
Determined to teach him to fly,  
forget nuns, divorced parents,  
over-protective mother,  
or, just ride a bike.  
A two-wheeler, banana seat,  
shiny, chrome, bells, streamers.  
He'd run alongside it  
throw one leg far and wide  
in time to find the peddle  
on the other side.  
I clutched the back of the seat  
sent him off as far as I could.

Like my father did for me,  
knowing spills and harm  
would follow.  
Years later,  
a knot in my heart,  
his dusty, tear-smearred face  
lips quivering, telling me  
of a quick ride to an Italian  
neighborhood in Pelham Bay  
where he was chased down  
by taunts of  
*You don't belong here.*  
*I tried to tell them my name*  
*but no one listened.*  
I think of all I don't know  
about courage – how to build it,  
pass it on, when to fight, to flee,  
and when to leave your bike  
behind, save your life,  
find your way home.

---

Maria Lisella is the sixth Queens Poet Laureate; and is an Academy of American Poets Fellow. She co-curates the Italian American Writers Association series celebrating its 31<sup>st</sup> year. Her collections include *Thieves in the Family*, *Amore on Hope Street* and *Two Naked Feet*; *The Man with a Plan* is forthcoming. She featured on “The Poet and The Poem” from the Library of Congress.

Radomir Vojtech Luza

*Poet Laureate of North Hollywood, California*

**Halloween Saturday Night, 2020, At 6:07 p.m.**

Instead of gargoyles and ghouls  
Witches and warlocks invade schools.

Sky reddish pink and royal blue  
Mixing with North Hollywood's  
bright green hue.

A sacred stew of me and you.

A heavy crew looking for life anew.

Among this COVID clue  
ending at the local zoo.

Moon full as a burning head  
Glowing like flaming lead.

Alabaster clouds puffy  
Lush trees fluffy.

Standing like royal sentries at state ball.

Pushing hour back for some slack.

Frightened that life will not grow.  
Fit to tow my grit  
Or ease this quit in my pit.

Darkness do not drive me tonight.  
Instead turn to water and light  
windmill and kite.

At earliest sight as dawn turns  
the rabbit right.

---

Radomir Vojtech Luza was born in Vienna, Austria in 1963 to renowned Czech parents. The SAG/AFTRA/AEA union actor, veteran stand-up comedian, theatre, film, book critic and host has been the Poet Laureate of North Hollywood, CA since 2012, and the author of thirty-one books, (twenty-seven collections of poetry), the latest of which MENTAL MALL, a twenty poem chapbook published by Four Feathers Press in Pasadena, CA this past August. The sports and freelance writer is a graduate of Jesuit High School and Tulane University (New Orleans, LA). The organizer, host and curator of fifteen poetry readings in places such as Jersey City, New Jersey; Hoboken, New Jersey; New York City; Fort Walton Beach, FL; and Los Angeles has his thirty-second book, (28th Collection of Poetry) ONYX ROSE forthcoming later this year or early next year from Westbow Press. Luza is also the editor and publisher of the literary journal VOICES IN THE LIBRARY, published by Red Doubloon Publishing, the literary arm of Radman Productions. Luza, who has recorded nine spoken word CD's has also published over seventy poems in literary journals, anthologies, websites and other media. He has featured his poetry over one hundred times across the country.

Mary McElveen

*Poet Laureate for Alexandria, Virginia 2007-2010*

**Junk Drawer**

Two wrenches, one ruler.  
One stapler, jammed.  
Fifteen pens and a lonely highlighter.  
Pruning shears, small,  
recently released from incarceration  
in the garden shed.  
Gift cards, business cards,  
appointment cards. A hammer.  
A Leatherman: the awkward  
Jack-of-all-tools, but master of none.  
Packages of tiny beads that morph  
into marble-sized colored spheres  
amazing all and sundry, but mostly me.  
Allen wrenches and Lilliputian  
screwdrivers for delicate jobs..  
A box cutter for less-demanding ones.  
One Noah figure  
(and one Noah arm)  
inexplicably separated on the ark.  
Scotch tape, duct tape, decorative tape,  
sticking together through thick and thin.  
Keys. More keys. and yet more keys  
unlocking the secrets of the ages..  
or the back door of another house.

Receipts. Coupons. Phone numbers.

Twelve small black pellets of mysterious origin  
and no apparent use.

A veritable variety store  
of pennies, buttons, magnets,  
pins, binder clips, matches,  
sticky notes.

And two harmonicas  
Humming sad histories of  
the forgotten.

## King Tut—2020

We've been buried for a month or more,  
and it's gotten old.

This tomb has lots of distractions  
(I'm reminded of the pyramids):  
but nothing like the world we knew.  
No matter how many gadgets and gew-gaws,  
the fact remains: we're stuck.

There's food, there are books, there is  
the inevitable television,  
(which the pharaohs were spared)  
replete with news and politics  
and assorted drivel  
that would bore us to death, if we weren't  
already dead and buried.

So here we sit, lined up nicely  
in our nice, neat boxes--  
veritable mummies, wrapped in  
anti-virus masks, antiseptic wipes, and fear,  
drumming our freshly-washed fingers,  
impatiently awaiting  
    resurrection.



---

Mary McElveen is a former Poet Laureate for the City of Alexandria (2007-2010). As such, she has written poetry for dedications of cemeteries, high school renovations, recreation centers, awards ceremonies—and just about anything you’d care to name. She has also enjoyed a number of disparate careers: mom, school volunteer, PTA president, biochemist, chemistry researcher, high school chemistry teacher and science department chair, tech support for a major financial institution, tech education resource, and has acted as director for office support and lawyer referral at a local bar association. She volunteers and gives tours as a docent at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. She is also a member of the Grolier Club, America’s oldest and largest society for bibliophiles and enthusiasts in the graphic arts. In her spare time, she writes.

John F. McMullen

*Poet Laureate of the Town of Yorktown, New York*

**A Poem Is Not A Jump Shot**

I have done at least  
one thing perfectly  
in my life  
I have faked my man  
gone up in the air and  
*gotten nothing by net*  
perfect  
Now I write poetry  
and now no matter  
how happy I am  
with a poem  
it is never perfect  
It can always be tweaked  
have words added  
or cut or changed  
never really finished  
never perfect  
But, sometimes,  
I have  
    to pause  
    to stop  
and just get  
poems out the door  
And that is this submission

---

John F. McMullen, “*johnmac the bard*”, is the Poet Laureate of the Town of Yorktown, NY, an adjunct professor at Westchester Community College, a graduate of Iona College, the holder of two Masters degrees from Marist College, a member of the American Academy of Poets and Poets & Writers, the author of over 2,500 columns and articles and 10 books (*8 poetry*), a contributor to a many magazines, journals & anthologies (*including three from Local Gems Press*) and the host of a weekly Internet Radio Show (*300 episodes to date*).

Daniel McTaggart

*West Virginia Beat Poet Laureate, 2017 - 2019*

**A Gathering Of Uncles**

The farmhouse kitchen became a mystery  
When old men smoked fat cigars after dinner  
Beneath a plaster ceiling  
Stained with a whiskey sour glow.

Conversation curled with every breath.  
I left when the air stung my eyes  
To read comics with coffee rings on them.

I heard grandpa and his brothers-in-law  
Laughing like diesel carburetors  
Coughing up carbon in a small humid room  
As another puff of smoke pushed

Through all the previous whispers.  
I couldn't tell how they were smiling.  
Only that they were.

## **The Neighbor Kid**

He helped me cut branches off  
Old pine trees his dad planted above a wall

His three grandkids couldn't imagine  
Undergrowth almost ten times older than them

I remember stopping by his house every Halloween  
His dad gave out bags of potato chips from work

Man, that was the best

He recalled playing whiffleball with his brother  
Just below where we stood

He reached down in a thatch of ground vines  
Picked up a plastic sphere laying there for decades

Either he or his brother hit it  
And he just caught a 50-year line drive

---

Daniel McTaggart served as the West Virginia Beat Poet Laureate from 2017 to 2019. His poetry has appeared in *Amomancies*, *Backbone Mountain Review*, and *Kestrel*. His book "Midnight Muse in a Convenience Store" is available from Venetian Spider Press. He can usually be found writing in bookstores, diners, and local coffee shops."

# Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

## *Kansas Poet Laureate, 2009-2013*

### **The Thread**

My mother singing “Tora Lora Lora,”  
an Irish lullaby although we were Brooklyn Jews.  
The vacuum's roar muffled by shag carpeting  
while the birch banged on the hapless window sill.  
The humming refrigerator in the middle of the night  
when everyone slept or paced alone in the old house.  
The chants encasing me in each swaying note  
as I wrapped my thin arms around my cold chest  
in the cavernous synagogue. The creak of the swing  
as I turned horizontal, defying gravity in the static  
of the transistor radio. The old staccato of my father's anger.  
The loud slap on the bass notes of the bare torso  
making new bruises, then the slow breath pacing in  
until the danger was gone. All the possibilities in each  
novel about a girl born afraid but about to enter the calm pond  
of my life and swim. Bike tires on wet pavement at dawn.  
The first kiss in the back of the school bus broken by applause.  
How rain parts its pouring for thunder's interior roar.  
The mornings revved up like motorcycles, the exhaling speed  
of rivers, starving for new ground or betrayed by rocks  
toward the remembering willows, singing reed by reed.  
The happy rhythm of the subway rocking my spine  
in and out of alignment with the dark, tunneling through water,  
all the buzzing bodies ferrying millions of cells into sound,  
the miracle of one rushing animal carrying us all.

## How To See

You think the way you see is a commons,  
right in the middle of a Midwestern college town  
where all the regular Joes mill about, calling out  
"Daffodil!", "Blue bench!", "Red coffee mug still warm!"

You think we all see the same stream to the left  
winding through moss where someone planted  
one jonquil in 1967, now turned into a thousand,  
and to the right, a freshly-built housing complex  
with matching faux balconies and red trim.

On the cobblestone plaza someone laid 100 years ago,  
you think you see nothing but the yellow wrapper  
of a cough drop, and later, someone's three-year-old,  
squatted low, reaching out to catch what he can't  
of cottonwood fluff before it turns to snow.

You don't remember learning to see in the womb,  
a pale shadow of someone approaching  
or the tight space between where your mother ends  
and the car dashboard begins until the violent  
disruption of light that doesn't soften, only sharpens  
until you are old, looking away from the crowd  
at the leggy creek where water winds over rock.

None or all of what you see is you: the tendrils  
of earth and all its DNA in its variety pack of spirals  
winding through time, or is it time exhaling  
into another blossoming lily-of-the-valley,  
or months before, melting black snow  
on the street where you first lived?

Maybe sight has always been a great lake,  
too cold, even in summer, in swim, but look!  
You can lean on this rock, a remnant of magma,  
stop measuring your life in beauty, and love  
the distance turning gold, then orange, then blue.

---

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Ph.D., the 2009-13 Kansas Poet Laureate is the author of 24 books, including *How Time Moves: New & Selected Poems*; *Miriam's Well*, a novel; *Needle in the Bone*, a non-fiction book on the Holocaust; *The Sky Begins At Your Feet: A Memoir on Cancer, Community, and Coming Home to the Body*. Founder of Transformative Language Arts, she leads writing workshops widely, coaches people on writing and right livelihood, and consults on creativity. [YourRightLivelihood.com](http://YourRightLivelihood.com), [Bravevoice.com](http://Bravevoice.com), [Caryn-MirriamGoldberg.com](http://Caryn-MirriamGoldberg.com)



karla k. morton

*Texas Poet Laureate, 2010*

**Aperçu**

You ask me to sum up this manuscript  
in 90 seconds –  
a ride in an elevator,  
200 words or less.

But this is a book of *poems* –  
those things lodged in the heart  
brought on by bacon and chocolate  
and war and kids that miss their curfew  
and sisters dying  
and a kiss that punctures façade.

And they're for *you* – to roll in,  
to swallow, to seep in your bloodstream  
and pound open the chamber doors  
of your own heart.

They are interior dwellers –  
those things that rise in your chest;  
that suffer the back of your throat till you  
speak their name.

They are memory and breath and need.  
They are the 88 spring times we wish

we could have;  
the lush grape before the wine,  
the stained lips after.

\*aperçu – a glimpse, insight, or summary

First published in *Accidental Origami: New and Selected Works by karla k. morton* (Texas Review Press)

---

karla k. morton has fifteen books, and is nominated for the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame. Her “*The National Parks: A Century of Grace*” (TCU Press) with fellow Poet Laureate Alan Birkelbach, is historic: there’s never been another poetry book written in-situ from each of the 62 National Parks to help culturally preserve and protect these sacred spaces for the next seven generations. Her most recent poetry book “*Politics of the Minotaur*” has just won the Spur Award from the WWA and the Firebird Book Award. A National Heritage Wrangler Award Winner, Foreword Book of the Year Award winner, and twice a Next Generation Indie National Book Award winner, she’s published in journals such as *American Life in Poetry*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Southword*, *descant*, *Boulevard*, *Comstock Review*, *Lascaux Review*, *New Ohio Review* and *Right Hand Pointing*. She was named Texas Poet Laureate in 2010.

Tom Murphy

*Corpus Christi, Texas, Poet Laureate 2021-2022*

**About the Mask**

Only have one bought mask. The rest were given  
and many home-made. Most of the given are too thin  
as well as the bought, “You shall not pass!” Gandalf  
mask with floating Covid-19 viruses battered back  
by his staff on the Bridge of Khazad-Dûm.

Sarah, Gail and Janet hand sowed masks and gave  
them away. The one that I use most come from Janet B.  
Some rip my hair out, some burn the back of my ears.  
Having to teach through them for classes face to face  
while other students are synchronistical online —

fogging up glasses, feeling suffocated at times.  
That one instant I appear without a mask, upon arrival  
handed a paper medical turquoise one that hid my shame  
from the tsk-tsk. For nine months so far with no end in sight.  
I may not like wearing a mask, but I sure do love living.

---

Tom Murphy is the 2021-2022 Corpus Christi Poet Laureate and the *Langdon Review's* 2022 Writer-In-Residence. Murphy's books: *When I Wear Bob Kaufman's Eyes* (2022) from Gnashing Teeth Publishing, *Snake Woman Moon* (2021), *Pearl* (2020), *American History* (2017), and co-edited *Stone Renga* (2017) with Alan Berecka. He's been published widely in literary journals and anthologies such as: *Poetry is DEAD: An Inclusive Anthology of Deadhead Poetry*, *Boundless*, *Concho River Review*, *MONO*, *Good Cop/Bad Cop Anthology*, *Odes and Elegies: Eco-Poetry from the Texas Gulf Coast*, *Wine Anthology*, *The Great American Wise Ass Poetry Anthology*, *Red River Review*, *Switchgrass Review*, *Windward Review*, *Corpus Christi Writers Anthologies*, *Voice de la Luna*, *WordFest Anthology*, *Outrage: A Protest Anthology for Injustice in a Post 9/11 World* among other publications. Recently retired from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, he still works with the Barrio Writers and the People's Poetry Festival. Contact information, books or bookings tom@tommurphywriter.com <https://tommurphywriter.com>

Abby E. Murray

Tacoma, Washington, Poet Laureate 2019-2021

**Short Lectures on Hope**

Some of us  
inherit hope.  
Some of us  
dip our doubt  
in gold paint.

\*

I like hope.  
It sounds  
more livable  
than *waiting*  
or *wanting*.

\*

Is hope  
cliché?  
I suppose.  
So is  
breathing.

\*

It turns out  
my problem  
is with people  
who dismiss  
clichés.

\*

It's easy  
to dislike  
what's constant:  
clichés, mothers,  
death, souls.

\*

When I was little  
I thought the soul  
was a sword  
only death could  
pull from you.

\*

I thought hope  
was a yellow fruit  
that grew in  
a husk you weren't  
supposed to eat.

\*

This is what  
happens when  
you tell a kid  
to go play  
and be quiet.

\*

She turns  
your words  
back into  
what they  
were before.

\*

I have ruined  
this poem  
more times  
than I have  
written it.

\*

To survive is  
to carry  
a story.  
To hope is  
to set it down.

---

Abby E. Murray is the editor of *Collateral*, a literary journal concerned with the impact of violent conflict and military service beyond the combat zone. Her book, *Hail and Farewell*, won the Perugia Press Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the 2020 Washington State Book Award. She teaches (remotely) rhetoric in military strategy to Army War College fellows at the University of Washington. After serving as poet laureate for the city of Tacoma, Washington, she recently relocated to Washington DC, where her spouse works in the Pentagon.



Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan

*Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2009-2011*

**I Couldn't Write a Poem Because**

The birds are flocking in orangng trees  
It is Friday  
I am fifty-seven years old  
My phone keeps ringing  
The midterms are over  
It isn't my birthday  
My daughter just got a great job  
My neighbor is building an addition  
Regular gas is \$2.85 a gallon  
I live on Long Island  
My son lives in Harlem  
My cat is mean  
I ran out of coffee creamer  
Rich Hoffman says it won't rain today  
My husband just kissed me  
I'm working on my dissertation  
My friend came over for lunch  
I teach Freshman English Comp  
I cannot win spider solitaire  
You aren't here

## **How to Write a Poem**

Begin with the lump in your throat,  
the anguish in your heart,  
let it simmer, swell, seep into your bones.

Set it aside and look for the proper container:  
form, lyrical, free verse. Make sure you wash the  
remnants of other poems cleanly away.

Use adjective, adverbs, prepositions and  
articles sparingly; these are useless and signal  
you do not trust your guest's discerning taste.

Open your salty rivers, let just enough to  
flow into your mixture, allow verbs and  
nouns to bring forth clear images.

Stir imagination into the mix deftly until thickened  
into a poem which can stand on its own,  
and the guest can savor the pain.

Put your creation out to cool on the windowsill.  
Be sure to watch out for pecking birds who would  
delight in devouring your creation.

After the heat has dissipated give your prize a second look  
for any imperfections, dust off, place into a tidy title box,  
finally, wrap your name around in the shape of a bow.

---

Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan is the first woman to be appointed Suffolk County Poet Laureate (2009-2011). She awarded by the Walt Whitman Birthplace the title of 2017 Long Island Poet of the Year. She is the founder and president of Long Island Poetry & Literature Repository. Tammy, who already holds a Master of Business Administration degree, has also completed a Master of Fine Arts degree from Stony Brook University Southampton. She has earned her Ph.D. in Humanities & Culture in the Interdisciplinary Studies program at Union Institute & University. Her dissertation was on: The Healing Power of Poetry. She teaches at Long Island University at the C W Post campus. She maintains an active schedule of workshops and performances.

Linda Opyr

*Nassau County, New York, Poet Laureate, 2011-2013*

**Something Changed**

The light shifted  
into shards of shadow.

The trees spread their dark sides  
to the earth before me.

How will I breathe  
when your breath is gone?

## **Late Afternoon, The Wind Cold**

Small girl crying at the door,  
what do you keep inside?

Red leaf floating in the wind,  
why am I so heavy?

One stone upon the other,  
why questions I cannot answer?

---

Linda Opyr was the Nassau County Poet Laureate 2011-13. She is the author of eight collections of poetry, most recently *Where the Eye Wants Coast* (2020). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *the Paterson Literary Review*, and *The New York Times*, as well as other publications in Ireland, Wales, England and the United States. In 2017 she was a featured poet at the Bailieborough Poetry Festival in County Cavan, Ireland.

Carlo Parcelli

*Maryland Beat Poet Laureate Emeritus*

**Empedocles on the Dulles Parkway**

The Pentagon was built in 1941,  
    In the beginning  
    Of the last slug fest America thinks it won.  
Grudgingly abetting the Soviets  
    In their Great Patriotic War  
    Became the bogey at the center  
    Of the American panopticon  
Which concluded millions of lives, subito,  
    Those who have been here and gone.  
And among these bones  
    Our poet's heuristic overtones.  
Rag picker to the stars;  
    Street sweep of the holy satyrs,  
Among the women's imperious chatter  
    About maids and nannies  
    Prep schools and working class slatterns;  
Where he on Porter Street met  
    James Jesus Angleton sucking on a cigarette  
And an addled Allen Dulles,  
    Like a ghost wreathed in smoke.  
Stuttering a quizzical hello and  
    Presenting a limp, doubtful hand  
    In this sad, little vignette.  
"You know," Angleton said, "John and I

Had a go at your man Pound  
At Yale in a magazine called Furioso.  
But I'm certain Rudd has you familiar with all of that.  
Of matters Pound I hear you're quite the talib.  
Stick with it and someday you too may be as renowned.  
Reliving another man's life in prose and verse.  
I can think of worse ways  
To spend our measure upon this earth."  
And the sense of loathing and nausea  
That rose in our dear boy.  
A brooding evil and the capriciousness of fate  
That would elevate two so insidious  
And, frankly, sorry American reprobates.  
And gazing upon these dismal demigods  
Dressed in ash like desolated bums  
Waiting for their kingdom to come,  
He thought of Beckett and his 'boy'  
Standing before Didi and Gogo,  
And gave a sick, bewildered look at his host  
Who drew on his fag and  
Through eyes, lids half drawn from smoke,  
Faintly grinned as if to say 'Here now.  
I've sucked you in'.  
But as Godot does not beat the boy  
But only his brother and the brother  
That tends his sheep off stage is bred of  
What the matron's above mean  
By 'maid' and 'nanny',  
The kind their husbands prefer to fuck or kill;  
If you will - the 'other'.  
And before Pozzo delivers Lucky a blow,  
And fate to masque irony, Lucky shin kicks Gogo,  
Who's already been throttled by hooligans,

And all the ugliness and violence, the futility,  
The rag and bones these three spooks portend;  
The poet conjures Samuel's play and says  
"Mr. Godot told me to tell you  
He won't be coming today,  
But surely to-morrow."  
And the shepherd boy turned to go.  
There was no pithy quote from Shakespeare or Marlowe,  
Or risible blindside from Bierce or Cocteau.  
No, no one stopped him,  
No one raised a hand to slow  
His exit.

---

Carlo Parcelli is a poet living in the Washington DC area. He is Beat Poet Laureate Emeritus for Maryland & an editor with the literary journal [www.flashpointmag.com](http://www.flashpointmag.com). He has published 6 books of poetry & has appeared in numerous literary journals.



Linda Pastan

*Maryland Poet Laureate, Emeritus*

**My Obituary**

Will it merit a full column in *The Post* or *The Times*  
or just a squib by a relative late for work?  
Will it mention awards I didn't win,  
poems that didn't quite scan,  
and how a student asked me once  
if "To a Daughter Leaving Home"  
was my penance for driving a daughter away?  
It will surely say I was born in the Bronx,  
spending the first few weeks of my life  
in the hospital nursery, alone. Which may  
account for my chronic melancholy  
and why I keep blaming my surgeon father  
who tried to do his best for me  
but whose anger always mirrored mine.  
Some obituaries written years in advance  
are stored in the newspaper's basement vault,  
like turkey vultures asleep in their nests,  
just waiting for death to catch up with life.  
Let any newspaper where my obituary appears  
be used to keep the floor clean under the dog's dish.  
And let my "survived by..." children remember me  
not by a list of ambiguous facts collected  
like so much mathematical data, but by my usual  
obsessions: rising bread and falling leaves.

---

Linda Pastan grew up in New York City, graduated from Radcliffe College in 1954, and received an MA from Brandeis University. She has published 15 volumes of poetry, most recently *Insomnia* which won the Towson University Literary Award and *A Dog Runs Through It*. Two of her books have been finalists for the National Book Award, one for The Los Angeles Times Book Prize. She taught for several years at American University and was on the staff of the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference for 20 years. She is a past Poet Laureate of Maryland. Pastan has won numerous awards, including The Radcliffe Distinguished Alumni Award and The Maurice English Award. In 2003 she won the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize for lifetime achievement. Pastan lives with her husband in Maryland. They have 3 children and 7 grandchildren.

## Alexandria Peary

### *New Hampshire Poet Laureate*

#### **“The Fish,” on a Plate**

The fish, all forty lines  
like feathery bones fanned out  
on a plate of unpolished silver, a shield or hubcap  
displayed by Coptic Peter tableside.

*[C]row-blue mussel shells*  
*bespattered jelly fish, crabs like green / lilies*  
is served with timber by Marsden Hartley,  
a crisscross of fallen men, medals  
and ribbons along with Marsden Hartley’s Heart,  
decorated, —parsley of elms.

All forty lines of the Fish  
an ichthys formed by Greek letters,  
a secret sign, sprinkled with salt  
from Sand Hill back home in Augusta,  
ME, poured from a cathedral amid triple-deckers,  
a Neruda tomato and Greek poet coffee,  
overturned cup, a mess of lemons.

*[C]hasm-side*, the one who will always get away,  
American shad, eel, Alewife  
Blueback herring, Rainbow smelt  
Tomcod, sea lamprey, the sign of the fish  
near licenses plates—3 o’clock traffic.

---

Alexandria Peary (MFA, MFA, PhD) serves as New Hampshire Poet Laureate. She is the author of nine books, including *The Water Draft*, *Control Bird Alt Delete*, *Prolific Moment: Theory and Practice of Mindfulness for Writing*, and *Battle of Silicon Valley at Daybreak*. She is the recipient of a 2020 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship and a specialist in mindful writing.

Tony Pena

*Beacon, New York ,Poet Laureate 2017-2018*

**Farewell Party**

Some days I simply  
missed you but most  
days I longed  
like the night  
panting for the stars  
on an overcast evening.

Damaged as we were,  
solace the soothing  
ointment of choice  
but it takes two  
to tango no matter  
the steps of the dance.

Somewhere along  
the line a familiar  
stranger cut in,  
changing the sweet  
dark where whispers  
lit up our souls to these

see your breath  
mornings where  
the best of intentions

die as myths leaving  
the damned to do  
what they do best.

## Noir Boy

I'm no tough guy  
in the Sam Spade  
sense of the words,  
preferring to leave  
the hard boiled  
to the eggs  
in a Lee J. Cobb  
salad but I do love  
basking in the black,  
grey, and white  
shades of a sinful  
city donning a dark  
halo like Bogey wears  
a Borsalino fedora.  
Down and close over  
the eyes so nobody gets  
a clear shot at shattering  
the window to my soul  
with a silver bullet  
from a snub nose 44.

---

Tony Pena was formerly 2017-2018 Poet Laureate for the city of Beacon, New York. His work has appeared in several publications over the years including Best of the Net nominations in 2019. A volume of poetry and flash fiction, "Blood and Beats and Rock n Roll," is available at Amazon. A chapbook of poetry, "Opening night in Gehenna," is available from author.

Juan Manuel Pérez

*Corpus Christi, Texas, Poet Laureate 2019-2020*

**Ode To Rosa Parks**

She wasn't the first to take a stand  
For our just and natural right  
But she made it stick by sitting down  
That is how she joined the fight

One eventful, cold December day  
She decided she had enough  
The world will have to listen now  
Even though this might be tough

The white man said you've got to move  
To the back is where you'll go  
You know the rules, it is the law  
Stand quickly now and don't be slow

That fateful day she did not move  
And disobeyed the distraught man  
The policemen came and arrested her  
Forcing her to play by an unjust plan

It didn't matter for time would tell  
That she was right to take her stand  
Our civil rights became stronger still  
From Montgomery to Selma to Birmingham



## Swing

reflection from an excerpt of the book  
The Boys In The Boat by Daniel James Brown  
...as well as, current events

“Poetry, that’s what a good ‘swing’ feels like”  
Like rowing, eight in blissful unison  
Without missing a single beat at all  
A heart beating as one, beating as one  
Rowing into blissful oblivion  
One that just might have a probable end  
Or does it? Maybe Heaven, perhaps hell  
Peace or war, life or death, joy or sorrow  
Rowing against fear and polarity  
Whatever is the most current affair  
Rhetoric so fluid like blood on fire  
Hand gestures signaling our common state  
Whether then or now, we all strive for swing  
Which way will you row? How fast will you go?

---

Juan Manuel Pérez, a Mexican-American poet of indigenous descent and the current Poet Laureate for Corpus Christi, Texas (2019-2020), is the author of several books of poetry including two new books, *SPACE IN PIECES* (The House Of The Fighting Chupacabras Press, 2020) and *SCREW THE WALL! AND OTHER BROWN PEOPLE POEMS* (FlowerSong Press, 2020).

# Octavio Quintanilla

## *San Antonio, Texas, Poet Laureate 2018-2020*

### **Poem Writing A Suicide Note**

By the time you begin  
writing this poem,

your father is dead.

This time, it's for real.  
Unlike that poem you wrote

in which you have him fall  
from a ladder, cracks

his head, loses memory,  
but doesn't die.

In another poem, he is  
a construction worker,

South Texas sunlight  
hammering his back,

dies in the end.  
For you, it was all pretend.

Most of your adult life  
you've been like a five-year old

child, pretending patricide,  
documenting it in poems,

all the while afraid to dirty  
your hands with true blood.

Keep pretending to be five  
and offer your testicles

to his inspection.  
How silly you feel in this memory,

such a tough guy now,  
knowing there was nothing

shameful or perverse about it,  
just a man making sure his son

had the balls to rise against him,  
if necessary.

How much more pretending  
must you do?

How small you are  
in that mortgage

you'll never finish paying.  
The student loans you drag

to bed every night.  
How much longer will you pretend

the world does everything right  
and all you do in the world

is wrong? If you could only believe,  
one last time, that missing someone

can be infinite, can outlive you.  
Pretend, for your sake,

that maybe it does.  
that maybe it doesn't.

---

Octavio Quintanilla is the author of the poetry collection, *If I Go Missing* (Slough Press, 2014) and served as the 2018-2020 Poet Laureate of San Antonio, TX. His poetry, fiction, translations, and photography have appeared in numerous journals and his visual work has been exhibited at the Southwest School of Art, Presa House Gallery, the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, and many other art spaces. Octavio teaches Literature and Creative Writing in the M.A./M.F.A. program at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. Website: <https://www.octavioquintanilla.com/>

Kevin Rabis

*Poet Laureate of Kansas 2017-2019*

**musical**

Gray day, after  
    the long rain, everything  
green, and inside, dry,  
he sings the first  
    few words of "Love  
a Rainy Night,"  
    by Eddie Rabbitt,  
and she says, "Enough.  
It's not raining.  
And it's not night."

**our town**

And the days lay down  
    like wheat  
in the rain, hard rain,  
    and you get in your car  
and drive: and what  
    do you do  
with the night?

---

Poet Laureate of Kansas (2017-2019) Kevin Rabas teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks and chairs the Department of English, Modern Languages, and Journalism. He has twelve books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner; *All That Jazz*; and *Everyone Just Wants to Drum*. He is the recipient of the Emporia State President's Award for Research and Creativity and is the winner of the Langston Hughes Award for Poetry and the Salina New Voice Award.

Sam Ragan

*North Carolina Poet Laureate, Emeritus*

**The Election**

He didn't get drunk  
But once every four years,  
On election day.  
He would rise early and go  
To the polls drinking hard  
All day. By the time  
The polls were closed  
He would be passed out.  
It was his way of expressing an opinion.

## **Sandhills Summer**

They say the sea was once here.  
And sometimes at night  
When the wind is rising  
I can hear the sea's surge  
In the sound of the pines.

You have gathered the brown branches  
Which bear the pink blossoms  
And I watch you arrange them  
In a green bowl.  
Your hands ask questions  
And then give the answers.

It is very still tonight,  
Before morning there will be rain.  
The only sound is the cry of the cat  
Wanting to come in.

I sleep under the shadow of ghost winds.

---

Sam Ragan (1915-1996) was a well-known journalist, poet and arts advocate in North Carolina, the state's first Secretary of Cultural Resources, Chairman of the NC Arts Council, NC's Poet Laureate, and recipient of the Roanoke-Chowan Award for his book of collected poems. His literary column Southern Accent ran for 48 years and he is fondly known as "North Carolina's Literary Godfather."



Thelma T. Reyna

*Altadena, California Poet Laureate 2014-2016*

**Trembling Leaf**

A trembling leaf on my orange tree  
tells me there's a village scout  
in the branch, a faithful worker  
in a velour suit seeking sweetness  
for his queen and comrades  
back at the hive.

So I await with breath abated, bending,  
peering at the aromatic tremor,  
waiting for the blur and buzz of  
the seeker to appear.

He emerges smiling, triumphant,  
but not before shaking things some more.  
Suit pristine, shoes dusty with his work,  
he shows off dance moves  
on the airy floor, then butts his hips  
on a few more leaves and weaves away.

No, he's not drunk with nectar,  
just an emissary as we all are,  
from queen or gods, joyful in due  
diligence, in doing for others.

---

Originally published in the author's book, *Dearest Papa: A Memoir in Poems*. (Golden Foothills Press, 2020).

---

Thelma T. Reyna's books have collectively won 16 national literary awards. She has written six books: a short story collection, *The Heavens Weep for Us and Other Stories*; two poetry chapbooks—*Breath & Bone* and *Hearts in Common*; and three full-length poetry collections—*Rising, Falling, All of Us*; *Reading Tea Leaves After Trump*; and *Dearest Papa: A Memoir in Poems*. She has edited three anthologies, comprising about 200 poets: As Poet Laureate in Altadena, 2014-2016, she edited the *Altadena Poetry Review Anthology* in 2015 and 2016; and her curated anthology, *When the Virus Came Calling: COVID-19 Strikes America*, was released in September 2020. Thelma's fiction, poetry, and nonfiction have appeared in literary journals, anthologies, textbooks, blogs, and regional media, print and online, for over 25 years. She was a Pushcart Prize Nominee in Poetry in 2017. She received her Ph.D. from UCLA.

## Paul Richmond

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2019 – 2020*  
*Beat Poet Laureate, Massachusetts 2017 - 2019*

### **Normal**

As a little girl  
She found herself  
Banging on everything  
She encountered

She wanted to hear what it sounded like  
She was always searching for sounds  
It drove her mother crazy  
She was always asking her to stop  
Asking her  
Can't you be normal

She didn't listen to her mother  
She listened to the sounds  
She became the most vanguard musical performer  
Who would go into a rage  
On hearing the word normal

Her music  
We had never heard anything like it  
She was letting us hear  
What she heard  
And everyone who was around her  
Learned never to use the word normal

## **Germes Are Everywhere**

He was squatting  
At a river bank  
Dipping his toothbrush  
Into the river  
To brush his teeth

Above stream  
A man  
For some reason was shitting  
In the river

He was interrupted  
As a bloated cow  
Floated down the river

Some people  
Worry about germs

---

Paul was named Beat Poet Laureate twice, Massachusetts 2017 to 2019, and then U S National Beat Poet Laureate 2019 - 2020. He is best described as political, deadpan and wryly humorous delivered in his own style. He has been called, “Assassin of Apathy – power of words / humor - on the unthinkable, the unsolvable, to analyze to digest to give birth to creativity and hope.” He has performed nationally and internationally as a featured poet: The Austin International Poetry Festival, at the Jazzköltexzeti est in Budapest, Hungary. at the Beat Festival Stockholm, Sweden, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival Scotland, at the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, at West End Poetry Festival NC, in Senegal, Africa with the Senegal – American project, and at the National Beat Poetry Festival. Paul was also in the movie “Trash” by Bucky Jones as a poet. [www.humanerrorpublishing.com](http://www.humanerrorpublishing.com)

Luis J. Rodriguez

*Los Angeles, California Poet Laureate 2014-2016*

**Make a Poem Cry**

*“I can’t see ‘em coming from my eye, so I had to make this poem cry.”*  
—Jimmy McMillan, an incarcerated poet in California’s prison system.

You can chain the body, the face, the eyes,  
the way hands move coarsely over cement  
or deftly on tattooed skin with needle.  
You can cage the withered membrane,  
the withered dream,  
the way razor wire, shouts, yells, and batons  
can wither spirit.

But how can you imprison a poem?  
How can a melody be locked up, locked down?  
Yes, even caged birds sing,  
even grass sprouts through asphalt,  
even a flower blooms in a desert.

And the gardens of trauma we call the incarcerated  
can also spring with the vitality of a deep thought,  
an emotion buried beneath the facades  
deep as rage, deep as grief,  
the grief beneath all rages.

The blood of such poems, songs,

emotions, thoughts, dances,  
are what flow in all art, stages, films, books.

The keys to liberation are in the heart,  
in the mind, behind the cranial sky.  
The imagination is boundless,  
the inexhaustible in any imprisoned system.

And remember—we are all in some kind of prison.

If only the contrived freedoms  
society professes can flow from such water!

---

Luis J. Rodriguez served as Los Angeles Poet Laureate from 2014-2016. He has 16 books in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and children's literature. He's founding editor of Tia Chucha Press and co-founder of Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley. His awards include a Carl Sandburg Book Award, a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writing Award, a Passaic Poetry Book Award, and fellowships from the Lannan Foundation, North Carolina, Illinois, California, Chicago, and Los Angeles, among others. His last poetry book is "Borrowed Bones (2015 Curbstone Books/Northwestern University Press). His latest book is "From Our Land to Our Land: Essays, Journeys & Imaginings of a Native Xicanx Writer" (2020 Seven Stories Press).

Margaret Rozga

Wisconsin Poet Laureate 2019-2020

**Morning Prayer**

Dear God of green unfolding  
up out of the earth, what strength in tiny gentle  
Dear God of small children  
Dear God of laughter, lists, longing, and litanies  
Dear God of those who will die before  
they have a chance to claim a place on this earth  
Dear God, anthropomorphized  
almost beyond recognition  
Dear God of children crying for their parents  
Dear God of my unbelief  
Dear God of stories  
Dear God of the faint rose-gold light rising  
at the lake's eastern shore  
Dear God who hums, almost inaudibly  
who hums along the bend in the river  
who sets humming going, who sets song going  
who doesn't sing along  
Dear God of crying parents  
Dear God who, dear God of, dear God, what,  
when, where. Dear God, why  
Dear God, I    dear God, not I    dear God, you  
Dear God, we, us  
Dear God, them  
Dear God, why



Dear God of the worm and the whale  
Dear God by the book and the unwritten  
the spoken and the not yet imagined  
the crop come to fruition, eaten,  
digested, and become one  
with she who prays by paying attention  
when words ring false, too small or too big,  
twisted or ironed flat  
Dear God, what strength

---

Margaret Rozga, 2019-2020 Wisconsin Poet Laureate, creates poetry from her ongoing concern for social justice issues. Her fifth collection of poetry,  *Holding My Selves Together: New and Selected Poems*, will launch in spring 2021 from Cornerstone Press.

Raúl Sánchez

*Redmond, Washington Poet Laureate*

**Resurrection**

At half-staff, the flag waved in the air  
that century old air, that eternal air, dangerous air.  
Survival is a matter of priority  
But dying while breathing?  
An impossible story of resurrection  
to test my beliefs, to prove  
that the world has not lost its embrace  
for all of us despite the pain—

The annuals return every spring  
not always wearing their glorious colors  
nor the petunias blossoming at the root  
of magnolia and maple trees.  
Their resurrection is not impossible—  
muted on the ground along  
the roots of dogwood and maple  
resurrection seems possible.

But who am I to speak about that  
which I've never experienced—  
will I come back next year as a blossoming crocus?  
Or a dandelion weed?

I want to touch the serrated leaves  
of the nettle stalks and the poison oak  
to prove I'm alive! And feel  
the pain of living.

---

Raúl is the current City of Redmond Poet Laureate. He teaches poetry in Spanish at Evergreen High School through the Seattle Arts and Lectures (WITS) program, also at Denny International Middle School through the Jack Straw Educational Project and volunteers for PONGO Teen Writing at the Juvenile Detention Center.

Hayden Saunier

*Bucks County, Pennsylvania Poet Laureate Emeritus*

**Say Luck**

Since you are alive and have leisure enough to read poems  
I'd say luck has entered your life more than once

unless this is the first poem you've read. If it is, well,  
I'm sorry, but still, you're alive and that involves

Luck and her trusty companion, Split Second Timing.  
Remember those movies in health class; remember

the odds for each egg, each spermatozoan? This morning  
I woke determined to write a poem about love:

in my dream I'd crossed over a bridge like the bridge  
by a slow moving river where my boyfriend

from high school and I used to park. I wanted to  
slide slowly down the slick Naugahyde seats of that car—

writing does that—takes you back, makes you look  
odd things up, like how to spell Naugahyde—

and the first poem everyone reads should be about  
love. Not luck. And not trees. I mean no offense

to Joyce Kilmer, who was—did you know this?—  
a man. Alfred Joyce Kilmer, writer, editor, poet,

sniper-shot through the head at the second Battle  
of the Marne—that's how quickly it happens.

Say *love* and death kicks in the door, ejecting spent shells  
as it reloads; *click, click*. My old boyfriend's not dead,

but his brother, who parked by the bridge with Susan  
St. Clair, is. Five years of Lou Gehrig's Disease,

that's how slowly it happens. Love walks down the road  
and death waits at the river. Love wakes in the morning

and death's in a car and you're in the crosswalk,  
your mind on a bridge and a boy and a slow moving river

thinking how poems of praise should be about love  
and it's Luck that pulls you back, Luck and Split Second Timing,

those two with their lassoes of *not yet, not yet*. Say *love*  
and death checks the chamber. Say *death* and love

drops his head in his hands. Say *luck* and bow deeply  
to Split Second Timing, since you are alive to read this.

first appeared in *Smartish Pace*

## The One and The Other

The child hums as he carries, too late,  
his grandmother's sugar-dusted lemon-glazed cake

down the street to the neighbor who needs to be cheered,  
too late for the neighbor

who's stepped into the air  
of her silent front hall from a ladder-backed chair

her church dress just pressed, her head in a loop she tied  
into the clothesline, too late

he unlatches the gate,  
walks up the brick walk on his tiptoes, avoiding the cracks

toward the door she unlocked, left ajar, who knows why  
or for whom, if on purpose

or not, but because he's too late  
she's gone still when he reaches the door and because

he's too late, as he calls out and looks, brilliant sun  
burns through haze

pours through sidelights and bevels  
through chandelier prisms, strikes white sparks and purples

on ceiling and walls, on the overturned chair, on her stockings  
her brown and white

spectator shoes on the floor  
and because he's too late he remembers both terror and beauty

but not which came first. But enough of the one  
that he ran

and enough of the other  
to carefully lay down the cake at her feet.

*Rattle #36 (Rattle Poetry Prize)*

---

Hayden Saunier is the author of four books of poetry and one chapbook; her newest collection, *A Cartography of Home*, was published in 2021 by Terrapin Books. Her work has been awarded the Pablo Neruda Prize, Rattle Poetry Prize, Gell Poetry Award, Keystone Prize, and has been published a variety of journals including *VQR*, *Beloit Poetry Review*, *Pedestal*, *Poet Lore*, *32 Poems* and *Tar River Poetry*, online at *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and read numerous times by Garrison Keillor for *The Writer's Almanac*. Hayden is also an actor and the founder/director of No River Twice, an interactive multivocal improvised poetry reading and performance. She is proud to be a poet laureate emeritus of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. More at [www.haydensaunier.com](http://www.haydensaunier.com).

Annie Petrie Sauter

Colorado Beat Poet Laureate 2017-2019

**If you wade in the water**

when you wade in the water

it is no secret

That when I drive by

Certain hidden spots in

The river

That I think of you

That I remember the warm of the boozy feel of handing

You our bucket

Full of ordinary treasure

Hand to hand , knee to equally

Crippled knee

We passed those plastic hosts up

Those banks with a meaning

We constructed for a drunken

Evening

Disguised

As purpose .

On purpose

I would love to watch you wade

Out into the cold current - as if you

Were

*A man* for a moment

My man , and then watch as the

Water filled your waders



Leaving only your idiot smile above  
The river's truth — as it pulled you down .  
Past the Almont bridge where we  
Once had walked touching , in what had passed  
For love, Down to  
Gunnison  
Where  
Unlike me, They would know  
What to do

With your cold blue body .  
Quickly . They would  
Check your pockets  
--For anything they could steal  
Fast-- and without feeling  
They would remove your heart  
Before the equally blank cops  
Arrived to remove your face  
From the face of the earth

---

Annie Petrie Sauter is a poet of the loud and rowdy variety. She has been published in multiple journals, collections, magazines and underground press publications over the years. She has also had her work published by Berkeley Women's Collective, Bright Hill Press, Great Weather for Media Press, Maverick Press, and the Alternative New Years Day Collection, Poetrybay, and in Reality Beach .Her Book A Plastic Bag of Red Cells was published by Bright Hill Press.

Robert Savino

*Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2015-2017*  
*Bards Laureate 2019-2021*

**Lifechanger**

*-for Allen Planz*

Years after studying Whitman, the most  
influential poet and father of free verse,  
something shocked the spirit inside its shell,  
linking seams with transcendental thread..

Perhaps poetry, with its trigger  
on conceptual minds would satisfy  
cravings beyond this abstract development,  
build a bridge of natural expression.

I sat opposite the teacher, a different teacher,  
a fisherman; but this was no ordinary angler.  
This was the Captain of Paumanok's briny deep,  
setting his depth sensor to exact levels of my experience.

His feedback was a chilling echo of dashed hope,  
but I learned to cast a line from him.  
The fisherman angled my ambition,  
a lesson I've not forgotten like fish forget.

Today, he remains a spirit of encouragement,  
peeking through holes in the sky

while fish swim into the tidal wilderness,  
far beyond where fog gathers.

Here where he again can say,  
“Light is always ahead of the season.”



---

Robert Savino, Suffolk County Poet Laureate 2015-2017 & Bards Laureate 2019-2021, is a native Long Island poet, Board Member at the Walt Whitman Birthplace and winner of the 2008 Oberon Poetry Prize. Robert is the co-editor of two bilingual collections of Italian Americans Poets (*No Distance Between Us* & *No Distance Between Us - The Next Collection*). His books include *fireballs of an illuminated scarecrow*, *Inside a Turtle Shell* and *I'm Not the Only One Here*.

Robert Scott

Prince William County, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2014 - 2016

**Cloudbursts**

I wish to be young again,  
just you and me,  
twenty seven and impervious to the immutable clutch of gravity and time.  
You, because you deserve it,  
me, because I want another chance.  
I've got a fistful of carnival tickets, jonesing for a go at that tilt-a-whirl or a  
dip into the lunatic delirium of our boardwalk funhouse.  
I'll bring a compass this time; I promise.  
The algorithm's scribbled on a drunken noodles receipt.  
You'll see.

And that's all;  
that's the end of the poem.  
The rest is a ceramic knickknack we can shatter with a hammer.

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Around 3:15 a.m.

Hope and Regret battle on the distended hummock of my middle-aged belly, smooth in the dark beneath Bed, Bath, and Beyond blankets, like a freshly-filled grave.

Most nights, I watch.

Regret wears armor plated with ten-thousand lies, failures, missed opportunities, and uncompromising fears. She wields fifty years of boneheaded decisions like Jason Voorhees's machete.

Yet Hope is a determined, nineteen-year-old girl with the loose, blithe endurance of an ultramarathoner.

Back and forth, they clash

until 4:30, when I rouse and wander into another artificially-vanilla-scented day, my soft khaki pockets filled with thumbtacks.

---

Robert Scott dreams of running all the way across South Dakota, but tragically, he's only given 3 days of personal leave each year - and he's deathly afraid of snakes. He's been a public school teacher for nearly 30 years, so he's grown accustomed to the daily dance of encouraging students to trade their iPhones for a story or two from Edgar Poe. He can play Bach and Mozart on the guitar but most days wishes he could remember the math equations he mastered as a high school kid in 1983. He's utterly addicted to coffee, murder mysteries, and cross country running. If you're around the Manassas Battlefield at 5:30 a.m., feel free to join him for a few miles.

+

# Betsy Sholl

## Poet Laureate of Maine 2006 - 2011

### Shore Walk with Monk

Whoever lived here is gone, but a slick  
staircase remains in the broken shell,  
damaged just enough to suggest secret  
recesses spiraled inside where *something*  
slid down to poke out its head,

and when a threat appeared, scurried  
or oozed back along those pearly halls.  
*Someone* stood catatonic when shaken down  
by cops, but when he felt safe on the bandstand  
he'd step out and dance, flap his elbows

like nubby wings, then back to the keyboard  
to pick up his place, foot kicking  
the piano's invisible flywheel.  
Those were the years everyone changed shape,  
painters squinted, poked their heads outside the frame.

Why have frames at all—or canvas, or paint?  
And why not play the least expected note  
so the music's a double exposure,  
what's there and what isn't superimposed,  
a musical house all fretwork and jut,



as if any minute the whole structure  
might topple. But a house, once you've entered,  
nothing four-square will do. You want those  
crooked doors, those circular steps ending  
in pure misterioso, you need

those rooms suspended over a bay  
where sunlight keeps changing tempo and key—  
or so I was thinking when my tape started  
to chirp like a hip calliope,  
and I took it out to see if I could rewind,

finger holding one reel, pencil turning  
the other, like one of his visitors  
fidgiting while Monk sits wordless for hours  
or grinds his teeth. Funny, how he gets me out  
of my own head's maze, its slippery hall of mirrors,

when he could go so far inside his own,  
nothing moved but his eyes. Or he'd spend days  
in constant motion, pacing and spinning  
till the turbulence inside finally found  
a room with a bed and laid itself down.

Weeks it could take to stumble back out—  
which might explain all the doors and tilted  
balconies in his musical house,  
Magritte windows with their starry skies  
painted on glass, while a perilous void

expanded inside. I'm off the beach,  
beside my car by now, unraveling  
a Mobius strip of Monk, Monk billowing

over dune grass and rocks, ringing the car's  
antenna, Monk in hundreds of tiny

accordion pleats I couldn't undo  
no matter how I try, all spiraling out  
of their plastic shell, catching the light, pouring  
a kind of broken music the maker's  
done with, just slipped out of and left behind.

## Alms

Small as a fly bump, the little voice  
behind me calling *Miss, Miss*, wanted  
a dollar, maybe for food as she said

in that voice of mist, so plaintive  
and soft it could have come from inside  
my own head, a notch below whisper,  
voice of pocket lint, frayed button hole,

voice of God going gnat small. I shivered  
and stopped. I looked for the source,  
and there it was again, *Miss*, so slight

it wobbled moth-like on air,  
up from a bare trash-filled recess  
beside the post office steps. Yes,  
I gave the dollar. But I had seven

in my wallet, so clearly that voice  
wasn't small enough, still someone  
else's sorrow, easy to brush off—

till later that night, in bed, I heard it  
again, smaller—*miss, miss*, little fly strafe  
troubling sleep—not a name at all,  
but a failure, a lack, a lost chance.

---

Betsy Sholl served as Poet Laureate of Maine from 2006 to 2011. Her tenth volume of poetry, *As If a Song Could Save You*, winner of the Four Lakes Prize, will be published by the University of Wisconsin Press in fall of 2022. She teaches in the MFA in Writing Program of Vermont College of Fine Arts and lives in Portland, Maine.

# Virginia Shreve

## Connecticut Beat Poet Laureate, 2020-2022

### **Philosophy of Thirteen No Waiting, No Blackbirds**

I.

Sometimes, if you are smaller  
Weaker, slower  
You just got to own a bigger crazy

II.

It is seldom advantageous  
To impersonate  
An expiring wildebeest

III.

We will never have Paris.  
Your Chinese girlfriend threw walnuts at you.  
I was secretly married to a man in Texas

IV.

If your dog wants to roll in you  
It may be time  
For some serious personal grooming

V.

Do not trust a man who says Believe Me  
Do not marry a man  
Who eats the last brownie

VI.

It is wise not to antagonize crows.  
They remember your face  
And know which car is yours

VII.

When winter sky is that deep clenching blue  
Almost violet  
It is nearly enough to make you forsake red

VIII.

You may find yourself groping a married sergeant  
In a taxi in Budapest  
Or you may not. Life is uncertain. Sometimes sweaty

IX.

Not everyone can taste  
Colors  
Or swallow music like air

X.

I will not tell you how to mourn.  
Sometimes it is weeping. Sometimes it is cake.  
Sometimes becoming yourself inside out

XI.

Yodeling is not a mating call  
Thank God for chocolate  
And strong drink

XII.

Do not pity those who make a madman king.  
Better not to give them torches, though  
Fiddles maybe

XIII.

Any day you wake up  
Not tied in a sack with weasels  
Is a good day

## Dear Roberta

Why I haven't written in so long

Your cat tried to kill me, you know,  
my pulse like a fluttering moth  
in my throat, you said

I drank your mother's weak coffee  
picking the grounds out of my teeth  
She drove to the vet  
I carried Mitty in a box  
I didn't gloat

Was your mother a bareback rider in the circus?  
She looked like she could wear  
a plumed headdress  
She looked like she knew secrets.  
Mine knew more.

The ceiling collapsed  
toilets exploded, tires blew, furnace quit  
pretending

My father is himself  
only part-time now.  
He pastes my mother's old face  
on the scantily clad bodies of pin-ups

"Unfortunately," began my horoscope  
I didn't read the rest  
buzzards nested on the roof



We crossed Moon River  
mudflats slicked silver and stunk  
took the Diamond Parkway into Savannah  
for the last time  
He didn't look back

Joey and Louis grew up  
Louis became a monster  
planted hair plugs  
whitened his teeth  
sharpened them

I know about the dildo in the bedside table  
I told him  
or meant to  
but didn't want to hear the explanation

Alice, unrepentant  
Alice slept with a married man

I watched them put the paddles on  
Should we get her out of the room they asked  
I watched them shock his heart  
His body twitched and leaped like it was  
escaping

There are claw marks in the vestibule

The bitch was in heat  
the dog mad for her

For nine months I felt the swelling  
knew the heartbeat  
I dream of her tiny pale fingers  
like anemones strumming the current

Dear Roberta  
I hope the family  
is well  
dear

---

Virginia Shreve, grateful to be named the Connecticut Beat Poet Laureate for 2020-2022, considers the honor to be a vast step up from penning a catalogue devoted solely to corrugated office products, as she did in her sordid past. But that was when she lived in Dallas, and she couldn't help herself. After touching down in Kankakee, Siesta Key, Budapest, and other way stations, she now resides in a small river town in CT with husband and dogs, none well-trained, but all good-natured. For years she wrote and edited numerous regional newsletters, much dog humor, and her poems have appeared in print and online in *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Slippery Elm*, *Phantom Drift*, *Cedar Rock*, *Crucible*, *Your Daily Poem*, and others, including various anthologies. Her poem "Tintype" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Ron Smith

Poet Laureate of Virginia 2014-2016

**Oxford, 1975**

*for Delores*

If we had not gone there, away  
from our real lives, gone  
to drift along the Cherwell  
in a haze of good sherry, recline  
on elbows by the Isis  
like people in ads,

we wouldn't have seen  
those spires blacken against  
the sky's vast burn and ribboning,  
or leaned together  
down the High in the hush  
of dinner-time shadows, sleeping,

nearly, between our steps,  
the day settling

like influenza along our bones,  
or found ourselves at twilight  
behind the flutist  
in his tattered gown  
drawing us into Longwall

with, yes, "Scarborough Fair,"  
black gown floating away,  
invisible roses trellised  
on the faint smell of soot,  
that simple melody  
pulling itself out of our hearts

like guilt, like sweet confession,  
until, at a turning, the rush  
of traffic tore something  
from the air, and he strolled,  
just a student, flute  
swinging at the end of his arm

like the spit hung silver in your snapshot  
of a boy on Magdalen Bridge,  
and we knew, without  
speaking, without  
leaning apart to see our eyes,  
that we loved each other  
and that it would never be enough.

[from *Running Again in Hollywood Cemetery* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, MadHat Press, 2020.]

---

Ron Smith, Poet Laureate of Virginia 2014-2016, is the author of *Running Again in Hollywood Cemetery* (chosen by Margaret Atwood as “a close runner-up” for the National Poetry Series Open Competition and now issued in an expanded second edition) and of three books from LSU Press, most recently *Its Ghostly Workshop* and *The Humility of the Brutes*.

# Barbara Southard

## Suffolk County, New York, Poet Laureate 2019-2021

### Days

The split log cottage I live in is not much more  
than a large tree house perched on a hill  
surrounded by a curtain of greens in spring  
through summer, turning to rusted orange in fall,  
then winter trees stripped of all but their graceful  
bones, filigreed branches arching over the roof.

Muffled by a stretch of water and hills, I can hear  
the ferry horn as it leaves the harbor, and through-  
out the day, the soft rumble and whistle of trains  
arriving then leaving the station, sounding like  
a great friendly beast walking through woods.

Listen, bivalves in the harbor siphon their survival from  
water, sending what they don't need back to sea  
and did you know  
an octopus has three hundred million neurons spread over  
the whole of its body in an infinite loop of body and mind.

So many questions still not answered.

Today I will consider the green of the rhododendron,  
how light sends out its waves,  
how our eyes open wide to receive them.

Is this not astonishing?

Watch a baby grow.

She filters her days through mirrors and lenses,  
soon learns she is not the center of the universe.

Earlier I was stung by angry wasps protecting their nest by the pond  
and the deer have bitten off the daisy buds.

Let them have their way.

## Dear Whale

There was a time when you were not much  
larger than a dog, and like a dog,  
walked on land.

No one knows why you abandoned land  
for water but I see the attraction.

Some of you have teeth, others silken  
curtains that sift your food.  
You've learned to blow bubbles to corral your meal,  
your songs heard for hundreds of miles.

There was a day when a pod of you  
surrounded my son's small fishing boat  
off the Lost Coast. You gave him joy  
and for that I'll always be in your debt.

After his ashes joined you in the ocean  
I saw one of you breach the waters  
off the Kenai Peninsula and I thought  
I was seeing God—  
he was there with you in all your evolved beauty.

---

Barbara Southard currently serves as Poet Laureate of Suffolk County, New York. One of the projects she's involved in is working with the Long Island Poetry Collective to provide Zoom poetry workshops for those who have lost their workshops during Covid. Special thanks should be given to Richard Bronson, Kate Boning Dickson and Tony Policano for their hard work in hosting and facilitating the workshops. She's also part of a team that holds poetry readings (through Zoom presently) called Second Saturdays. Thanks should also be given to Kathy Donnelly and Dan Kerr for their dedication and service to the community. Barbara Southard's work has been published nationally and internationally in a variety of literary journals and anthologies. She is the author of *Remember*, published in 2008 by Allbook books, and *Time & Space*, published in 2020 by Allbook books.



# William Sovern

## Indiana Beat Poet Laureate, 2019-2021

### **New Years Eve**

*“I keep trying to find out what it really means to be American”*

- Patty Smith

I'm spending New Years  
Eve in a blue collar Indiana  
town in the pool room of a  
Karaoke bar with the spirit of  
Isadore Duncan  
I drink she dances  
I drink she dances  
I drink she dances  
but it isn't  
Isadore Duncan rather a 24  
Year old Venus in blue jeans  
Somehow I was supposed  
to be in New York City down  
on Bowery Street eating poetry  
for breakfast lunch & dinner  
but I'm spending  
New Years Eve in the  
pool room of a karaoke  
bar channeling Woody  
Guthrie I would rather be  
channeling Alan Ginsberg

But there is no poetry on  
the karaoke play list  
I'm sitting at a table  
in the pool room of  
a karaoke bar with  
the sons & daughters  
of American and it's  
midnight and I'm  
dressed like Carmen  
Maraca and the sons  
& daughters of America are  
blowing their horns  
blowing their horns  
blowing their horns  
I'm spending New Years  
Eve in the pool room of a karaoke  
bar in blue collar Indians town

---

William Sovern hosted poetry performances for 26 years. He has promoted over 200+ poetry readings in the Evansville, Indiana area. Dr. Santosh Kumar Describes Sovern's poetic technique as marked by innovation and experimentation. His poems reveal 'hard, dry image', instead of vague, facile and hollow style of the Georgian poets of the early 20th century. Consequently, Sovern succeeds in creating poems full of sharpness and preciseness.

Kim Stafford

*Oregon Poet Laureate, Emeritus*

**Lost & Found People**

That's what Jamie called them,  
when we met in prison  
and he spoke of love: "There was  
this great big woman," he said —  
"big heart, trouble getting around,  
so I helped her, we went to all  
the homeless camps to round up  
the First people, the Native people,  
the Lost and Found people, got them  
on this bus to the Sun Dance where  
you have to bleed to make it  
real, to let the Creator see you,  
just look up into the sky, into  
the sun, let go all the bad you've done,  
stand on the ground, on the earth,  
open your heart to who you are —  
lost and found, lost and found,  
I was lost and I was found."

Then Jamie was silent for a time.  
There was a light around him  
where he sat in that flimsy prison chair.  
That light came from the woman he helped.  
It came from the sun.

It came from his heart  
first hurt when he was young.  
It came from what he still has to do.  
He carried that light. I carry it.  
I give his light to you.

## Poetry in Prison

You're in, but the question is:  
What's in you? What story  
aching to be told do you hold  
in solitary, shackled, denied  
its rights to visitors?

The hard things that happened are gold  
you hammer into shape, the pain  
you twist, the grief you make shimmer,  
the lost good thing you restore  
by telling it back into being.

Everyone is in prison, one way  
or another. And everyone is  
free, one way or another. The trick  
is to find your way to bear the story  
forth, so it shines in a listener's eyes.

---

Kim Stafford, founding director of the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis & Clark College, is the author of a dozen books of poetry and prose, including *The Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer's Craft* and *100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do: How My Brother Disappeared*. His most recent book is the poetry collection *Singer Come from Afar* (Red Hen, 2021). He has taught writing in dozens of schools and community centers, and in Scotland, Italy, Mexico, and Bhutan. In May 2018 he was named Oregon's 9<sup>th</sup> Poet Laureate by Governor Kate Brown for a two-year term.

Sofia M. Starnes

Virginia Poet Laureate, 2012 - 2014

### Archetypes

They never were, they always are—  
these children who run heaven in our midst,  
who populate our parks,  
who lose their daily grit on graveyard walks  
but find it in the gravel of their shoes.  
*We are far stronger than you are, they think;*  
*We are alive and you are not.*

I never met them, but I always knew  
the tawny moths that fevered on their cheeks.

You've heard me say "Elena" for a girl,  
and "Carlos" for the anonymous young boy;  
they run home, so the rule says,  
when it rains,  
they rush off, so my eyes fear, when it storms.  
They play, unpausing, with the village brood,  
where children seem less clear, less separate—

I never met them, but I always knew  
about the notes their oyster-pockets hold.

What do they say?

How do they pick the words?  
I'm sure that Carlos clamors his in haste—  
he, of the archetypal kind,  
who'll lift a sword without excessive qualm,  
but who remains a child before the dark.

When shall I draw them out, free from the woods,  
he and Elena, and others, fresh from myth?  
When will their muddy feet, heard two by two,  
turn to the open air of Burnley?  
That day, they'll cease their darting in and out,  
and come in pairs (or halves) as humans do—

They live in houses, light their fires, and dream  
about the world, how it will come to be.

*(The Consequence of Moonlight, Paraclete Press, 2018;  
first published on the National League of American Pen Women website.)*

## Between

—*a dizain sequence*

1

A little boy, whose curly hair is gone;  
the father's massive head, stubby chin, rough  
pallor. He watches, wishing he were stone-  
blind to this subtle shell. Less is enough.  
Yet, nothing tears his eyes away. His wife  
is altar for their quiet son; her skin,  
its linen. With a hand, she shadows the thin  
sheet, cloudlike. Until the evening carries  
him away—this little boy—gradually, in-  
to a hush-hush place, where no one hurries.

2

I'm telling you this without having seen  
them. A divide, like the eyelid of a child,  
keeps us apart—nightfall over a green  
meadow, some children running after wild  
geese, others nesting with lambs. Who's exiled?  
Who's closer to home? Who murmurs about  
a battle fought in the furthestmost redoubt?  
Who's on the backyard swing? Still, pacing is  
our common language: we pace between doubt  
and assurance, between hunger and kiss.

3

Some children are never hurrying home;  
this much we know from the ephemera  
around us, or from the yield of a rhizome,  
lifeless between thumbs. Amid a para-  
phernalia of things—the end of an era—



come our shared bones shouldering a defeat.  
Daylight hurts and daylight binds us; all week  
the crescent moon rivals the evening star  
in our minds, until we hear the wind speak:  
*Ribs of My ribs, O child of My soul, come far.*

---

Sofia M. Starnes served as Virginia Poet Laureate from 2012 to 2014. She is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *The Consequence of Moonlight* (Paraclete Press, 2018). She is also the recipient of a Poetry Fellowship from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, among other commendations, including the Rainer Maria Rilke Poetry Prize, the *Marlboro Review* Poetry Prize, the Whitebird Poetry Series Prize, five Pushcart Prize nominations, and an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Union College, Kentucky. Sofia is currently Poetry Editor of the *Virginia Writers Club Journal*. In addition, she is working on a collection of dizains, a 16th century poetry form, which she is recasting in contemporary voice. Some of her recent work appears in *First Things*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *William & Mary Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Presence*, and *Modern Age*. She lives in Williamsburg, Virginia, with her husband, Bill, an emeritus professor of chemistry and jazz pianist. More information about Sofia's work can be found in [www.sofiamstarnes.com](http://www.sofiamstarnes.com).

# Shelby Stephenson

## North Carolina Poet Laureate, 2015-2018

### **Elvis**

Thinking of words that would salvage him, wiggling  
Before the microphone, 1954,  
Raleigh Memorial Auditorium, my rolled-up sleeves,  
Peg-legged pants a camel-turd brown – glory

Be rock-n-roll in the highest,  
I was there, chauffeured by my brother Paul,  
To see Ferlin Husky, the biggest  
Name in country music after Hank, “That’s all,”

He said, singing his final song, “I Feel Better All Over More Than Anywhere  
Else.”

The seats in the auditorium clanked in tunes  
Fine, full, perfect as Paul and I  
Scampered toward our car for the run

To Paul’s Hill, Elvis’s face already in the microphone,  
“I got a woman, way cross town, she’s good to me, yeah!”  
Seat-bottoms went down like  
The clatter of a train on a track piled with telephones.

“Here, here, here,” he comes again,  
His white suit shaking, guitar dressed  
In something like a baby’s bunting.

I was fifteen: I felt the blessed

Show I was witnessing, that haste of stardom  
The close-up of fame becoming art,  
The blast of records he made, bruising boredom,  
With Sam Phillips at Sun, the center of the earth.

In a week or two Elvis Presley was on RCA.  
The song, well, we know it, “Heartbreak Hotel,”  
The ready throttle of his voice fully packed with grace,  
With that extra salute to guts and secrets of nature.

I love to sing country music; yet I never sang  
An Elvis song, for once he did it, it was done.  
Impersonators come and go, dressed for flim-flam  
And money to put in the bank and some for RCA and Sun.

---

Shelby Stephenson served as Poet Laureate of North Carolina from 2015-2018. Recent books: *Possum* (Bright Hill Press), winner of Brockman-Campbell Award; *Elegies for Small Game* (Press 53), winner of Roanoke-Chowan Award; *Family Matters: Homage to July, the Slave Girl* (Bellday Books), the Bellday Prize; *Paul's Hill: Homage to Whitman* (Sir Walter Press); *Our World* (Press 53); *Fiddledeedee* (The Bunny and the Crocodile Press; reprinted by Press 53); *Nin's Poem* (St. Andrews University Press); *Slavery and Freedom on Paul's Hill* (Press 53); *More* (Redhawk Publications); *Shelby's Lady: The Hog Poems* (Fernwood Press). A member of the Society of Distinguished Alumni, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, he is Professor Emeritus, University of North Carolina-Pembroke, serving as editor of *Pembroke Magazine* from 1979 until his retirement in 2010. He lives at the homeplace on Paul's Hill, where he was born, near McGee's Crossroads, about ten miles northwest of Benson, North Carolina.

Ed Stever

Suffolk County, New York, Poet Laureate 2011-2013  
Bards Laureate 2015-2017

**The Boy On The Bridge**

The rising river

*Is*

always here  
and it

*is*

always gone  
as I stand contemplating  
how close the word  
*reappear*

*is*

to *reaper*.  
And the boy on the bridge  
tugs at my trousers  
and says, “Hey, mister,  
you have tall skin.”

And as he dashes

away  
I realize  
I have not died enough  
yet to know anything  
greater than the froth  
that sloshes  
above my shoes.

---

Poet, playwright, actor, and director, Ed Stever has published two collections of poetry with Writers Ink Press: *Transparency* and *Propulsion*. He has published extensively since 1986 and has garnered numerous writing awards, including a National League of American Pen Women's award. In 2000, he took top prize in Theatre Oxford's Ten Minute Play Competition for *Shakespeare, Time Warps & Black Holes*. As an actor, he has appeared in 34 plays and has also directed numerous productions of his own work and that of others. Ed was adjunct professor at Suffolk County Community College, where he taught Creative Writing, among other courses. He was Suffolk County, NY, Poet Laureate, 2011- 2013 and Bards Laureate 2015-2017.

Priscilla Celina Suarez

McAllen, Texas Poet Laureate 2015-2017

**Her Story is my Heirloom**

Las comadres in my life,  
their stories never wait their turn.  
They come in the form of  
a tia, a cousin, a colleague, a friend  
and carry  
a trace, a bloodline, an inheritance  
an atlas  
of the worlds before me.

“Ay, comadre, but you are never alone,”  
they whisper  
and dab at the silences  
with a *bidi bidi bom bom*  
*y se emocionan, ya no razonan*  
los consejos de quien bien te quiere.

The paths they have taken  
come back as cuentos  
of those *ooo-oo-ooo, baby, baby* tunes.  
Mami’s childhood an image in my mind  
tell-telling a map of where  
the baby boomers in my family have been.

the stories of las comadres are to be buried

but never hidden  
away in the grating lumber chest  
my grandparents  
brought home from Reynosa. not every moment  
has to be so hard  
on us

    when the distance  
        we travelled  
is never far enough  
to hide and cry  
for fear of belonging...too much to too many.

their stories are rather the worst kind  
insisting they have a chance  
to exist and re-exist  
as they travel  
    from one ear out one mouth and into another ear.  
so, they become  
a rather fragile  
heirloom needing constant care  
and renovations  
    from the passing and re-enacting  
an aunt, a cousin, a son, a nephew  
bring to light  
with the recollection another story  
has triggered.

their stories are like a trance  
we as offspring cannot escape,  
whether because we respect our elders  
when they tell us a boring chronicle  
of childhoods spent out in the labores  
    or because we are enchanted

by the ghosts  
of an old farmhouse in North Dakota.  
experiences which are curative  
against blemished ambitions  
and gently ignored  
by our young ignorance  
of appreciating, but not really knowing  
what we ourselves  
have never encountered.

their stories are fractures  
in our ribs  
as we slowly breathe out  
the subsistence of our departed  
sangre de sangre  
who come out  
rolling the punches  
and remembering the relampagos  
of their earthly existence,  
slowly invading  
space only the living  
are given credit for.

que en paz descansen  
pero  
in another cuento,  
we resurrect them  
from a tomb of hidden memories  
that are passed on and on and on  
because without them  
our heirloom, our family  
vanishes  
into a steady stream of wondering.



---

Priscilla Celina Suárez is a cofounder of the Gloria Anzaldua Legacy Project and the 2015-17 McAllen Poet Laureate, where she had an opportunity to rediscover the many communities in the Rio Grande Valley. During her childhood, she lived surrounded by the farmlands of the then small colonia of Las Milpas, TX, where she first heard many of the cuentos she shares in her work. A recipient of the *Mexicasa Writing Fellowship*, her poetry is a hybrid of rancheras, polkas, pop, rock, and música internacional. A past contributor to the American Library Association's *Young Adult Library Services* magazine, she authored the Texas State Library's *Bilingual Programs Chapter* – allowing her an opportunity to gain experience in writing poetry, rhymes, and tongue twisters for children and teens. She has shared her poetry in *¡Juventud!:* *Growing up on the Border* and *Along the River III: Dark Voices from the Río Grande*. In 2003, her work was selected by The Monitor as *The Best Poetry of the Year*.

Gayl Teller

*Nassau County, New York Poet Laureate 2009-2011*

**At the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit**

While one visitor sees Van Gogh's self-portrait  
on a vast wall, upside down,  
sinking into the sea as a sunset,

another sees that face reflected on the floor,  
right side up, rising from the water  
as a well-fed seabird,

and another sees those eyes sliding  
across a visitor's chest as she moves  
across a glass globe in reflection,

while another sees her own eyes  
mirrored back from a glass prism tower  
as her eyes merge with Van Gogh's—

maybe Van Gogh, too, had a different experience  
each time he looked at one of his portraits,  
incompleting the painting each time he looked—

as those masked, sitting in socially distanced  
pandemic circles, see this moving portrait uniquely,  
whether they're lying down, leaning left or right,

whether turning their heads, or on their heels,  
whether watching the fractured features as the face  
projects across a jagged, reflective sculpture,

or carrying that fractured face away on themselves,  
unawares, on their own body surfaces,  
in this shifting kaleidoscope of Van Gogh brush strokes

actively painting across every surface of 3 vast rooms,  
across the floors, across the walls, across the ceilings,  
as each room opens into each other's changing vistas,

brush strokes creating and recreating his irises as they bloom,  
his sunflowers as they enclose me, my hmmm  
hmmmming like a buzzing bee's on the sweets,

and visitors are bending with his potato eaters,  
sitting with his card players, stretching up  
into his cypress trees, winging over

rippling red-green waters with his birds,  
as the arches of the Arles asylum, where  
he was committed as fractured, go swimming

in multiple directions all around the room,  
and the floor is rising in shimmering rivulets  
with music embedded in the vibrant colors,

then falling into the starry night cosmos swirling  
all around no absolute perspective,  
as old faces are melting into young faces,

into dazzling hues in creation's fluid universe,  
where visitors are turning into paintings,  
entering the fidelity of otherworldly dimensions,

where paintings are all process in motion,  
and visitors are all painters with their own  
moving perspectives, shifting realities,

and millions keep participating across the US,  
across Italy, across Brussels, across the UK,  
with the man who died penniless, obscure,

because being alive means eyes need to brush  
with branches of light and resounding colors  
so they might sing in art's glorious hills.

## Off to Work

As small as Rahul is, for he's only six,  
and so far away from me he shrinks  
in the distant Tumakuru dawn,  
as he carries his filthy plastic bag  
his mother bestowed, sent him off again  
unmasked, barefoot, with his bump  
of malnourished belly,  
as I relish another spoonful of rainbow cake,  
tartufo on top, mask in my pocket,  
at the diner's outdoor table, six feet from others,  
and Rahul rummages through a garbage dump  
littered with broken glass, slits his thumb,  
as he lifts a shard from among stinky discards,  
prizes the plastic piece to recycle  
for his mother, for a few cents per hour  
since March, when India closed its schools,  
and no one has praised him as "bright"  
as his teacher had since then,  
as I, on leave since the pandemic,  
unknowing how to teach online for real,  
pay the check to the masked waiter, drive off  
with Rahul facing up, lying next to me,  
his eyes open and bound by where I take them  
as they look out from the front page,  
but Rahul and I will never meet  
the further, the faster I drive away  
in my distant galaxy of experiences,  
yet the more he shrinks from my sensibility,  
the dimmer each step he takes in my view

with his bleeding unshod soles,  
his stabbing hungry belly,  
the larger Rahul gets in the looming  
entangled human family.

~ "At the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit" (*The Seventh Quarry, Swansea Poetry Magazine*)

~ "Off to Work" (*Corona, An Anthology of Poems-- Walt Whitman Birthplace Association, 2020*)

---

Nassau County, NY, Poet Laureate for 2009-11 and the Walt Whitman Birthplace 2016 Poet of the Year, Gayl Teller is author of 7 poetry collections, most recently, *Flashlight: New and Selected Poems* (WordTech/ Cherry Grove Collections, 2019) and the editor of two poetry anthologies— *Toward Forgiveness* (Writers Ink, 2011): awarded a NY State Decentralization Grant for the Arts, and *Corona: An Anthology of Poems* (Walt Whitman Birthplace Association, 2020). Director of the Poetry Series at the Mid-Island Y, in Plainview, NY, and a Hofstra University professor, she has been the recipient of many national and international poetry awards. Her website: [www.gaylteller.com](http://www.gaylteller.com)

Larry D. Thomas

*Texas Poet Laureate, 2008*

**A Few Months Shy of Ninety**

(Far West Texas)

She lives alone in an old stone  
house on the outskirts of Alpine.

Though her petite frame's acquiesced  
a tad to the nagging lists

of arthritis, her mind's quite keen,  
active as an uncaged cactus wren.

To honor her dead husband,  
she's declined at least a dozen

blue-rivered hands offered her  
in marriage. A list of widowers

lies folded in her bedside table  
drawer, each willing and able

to lead her in a wicked Texas  
Two-Step culminating in safe affection,

sans the baggage of attachment,  
just enough to keep her cheeks sanguine

and her arteries free of fat.  
Too old to fret, she likes it like that.

(first published in *New Texas*)

---

Larry D. Thomas, a member of the Texas Institute of Letters and the 2008 Texas Poet Laureate, has published twenty-three print books of poetry and numerous online chapbooks. He resides in the Chihuahuan Desert of southwestern New Mexico. His Web site is [www.larrydthomas.com](http://www.larrydthomas.com)



Mary Langer Thompson

*Senior Poet Laureate, California 2012*

**Poem in Water**

By Lingering Lake

I watch a Chinese poet  
with sweeping brush strokes  
write characters  
in water  
upon the pavement.

Disciples follow in silence  
under the willow trees  
reading retextured liquid,  
the path an impermanent context.

I can't decipher the message  
of this groundling poem,  
but feel unmoored  
then embraced, bent and baptized,  
evaporating verse  
washing the dust from my heart.

## Cell Phones and Song Cells

Usually, I like  
to drive and sing  
with the radio.  
But not today.  
I'm racing across freeways  
to join you in  
an emergency room.

I read that  
canaries stop singing  
each autumn  
when their song-generating  
neurons die.

You were able to tell me,  
with slurred speech  
over the carphone that  
your head felt strange,  
you were too dizzy  
to walk.

In winter, the birds' neurons  
grow back. In spring  
they learn their songs  
all over again.

I step harder on the gas,  
knowing that  
if you leave me,  
replenished neurons or not,  
I will not sing.

---

Dr. Mary Langer Thompson's articles, short stories, and poetry appear in various journals and anthologies. She is a contributor to *Women and Poetry: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing by Successful Women Poets* (McFarland) and was the 2012 Senior Poet Laureate of California. A retired principal and English teacher, she now writes full time in Apple Valley, California where she received the Jack London Award in 2019 from the High Desert Branch of the California Writers Club.

Tammi Truax

Portsmouth, New Hampshire Poet Laureate 2019-2021

Maine Beat Poet Laureate 2018-2020

**For Lonesome George, the last Pinta Island Tortoise**

On reading *The Last of its Kind* (The Atlantic, June 2019) by Ed Yong

The last, the very last  
one of a species  
is called an endling.  
When the last  
one of a species  
dies, disappears  
it usually goes unnoticed  
by us. But always  
it leaves behind a body;  
The ending of an endling.

When there is  
but one left  
the species is already,  
of course, extinct.  
The endling then  
is just surfing solo  
in its lonely little place  
on the sixth mass wave,  
representing, giving us,

spectators on the messy beach  
a chance, a last chance,  
to say good-bye,  
or sorry, or something,

instead of sticking our heads  
in the sand to hide from  
the truth and the heat  
of the scorching sun  
we installed in the  
perfect sky.

---

Tammi Truax, an MEd graduate of Plymouth State University, is a writer, teacher and school librarian. Her poetry has appeared in twelve anthologies, including *The Widows' Handbook: Poetic Reflections on Grief and Survival* with a foreword by Justice Ginsburg (Kent State University Press, 2014). A YA verse novel, *For to See the Elephant* (Piscataqua Press), was released in 2019 and a volume of poetry in 2022. She has prose in *Compass Points* (Piscataqua Press, 2015) and *The Mud Chronicles: A New England Anthology* (Monadnock Writer's Group, 2018). Her work can be found in several journals, newspapers, magazines, and online. Tammi served as the Maine Beat Poet Laureate and the Portsmouth (NH) Poet Laureate with a project that was covered in the New York Times and AP. When not at work she is at home in a Maine cottage making final revisions to a two book historical novel for adults to be published by Oghma Creative Media.

Chris Vannoy

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2019*  
*Beat Poet Laureate, California 2017-2019*

### **His Heart**

His heart is a pothole its edges cracked and broken  
The center filled with coarse crushed asphalt and mud  
He has no willow in him to let the wind pass through  
Just concrete and rock

He scoops handfuls of sand into his mouth then  
turns his face upwards and drinks in the cold rain  
chews, then swallows  
... he eats no dandelion seeds to make him dream  
...no vines grow around him to keep him warm

He is wedged between the boulders that Sisyphus has let roll down the hill  
tries to stand alone as he yells against a stiff wind  
into the silence of his own m i s e r y  
that does not care to listen

---

Chris Vannoy has read up and down both the east and west coast. He was the Beat Poet Laureate of California 2018 and the United States Beat Poet Laureate in 2019. During those years he completed 2 tours of Europe. His first reading in London was at the church where William Blake was baptized and his last reading was in Dylan Thomas's childhood birthplace in Swansea Wales. Last year he was invited to attend the TANTA poetry Festival in Tanta, Egypt. This year he was given the Beat Poet Laureate Lifetime award.

Angie Trudell Vasquez

Madison, Wisconsin Poet Laureate

**Kick the Can**

Trains rattle across Four Mile Creek  
carry livestock to feed the hungry machine.

Swimming in flooded cornfields we crawl through DDT.

Mulberries purple stain ooze through bare toes,  
starburst heels. Mosquitos buzz in our ears –

feed on limbs, bite under shorts. Tics land  
on our heads cause night body inspections.

Corn arms scratch our legs as we run through farmers’  
young rows play find the scarecrow, the hobo.

We cut off kids play *kick the can* under earthshine  
cry out in the soft blue dark.

Sweet clover, dandelions, oak trunks  
know our names as we dangle –

from stripped limbs dive off at six feet.  
I am nine, the ringleader, the *I know* girl.

We tell ghost stories, hunt for clues, peer into panes



little ones stand on shoulders to see      report back.

We trample earth paths, search for caves,  
sunken farm houses, old graves. Sometimes –

semis tip over and hooves clatter up  
our dead end street, earth crashing roar

nostril thunder snorts      steam...  
Cows and horses destined for meat packing plants

plot for freedom, pass under our window frames  
their last chance hangs.

Mothers run out of their kitchens scoop stunned toddlers  
from the middle of the stampede

remark how often this happens animals  
breaking semi steel doors.

Winegardner Road      where underground railroads ran  
and good Iowans hid refugees in root cellars

in between fake walls, civil wars  
until the next train crossed the land,

the creek, loess fields      straight line from China  
spine of tundra. Trains still rattle

carry oil, soybeans.      And children  
stub their toes bloody all summer play

*kick the can*     barefoot on concrete  
moisture riding their back, sweat beads

the second they leave the shower. Reporters –  
crack eggs on sidewalks the whites steam...

---

Angie Trudell Vasquez is a poet, writer, performer, and activist. She is the current City of Madison Poet Laureate. Angie Trudell Vasquez received her MFA in poetry from the Institute of American Indian Arts. Her work was recently featured by Tracy K. Smith, former U.S. Poet Laureate, on the poetry podcast, *The Slow Down*, which is broadcast daily on Minnesota Public Radio. Most recently her work has been published in *Taos Journal of Poetry*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Raven Chronicles*, *The Rumpus*, *Cloudthroat*, and the *South Florida Poetry Journal*. She has poems on the Poetry Foundation's website, and was a Ruth Lilly fellow while at Drake University. In 2018 she was a finalist for the New Women's Voices series and her book, *In Light, Always Light*, her third collection of poetry, was published by Finishing Line Press in May 2019. She guest edited the Spring 2019 edition of the *Yellow Medicine Review* with Millissa Kingbird. She is co-editing a collection presently with Margaret Rozga, current Wisconsin Poet Laureate, entitled *Through This Door*, to be released in fall 2020. She serves on the Wisconsin State Poet Laureate Commission as co-chair.

Chryssa Velissariou

*Greece Beat Poet Laureate, Lifetime*  
*International Beat Poet Laureate, 2017-2018*

**Guilt**

Your flaming words  
like little diamonds,  
polyhedral,  
engraved gems  
at depots in  
her darkened mind.

Consolation  
of a thirsty  
innocent soul  
for romantic  
passion's heartbeat.  
She's hurt by you!

She believed that  
they were purchased  
in bloodthirsty  
hellish deep mines  
down in Africa  
through skinny hands  
of black children,  
who were hungry  
for altruism's truth.

You had bought them,  
man, so cheaply,  
in odd bazaars  
of illegal,  
artificial,  
rare gems workshops,  
up there in the  
liar steppes' cold.

Tiny diamonds,  
so resistant,  
her dropping tears,  
they have washed you  
and let you nude  
in front of your  
own being's needs and,  
in the end, squashed,  
you have fled in  
violent escape.  
Your silent scream  
unresponsive  
to her carnage.

You, through your lies,  
ashamed yourself.  
And the love which  
you felt, was like  
flame retardant  
grenade, cut  
the victim's guts  
as bad as yours,  
of the addicted

storyteller.

So, well yes, she  
will recover...

You have been lost,  
just sat upon  
a continuous  
dream's illusion.

## **In A Net**

Do you feel it, how unbearable is  
to be alone  
among the crowd?

To be elsewhere,  
with mismatched people  
who are looking for your love though?

Do you realize you're in a net,  
which you set up yourself,  
ignoring that you're drowning in it?

Impossible!  
You surely know about your own prison...  
Many degrees of your freedom  
got limited over time.  
After that moment you had set up  
that ugly success plan.

My little soul,  
when did you realize you were going to fly?  
Do you feel the foot of time on your chest now?

I managed to reach perfection,  
I was lucky,  
I existed where I belong  
for several moments,  
for several charming hours.

Ah, but I feel deep nostalgia for them

and that torch of dearth  
is torturing me often silently.

My little soul,  
you were born for ethers and  
you are in a hurry  
to be free sooner ...

What other adjoining souls were you attracted  
to that net  
where you are entangled?  
You are responsible for them!

Hang on the best you can in there,  
no matter if your wings flutter.  
You owe to your followers!

You cannot leave,  
even if you have the chance,  
it is not right!  
You are not entitled to escape.

Because of these innocent souls  
that kept you company all these years  
They shouldn't be obliged to pay  
the debts you would leave behind...

---

Chryssa Velissariou, published Poet and Physics professor, and entrepreneur,  
the 1st International Beat Poet Laureate, Greece 2017-18, Greece Beat Poet  
Laureate 2019-Lifetime, honored by the National Beat Poetry Foundation,  
Inc.

## Pramila Venkateswaran

### Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate 2013-2015

#### **Young Wonder**

These days when the world is in lockdown  
I like to walk to the pond, sit on a downed log and watch  
flies buzz above rippling water. They must sense  
the monster just below the glassy skin. A frog leaps  
up and snaps its prey in a trice.

Oak and maple rise serenely all around. Dressed in green  
and red, they are grandmothers who've seen the antics  
in the pond for years—stupid insects, foolish humans  
dipping their sticks in the water to poke at fish, wily foxes  
spying the banks, humans who scream beside  
the placid water to loosen the knots in their hearts.

“I want to count all the frogs in the pond,” a boy tells  
his mom. “Like the chimpanzee lady on TV?” asks  
the mom. “Yep. Can the frogs hear me? Tell me  
what they are saying.” “Imagine,” says the mom,  
so he kneels on the grass and peers into the emerald  
depths and sees and hears frogs riding tortoises,  
iguanas laughing, fish dining on flies.



## **Autobiography**

I was a ball passed from hand to hand.  
“Unbelievable. 9 pounds?” they cooed.  
My mother placed a black dot on my cheek  
to ward off the evil eye, fed me arrowroot,  
and formula, and watched me grow chubbier  
than any infant in the neighborhood.  
Most of all I fed on strangers’ how-cute-  
never-seen-such-a-fat-child-from-such-a-thin  
woman, as she wheeled me up and down  
the city. When my hair grew, my mother  
twisted it into two tight plaits and put me  
in frilly dresses and set me in the compound  
to play hide and go seek. I cried when I could not  
find her, and when she appeared with outstretched arms,  
I clung to her so tightly, she could not change  
out of her sari to go to bed.

---

Pramila Venkateswaran, poet laureate of Suffolk County, Long Island (2013-15) and co-director of Matwaala: South Asian Diaspora Poetry Festival, is the author of *Thirtha* (Yuganta Press, 2002) *Behind Dark Waters* (Plain View Press, 2008), *Draw Me Inmost* (Stockport Flats, 2009), *Trace* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), *Thirteen Days to Let Go* (Aldrich Press, 2015), *Slow Ripening* (Local Gems, 2016), and *The Singer of Alleppey* (Shanti Arts, 2018). She has performed the poetry internationally, including at the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and the Festival Internacional De Poesia De Granada. An award winning poet, she teaches English and Women's Studies at Nassau Community College, New York. Author of numerous essays on poetics as well as creative non-fiction, she is also the 2011 Walt Whitman Birthplace Association Long Island Poet of the Year. She is a founding member of Women Included, a transnational feminist association.

# Edward Vidaurre

## McAllen, Texas Poet Laureate 2018-2019

### **When A City Ends**

I.

a poor kid sees clean clear water  
he envisions a treasure, a hope  
have you ever seen a murky  
opaque wishing well?

II.

When a woman kneels  
along the river's edge to wash her sheets,  
she thinks, a new beginning, a cleansing,  
when was the last time you washed your clothes in oil?

III.

When a thirsty stray dog walks for miles  
along the gutters of this nation  
wishing to quench her thirst  
where does she find relief?

IV.

When have you seen  
dogs or cats, blood dripping  
from their jaw hair  
laying on your front porch content?

It happens, blood and oil mix with mother earth's tears, and we watch as it happens.

V.

Soon we'll be drenched.

VI.

question marks fall from trees in place of leaves, a girl yells at me saying her dog has down syndrome and that I should believe her like I believe in last night's moon, "even if he does" I cry, I worry about being bitten. When a city ends, poems get shorter, sometimes just a word long. We stay away from windows, and breathe slowly in anticipation of, what, the end? People loot and turn mad, while others pull flowers out of the rubble, sometimes finding the missing not meant to be found. They hear a loud voice coming from the North, sounds of wailing drums, the sound of a faint condolence, like gasps.

VII.

the earth sneezes, snores, and coughs, and you feel like grabbing the priest from his collar and demanding an answer. You sleep with jeans and tennis shoes on in case you need to run out of your home, in the silence of night you hear the cries and howls and sirens. You hear death. You see nothing. Normalcy is replaced with eeriness and the moon wears down on you something heavy. You want to sleep, but the earth starts to tremble again. Your past due bills are forgiven until everything is back to normal, then you return to the purple of days.

VIII.

I do yard work and get all sweaty. I wait for the smell to set in. I splash some old spice and I'm the old you. Armpits and cologne. I walk around smiling and on my tip-e-toes to make myself tall like you, I call out for the cenxontle that flew away the day you died. I drink coffee and watch black and white

movies. I imagine the woman in my home old and fragile, I tell her to cuss me out, because today I am you, and I'm man enough to take it.

IX.

I buy a stack of postcards with tacuazín having seizures: cure them with short poems, send them to prison inmates doing time for resisting the oligarchies of the world. Boil a beef shank and discard the meat, suck out the marrow while watching a soccer match between Everton and Manchester United. Go up on the roof and count passing cars with low tire pressure and engine trouble. Empty your pockets and put contents in a ziplock bag, if you have a box of cigarettes, smoke two at a time until your tongue gets scratchy, then proceed to lick a cat. Watch the evening news and scream "Lies, Lies, Lies" until the national anthem comes on. Write a lullaby or ode to your neighbor. Drink warm milk. Close your eyes. Count your breaths. Call me in the morning. This is how I cure the insomniac.

X.

my memory returns, I'm twelve again. I am in love with a cinnamon skin colored girl who spends her day washing clothes in a light blue painted pila under a cloudless sky. I write poems to her every night in her native tongue that she can't decipher, so I draw hearts and balloons, stick figure animals and little children holding hands. I don't recall hurricanes or politics at that age, life was better in that third world country. Only the adults died at one time in my life, we just went missing. Music was life, the anthem of my youth was filled with bass drums and the introduction of raging resistance raps, when I couldn't move I listened to 80s love songs. I wrote more love poems, this time to Julia Roberts and Drew Barrymore and Wonder Woman. I was Erik Estrada on a motorcycle, with a gun, without violence, with a big smile, with straight teeth, with a badge that took down the maliantes, with an accent on this side of the border, on a television set, in a make believe world. I fear nothing when

my memory returns, my mom is young and dyes her hair a color not to hide greys, but because she still feels beautiful enough to bring out the green in her eyes. I am fifteen again, the earth shakes and I ask God to forgive me for the first time.

---

Edward Vidaurre is an award-winning poet and author of eight collections of poetry. He is the 2018-2019 City of McAllen, Texas Poet Laureate, 2022 inductee to the Texas Institute of Letters, and publisher of FlowerSong Press. His writings have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Texas Observer*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, as well as other journals and anthologies. He has edited over 50 books and anthologies. Vidaurre resides in McAllen, Texas with his wife and daughter.

Daniela Voicu

*Romanian Beat Poet Laureate, Lifetime*

In every trace remained  
a road  
in every step  
remains a shadow  
green is not anymore green only  
in the crouched love forgotten in a corner of the room  
where  
hidden  
we sat with masks on face  
and with our hands in sight-  
our word was stolen  
our air and sun were stolen  
fear has traveled millions of tiny steps  
from  
every edge of the gaze of deserted roads  
to the strangest thoughts-  
no man  
no birds  
no sound

"let's hold hands  
or to hug?"  
is the last movie we saw at the cinema  
and all over the planet ...

where is the little girl dressed in red who was  
running through the park after a clown  
to buy rainbow-balloons?

---

Daniela Voicu is a Romanian poet and painter. Her poems, interviews, articles and paintings have been published in various international journals, magazines and anthologies. Lifetime Romanian Beat Poet Laureate May 18,2018



James P. Wagner (Ishwa)

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States, 2020-2021*  
*Beat Poet Laureate Long Island, New York 2017-2019*

### **Everyday Alchemy**

Alchemy *noun*

- 1. the medieval forerunner of chemistry, based on the supposed transformation of matter. It was concerned particularly with attempts to convert base metals into gold or to find a universal elixir.*

To turn lead, into gold  
a power that countless have sought out  
through the ages  
many of the smartest minds in history had tried  
their hand  
at this craft, yet hundreds of years of research  
and the conclusions of modern chemistry  
have taught us  
that this science  
is a pseudoscience,  
alchemy doesn't exist.

And yet, my mind, and eyes, have never fully  
received that memo  
because I see alchemy every day.  
I see it in my cup of coffee  
when I think of the magic of the change that these  
beans go through, with a little hot water

I see it in the kitchen, with every amazing meal  
cooked

I see it in the morning paper,  
a mere combination of ink and parchment, that now  
conveys untold information  
through abstract lettering, that we can actually  
understand.

I see alchemy performed masterfully through the  
kids at the lemonade stand,  
taking literally the life gives you lemons quote  
and turning it into pocket money  
to buy things, that will enhance their summer  
creating experiences, and fun times they will  
cherish forever.

I see alchemy in the classroom, where the teachers  
turn books and lessons  
into knowledge

I see it in the roads we take, that have cut our long  
journeys down from days or weeks  
to minutes or hours

I see it in the inventor, the business owner, the  
repairman, the plumber, the carpenter

I hear it, in the music

I see it, on the stage, and the television screen,

I look at it, in the art gallery, and the museum

I see alchemy,  
the concept of turning something of little worth  
into something of great worth  
in almost everything I see around me.

When I really look, with knowing eyes.

Perhaps the scientists and historians who have  
declared alchemy

a dead art, have just gotten so used to the magic

so desensitized to the transmutations we perform  
on a daily basis  
that they forgot to look deeper  
and appreciate  
everyday alchemy.

## Waiting For My Sister

"I'm waiting for my sister,"  
I say sometimes  
to people who don't know me  
see me waiting on the sidewalk outside  
of a busy place where people come and go  
and me standing by an entrance  
could be just another person  
waiting for someone  
even a sister.  
It's always strangers I say this too  
not someone who thinks of me  
as an only child  
who would know  
I'm not really waiting  
for someone at these places  
see, I haven't had a sister in close to 30 years  
since the time I sat on my mother's lap  
and asked her how long would it be  
until the baby came  
too young to understand  
what premature birth meant  
being told only  
that she wasn't coming anymore  
but even now  
nearly 30 years later  
in some ways  
I still am  
and always will be  
waiting for my sister.

# George Wallace

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2015*

*Suffolk County, New York Poet Laureate LI NY 2003-2005*

## **Peace Is Honey**

Peace isn't the absence of war.  
It is sweet milk in a clean bucket.  
It is the bleating of goats in an honest  
man's yard. Peace is the honking of geese  
in the pond, cicadas chirping in the tall grass.  
Peace is olive presses, wine presses,  
harvesters clamoring for more fruit  
in the foothills of the Lower Galilee.  
More than silence of dawn with no rockets  
to disturb it, peace is rooster crowing,  
hen clucking -- plow points, shovels and  
stiff rakes and hoes rattling in the back  
of a pickup truck. It is the buzz of harvest  
machines combing the harmonious land --  
horizon to horizon, feeding all the  
children women and men without  
prejudice, giving all the people  
in the land full employ.  
Peace is Palestinian boys  
in the apiaries of Doura,  
west of Hebron, working  
their father's hives. It is  
a cloud of honeybees

hovering over the roof-  
tops of Kibbutz  
Ayelet Hashahar.  
Peace is not just  
the absence of  
small arms fire,  
or treaty-signing  
ceremonies in  
far away capitals.  
It is more than just  
who gets what,  
who loses what,  
and both sides  
agree to accept it.  
Peace is more than  
the absence of war.

Peace is wild ducks splashing in the Jordan River.  
Peace is the shared laughter of workers in the field.

Peace is honey and milk in the land of milk and honey.

## Sunday Morning Before The Creation Of The Modern World

By mid-day  
the sun  
will break through  
the river fog  
(with its mourn-  
ful heart intact)  
but for now  
a lone seine  
worker on the  
woeful dock  
contemplates  
his clay pipe  
(on the bank a  
man & child of  
the middle class  
too statuesque for  
intimacy stand  
safely distant from  
each other) -- this is  
Sunday morning  
before the creation of  
the modern world  
before the creation of  
the modern world  
the Bridge at Courbevoie  
Seurat at his gray  
dismal best  
a lingering dolor  
like regret  
suffuses every  
waking soul

(not until noon  
will the bathers  
arrive, with their  
picnic baskets and  
working class joy) --  
what delicate  
sensibility  
holds sway  
(like a gypsy  
violin) this is the  
hour of the forlorn  
this is Milhaud  
before he discovered  
jazz on the streets  
of Harlem (the year was  
1923) in this picture  
it is 1886  
we are gathered  
here, bankside  
in the midst  
of a supreme  
dying pastorale  
(in the horizon a  
smokestack pierces  
the unity of  
heaven) -- is this  
even Sunday? Will  
the churchbells  
never ring?)



no call  
to worship  
greater than this --  
solitude  
in the mist

---

George Wallace is the first poet laureate of Suffolk County, LI NY (2003-2005), first poet laureate of the Beat Poetry Festival (2008-9), writer in residence at the Walt Whitman Birthplace (2011-present), and author of 37 chapbooks of poetry. A professor of English at Pace University in NYC, he is a major organizer and supporter of poetry communities nationwide, and travels internationally to share his work. He was recently honored with the Alexander Gold Medal for contributions to the arts by UNESCO-Piraeus, Greece, the first American to receive this recognition.

Marjory Wentworth

*South Carolina Poet Laureate 2003-2020*

**Holy City**

*“Only love can conquer hate.”*

Reverend Clementa Pinckney

Let us gather and be  
silent together like stones  
glittering in sunlight

so bright it hurts our eyes  
emptied of tears and searching  
the sky for answers.

Let us be strangers  
together as we gather  
in circles wherever we meet,

to stand hand in hand and sing  
hymns to the heavens and pray  
for the fallen and speak their names:

Clementa, Cynthia, Tywanza,  
Ethel, Sharonda, Daniel,  
Myra, Susie and Depayne.

They are not alone. As bells  
in the spires call across  
the wounded Charleston sky,

we close our eyes and listen  
to the same stillness ringing  
in our hearts, holding onto

one another like brothers,  
like sisters because we know  
wherever there is love, there is God.

Published in *Illuminations*, 31, Summer 2016; *The Post and Courier* June 21,  
2015, and BBC NEWS (6 days after the killings at Mother Emanuel Church)

## **In the Shadows of Nuremberg**

*For Henry Barbanel*

Because we are forever weak  
and wounded, looking for someone  
to follow or blame; sometimes  
we become savage and change  
the rules to ease our minds.  
Clouded by delusions  
of power or fame, human  
beings can justify anything.

Too often things can go wrong  
in a hurry, and the masses  
go along as if their hearts  
were turned inside out, and hatred  
was something long hidden  
but there, like a riptide  
pulling below the glittering  
smooth surface of the sea.

Abandoning everything  
we know is right, we become  
tribal and primitive,  
tearing the ties that bind us  
one to another, as if  
they were made of air. And love  
dissolves into something  
lost in the cruel cacophony.

And though it may be far,

there is always a storm  
swirling somewhere. The sea  
that connects and creates us,  
holds the seeds of our destruction.  
Still, God keeps nothing from us.  
Each new wave is a renewal;  
every day a gift of our own making.

As we stumble from the shadows  
of the twentieth century,  
covered in blood and ash,  
cradling the bones of those who are lost,  
we know there can be justice;  
the pattern has been set.  
No matter how long it takes,  
there is no peace without redemption.  
Without shadows, there is no light.

*Written for the commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Closing of the  
International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg (1946)*

Published in: *About Place Journal: Works of Reistance, Resilience* Oct. 2020  
and *American Society of International Law*, 2017.

---

Marjory Wentworth is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Out of Wonder*, *Poems Celebrating Poets* (with Kwame Alexander and Chris Colderley). She is the co-writer of *We Are Charleston, Tragedy and Triumph at Mother Emanuel*, with Herb Frazier and Dr. Bernard Powers and *Taking a Stand, The Evolution of Human Rights*, with Juan E. Mendez. She is co-editor with Kwame Dawes of *Seeking, Poetry and Prose inspired by the Art of Jonathan Green*, and the author of the prizewinning children's story *Shackles*. Her books of poetry include *Noticing Eden*, *Despite Gravity*, *The Endless Repetition of an Ordinary Miracle* and *New and Selected Poems*. Her poems have been nominated for The Pushcart Prize seven times. She served as the poet laureate of South Carolina from 2003-2020. Wentworth is a 2020 National Coalition Against Censorship Free Speech is for Me Advocate. She teaches courses in writing, poetry, social justice and banned books at The College of Charleston ([marjorywentworth.net](http://marjorywentworth.net)).

Ron Whitehead

*National Beat Poet Laureate, United States 2021-2022*  
*Beat Poet Laureate, Kentucky 2019-2021*

### **The Underground**

More than once  
I have been a recluse.  
I have lived in the woods,  
away from everyone,  
studying the Essenes.  
Much of my life  
has been spent  
as a member of The Underground.  
I abhor politics.  
The politics of greed.  
The politics of power.  
The politics of raping pillaging murdering  
Mother Earth and animals and people  
in order to selfishly gain and maintain power.  
But abhorring the history of greed,  
the history of power,  
is only half of my story.  
I do not want  
what is not mine  
is the other half of my story.  
Thankfully, not everyone  
is an insane greed and maniacal power tyrant.  
The only government for me

is the government of individual responsibility  
and helping my neighbors.

Have i always been individually responsible?

Of course not.

Have I always helped my neighbors?

Of course not

I have failed more times  
than everyone I know put together.

I have said "FUCK OFF!" many times.

But people change. I do.

Change is the number one universal principle.

Though often painful,

I embrace change.

Throughout my life,

I have changed.

There came a point where

I chose to make decisions

that impact my life,

and the lives of others,

in unselfish ways.

I have come to understand

that being individually responsible

and helping my neighbors

creates the healthiest personal,

communal, global environment.

I choose to walk this path

as far as it will go.

I want to see where it will go.

I like not hurting others.

I like being a good neighbor.

I like having friends.

I love people and animals

and all the terrible beauty



that Mother Earth bestows upon us.  
I do not want what is not mine.  
I always remain  
one step away  
from being a recluse.  
I am happy in the solitude  
of inner and outer nature.  
I am a member of The Underground.

---

Poet, writer, editor, publisher, professor, scholar, activist Ron Whitehead is the author of 24 books and 34 albums. In 1994 he wrote the poem “Never Give Up” with His Holiness The Dalai Lama. In 1996 he produced the Official Hunter S. Thompson Tribute featuring Hunter, his mother Virginia, his son Juan, Johnny Depp, Warren Zevon, Douglas Brinkley, David Amram, Roxanne Pulitzer, and many more. Ron has produced thousands of events and festivals, including 24 & 48 & 72 & 90 hour non-stop music & poetry Insomniachthons, in Europe and the USA. He has presented thousands of readings, talks, and performances around the world. He has edited and published hundreds of titles including works by President Jimmy Carter, His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Seamus Heaney, Wendell Berry, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Rita Dove, Diane di Prima, Bono, John Updike, Douglas Brinkley, Jim Carroll, Anne Waldman, Joy Harjo, Yoko Ono, Robert Hunter, Amiri Baraka, Hunter S. Thompson, and numerous others. The recipient of many awards, his work has been translated into 20 languages. In 2018 Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer presented Ron with a Lifetime Achievement for Work in The Arts Award. In 2019 Ron was named Kentucky’s Beat Poet Laureate and was also the first U.S. citizen to be named UNESCO’s Tartu City of Literature Writer-in-Residence. He is co-founder and Chief of Poetics for Gonzofest Louisville. Outlaw Poet: The Legend of Ron Whitehead movie will be released by Storm Generation Films/Dark Star TV in 2021.

Thom Woodruff

*Texas Beat Poet Laureate, 2020-2022*

**The Night Sky**

**No Body Knows All Of You**

Celestial agencies plot the path of orbits  
of asteroids with future appointments  
Nobel Prizes are given-to those who see and acknowledge  
the Black Hole at the center of our existence  
We stare Up only sometimes  
to see the kiss of moon and stars and planets  
but that star map was written long ago  
as it moves across the blackness  
with temporary illuminations  
Larger than our Only Earth  
from which we came in birth  
and leave and stay and change  
While Night Skies remain in play  
of Consciousness-wider,taller,deeper  
than word or dream or vision  
Night Sky horizon to horizon has seen  
pre-us,pre-our becoming and our being  
Older than gods with names and goddesses anon  
Night sky both engineer and witness  
Mute only if you do not believe  
that stars have consciousness  
and it changes us/as the weight of planets  
sings through body space.Violent births in forever flames

in time shifts deeper,darker than we can ever see or know  
It glows!From our first eye,we tried to name the gods  
but they had different destinies/were larger than our mortalities  
And stories written in our stars change with every civilization that came  
and left on stone a name,remained only while witnessed once  
Forgotten like the flame of birth,and dying of ,and change  
Night Sky Remains.

## On My Way To The Winery

I met a man of dust-whose name was Shams  
He was invisible to most  
but his student Rumi saw him clearly  
He was not of this world  
but our world of wine ,laughter and dance  
belonged to his expository generousities  
Storyteller he,from West Texas  
He would improvise jocular fictions  
about men of sour grapes  
angry men of Grapes of Wrath  
Sufi Dancers whose steps  
invoked the Divine in every smile  
The journey was a long epic  
Chapters of Longing for Refreshments  
Flash fictions of Epiphanies  
Mini-operas of Amazements  
We were thoroughly engaged in the relationships between  
longing and the Beloved.Vision and the Dream.  
So we sat by Eternal Roadsides,sharing what we had both seen  
If i could unfold his Map of Laughter/those ribald tales of drunken nights  
How he started Green and ended up as Fine Wine  
All is process,towards Perfection  
All is taste and touch and bite  
Never made it to that winery  
But i keep feeling-  
EVERY THING IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT!

---

SPIRIT THOM is an improvising bard who works best with improvising musicians. One of the founders of AUSTIN INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL, and now available on ZOOM (Poetry Aloud!/SOAPBOX POETRY), SKYPE (Spoken n heard @Kick Butt) and CISCO WEBEX (Nomads Choir). Many clips on YOUTUBE. enjoy LIVE! Has performed with GONG, MOTHER GONG, KANGAROO MOON, FUTURE NOW, INVISIBLE OPERA COMPANY OF TIBET , GLOSSO BABEL, TERATOMA, BLISSNINNIES etc etc etc

Katherine E. Young

*Arlington, Virginia, Poet Laureate 2016-2018*

**hush: unbutton sunset**

hush: unbutton sunset  
let soft breeze skim your skin  
on sidewalks people sigh  
shake loose the day's last stone  
from shoes that rub heels fine  
buses abandon asphalt  
to doze in antipodean lots  
amid nimbi of razor wire

hush: unbutton sunset  
unloose the coils of day  
appointments at a quick-step  
headlines deadlines red lights  
hand-lettered signs  
aligned in highway islands  
amid the sea of vehicles  
veteran—homeless—hungry

hush: unbutton sunset  
fold back the flaps of evening  
examine your ineffectual hands  
scrolling through the pages  
of mute anonymous faces  
a man on hunger strike

a child warehoused in a cage  
in a repurposed Walmart  
adrift in the digital night

hush: unbutton sunset  
dismiss your fear of the dark  
in all the centuries  
of our unlearning  
we've saved only ourselves  
and that only by the grace  
of the god of small favors  
and as twilight falls on the terrace  
and ice melts in your glass  
and your son comes for a kiss  
to be wrapped in your arms and  
carried to his air-conditioned room  
you who believe in so little  
must still believe in evening  
enough to carry on

*“hush: unbutton sunset” was written for the Columbia Pike Blues Festival by the Arlington (VA) Poet Laureate, a program of Arlington Cultural Affairs and Arlington Public Library.*

## Bar at the Folies-Bergère

It starts with the scent of lavender as she  
buttons clean pantaloons, laces up stays,  
smooths her bodice and shakes out the frills,  
ties the black ribbon about her neck.  
Her costume smells, as they all do: mingled  
sweat and makeup, the fabric itself,  
splashed, perhaps, with the licorice twist of absinthe.  
Then come powder and rouge, the small earrings,  
a pink and white corsage already starting  
to droop. Her props are placed on view: beer bottles,  
champagne, a vase containing two pale roses,  
cut glass bowl of oranges that may  
or may not indicate a certain kind  
of availability. Leaning against  
the marble bar, she doesn't look at you  
(Why should she look at you? Can you give her  
what she needs, or even cab fare home?):  
posing, perhaps, or perhaps beyond posing,  
her face bleak, artificially rosy amid  
the moon-pale globes and crystals shimmering  
in the ersatz heaven of the cabaret.  
Perhaps a man inspects her in the glass,  
perhaps he's looking past; neither of them  
seems to see the woman on the trapeze,  
feet squeezed into ankle boots of lizard green.  
Later, she observes his red-gold lashes,  
watches his still-young face slacken in sleep,  
breathes in his scent of cigars, cheap brandy,  
scent that clings to her fingers like orange oil



as she works her nails beneath the skin,  
methodically stripping the pith to find  
whatever's left of the fruit's sweet flesh.

*"Bar at the Folies-Bergère"* was commissioned by the Washington Shakespeare Theatre as part of its Poets are Present residency and appears in the Poets Are Present Anthology.

---

Katherine E. Young is the author of *Woman Drinking Absinthe*, *Day of the Border Guards* (2014 Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize finalist) and two chapbooks. She is the editor of *Written in Arlington* and curator of *Spoken in Arlington*. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Iowa Review*, *Subtropics*, and many others. She is the translator of *Look at Him* by Anna Starobinets, *Farewell, Aylis* by Azerbaijani political prisoner Akram Aylisli, and *two poetry collections* by Inna Kabysch. Young's translations of contemporary Russian-language poetry and prose have won international awards; several translations have been made into short films. Young was named a 2020 Arlington County (Virginia) Individual Artist Grant recipient, a 2017 National Endowment for the Arts translation fellow, and a 2015 Hawthornden Fellow (Scotland). From 2016-2018, she served as the inaugural poet laureate for Arlington, Virginia. <https://katherine-young-poet.com/>

Aprilia Zank

*Beat Poet Laureate, Germany*

**the digging of diamonds**

in the nearly empty cinema  
watching this film  
again  
with greasy tickets  
torn at the corners  
following  
the digging of diamonds  
from volcanic pipes  
the vulture diving  
peak stained with blood  
the cry of torn silk  
the bacchantes pour liquors  
in goat shaped goblets  
and the children perform  
their tiny gig  
their masks on  
well after  
the curtains were drawn  
the dogs scratch at the door  
and the diamonds burst  
emerge in razor sharp  
deep cutting sparks

---

Dr. Aprilia Zank is a lecturer for Creative Writing and Translation Theory from Germany. She is also a poet, a translator and the editor of several anthologies. She writes verse in English and German, and has been awarded several prizes. In 2018, she received the title “Dr. Aprilia Zank – Germany Beat Poet Laureate” from the National Beat Poetry Foundation. Aprilia is also a passionate photographer.



## About the Editor

James P. Wagner (Ishwa) is an editor, publisher, award-winning fiction writer, essayist, historian, actor, comedian, performance poet, and alum twice over (BA & MALS) of Dowling College. He is the publisher for Local Gems Poetry Press and the Senior Founder and President of the Bards Initiative. He is also the founder and Grand Laureate of Bards Against Hunger, a series of poetry readings and anthologies dedicated to gathering food for local pantries that operates in over a dozen states. His most recent individual collection of poetry is *Everyday Alchemy*. He was the Long Island, NY National Beat Poet Laureate from 2017-2019. He was the Walt Whitman Bicentennial Convention Chairman and has taught poetry workshops at the Walt Whitman Birthplace State Historic Site. James has edited over 100 poetry anthologies and hosted book launch events up and down the East Coast. He was named the National Beat Poet Laureate of the United States from 2020-2021. He is the owner/operator of The Dog-Eared Bard's Book Shop in East Northport, New York.