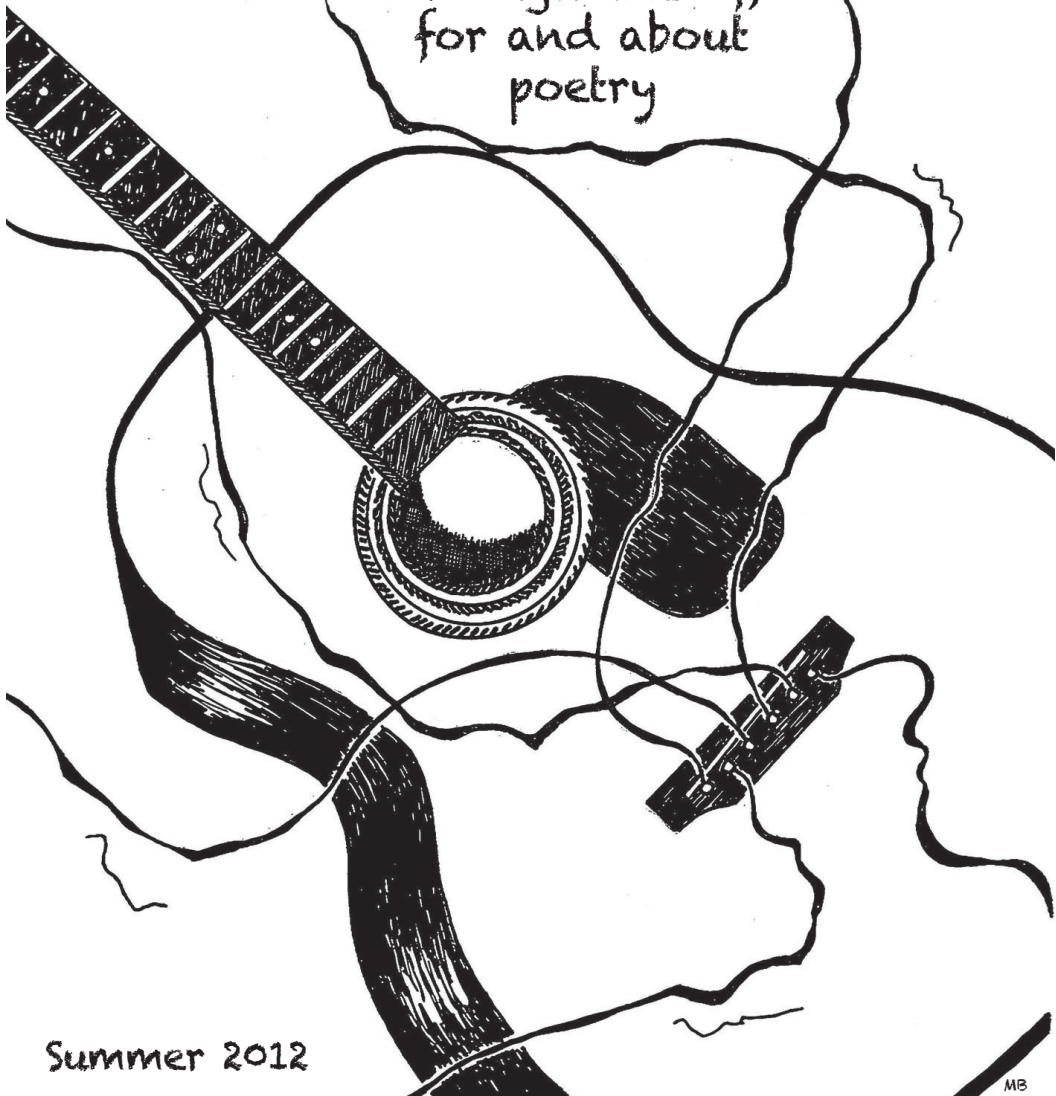


# UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,  
for and about  
poetry



Summer 2012

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Unstrung is a project of the nonprofits The Blue Guitar  
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Call



Capozzoli



Chorlton



Gaitis



Gilleland



Holden



McQuinn



Meadows



Miller



Nelson



Richard



Rider



Schnur-Berlot



Sederstrom



Soto

# Karen B. Call

## Four Mornings

May 27, 2012

I woke at 3:30 and listened to the night silence.  
The clock's blue beam shown into the room  
and I turned over hoping to go back to sleep.

I woke again at 5:30. Cool air breezed around me;  
the sound of a thousand moths hovered above me.  
Light threaded through the open door.

I lay still and listened to the cooing of distant doves.  
You slept and I watched your chest rise and fall  
as the CPAP machine made its white noise.

3

There is a pocket of coolness this morning;  
a storm in the Pacific Ocean has made magical air  
just for the two of us.

May 28, 2012

It's 5:30 a.m. on Memorial Day this year.  
I'm up because my neighbor  
dragged his garbage and recycle dumpsters  
to the curb. I look out the kitchen window.

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A rabbit hops around the yard across the street.  
It pauses before it scurries over the hard-packed dirt  
to a bush, kicking up dust  
that flurries then drifts, settling into a new place.  
A baby bunny scampers under the prickly pear,  
then to the curb, mama now beside him.

Birds soar above them and land in the creosote bushes  
swaying on thin branches.  
Shining through the leaves the sun makes lacy patterns  
on the dirt.

I smile to myself and breathe.

4

May 30, 2012

I woke at 3:30 a.m.  
I lay listening to a cat yowl  
hoping to fall back asleep  
and I breathed.

I woke at 5:30 a.m.  
I lay feeling the cool air brush by my face  
doves cooed in the distance.

I woke at 6:50 a.m.  
I lay knowing I was alone  
my husband awake and gone.

I rose at 7 a.m.  
and dressed for my walk.

As I walked I wondered if one morning  
the sun might pause  
and drift back to sleep to rise later.

I met other walkers and we nodded.  
I wanted to ask them what they would think  
if the sun dozed off one morning  
and didn't make it up as usual.

June 3, 2012

This morning on my walk  
I stopped to look at a saguaro cactus  
covered with white blooms near its crown,  
that place from which it grows.

This morning on my walk  
I came upon an old man  
wearing a tan straw hat at a jaunty angle  
and a long-sleeved white shirt  
with creases down the sleeves.  
He walked with a woman  
wearing a turquoise sweater  
and leaning on a cane.  
He touched her arm;  
she turned her head and smiled.

This morning on my walk  
I remembered  
when we walked together,  
talked, laughed and you introduced me  
to your Arizona.

This morning back at home  
I look for the crown of our togetherness,  
that place from which we grow.

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# Karen B. Call

Now I'm working on poems about Tucson mornings. I have a notepad and small flashlight by the bed so I won't waken my husband as I write those early hours' thoughts and any when I waken. I take a morning walk in my neighborhood and make notes of what catches my attention.

At home with coffee I begin the poem by reviewing the morning's notes and writing my thoughts down to see how it all fits together. At this stage I write across the page, prose style. I'm not concerned with verses, line breaks or word order yet. I'm figuring out what I'm trying to say. When the words are down, I read it aloud to hear what I have. Then I rearrange it all into the right order, tighten the piece, make adjustments and read the poem aloud several times. When I don't have any more changes to make, I put it away to mellow overnight. I'll finish it usually the next day but later I'll still tweak poems.

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Photo courtesy of Jan Scoggins

Karen Call came to Tucson on New Year's Eve 2001 from northern Wyoming. She retired while in Tucson and stayed to make it her home. Karen has essays in "Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West" and "Woven on the Wind: Women Write About Friendship in the Sagebrush West." She travels with her husband, Bill, who she met in Tucson, to visit far-off places and their three sons, wives and three grandchildren (so far) in Pennsylvania, Colorado and Oregon. She has been a member of a snail-mail poetry round robin for more than 15 years. Contact her at [Karenmb@cox.net](mailto:Karenmb@cox.net).

# Cathy Capozzoli

## Send Rain

When fresh clouds  
frame winter mountains,  
thickets of dirt  
turn to silt as  
water threads the early river.

Thin hairs coil  
into fine fertile earth,  
now moist for the root.

8

First roses light the thaw,  
set the melting path  
with first takes of leaves.

Snakes nest in rising sunlight.  
Bees visit the blooming lotus.  
Blossoms thread abandoned limbs.

May the branches of banyans  
draw water to dried ink—  
roots to my pen,  
the river to my hand.

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# Cathy Capozzoli

Not all words in English were created poetically.

I love words that resonate inside me. I keep paper all around me, in my car, my purse, even my kitchen. When I hear a word that fills me with love or fear or melancholy or feelings of solitude, I write it down, and stash these scraps of paper in a messy binder that also has copies of favorite poems or prose passages that arrive in my life. These come from everywhere--the internet, books of poetry, the New York Times.

I also hear phrases or poetic combinations of words in conversations in my own head, with others, overheard in hallways or restaurants. I write down these segments, too, and add to the stash in my crusty binder.

I keep two journals at my desk, one for musings in sentence form, and the other for words or phrases that leap into my hands as I work. Lately, I have opened a file on my computer, and store images and phrases in there, too.

To write poetry, I sit quietly at my desk, with these scraps and musings spread in front of me. Like a patchwork quilt, one or many poems emerge, stitched together from scraps, threads and ruminations about living this embodied life.

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Photo courtesy of the author



Cathy Capozzoli is a poet and a student of acupuncture and oriental medicine in New Mexico. Her connection with Arizona, in addition to having lived there for 5 years, is that she loves the Arizona Consortium for the Arts and all of their literary endeavors. Her second collection of poetry, "Tenth Sky," is forthcoming from Blue Light Press of San Francisco in winter, 2012. She is at work on her third collection of poetry, "Five Seasons." Reach her at [info@cathycapozzoli.com](mailto:info@cathycapozzoli.com).

# David Chorlton

## Hohokam Woman and Metate in Madera Canyon

10 In oak shade close  
to the stream running shallow  
a Hohokam woman presses  
her knees into depressions  
they left when she rose  
from her yesterday's work  
and with a round stone  
in the palm of her hand  
grinds mesquite beans  
into flour. She turns her wrist  
a little to the left and back  
while moving her arm  
from the shoulder  
and shifting her back  
as she looks now and then  
down to the bajada  
and toward the huge rock head  
that juts out of the earth  
as if it had broken through time.  
Leaning on her left arm

held stiff, she keeps pushing  
with the right in a liquid  
movement while the leaves  
on the cottonwoods behind her  
rustle and from a tangle  
of twigs and dry grass she hears  
quail passing through. Pressure  
and release continue. The woman's  
easy motion never slows until  
she takes hold of a branch  
on the tree that gives her shade  
and pulls herself upright when  
in granite's late glow the mountains  
rise and the ridgeline  
burns into the empty blue  
turning slowly rose with clouds  
drifting across the day moon  
where it cools from ivory to ice.  
© 2012

# David Chorlton

Please don't give me a manual and expect me to follow the instructions on how to make some new device or appliance work. It isn't that I can't understand the steps to be taken, just that something in me refuses to accept that there is a single way to reach any goal. Perhaps I'm imposing poetry onto the practical side of life, because when I'm writing I rely primarily on intuition. Getting started is always the most difficult part of the process for me. I sit down, often unaware of where I intend to go, or at least without a first line or idea that seems interesting enough to have me continue. Once I have that, on a good day I feel myself sinking into what I'm doing and building associations into a poem until the ending becomes apparent. It is a largely subconscious journey, one that holds my attention by courting the mysterious way things relate to each other. I heard once that the creative type doesn't have (or employ) the social filters most people automatically use, and that allows everything into and out of the mind regardless of how appropriate it is. Draw your own conclusions from this, but the creative advantage can easily turn into a social disadvantage! That happens when, as in my case, the process is never quite switched off.

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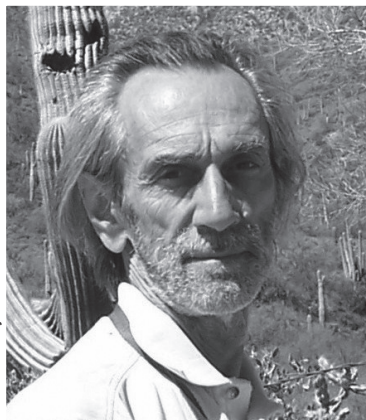


Photo courtesy of Roberta Chorlton

David Chorlton has lived in Phoenix since 1978. Born in Austria, he grew up in Manchester, and in his early 20s he went to live in Vienna. In Arizona he has grown ever more fascinated by the desert and its wildlife. In 2008, he won the Ronald Wardall Award from Rain Mountain Press for his chapbook "The Lost River," and in 2009 the Slipstream Chapbook Competition for "From the Age of Miracles." Other collections include "Return to Waking Life" (Main Street Rag Publishing Company) and "Waiting for the Quetzal" (March Street Press). "The Taste of Fog" is his first work of fiction. Contact him at [rdchorlton@netzero.com](mailto:rdchorlton@netzero.com).

# David Chorlton

## A Day in Arizona Territory

On the wooden balcony  
above the Chinese laundry  
globes of satin light hang  
and calligraphic secrets  
frame the door to the room  
where prayers burn to a taper.  
The first man to wake up  
from his opium sleep  
comes out for fresh air  
and as he paces up and down,  
his pentatonic footsteps  
make the day's first sound.  
Walking around, you might  
hear next the straw broom  
in a small boy's hands  
as he sweeps the part of Granite Street  
where the apple and cigar stand  
has opened for business, or  
the bottles clinking  
on the plaza as half a dozen  
men set up their wares in hope  
of earning the first cents  
of a fortune. Above the soft  
percussion of hooves on the road

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Continued on page 13

when a horse pulls its owner  
into Prescott on two wheels  
come voices still hoarse from the mines  
and sometimes the tongue  
of the Irishman who can't stop  
reliving his part in the Civil War  
rattles louder than the train  
as it takes the final bend  
before arriving. Just outside town  
Yavapai women  
are stripping agave to the root  
preparing it to roast. They live  
where they're allowed to  
now, remembering when all  
the land they see was theirs.  
On most days you listen  
to what you most expect,  
with bargaining and boasting  
through the hours, except  
when there's a moment  
so quiet you can hear  
the platform give on Courthouse Square  
and a bone crack  
in a robber's neck.

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# David Chorlton

## Salt River Merchant

Quong Hop sells barley in the dark  
from a small adobe refuge  
with no windows  
where he spends each day  
always in the same round-collared shirt  
and blue suspenders.

When he steps outside for air  
and stands at the doorway,  
he leans back against  
the rectangle of mystery  
through which his customers must pass.

They have seen him  
wearing a suit and bowler hat  
in the annual procession  
with the flag at its head and the gong  
that is a golden splash  
when he strikes it, but never know  
what he is thinking  
as they dismount from their horses,  
and cautiously follow him inside  
where he states a price  
in Spanish, completes  
the transaction in English,  
and to say goodbye  
reverts to his habitual Chinese.

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# David Chorlton

## Tombstone

We could be forgiven  
for mistaking the photograph  
to have been taken at a crucifixion,  
or else been modeled on a painting  
from the renaissance, so composed  
are those beneath the body, limp as it is,  
against the pole, but John Heath  
couldn't be forgiven  
for his part in the murders  
down in Bisbee; protestations  
of his innocence as the white  
handkerchief was tied around his face  
be damned. The cross bar  
is at the very top of the pole, but too short  
to have borne the man's arms. The rope  
is tossed over it,  
but the lack of tension  
in the left knee and the way the head  
appears weighted down with resignation  
suggest there was nothing more to be done.  
The picture shows sky all the way  
down to the grey suggestion  
of a mountain as backdrop  
to the scene. It was, according to the shadows  
cast by hat brims

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across the eyes of the men standing close  
to the telegraph pole, a sunny day  
for February, so the miners  
dressed for daylight could enjoy it  
after their hours in the dark. They turn  
toward the camera with no urgency,  
content to be a part  
of a fine day on which there happened  
to be a distraction to break  
their monotony of drink and smokes.  
The men had arrived at the jail  
at the time the Chinaman was due  
with breakfast and when the Sheriff tried  
to stop them he was quietly removed.  
It was their way  
of advancing Arizona, they wrote  
on a placard posted on the pole,  
which made the occasion  
a useful lesson to the children  
whose mothers brought them  
out to look, a lesson endorsed  
by the coroner's jury,  
who concluded that death  
occurred through emphysema,  
caused by strangulation, which, for all  
anybody knows, was  
self-inflicted.

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# David Chorlton

## Geronimo's Birds

It must have seemed a good time  
in December, late in the eighteen-eighties,  
to wear civilian clothes  
and find a patch of sunlight  
in which to spread white cloth  
for an officers' picnic  
with the wives relaxed as though  
the rustling in the nearby trees  
had come from jays and not  
Geronimo. The setting made  
the food taste good, and when  
a spotted towhee flashed  
past the party, one lady  
called it pretty while others looked  
to see what made it fly. These were  
nervous years with raids made unexpectedly  
and with the heat came  
hummingbirds like drops of blood  
suspended in the air, present  
for a second and gone  
as fast as horses  
fleeing into Mexico. A general  
in July would sit back on his porch  
curved into the canvas  
on a folding chair and watch an oriole

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perching high enough to see  
whether there were Indians  
close by, while Geronimo would never  
rest. He circled every target  
the way the red-tailed hawks do,  
looking first from far away  
and following the silence  
to a kill. I never do wrong ,  
he told General Crook, without a cause .  
And the Cooper's hawk  
never takes a gilded flicker  
without having an appetite. Geronimo's people  
were hungry. They were quick  
but the land on which they lived  
changed faster than they  
could run. When thick-billed parrots  
flew in the mountains  
Geronimo heard their calls  
as laughter in the pines, and soon  
he was no longer there to listen.  
Then the parrots disappeared  
and the trees could not remember them  
when some returned years later,  
only to be hunted by  
the stronger birds, the ones  
who were never moved away  
and kept in bland captivity.

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# David Chorlton

## Bisbee 1912

When they walk along the Gulch  
the men step sharply  
to avoid the effluent that streams  
freely past the restaurant  
whose tablecloths are always fresh  
and the store  
where food is canned and stacked  
in pyramids and rows as orderly as if  
it were a temple where  
a man might pray for his own  
preservation. Everybody breathes  
the same air, with the smelter  
never sleeping. Karl the tailor's  
job is to make them look human  
once they have washed away the mine dirt,  
and Nobile sells them general  
merchandise with his colleague, Medigovich,  
who's growing concerned  
that the Serbs who came to work  
are leaving to fight  
their country's newest war behind a flag  
that leads them to the train  
waiting to allow them time  
to reconsider their allegiance

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Continued on page 20

to the present versus that to the past. As the brass  
band plays to urge them on  
the ladies at the YWCA don't even look up  
from the linens they repair  
while they sit in wicker chairs  
with their sewing machine running almost  
as fast as the needles  
in their chattering mouths. They have  
everyone's name on the tips  
of their tongues, except for the ones  
nobody uses, not here  
with the border so close, where  
*Mexican* describes each Jose, Miguel and Maria.

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# James M. Gaitis

## A Self-Reflection on the Origins of Poems

In this mediocrity  
of almost once  
and nearly twice  
at times an urgent, reminding call  
visits itself  
upon me

A thought  
perhaps generically inclined  
emotional, metaphysic  
associates finite words,  
quantifyingly definitional,  
to meld in personal phrases  
propositions  
of a self-styled meter

21

And  
if the opening moves  
are played  
the pawn  
skirmishing  
within the framework  
of individual and etymological limitation  
might do well to sacrifice  
the Amazonian queen

Continued on page 22

I realize

    this radical frivolity  
    might presage things  
        here still to come

What? Should I succumb

        to a Delphic failure  
        to adequately measure  
            the interiors

    before I exit  
        the peripheral room?

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# James M. Gaitis

When I sit down to write a poem, I am very much like a runner at the starting block who cannot race unless he finds a way to translate the sound of the starting gun into physical motion. Just like the runner who knows that a bad first step will be fatal to his chances of winning the race, a misstep by me in selecting the right first words to a poem or the right opening phrase most often spells doom for my effort. I depend on the element of risk, which I believe underlies great poetry writing and the success of many great poets. Risk, it might be said, can open many unseen doors. Once the opening moves are made (i.e., the first words are written), I believe writers of poetry do well to risk allowing the poem to emerge subconsciously from their innermost emotions, which arguably are better suited to exploit the infinite number of ways that vocabulary, when unfettered, can interact to conjoin expression and beauty into the innumerable forms that poetry can take. In Siddharthan terms, let the fall be free.

James Gaitis (pictured at his home in Montana) earned a BA in English Lit from the University of Notre Dame and a JD from the University of Iowa. A former resident of Tucson, he is the author of two novels, including *The Nation's Highest Honor*—a desert satire. He and his beautiful wife currently live in Montana's remote North Fork of the Flathead, on the west flank of Glacier National Park. Contact the poet at [gaitis1@aol.com](mailto:gaitis1@aol.com).

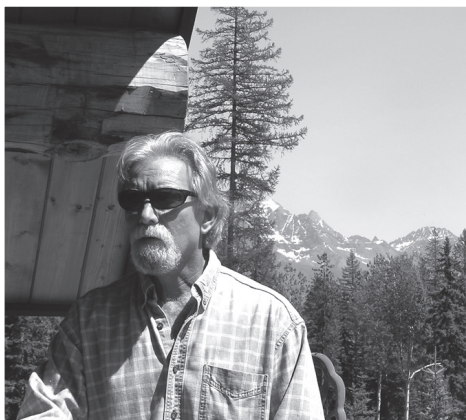


Photo courtesy of the author

# Amanda Kay Gilleland

## Serenity

When my last breath leaves my body,  
a lily reaching full bloom,  
pine trees will sigh in the wind  
and water will cut through narrow creeks  
singing me to sleep.  
My skin will absorb my sister's tears,  
Small drops of salt water,  
each one full of love.  
We shall cry together,  
until both our dark chocolate eyes  
dry in the warm comfort of the sun's rays,  
and all that are left are wet trails running down our cheeks.  
My father will clutch my hand tenderly  
and with his hard calloused palm against mine,  
I will be braver.  
My Mom will hold me in her arms,  
and rub my back lightly, her fingertips like silk waterfalls.  
With my head in her lap,  
my hand in his,  
her tears mixed with mine,  
the ocean's gentle tide will take me.

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# Amanda Kay Gilleland

As a child, I always assumed that poets were conceited and snobby members of the upper-class echelon. I imagined Emily Dickinson, who bore a strong resemblance to my fourth-grade English teacher, smiting me with her wit and ambiguity, while holding a rose-patterned teacup. In my mind, a person was only wholly pompous if they toted around flowered teacups everywhere. I went around for years telling people I despised poetry, never realizing that two of my favorite childhood authors, Shel Silverstein and Dr. Seuss, were writing poetry in the books I adored so much.

It wasn't until high school that I truly realized the beauty and power a poem can hold. The first poem I ever wrote was about a homeless woman I had spoken to briefly outside a grocery store as a child. This woman and our conversation haunted me for quite a long time, appearing in my dreams over the years, and tugging at something in the back of my mind. I write poetry to stop those tugs.

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Photo courtesy of the author



Mandi Gilleland is a young poet and aspiring author who lives in Tucson, and loves the desert sun almost as much as she does writing. She volunteers at the University of Arizona Medical Center, and has a deeply rooted addiction to reading literature. She is currently studying English Language and Physiology at the University of Arizona. You can reach her at [akg2@email.arizona.edu](mailto:akg2@email.arizona.edu).

# Amanda Kay Gilleland

## The Great White Lady

26

You look at me through the eyes of the sycamore.  
Towering and twittering, life teeming through your limbs,  
your sagging skin is almost completely molted.  
Behind it the breathtaking bone white shines through.  
Slender and strong no wind moves you.  
What secrets are hidden in the curve of your limbs?  
In between your index finger and thumb?  
In the smoke you exhale into the dark decrepit night?  
When you sweep the stairwell of dust over and over again  
do you think of the child who wanted to learn but taught instead?  
When your back creaks and your breath becomes ragged,  
and the arches of your feet scream in agony,  
you still stand tall ironing out every wrinkle  
though your bark is peeling apart.  
The sun will come out tomorrow you sing,  
the wind waltzing through your leaves,  
tomorrow there will be sun.

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# Amanda Kay Gilleland

## Sunshine

Swaying in the torn leather passenger seat  
of my saffron nineteen seventy Volkswagen  
beetle

Underneath the round perturbed fishbowl  
nestled inside a book whose pages were cut by a scalpel  
into perfect rectangular prisms

Shines a piece of the sun

Hot and white, burning brighter than a child's laughter in summertime.

Needless, endless, breathless, trestles holding me  
everlasting in an embrace warmer  
than hot chocolate.

© 2012

27

# Ryan Holden

## Camera Lucida

Can I trace the bridge  
of her nose? Adjust  
the angle of sunlight  
onto thin wax paper,  
the kind her butcher  
wraps the chicken in.

Rub charcoal on glass,  
cast her shade  
on sheaf after sheaf.

Can I hold her face  
captive in a prism?  
Watch each color

drift from freckle  
to earlobe to small  
hairs on her shoulders.  
The light washes  
through each wrinkle,  
each glass prison.

Is this the purpose  
of a silver frame—  
hold on, love, hold  
on—bound  
& her image in these  
optical, illusory, rules?

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# Ryan Holden

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Ryan Holden received his MFA in Creative Writing from Arizona State University. His poems have been recently published in Country Dog Review, ditch, and Ampersand Review. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2011 by the Hobble Creek Review. Reach the poet at [ryanholdenasu@gmail.com](mailto:ryanholdenasu@gmail.com).



Photo courtesy of Monday Storm

# Ryan Holden

## a conversation with the floor

30 & she answers with a sideways story to avoid  
a question she doesn't feel comfortable  
answering *are you homeless*—her name  
is on the lease—with a preamble  
a movement of sentence fragments (I stay  
at two places) or a downwards glance (I was  
paying the rent before when I was working  
I saved to pay in advance a large chunk but  
my roommate is paying it now) & she can answer  
(no) to the question so it'd seem there would  
be no reason to be ashamed or feel like a direct  
(no) might be problematic & I'm holding her hand  
so I can count the accents of her story each syllable  
an arrow marking a way to try to get behind  
the programming of her mouth & a freedom  
to be ok with a fear of judgment I can see  
how her eyes count the specks in the white  
floor tile to avoid looking over at me while she goes  
through a series of questions she doesn't want to  
be judged so she answers each question roundly  
with an explanation even while the lady asking  
reassures her that *it's just the questions I have to ask  
for this form* I can see the automatic movement  
of a pen filling out form after form each checkmark  
or signature can be read as assurance or indictment

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& I hold her hand or brush her hair out of her eyes  
but what comfort can I provide her my judgment is  
her terror & even though I'm wearing the shirt  
from the night before & she's wearing my boxers  
underneath her skirt a sense of modesty in the ER  
with hospital gown & what that reveals is that I  
hold her hand or brush her hair back or scratch her neck  
& draw little hearts on her back with my nails she still  
can't be sure whether I'm casting judgment through  
my comfort & each heart drawn is a needle  
in the blood infected & the doctor said *staph, probably*  
*MSRA* he prescribes a standard antibiotic anyway  
& we still have to go fill that but there's form  
after form with questions that drive her eyes into the floor  
& leave the little nail-drawings in flesh gasping  
trying to say that *I love you & everything's going to be*  
*ok* but each voice is choked off by form after form  
& each sideways story is necessary in its roundabout  
way so I hold her hand in that cold room & wait  
for the pen to stop checking boxes & an indictment in her eyes

© 2012

# Ryan Holden

## mosaic collection

when that mirror  
shattered

you polished  
every shard

& placed each one  
in a box you used

to build walls  
at odd angles

you glued  
the pieces to

scattering light  
in all directions—

a scar on your left hand  
matches your mother's

your real one  
not the reflection  
who raised you  
© 2012

32



# Ryan Holden

## camera obscura

it's us  
standing in the room now  
drilling a hole in the shoebox-  
sized coffin to let  
the light in there  
is no film but the image  
of us can stay lit on your  
eyes developed on your skin  
& it is something  
for you to carry after  
we have photos of you—first step  
first trip to Disneyland first  
day of school first bicycle  
ride—your mother stopped  
recording earlier this year—  
a new digital camera ready  
to give to you for college  
that sits in a box  
under my desk—we have  
this small hole the image  
of us may be blurry  
but we need ourselves  
recorded on your face

© 2012

33

# Ryan Holden

## Funhouse

Fold glass—  
watch the body shrink & expand.

Circle light away from her  
wrists as they vanish to sky.

Pause for a moment to look up at her  
reflection—see color under the eyes.

Stretch glass into thinnesses—  
wish for the radiation of bones.

© 2012

34

# Ryan Holden

## Clear Sky Building

A praying mantis on glass  
wall stops to identify  
itself in the soft reflection.

There is wonderment in a prayer  
to forsake its identity in  
opposite form—to speak

aloud the idea of forelegs  
curled in on themselves,  
to recognize the slight

discoloration of wings.  
Undergo movements,  
wind-blown & vagrant.

Will it disguise by twinning,  
bowing its head to the mirror,  
reciting small mantras

to capture a variant  
nomenclature?  
It's ego in crush

of stillness  
to release its image—  
the mortality of photons.

© 2012

35

# Melanie McCuin

## On the Occasion Captain Alfred Stormalong Slew a Monster

36 I remember her eyes, rolling and rolling like cannon balls in the seats of their translucent sockets. My captain's forearm flexed as he cut her tentacles. She was twisted into a double carrick knot. She was a loop around a loop around a loop, a string of suckers and swiveling hooks, he had pulled together and tied to the side of our boat. The first mate pulled her onto the deck of the Tuscarora, and we watched as Stormalong spread her legs to reveal a black beak, hard as diamonds, beaded with ice and salt water, a colossal mouth. She had been hunting near our clipper ship. I had never seen one such as her, an undulating muscle, a fan of arms, waving above her mantle like pink kelp. Our ship's cook poked at her gills, fingered her insides, sang about the man who brought her to the surface. *To my aye, Stormalong, to my aye ...* Her beak opened, then closed, opened, then closed, as she drowned, and I wondered what she saw in those last minutes, as the gulls circled the main mast. Was it only Stormalong's knife, swift as a gunner's hand, ready to dig out the great opals that were her eyes?

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# Melanie McCuin

## All Writers Are Pirates, All Pirates Are Thieves

A poem is not built from nothing. As writers, we draw from a bank of memories to create something new. But what happens when we continuously craft our verse from the same tired details? A year ago, I was relying too heavily on my previous experiences. My poems were repetitive. So I started interviewing people—friends, relatives, bar patrons—sifting through their reminiscences, looking for material. I did not ask them the obvious questions—“How did that make you feel?”—but the unobvious questions. For example, I asked a friend about her favorite place to hide when she was a girl.

*What did it smell like?* I said.

*Turnips and rotted wood,* she replied.

She reconstructed her grandparents' shed for me from recollections of saws, mold, and the squeaks of mice. I scavenged the meatiest bits and fused them with my memories to produce a new poem. Am I a thief? Yes. But shouldn't all writers pillage the shores of foreign memory for a glint of lost gold?

37

Melanie McCuin graduated from Arizona State University in 2005 with a BA in History. She has been published in *The Blue Guitar*, *The Gila River Review*, and *The Salt River Review*. She plans to pursue an MA in English at Northern Arizona University beginning in the fall of 2012. Reach her at [melanie.mccuin@gmail.com](mailto:melanie.mccuin@gmail.com).



Photo courtesy of Judy Wood

# Melanie McCuin

## As My Mother Washes the Dishes

Her hands are not five-finned fish pushing through the water. They are not the paws of some mutt walking down the street in moonlight. They are wanted, wet, people things. They work in tandem like two fleshy, long-boned thoughts, one answering the other with the press of a sponge. These are my mother's hands. They pulled at my hair with a sharp-tooth comb. They sewed bows and lace on the hems of my skirts. They dressed me, yanking shirt collars down so hard, I saw the lights of God. My mother's hands have slapped my mouth. I was thirteen then, with two hands of my own, wild bucks that rammed their horns through plaster and dug into the pants of my PJs at night. My mother, with hands so much like hands, could not understand the animals that grew from the stumps of my arms. She struck my face, I think, to connect with the human in me. Now, her hands dry the dishes and stack them high.

© 2012

38

# Melanie McCuin

## The Broken Column

*(Based on Frida by Hayden Herrera)*

Dear Frida,  
when we met, you were hanging in a museum,  
tough as bone. *You were a bomb*  
*wrapped in red ribbons*  
of surgical tape.

Your spine  
had crumbled, but you were bright  
as blood, and we shared a joke. Three jokes.  
Cezanne, Picasso, Degas—  
*the bitches of Paris*—we laughed  
at their animal women,

those girls, lovers who entertained,  
who posed with trained limbs, who exposed their  
white breasts and underbellies,  
especially Degas's dancers. He painted them  
as rats, didn't he? They scratched their backs for him  
with tiny paws.

39

Continued on page 40

Not you, Friducha. You stand in deserts  
inherited at birth, painting rain forests, plump hearts,  
bursting into flame, burning like the ends of your  
final days.

That day you made me

want to drill deep to the marrow  
of my bones and discover with honest eyes  
the black velvet hair that coats  
my upper lip.

© 2012

40



# Melanie McCuin

## Home Coming

Out here, near the Mekong River, we shit in barrels. No plumbing. So we piss in used oil containers, and after a week, two of us carry the mess down to the clearing to be burned. That's where we found Henry this morning, slumped in the corner, a body and half a head, leaning against a steaming drum. Two days back at Base and he shoots himself in the latrine. None of us said it out right, but Henry'd gone goofy when we were on leave in Japan, where we'd lost ourselves in acid rock and geisha wails. Now, he's being shipped home in pieces, a smashed cup. And I'm back in my hammock. I go to Mass tomorrow—06:00 hours—and usually I sleep heavy, except tonight I can't rest. They're burning our feces down to ash. The air is a wet blanket. A few tents down, someone is playing a record, someone is shuffling a deck, another guy is turning a page, Rimbaud, maybe Verlaine. Henry's mom is waking. She doesn't know what's coming home. She'll put the coffee on and yell at Henry's brother to feed the dog. Poor thing hasn't been fed regular, since Henry left. But they all make do while he's gone. Her husband repainted the garage by himself. She attends church alone and lights candles for the dear departed. Henry used to hold the offering, had done since he was a little boy, now the money disappears into the folds of her pocketbook, and she struggles to find it as the basket heads her way. She didn't want him to go, of course, but his number came up, and as Father says there is a season for everything, a time to sew, a time to reap, a time to speak and a time to hold one's tongue. It was Henry's time, and he writes, at least, long letters that smell like unknown dirt.

41

Continued on page 42

He tells her about his friends, the colored boy who shares his socks, that quiet kid who always goes to Mass on Sundays, the one who tells him not to drink too much and plays the ukulele. It's comforting to know her son is surrounded by goodness, a nation of altar boys waist deep in the rivers of Vietnam, together. Henry's mom will check the mailbox at noon. She'll drive to the store and buy a carton of smokes, some bologna, a few apples. She'll tell the cashier Henry is fine, he's just fine, and when she gets home, she'll stop to remove her boots in the mudroom and just before she enters the kitchen, she'll kiss the cross around her neck, the way she does when she's hopeful, the way she did before Henry boarded the plane for Saigon.

© 2012

42

# Kaitlin Meadows

## The Ice Breaks At Last

It was the longest winter on record,  
Cruel cold and deep ice,  
Silence and solitary sleep,  
Wordless loneliness  
And frigid longing.  
On the darkest night of no moon  
We made love,  
Warming ourselves slowly  
On each other,  
Melting old walls,  
Disarming our long barricaded  
Resistances.

The first sound  
Of spring kindling,  
Fish rousing,  
Birds set to wild singing,  
Awakening appreciative laughter  
In the deep belly of the lake.  
The long, bleak spell  
Of our heart's sad winter  
Broken  
At last.  
© 2012

43

In the morning,  
We awoke entwined,  
Warm and amiable,  
In the damp heat left  
From our unfamiliar combustion,  
And heard the unmistakable  
Crack and rumble  
Of ice breaking  
On the frozen lake.

# Kaitlin Meadows

## My Reason For Writing Poems

I write poems to make discoveries,  
To feed my obsessions,  
To tame and shape my essential curiosity,  
To frame and enclose my internal wonderment,  
To say things I can never think to say  
At cocktail parties or to strangers on trains,  
And because, quite simply,  
I must.  
I write poems  
Because they are the only path I have

To explore the thickly embroidered,  
Heavily textured landscape  
Of my imagination  
And to map that place of no name  
Where answers find new questions  
And memories  
Become truths.  
I write poems  
To invent myself  
Right before your eyes  
And to tell you the story  
Of my emerging vocabulary,  
Opening my word smith's heart  
That you might enter  
And find solace.

44

Photo courtesy of the author



Kaitlin Meadows is the Mistress of Mer-riment at her enchanted art studio The Creative Cottage where she teaches creativity and art classes, makes masks and books, paints and sculpts, works with clay and invents mischief. She holds a twice monthly writing circle called Word Weavers for women interested in writing and sharing in a nurturing environment. Please check out her classes at: [www.thundermoonstudios.wordpress.com](http://www.thundermoonstudios.wordpress.com) or visit her website at: [www.kaitlinmeadows.com](http://www.kaitlinmeadows.com) or contact her at: [paloma@dakotacom.net](mailto:paloma@dakotacom.net).

# Kaitlin Meadows

## Learning To Speak

Does language wear out like hips  
And insight fail like eyesight?  
When we are gone,  
Does rain fill up our space?  
Do the oak trees  
Remember us  
And the lilacs remark our absence?

Siblings a decade apart,  
We never spoke at home,  
Like two continents drifting  
In our own separate seas,  
Two refugees  
Of different wars,  
Separated by the ocean of years.

But we talk now  
In the waiting room of the hospital,  
Over cold coffee and stale cake,  
About pain, loneliness and loss,  
Speaking the same language at last,  
Realizing too late,  
We always did.

45

Continued on page 46

*She cannot be dead,  
I say,  
Who will prune the roses,  
Bake the birthday cakes,  
Remember the names of all  
My imaginary lovers?*

*She cannot be dead,  
You say,  
There are still golden jars  
Of her marmalade in my cellar;  
Handkerchiefs smelling of lavender,  
Ironed and folded  
In her top drawer,  
Waiting to catch more tears.*

Together we agree,  
She is with us now  
More than she ever was,  
Having taught us  
At last  
How to speak.  
© 2012

# Kaitlin Meadows

## What Made Magellan Want To Know?

the Druids were convinced  
by remarking the cross quarters  
of sun and star,  
arranging the light,  
just so,  
through alignments  
of stone,  
that they could engineer  
a foot hold  
on the chaos of the world

47

in the apothecary of life's  
mysterious chemistry,  
we try desperately  
to concoct antidotes  
for the poisons  
we call  
medicine

Continued on page 48

we struggle to reweave  
raveled trust  
in the hearts  
of bloodied refugees  
driven from their hearths  
by the madness of  
insuring democracy  
with bombs

we eagerly suspend reason  
just long enough  
for someone to walk on water  
or fishes and loaves  
to materialize from  
thin air,  
but not for the Buddha  
to lift his white lotus of peace

we believe urgently  
that wine blood  
drunk greedily  
and thin wafers  
of flesh  
melting into nothingness  
under our starving tongues  
will save us  
from ourselves

48



we screw our engineered seeds  
into waiting furrows  
of atomic spring,  
drill into the thin sheath  
of our wounded earth  
to suck at parched teats  
of oil rivers gone dry,  
aquifers leached to sand

we build mirrored telescopes  
to search the skies for others,  
plumb the ocean's depth  
for beings that never  
seek the light,  
gouge into the layered strata of  
our pasts,  
but refuse to remember  
what cannot be forgotten

49

is it only me who wonders  
what made Magellan want to know,  
Pasteur discover healing in mold,  
Gandhi realize peace  
can never come  
through violence,  
and Frida paint  
the whole complicated  
geography of love  
though broken  
and betrayed?

© 2012

# Mary Maxwell Miller

## Wind Through Dried Grass

Pounding in the metal posts  
to mend the gate the Hereford bull tore through,  
(his blood now dried on my jacket)  
I knelt to twist the wire on a fence  
that should have been repaired months ago.

The tufts of red and white hair  
I pulled from the barbed wire  
were lifted by the wind, torn into smaller pieces  
like vultures would rip decaying flesh.

50 The meat packers stated  
he was the biggest animal  
butchered in the plant.  
His body had to be sliced in half  
for the pulley to hoist him onto the rack  
(as if that would make me proud)  
and the two bullets lodged in his head  
wouldn't deter from the quality of the skull  
should I choose to keep it.

Continued on page 51

As a calf, he pushed against my knees.  
I'd wrap my arms around him, scratch his red ears.  
As a 2,500 pound adult bull  
he leaned his huge head into my shoulders  
for his ear scratching and tick removing.  
But he would charge any male who ventured  
into the fields near his female herd.

As I struggled to tighten  
the last strand of barbed wire,  
I hurled gloves, wire cutters,  
post-hole digger and myself  
down into the sand  
very near to where he had laid  
bruised and broken,  
to rest,  
to listen  
to the wind rustling  
through the dried weeds and grasses  
that would turn green by spring  
to feed his new born calves.

© 2012

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# Mary Maxwell Miller

How can humans not write? What do they do for an outlet???? Journaling, any form of “writing it all down,” solves a problem, saves a memory, lessens psychic noise, captures a new thought, quiets anger. Reading others keeps one knowledgeable, motivated and humble. For me, poetry, always poetry, for the discipline of cohesion in rewriting, rethinking, quieting mental chatter in this overly verbal, noisy world.

52

Native of Arizona, mostly a closet poet ... peeking out. Reach the poet at [mmaxwellmiller2@juno.com](mailto:mmaxwellmiller2@juno.com).



Photo courtesy of the author

# Kelly Nelson

## Crash Land

Walk off the plane.

Think: *mistake*.

Haul two bags.

Find a room. The ice

that won't melt

under one snow

and the next

wasn't shown in the color brochures.

Two years later ...

53

Walk onto the plane.

Think: *at least*

*there was a river.*

Stow two bags.

Pick an aisle seat.

Unstiffen my lips

from their pinched embouchure.

© 2012

# Kelly Nelson

What kind of artist are you? I was asked that question several times this summer when I was a Visiting Artist at the Cultural Center in New York Mills, Minnesota. A poet, I'd say, a word artist. Like a sculptor works with wood or a painter works with oils, my material is words and I try to make something out of words, something that holds together, something that makes sense beyond myself. There are many writing books and websites that offer prompts, tiny directives aimed at sparking your writing. Those rarely work for me. What does work is setting challenges for myself. How would I write about my two years spent in Michigan? I asked myself. What came out was "Crash Land." While taking a Spanish class, I wondered, how could I use Spanish words in my poems without italicizing the words and without losing the reader? "Gringa at the Ticket Booth" is one of those poems. Using my own prompts or writing challenges is one way I go about building art out of words.



Photo courtesy of Carrie Meyer

Kelly Nelson lives in Tempe and teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University. She serves on the Tempe Municipal Arts Commission and volunteers as a docent at the Tempe Center for the Arts. Her poetry has appeared recently in *Dash*, *Eclectica*, *Ozone Park* and *Paddlefish*. You can visit her website at [www.kelly-nelson.com](http://www.kelly-nelson.com).

# Kelly Nelson

## Gringa at Ticket Booth, Chichén Itzá

Hola, buenos días, I have come  
(do not attempt  
compound tenses)

I want to see  
the ruins  
(do not take your eyes  
from his lips  
when he speaks)

sí, soy Americana, I live  
in a state of ruins, I mean  
a state with ruins  
(well, both really,  
what you must  
think, news and all,  
of the people  
in my border state)

one ticket  
please  
to enter.

© 2012

55

# Kelly Nelson

## Promises

The man who stole my wedding ring  
warned me:

“Don’t call the cops.”

I nodded and later  
called the cops.

“Five tennish, twenty three or twenty four,  
Dodgers cap, blue jeans, a small green tattoo  
on his wrist, a turtle, I think, or a teardrop.”

56

It’s impossible to tell the officer  
I don’t want it back.

My voice goes on saying  
“I’ll be sure to call in  
if I remember, anything, more.”

© 2012



# Kelly Nelson

## Home Town

We've agreed to go back. Once. Before we're too shaky to tromp through the woods, through the skunk cabbage, to the stream to find whatever remains of the statue she made at sixteen, a girl standing with her arms crossed, a girl we left the day our mom moved out.

We'll carry her to the car, drive to the county park, lug her to that low lookout, the one spot in town where you can see someplace else.

No, we'll decide, we can't leave her there.

We'll head to where the main road meets the highway at the town's only stoplight. We'll park and wait for the bus to the city.

57

The driver will balk, but there are no rules against an unaccompanied statue riding the bus.

We'll wave. We'll drink Tab and eat Entenmann's donuts, a celebration for everyone who makes it out.

© 2012

# Frances New

## Step by Step

We humans have always  
mixed ourselves with our surroundings.  
We are dependent on inanimate things.

Long ago, our forefathers fashioned stone tools.

Not so long ago  
James Watt cultivated the steam engines  
so we may move faster,

58 so we may find out  
that no two humans are fashioned by the same cookie-cutter.

So we started to dream,  
and are still dreaming.  
So we work together,  
so we labor harder, faster, ...

so we move around,  
we escape,  
we connect,  
...  
and we dream...

Continued on page 59

I no longer think it strange  
when the angel announced to Mary  
that God would become a man,

paving ways for us to open our mouths,  
letting out new songs  
as told in Acts.

© **2012**

# Frances New

As to my process of writing, I would say it is exactly like childbearing and giving birth. I had no idea when a seed took up residence in my mind or heart and refused to go away. The gestation period varies — from a few days which is rare to many months. Of course I have an additional problem in that the English language was not my birth-language. It took me all these years to feel, right now, that I finally got it.

60

Frances New, born 1927 in China to Christian parents, came to the States in 1947. She was naturalized in 1954 under the 1948 Displaced Persons Act; became a widow in 1980; retired as a librarian in 1996 and earned her MFA in Creative Writing in 2004.

# Hannah Richard

## All the White of Heaven

Milk, white, is slicing gray  
Walls in half as I watch the ribbon  
Fall from the bottle  
Into my bowl  
And I put the bottle down  
And twist the cap  
With concentration  
Not to throw up eating.

Skin, white, is splitting red  
Rivers down the middle of my legs  
And the ribbons jump, they leap  
Down the bathtub drain  
And I drop the razor without a sound  
And choke on the breath  
Fighting its way up  
When I don't want to breathe.

Eyes, white, bright and healthy  
Because crying blues my iris, like this  
And the whites are shining like cleaned  
From the purification  
That comes with losing your feeling  
By flushing it out, down the bowl,  
Down your face, the water travels  
Down the drain, down the hatch.

61

Continued on page 62

Paper, white, is unnerving, breathing  
Never easy, I'm uneasy  
Stomach kind of turning and words nipping  
Like little flames, blown out in the breeze  
Gone before the heat  
Can even leave some ashes  
There aren't any ashes  
There aren't any words, the ink is useless.

Beads, white, dividing  
Duvet cover from comforter  
Hands that hold you "let it out, baby,  
Let it out" also with expectation  
That crying once is ever enough  
When your body holds an ocean  
And the words you can't get out  
Float there in a bottle.

The note, white, in the bottle  
Bobbing to me, bobbing far then  
Never reaching though the glass  
Brushed against my fingertips  
Red and raw from biting, crying  
In the dark because not even the lamp  
Is allowed to see me like this  
I will never write this.

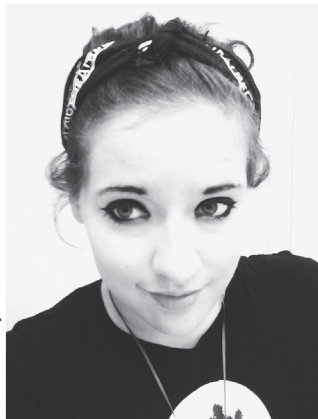
© 2012

# Hannah Richard

When I set out to write a poem, I do not start with any great or unusual process to seek out inspiration and capture it. My poetry is a collection of private thoughts and love letters left unsent and cries against injustices I have witnessed or experienced. In the coded stanzas of metaphor, I leave a fingerprint of myself to say, 'this is who I am; this is where I've been.' Unlike with my art or films, I do not write poetry for anyone else except for myself. I do not write poetry based on anything other than my thoughts and feelings at that time. Poetry is very personal to me, it is my diary, it is my platform for saying out loud the things I just cannot in life. If inspiration eludes you, ask yourself why you are writing. What are you trying to convey about yourself or to your audience? I believe inspiration comes from knowing why you are writing, not necessarily what you are writing. Are you trying to reach out so others feel less alone? Are you trying to profess and confess your feelings when you can't say the words out loud, even in a breathy whisper? Write honestly, lie blatantly, say what you want, how you want. That's the best advice I can offer.

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Photo courtesy of the author



Hannah Richard is an award-winning writer, artist and filmmaker living in the West Valley, raising her Chihuahua to be a productive member of society. Recently, one of her films received an 'Excellent' rating at the International Thespian Festival. This same film also earned her acceptance into the Zaki Gordon Institute of Film, where she will be starting as a freshman this fall. When not teaching her Chihuahua proper bedside manner or otherwise engaged with her artistic pursuits, Hannah records stand-up comedy that she posts to YouTube. She encourages all of you to visit her online at [www.hannahishappy.deviantart.com](http://www.hannahishappy.deviantart.com) or [www.youtube.com/hannahbehappy](http://www.youtube.com/hannahbehappy). You can also reach her at her e-mail: [hannahdraws@yahoo.com](mailto:hannahdraws@yahoo.com).

# Edgar Rider

## Billie Jeaning at Le triomphe de dolphin

In a land far away no ice mochas to be found

Blinded by anticipation

ready for the unknown

I stepped off the plane after 10 hours

and walked on Zambian concrete.

Started to get to work No time to rest at least for the first day in Zambia

met with native film actors they said, us, the whites looked serious.

Feeling like a minority at the local acting Lusaka Playhouse

finally being pointed out there goes another white. A real role reversal.

64

Eventually when we settled in we got to relax

Mosi on down drinking the Mosi

the key to the castle is to kick back and drink it

Lest I have to explain they had beer called Mosi and Castle

there is not a type of brew above being sampled.

Beer can bring countries together

The owner of the resort Dr. Edger Ngoma was a generous man

a pretension for calling himself a doctor but of what nobody knows.

He had a shirt that said Marijuana and was in opposition to it

but his shirt just said marijuana there was no explaining to him.

If you are opposed to it put a line through it or x it out.

Continued on page 65



We partied a lot at clubs nice to see some similarities.  
Never dreamed of someone sampling a hair metal band in  
Zambia it truly felt like I had come home to Europe's Final Countdown.

Eating fried caterpillars and flying over Livingstone's Victoria Falls  
wondering with a never ending supply of water  
why the need to turn off supply?  
The commode is full and ready to be flushed  
it needs relief too.

The connections are plenty  
people in Africa need their sports entertainment,  
discussions about spectacle superstars  
Hitman and the sharpshooter lots in common.

65

Karaoke in Zambia favorite of the  
dining host singing the obvious Toto's Africa.  
The worldly ties that bind us,  
pop culture abounds,  
at a karaoke restaurant  
an '84 Michael Jackson impersonator visits  
me I follow suit  
Billie Jeaning at Le triomphe de dolphin.

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# Edgar Rider

In 2006, Edgar Rider was lucky enough to join a group of Mesa Community College students on a trip to Zambia. Even today he remembers the exhaustive experience of getting off a 14-hour flight back home to Sky Harbor airport. He is grateful for keeping in contact with some of his Zambian friends.

66

Edgar Rider's work has appeared in strange and curious journals such as the aptly named Curious Record based in Australia. Some of his work has "stayed classy" in the Birmingham Art Journal, Avatar Review and Existere. His essay "Life Lessons of Grandpa Fannin," about his grandfather, was recently published in Copperfield Review. Edgar graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre. Contact the poet at [ecrider@asu.edu](mailto:ecrider@asu.edu).



Photo courtesy of the author

# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## The Summer Girls

brimmed with optimism  
hopping along on one  
foot kicking the potsy  
down a chalk grid  
sidewalk. They leaped  
high in the air  
in a full turn  
of laughter  
skipping off to join  
friends forever  
singing off-key  
holding hands  
Ring-Around-the-Rosie  
All Fall Down.

67

In the game of chance  
not all found  
pockets full of posies.  
Coming up empty  
they tucked away  
their laughter  
in a container  
of disappointment.

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*Potsy – New York hopscotch*

# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## How and Why Poetry

Sometimes I'm not even sure if I'm writing poetry but I do find it cathartic to vent my emotions without tempering imagination. When I write, authenticity becomes the craft. For me hate, jealousy, envy, love that includes setbacks, success and failure are far more interesting subjects than moon and June. The gift of surprise often bowls me over when the right word wanders by and the magical combination of the perfect metaphor appears. Looking back at some painful experiences I'm now able to laugh at and find myself writing a wildly absurd poem. Poetry is also the place I go to, to shout at life's injustices. I enjoy being a visual artist with pen in hand, coloring words with dialogue, accents, clothing and ethnic aromas that give the poem a sense of place and history.

Whether I send my poetry out to the world or place my scribbles in a drawer, the act of exploration helps me discover more of me.

Esther Schnur-Berlot is a transplant from New York City where she worked behind the scenes in TV commercials and then on to California where she taught wearable art. Now living in Tucson, she devotes her time to writing poetry. Esther's poetry has been published in the California State Poetry Quarterly, the Sonoma Collective and Desert Voices. E-mail lberlot@q.com.



Photo courtesy of Christa Lubatkin

# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## Still Spinning

Unraveling knots  
of tangled strands  
living in woven  
yesterdays.  
Fingers pluck  
at sun yellows  
interlaced  
in melancholy blues  
tired threads  
grow weary  
and break  
leaving gaping holes  
of tangled knots  
unwinding  
in a tugging dance

to find harmony.  
An array of boucles  
enrich the tapestry's  
fantasies  
awaiting fingers  
to weave into the palette  
soft melon sunsets.  
Crimson chenille  
bleeds through  
open wounds  
of misty mauves  
wending their way,  
to soften the drama  
of withering time.

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# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## Elegy for a Shirt

You were the last one

**ON SALE**

A Ralph Lauren

eighty percent markdown

English patterned roses

That screamed –

*I'm yours*

It was an intoxicating buy

*Did I deserve to wear the label  
of the rich and understated?*

Falling in love

with a no-frill floral shirt

was a first

I a thrift store junky

had scoured racks endlessly

for the perfect

glitterati collectible

after ten years

you were still my cover

for respectability

to impress the job interviewer

and to meet the in-laws

sun bleached your hues

of peach and sage

softening your image

with each washing

you emerged more delicate

finding a moth

caused endless sobs

I stitched your wounded

rose with mulberry thread

as you began looking

tired and worn

I began flirting with the new

ready- to- wear

tossing you in and out of

my give-away-bag

it was painful to send you off

to Goodwill

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# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## In Over My Head

Flailing in a pool of depression  
words recede into a stream of tears

Lost phrases disappear  
as I wait for dreams to awaken poems

I spent my childhood living  
in a cocoon of yearning.

How naïve to believe The Pushcart Prize  
was a perfect tomato off a peddler's cart

71

or that the Pew Fellowship was an award  
for outstanding church attendance.

I make demands on my Muse  
she casts away my pleas.

Now I stand before the Robber Baron Foundations  
Rockefeller, Guggenheim and Carnegie

a beggar in awe.  
drowning in aspirations

as I read the new poets –  
dusted in moon glow.

© 2012

# Esther Schnur-Berlot

## A Montage

flows through the transom  
of my closed eyes.

A scent of honey cake  
clings  
to Ma's homemade floral  
faded dress. My face  
gently brushes her effusive  
breasts as she nudges me  
bellowing.

72

*Get up already, get up.  
You'll be late for school.*

She pulls at my legs trying  
to put on my shoes and socks  
as I kick away, resisting help.  
Through open windows  
neighbors repeat Ma's chants.  
*Get up already, get up.*

Does Ma notice my silver strands,  
flabby dimpled arms and fleshy thighs  
all plucked from her gene pool?

Continued on page 73



Slipping into focus, Pa is wearing  
suspenders over an underwear  
union suit and looks puzzled.

*You've grown so tall.  
When did you start painting  
your face?*

He thumbs through my magazines  
books and newspapers strewn about.  
The child  
in me still waits for his approval.

Both look at me quizzically  
I've grown old beyond their years.

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# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## What's It Like?

### Seven Poems on Being a Poet

#### What You May Be Looking For

74 If you've been there many times before—  
Noticed that the corpse of old adobe  
Wall is maybe a little lower, weaker,  
Bits of ancient straw sticking out  
Like a boy's cropped hair or maybe  
A very old man's scarce colorless whiskers—  
Maybe just kicking around with your boot  
You may learn to sense what you might  
Be looking for, even if you're not looking  
Much for anything—especially then.  
If you sense what you're looking for  
You will nudge with your boot  
A ragged tooth of ancient pottery.

Continued on page 75

You pick it up, sense its familiar desert  
Roughness, a patina between your fingers.  
The shard is gray, almost a triangle  
Rounded and with a bit of old rim.  
The shard is bare for a thumb-nail width  
Under eroded remains of the bulge of rim  
And the bulge of lips that caress the jar  
That the small shard had been with the thirst  
To which the lips were indifferent.  
But the water in the jar! The cool intimacy.

The jar of permeable half-fired clay  
Is cool from evaporation of the film of water  
That almost glazes the outside of it,  
Which beneath that smooth band  
Is pressed in by the potter's finger-nails  
Small quarter-moons of indentation  
That inscribe rows incised into the clay—  
I see two rows on the shard.  
I try to unravel my own thirst now  
Lifting to my lips the story of our thirst together,  
How we came to be so thirsty together,  
The cactus shriveled droughts we have shared,  
The diminishing heft of the clay jar  
As we pass it from lip to lip,  
Word for word, look and stroke.

75

We sit, she and I under the reed-thatched  
Roof of our ramada braced upon a circle of adobe wall,  
Waiting for the sun to quaver into darkness,  
The air to cool. Night and coyotes sing.  
Bare feet leave departing prints in moon-lit sand.  
Leave the pottery shard in place, its place,  
Now that you sense what you are looking for,  
Your place, the place you start from.

### **What's It Like?**

76 “Do you ever wonder what it’s like being a poet?”  
Something like that. That might not have been  
The question at all. It was close enough for me.  
She asked it to someone else in the room anyway.  
What’s it like? Some of it is like sitting

In this corner, listening. Writing. Staring  
Into the ether. Staring. When I was seventeen  
I was sitting in a chair at a friend’s cabin,  
And I was staring into a pine knot in a paneled  
Wall. It was, I think I remember, fish-like.

Then this girl. Blanche, maybe. Blanche yelled,  
“Have you seen enough?!” Blanche was furious.  
I had been staring into that ether, but right above  
Her bedroom door, which had to have been open,  
And Blanche had to have noticed that when she

Slipped out of her bathing suit and into  
The balmy summer air. She slammed the door  
Into my innocent sputtering. What's it like  
Being a poet? It's like missing the best part  
Of the burlesque while it's going on, but living it

Wholly at moments like this. It is *remembering*  
*All the things that never happened* into what's  
Happening now—Blanche glistening.  
Her hot summer tan. Her lips.  
Her soft voice whispers.

### **An Evening on Brandy Brook Bridge**

77

The deceptive wooden bridge that spans Brandy Brook  
Hides the little concrete dam that turns the brook  
Into Johnson Pond, displacing the fiction of architecture  
In this rurality of purer being. Then both pond and brook  
Retire into forest, mosquitos, and day dreams.

I have used the wide rails on either side of the bridge  
For the sake of variety, for a writing desk,  
Or just to sit on, pretend to meditate maybe  
Or let my imagination dither like toes  
In the clear water, searching idly for minnows.

So I was pretty deep into one of these preoccupations, quiet  
To settle my inner tone for a poetry reading  
When I heard a gentle tick on the wooden bridge surface.  
I turned, and right there a spotted fawn stood frozen,  
Startled I suppose, to see what couldn't possibly be its Mom.

We looked at each other a little time.  
Then I suppose I must have twitched,  
That minuscule shudder we can't escape  
When we try to be as still as the fawn.  
I think I saw the shutter-speed grace of spinning legs

78 But the fawn was gone before I could really see it gather  
Into panic and escape. Or I was gone. I guess  
The reading went well, but I can never remember any of it  
Until I hear that tick of the tiny hoof behind my memory.  
Then I still don't remember anything else. Or care to.

**Soliloquy by the Candle Light of Day**  
*for Caedmon*

I wake up again to clouds—  
Clouds, dull linens of clouds  
To lines, words of poems  
Soft dull linens of words

On the fore and plowing edge of a determined  
Raft of dream surging down some sleep powered wake.  
I knew I could wake up—get up,  
Fumble for one of the pencils on my bedside table

And one of the folded shirt-pocket size  
Discarded memories of scarified paper  
Write the words or the lines or  
Once or twice

Lines of music whose delicacies I cannot notate  
Nor ever learned how.  
But I knew alerted by the clear spray of ideas now  
That I would remember in the morning.

79

I never did. Did you? Ever?  
But one night I dreamt some of those words again  
Or lines or prisms of image in the foam or notes.  
Then I dreamt that I got up

Got out of bed  
Picked up a pencil  
Found a folded paper  
And then I dreamt that I wrote it all down.

All and beautiful—and all in a murky second gone into the foam.  
I've never dreamt such dream again,  
But some urge behind the surge of dream told me  
To write for the fabric of dream, the linen shadows of clouds

Anything at all, anything away from my sullen old silence.  
Though it is a grace of old age the dream has been good,  
A faith in dreams of embers all these lights ago—the  
“Highest candle lights in the dark,”

Which dark  
Needs no more than a candle  
And less  
To read the wakening heaves of breath in a new old life.

### **Philoetius Redux**

80 You mean cowboys still call them “Ace Me” boots?  
Still, after all these years?  
Goll! Tradition holds.

The cowboy Odysseus, late of the rodeo tour,  
Defiantly anti, including Greek,  
Knows how “Acme” sounds when he doesn’t wear it.

But he can’t, won’t say it.  
He extols his ratty favorite old boots, Ace Mes:  
“Yeah, they’re cheap, but they feel pretty good,

’Specially when they start to fall apart.  
’Sides, when I ain’t ridin’, herdin’ touristas on barn-spoilt nags,  
Lookit what I’m standin’ in!”



Yeah. Tradition. It's May, fifty-some years ago.  
I stand in the middle of this unshaded corral,  
My first paid job, eighty-five cents an hour,

Temperature in the high nineties over there in the shade  
Of the stalls, where the horses are slurping water, and I'm not.  
I'm shoveling tradition.

The sun steams horse piss fumes in my face, dust all around.  
Three horses in their stalls look somewhere else, not at me.  
They're embarrassed for me maybe. I know I am.

When I grow up I'll get me a good pair of Justins.  
But Ace Mes are comfortable all right,  
Holey sole strapped on with duct tape.

81

On the other hand, hell,  
I could be standing here in Birkenstocks,  
Like the old man there in the mesquite shade, rewriting us.

## Epic and Hearth

Who knows who invented comedy?  
A thrown spear wobbles harmlessly  
Off the flank of a charging aurochs.  
The aurochs narrowly misses  
The spear thrower, who, avoiding  
The aurochs' natural response,  
Falls into the muddy fen, where  
Instead of drowning, he flounders  
Covered in mud. His mates laugh.  
He stares at them. Then he laughs.  
But it isn't comedy yet. At night,  
Around the fire, meatless again,  
They talk of the day. They work off  
The day's frustrations talking.  
The spear thrower, the man who  
Is the cause of their hunger, tells again  
What happened. The wobbly spear,  
The prat-fall, the mud. He stands  
As he tells the story and imitates the fall,  
The sputtering, the image of mud.  
That's where the comedy is made.

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Continued on page 83

The Greeks, we can be pretty sure,  
Invented tragedy, by way of having  
Invented the hero—Theseus, Perseus,  
Jason, Heracles, Oedipus, Achilles.  
Inventing the hero, they invented  
Conscience, which the hero in his deeds,  
Or after them, because of them, lacks.  
But it is Homer, least tragic, most  
Understanding of imaginations, who  
Invented the Greeks. So what does that  
make of the hero, of tragedy, of Greeks,  
Of us? Penelope and Odysseus take  
Each other to that sacred bed again,  
Make love. In the morning they'll awaken,  
Make love again, sleep a while longer.  
After they finally rise, they'll say Good  
Morning to Telemachus. All three  
Will have breakfast. Talk. Plan the day.  
Then they'll all go out and deal  
With some legacies, handle the politics,  
Plan a leisurely return to the underworld,  
Buy some boating gear, an oar or two.  
Sit back of an evening telling the old tales.  
Always, someone is willing to listen.

## Answer First, Then Question

### 1. My Father's Clarinet

He tried to get me to play the clarinet. Not teach—  
Not teach. We save our teaching for less worthy  
Mortals than sons. Otherwise how could we stand under  
The fatal blows, the barrage of our failures.  
I learned to play Twinkle, Twinkle, Little . . .

SCREECH!

And the room was attacked by the shrieking pterodactyl,  
Greatly taloned leather-winged banshee  
That ripped up, devoured the spinal cord  
Like vultures at defiant Prometheus' innards.

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I have been my petty Prometheus.  
Chained wrist and ankle, nailed hand, foot, and ears,  
Especially ears, to the cliff wall of the tortured room,  
I have refused to account for his graceful gestures  
Up and down the black wand of clarinet,

Acknowledge the grace of his notes  
As any force greater than magic.  
In my father's honor, today I will stuff my raspberry tongue  
Back into its wet socket, step away from the wall,  
Uncover his ancient Underwood, and tap out

Continued on page 85

The word *star*, a signal of the private music he taught me anyway,  
To resolve the silent poetry of our difference.  
For it is a dishonor, I think now, to believe,  
Through the gift of our ordinary failures,  
The dark and common creed

That anyone's good skill is only magic or miracle,  
Deserving of no more than the puny excuse of awe.  
It is a craven way out, not even to emulate, more,  
Not to challenge that skill with some resounding force,  
At least enough to have offered as his target, my gut.

## 2. Forgiveness

The rhetorical question you ask—unrhetorically—  
“Can forgiving move across generations?”  
Well, if some members of the generations are alive,  
Maybe, or not, maybe, but why?

Nothing in my poem suggests or hints  
Of forgiveness of anyone's father, certainly not mine.  
It is possible my father committed  
Much that should be forgiven.

But what's the point? He's dead.  
And he didn't intend to hurt.  
We put the tin of his ashes up there  
Behind the window frame,

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The “Celestial Seasonings” tin that honors him  
With a joke that could have been his.  
What we have now is still a relationship.  
But the word I used is “resolve,”

And I have much that may be resolved,  
But not by him. If I may be blunt,  
And for you and your own father I will be,  
I hope that my son fails to forgive me

The ills I have committed toward him—  
Which I have; I am a father.  
I prefer to go to my grave,  
Or ashes in my coffee can—

“Chock Full-O-Nuts” would be nice—  
Or sifted like flour-dust into the lake,  
Having left no issue so awful  
As to be forgivable.

But I hope I leave a host of issues  
For the next generation to resolve,  
Not for forgiveness, maybe not even for peace,  
But for all I know of fathers’ love.

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# Richard Fenton Sederstrom

I have tried to enter the conversation in a variety of voices, almost none of them the poet (“not me, not the poet,” John Berryman complained). Insofar as they all appear out of the shadowy interstices of my noggin, they are Arizona poems, save that the setting may be elsewhere or the imagination of a supposed poet preparing to appear before a scary public audience; or Philoetius’ imagination, somehow transported from Odysseus’ bunkhouse to an Arizona corral. As to Caedmon’s appearance, either he reflects a shared passion for barns, corrals, and the aroma of ruminants and equines or he reflects a long silence, a past of feckless stammering, long isolation that the poet might well share with Caedmon, if the poet were humble enough to admit to such a past and such an inclination (not this poet; some other poet ...).

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and Mexico and the North Woods of Minnesota. His book, “Fall Pictures on an Abandoned Road,” was released in 2009, “Disordinary Light,” in 2010, and “Folly, A Book of Last Summers,” in 2011. Sederstrom’s poems have appeared in *The Talking Stick*, *English Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *Big Muddy*, *Mother Earth Journal*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Memoir* (and), and *Ruminate*, among other journals and magazines. Fortunate to have retired from all respectable pursuits, especially teaching, he returns to the classroom as a visitor. Contact Richard at [richard\\_sederstrom1221@q.com](mailto:richard_sederstrom1221@q.com).

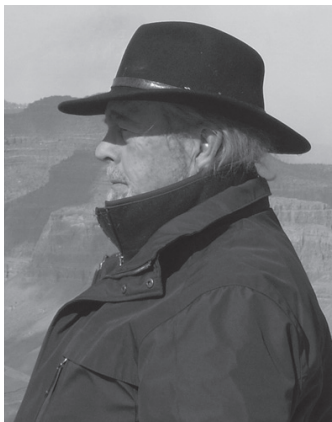


Photo courtesy of the author

# Lilvia Soto

## when a heart finds his voice

*If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come.*

– Chinese proverb

I was faithful  
did my job  
beat seventy-two times per minute  
forty-two million times per year  
kept him working, loving  
being a good man.

For 59 years, I was faithful  
then the accident.

I wanted to go with him.

I loved that man,  
we took care of each other,  
planned to leave together  
when our job was done.

They didn't ask  
just grabbed me—  
hadn't said good-bye—  
pulled me out  
kept me in dry ice  
put me in another chest,  
a famous one, they said,  
told me to keep beating.

Continued on page 89



They think I'm a dumb muscle  
a machine that performs  
regardless  
just keep the blood flowing  
keep the man alive  
they said.

They don't understand.  
I was happy to serve him  
because we were in accord.  
I murmured, he whispered.  
I sang when he kissed his daughter  
and danced when he threw a ball with his son.  
I fluttered and soared.  
He assented.  
We had no discord  
loved the same woman,

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for thirty years, we loved the same woman,  
rejoiced when the bees returned to the zinnias and the hydrangeas  
quivered the first time we saw the sun rise on the South Rim  
went to a different place  
when we listened to Plácido or Pavarotti  
on Sunday afternoons  
were wounded when his third child died.

His breath was my mainspring.  
He loved,  
and I, happy to love with him.

Now I beat in the chest of a stranger  
one who ordered mass destruction  
and knows no remorse.

I can't dance  
to the beat of his resentment  
can't soar  
to his plots of revenge  
can't sleep  
when he dreams of his crimes  
and wishes for more.

I murmur, he curls up his lip.  
I spend my days pumping blood  
heavy with cells of contempt  
corpuscles of hatred  
that poison his body  
wither my song.

They call themselves men of science  
but didn't ask why his first heart preferred to die.

© 2012

# Lilvia Soto

## An invitation to consecration

As most poets, I write for survival, for rescuing the sliver of freedom a human being needs to justify her time on this earth. My words are a lifeline of defense against the thanatic impulses of dictators, liberators, and predators who destroy and desecrate life out of their sense of separateness, out of their fear of being forsaken. In my dialogue with other artists, I am reminded of our common nakedness, our shared fragility, our need for asylum on this earth. Our words are a vindication of the human spirit that keeps us wandering and creating, a call to solidarity, an invitation to pay homage to the life force that grows the redbud, hovers the hummingbird, pollinates the zucchini, perfumes the freesia, flavors the raspberry, and pours forth the soul of the nightingale (John Keats), the erotic force we need to consecrate together. With each word we speak, sing, dance, paint, sculpt, weave, we open a window into empathy, moral imagination, and the sacralization of life.

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Photo courtesy of the author



Lilvia Soto was born in Chihuahua, México, in 1939. She has a Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literature from Stony Brook University in Long Island, N.Y. She has published poetry, short fiction, literary criticism, and literary translations in journals and anthologies in the U.S., Canada, Spain, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Venezuela. She has an English-language manuscript of poems about the American Iraq wars and another English-language collection of poems that dialogue with Iraqi poems. She has also completed an English-Spanish collection about language and her experience living in Spain. She is currently working on a bilingual collection about her return to Mexico in 2004, where she lived for six years, and the recovery of cultural and familial roots. Contact her at [lilviasoto@hotmail.com](mailto:lilviasoto@hotmail.com).

# Editor's Note

I have a vague recollection of writing my earliest poem as a 7-year-old in elementary school — it was a simple four-line stanza with each line rhyming. But the schoolmate who sat behind me, an inveterate copier, co-opted my lines. Frantic that I would be seen as the plagiarist and facing a deadline to turn it in, I quickly erased end words and subbed in new ones. Only now the poem didn't rhyme (a first foray into free verse?) ... and I got a red mark — but fortunately no lasting scars, just a discomfoting memory.

At that age, I was mostly writing little plays and mysteries. But by junior high, after reading a friend's contest-winning poem, and then in high school, seeing my own poem published in the school literary journal (it wasn't very good as I remember), something inside me took hold. I haven't been able to shake it off since.

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, has long been a dream of mine. As a showcase for the wonderful works of our contributing poets, Unstrung is intended to add to the ongoing poetic dialogue and to create a new conversation with our readers.

None of this would be possible without a talented staff — Publisher Elena Thornton, Cover Artist Marjory Boyer and Production Editor Richard Dyer. To them, and to the lovers of poetry everywhere — readers and writers — this inaugural issue is lovingly dedicated.

Welcome and enjoy!

**Rebecca “Becca” Dyer**  
**Editor in chief**

## Editorial Staff

**Editor in chief:** *Rebecca Dyer*

**Publisher:** *Elena Thornton*

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

**Artwork for front cover:** *Marjory Boyer*

# Open Mic: A celebration of the arts

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

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

**When:** Every last Sunday of each month, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

We also address key issues in contemporary art and culture, exchange ideas, learn new things through rigorous talks, conversations, debates and readings in an informal setting. Join us! Everyone is invited to bring a friend(s) and enjoy exciting conversations in the beautiful surroundings of the neighborhood bookstore. Meet new and old friends and enjoy. All programs are free and open to the public.

For more information, contact Elena Thornton — (602) 263-5373 or [info@artizona.org](mailto:info@artizona.org).

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## Coming Oct. 28: Save the date! The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' Annual Fall Festival of the Arts

Noon to 4 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 28

In the beautiful, huge courtyard of the  
Arizona Historical Society Museum at Papago Park,  
1300 N. College Ave., Tempe.

Admission is free!

For more details, visit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website,  
[www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org)

# A Call to Poets

## For Summer 2013

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2013 Issue from June 1 through July 5, 2013. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).

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

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

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

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

**Unstrung • Summer 2012**

# Meet the staff of Unstrung magazine



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

**Rebecca Dyer, editor:** A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher now residing in Mesa with her husband, Richard, production editor for Unstrung and The Blue Guitar. Reach her at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).



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

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



# UNSTRUNG

A magazine for and about  
people



Unstrung will  
return in  
Summer 2013