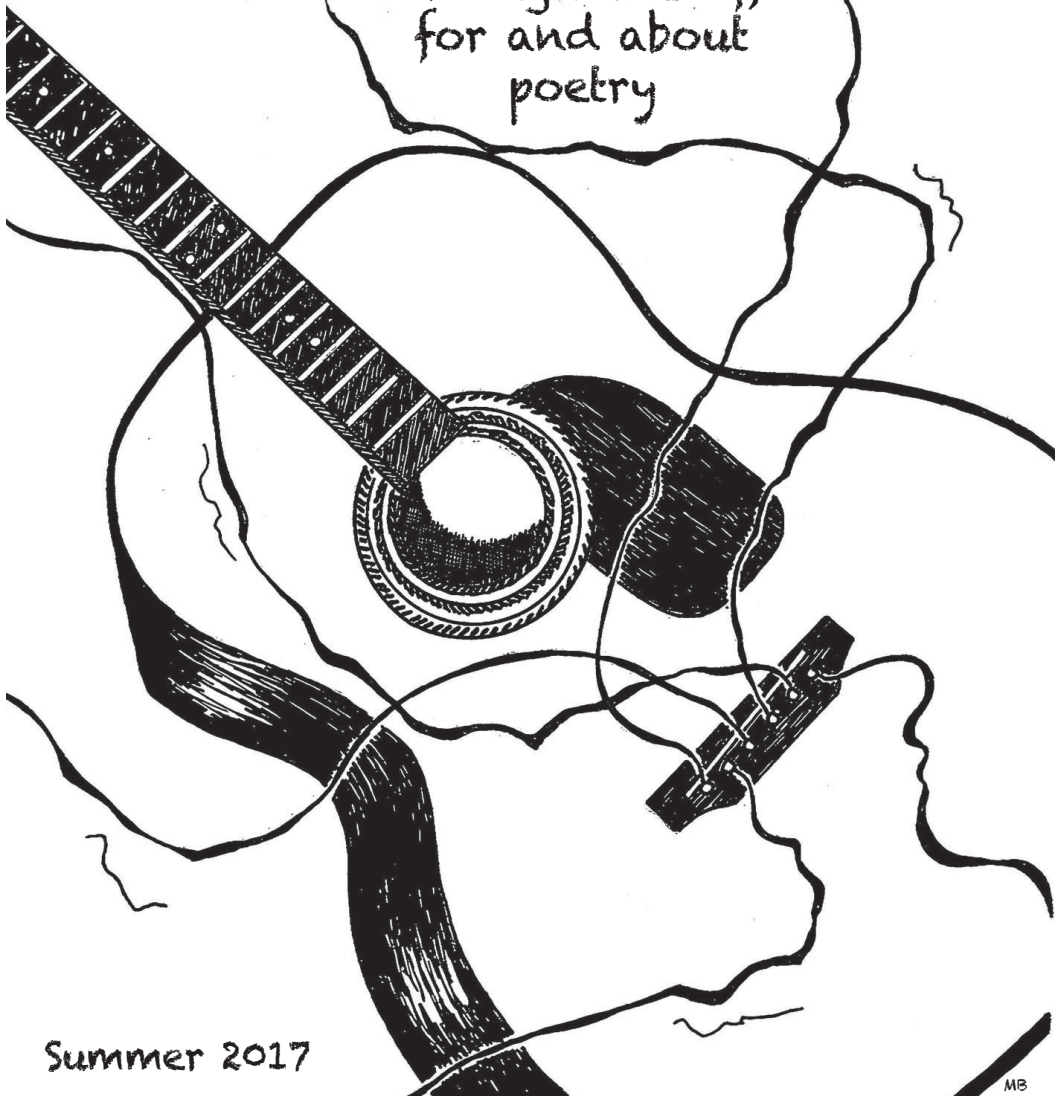


UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,
for and about
poetry



Summer 2017

The Poets

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Liptak



O'Connor



Pratt



Rives



Fenton Sederstrom



Sher-Walton

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

Paula Ashley

A French Couple in Love with the American West

from Bourgogne, steeped
in the history & art of the ages,
in spiritual complacency

seek awakening
in the white sands of New Mexico –
sands swirling in ecstasy.

White dunes, mystery of the desert,
invisible in shimmering heat waves,
stand watch as their souls are purified

in the agony of the passion of spirit
for the sublime, for the infinite.
They leave their water to their son.

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Paula Ashley

Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer who earned her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She lives in Glendale, Arizona, with her husband and an abundance of birds that hang out on the solar fountains in their backyard. Paula has had poems published in numerous journals including: Avocet, Four Chambers, Merge, New Fraktur Arts Journal, OASIS Journal, Sandcutters, The Road Not Taken, The Blue Guitar, The Examined Life, The Lucid Stone and Unstrung. She has poems in “Poetry and Prose for the Phoenix Art Museum” by Four Chambers Press and in “Weatherings” by Future Cycle Press.

4



Paula Ashley

& The Stars Still Shine

I am writing about a time in 1962
in the observation shack
on stilts above the Nevada desert,

the time I shivered in the night.
One of the guys, an older man,
dropped his jacket over my shoulders.

I do not remember his name,
only his kindness. I was too naïve
to know then that a woman's place

was not in a mine shaft where
the physicists had taken me earlier.
They laughed when the miners

struck, saying if the ground broke
it would be my fault. Now we sat
in the observation deck

& watched on monitors while
the ground wobbled and held
against the nuclear blast below.

Continued on page 6

I thought about my high school days
when we were taught to line up, two by two,
to march around the track

in preparation for the great march
of the children down the highway, out
of St. Louis, when The Bomb dropped.

Today, fifty-some years later,
the world still must argue and negotiate
with others not to build the bomb,

that no one might shiver
in that nuclear night, that feared
holograph of earth's last man.

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Paula Ashley

Poem for the Earth

I was four or five or thereabouts.
I stepped into the shallow waters off the Alabama shore,
lay down, spread wide my arms, closed my eyes.

The sun was warm.
I floated on the gray-blue amniotic fluid of earth,
felt the gray-blue vaulted sky above.

The waves rocked me to sleep.
I don't know how long I drifted there, bobbing in the waves.
I don't know what woke me up.

But a thought had entered my mind.
It split the vastness from me.
Panic shot through me.

7

I put my feet down into the shallow water.
Sand, gritty and lumpy, shifted
beneath me.

I saw the shore far away.
I saw my mother on the beach. She looked up at me
as if she had not known I had been gone.

But I knew, deep down inside myself, that I
had not wanted to go out there, had not wanted to drift
into that gray-blue luminescence.

I chose earth – gritty, shifting, unloved.

© 2017

Paula Ashley

The Hike

– *Effigy Mounds National Park: Marquette, Iowa*

Whispering oaks filter daylight
on the chipped bark trail
we hike up to the mounds.

Granddaughters skip and chatter
until the youngest looks at her Daddy
with an urgency he knows.

8

The girls race back down
to the museum at the base of the trail
while my son and I

round a corner to find
the little bear outlined by leafy greens
sheltering ancestral peoples

who tracked bear, ate bear, wore bear
then entrusted this sacred creature
with their souls forever.

Continued on page 9

We walk on to Fire Point
overlooking the upper Mississippi.
We sit on a rock wall, wait for the girls.

A hawk soars high above the river,
a motorboat speeds along the shore below.
Strange-colored bugs with long legs

high-step across our path. The secret
of this hike is to skip lightly on the trail,
to let the wind whisper in our ears,

to watch the hawks and the spiders
living their lives for the dead are asleep
and our children will find their way.

© 2017

9

Esther Schnur-Berlot

Cousin Marcia

I gulped down growing pains
while cousin Marcia whisper-giggled
secret crushes in my ear

On the back of our palms
we kiss-tested our braces
rehearsing Vogue's pucker poses

I hid my teenage pimples
under layers of Max Factor pancake
with hair topped in Egyptian henna

Marcia's clean freckled face
framed by wash-and-wear hair
bestowed by nature
that gap-toothed grin enhanced
her openness

The first time rummaging hands
unbuttoned my blouse
my painted armor was punctured
Feeling unattractive
I choked on fear of being abandoned

10

Continued on page 11

Cousin Marcia's life followed
the unwritten rules of our neighborhood
At twenty-one she was chased, lassoed
and married the popular boy
with babies to soon follow

while I committed
the unpardonable sin
of leaving home before marriage
to live on my own

The rhythm and flow of time
has not altered our friendship
Cousin Marcia's contagious laughter
still ripples across cell phones
as we share our different lifestyles

© 2017

Esther Schnur-Berlot

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." Esther also appears in "Desert Voices," 2nd anthology, published by the Poetry Corner in Sun City. She is also in Poetica's Spring Issue of 2016 and Poetica's Fall Issue of 2016. E-mail her at Lberlot@comcast.net.

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Esther Schnur-Berlot

Changing Conversations

After four decades of
shmoosing – talkathons
conversations are no longer
cluttered
with affairs, careers or clothes.

Now we obsess and assess
our timeworn faces

We talk in whispers
of that dreaded disease
old age

13

We flirt –
with collagen, restalin, botox
Do we dare display lined faces
with grace

After burying her soul mate
she returns to her girlish past
penciling in – women-only
dinner and movie dates

Continued on page 14

Our run-on dialogue
 runs the gamut
neglected by children
 or childless and alone

We remain in limbo
daunted by
 adult warehouses
and final exits

My steaming coffee –
has gone cold
I add a dash of Splenda
 to sweeten
the bitter taste of winter

© 2017

14

David Chorlton

Yard Sale

It's time to purge
the house of excesses: teapots, magazines
and amethyst
that outlived usefulness. The shelves
in the back room breathe again
now their burdens are displayed on the lawn
for the taking. Here's a set

of plates embellished
with faces from Hollywood, and a gramophone
that won't play any record made
since George Jones died. Here's
a television whose picture froze
the day the president was killed, and a newspaper
that crumbles when you turn
its pages. Take these shoes

worn down by worry,
vases that bloomed
beyond their time, a cabinet
filled with regrets,
eight-track tapes, videos and memories
without machines to play them.
These mysteries

15

Continued on page 16

can't stand reading more than once
but they're good until you know
the endings, as opposed
to the diaries which contain a family's secrets
from the name long hidden
of the youngest child's father
to the reasons two sisters
once close became distant and embittered.
Put this seashell to your ear

to listen to the arguments that drove
them apart, and if you raise this shot glass
to the light
you'll see the friendly uncle
we had to throw out
when his politics became an embarrassment.
Look at how

these kettles gleam, at the nibbled
edges on the letters
bundled for storage
in a box along with good intentions
and the tickets
for a journey never taken.
Here is all

16

our paint-by-numbers past,
the medals without a cause, summers
kept in airtight jars
and winters in the ash can by the hearth.
Everything must go

from the steak knives and fruit bowls
to the cousins who arrived so long ago
they forgot they weren't invited.
We have to make space for coming days
when we'll scatter birdseed
to lure back
species from extinction.

© 2017

17

David Chorlton

David Chorlton is a transplanted European, who has lived in Phoenix since 1978. His poems have appeared in many publications online and in print, and reflect his affection for the natural world, as well as occasional bewilderment at aspects of human behavior. His newest collection of poems is “Bird on a Wire” from Presa Press, and late in 2017 The Bitter Oleander Press will publish “Shatter the Bell in My Ear,” his translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant.

18



David Chorlton

Nightlight

Some rooms never sleep
inside a high-rise pressed against the stars
but pass from dusk to dawn
with a fluorescent chill at their windows.
The gas station in darkness becomes
a silent theatre glowing
and a dragon's tail of rear lights moves along
the freeway, crossing the bridge
beneath which men with nowhere else to sleep
are sleeping one shadow away
from the helicopter's beam
that seeks them out.

© 2017

19

David Chorlton

Venetian Webcam

Wake up: choose a world
to enter. Afghanistan is fire and dust
today, the tourists in Italy
converse beside a fountain carved
from antiquity, and the local
cats are resting from
a night on the tiles. Try to see

20 their way; it's a chase
or be chased city they're in
and better encounter a rat than
a coyote. It's too early
for confusion. Read the sports news
first because scores don't lie,
then move on

to politics. The president
is withdrawing the country from
the planet. It's comforting to look
at some pictures streaming live
from Venice. See how it

wears the light like a gown
as it sinks into time.

© 2017

Tara Hubbard

Born a Girl

I was born a girl.
I came in wanting to be seen,
Delighted in, enjoyed.
I liked dolls, jewelry, clothes,
Colors, whatever made you look!

Sadly I couldn't get anyone to look!
One looked down in sobbing sadness,
The other out the window in
Self-centered introspection.
My days became gray
My curls fell straight.
I lost my luster, and my will
To dance and twirl for attention
In retreat I resigned myself to wait, hoping

I waited and while I waited
More little, lost and ignored souls
entered my space. Being the eldest,
and of a tender-hearted disposition,
I vowed to protect these of a similar fate.

21

Continued on page 22

I became defender and fixer and parent,
Because those two were obviously unable,
Or unwilling to do the job.
As I did, the last vestiges of my femininity slipped
And the tender in me turned to the tough
The soft needy places had to be sacrificed
For the greater good. I put myself and my need
For defense, for protection, for tender care and touch
On the altar until there was no girl left in me.

*Now I lay here again asking my Savior
To cause a flower to grow in place of the rock
Beautiful, fragrant, adoration unto Him
To restore that little girl heart and let it long again
To be cared for and nurtured by His tender touch*
© 2017

22

Tara Hubbard

The poet writes: “My name is Tara Hubbard. I was born a foreigner in Ireland. This set me on a distinct path of separation, loneliness and pain, but for the most part I was wholly unaware of what was going on inside of me. It was the three beautiful children that undid me finally. For the first time in my life, I really couldn’t manage. I realized the lie I was living under — that I really didn’t need God — I could manage on my own, thank you. I thought I was proving to Him how worthy I was in my own goodness. Thus began my journey of glorious dependence and healing. It is from this place that I have come to know myself and give birth to feelings. Poetry is the raw expressing of this for me.”

23



Tara Hubbard

The Clock Struck Twelve

A Tuesday morning miracle
My desperate confession
And the prayer of saints
And, “Poof,” the spell is broken

With a thud I find myself
Sitting with a battered pumpkin
A mouse where a man used to be
Rats that galloped minutes ago
Scurry for the darkness
And I look down at my rags
A baggy t-shirt and worn shorts
And lament the heels, the color,
The bling, that marked my dream life

I plod home, habitually
putting one foot in front of another,
A sigh on my lips, shoulders drooped,
Free at last.
Home, where the dirt piles up,
And the man is waiting for me,
Tight-lipped, familiar lonely silence
He hands me the broom, and the baby,
And hits ‘resume’

Oh Prince, with your fancy footwork
And your fairy dreams, did you have to go?
Color you brought to the everyday
Fades ...away ...to gray

© 2017

Tara Hubbard

The Old Coat No Longer Fits

I have been hurt.
Risking it all.
Living as if I was loved.
It drove me back
To my old comfort,
To my safe place
Of self protection.

As I wrap the heavy coat
Around my whole form
I let out a sigh of relief.
Sinking down deep into
My own cherished notions
Of protection and safety
Feeling the sweetness of the familiar...

Ways of isolation, darkness
Separation from light, love.
This beloved soothe spoiled
Leaving me only to weep,
As pain and devastation creep in again.
And I am left further still from
My great heart longings!

25

Continued on page 26

In frustration and hope
I reach for Your hand again
And let You lead me out
Where nakedness is freer
And loving gives life
Tentatively trusting You
To be all the protection I need

© 2017

26

Karen Mitnick Liptak

Alien Crossing At The Observatory

My best tour so far on Kitt Peak?
Hands down, up, and every which way,
the one on Earth Day, Saturday,
April 22nd, 2017,
guiding 40 members from the
Arizona Association of the Deaf,
and two sign language interpreters,
to four telescopes in all, and hearing
these mostly retired Phoenicians'
thoughtful queries and quips.

At our second stop, the 2.1-meter scope,
one man asked if we'd ever contacted aliens.

Tim, my fellow guide, and a sweetie,
said, *"I'll give you the government's line—
we can neither confirm nor deny it."*

Their eyes on the interpreter,
everyone laughed.

Later, when I pointed out Kitt Peak's
two radio telescopes across the way,
saying many such dishes come in arrays
and search for intelligence elsewhere,
that same curious man asked,
*"Would you please
let me know when it's found?"*

27

Continued on page 28

“*You’ll be the first to know,*” I replied,
laughter reigning again
when the interpreter signed
on this, the Tohono O’odham’s
second most sacred mountain,
the land leased in perpetuity
to ‘the men with long eyes.’

Near the tour’s end,
as we left the public solar scope,
everyone having viewed two sun spots,
one woman said, “*I bet you learned today
that deaf people aren’t so dumb.*”

28
My hug took her by surprise,
unaware we were two peas in a pod,
my hearing loss a sign to some
I’m less intelligent than them,
which is why I buy
the latest assistive listening devices,
carry extra hearing aid batteries with me,
and start tours at Kitt Peak’s Visitors’ Center
by telling guests, “*Please save your questions
for outdoors, where it’s easier for me to hear,*”
not adding, it being too soon to share
that out there, like everywhere,
unseen forces abound,
scoping humans with nary a sound.

Karen Mitnick Liptak

The poet writes: “Native New Yorker, Tucsonian since ’78, author of some 20 children’s books, including ‘Dating Dinosaurs and Other Old Things’ (Millbrook Press), ‘North American Indian Sign Language’ (Franklin Watts), ‘Out in the Night’ (Harbinger House), and ‘The Glass Ark: The Story About Biosphere 2’ (with Linnea Gentry for Penguin/Viking). Former documentary filmmaker with Newsreel, and Editorial Director for Positive Promotions. Currently, as a tour guide at Kitt Peak National Observatory, I convey the science and mystery of the universe to visitors of all ages. I feel blessed to think in cosmic verse. My website TBA soon. Contact at kmliptak@comcast.net.”

29



Karen Mitnick Liptak

Best Question Yet

While guiding a tour group
from a Nogales' high school science class
to the McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope
50 miles southwest of Tucson,
at Kitt Peak Observatory,
one student's question
made me nearly cry.

30

At first the teens were shy,
silently listening to my rap about the Sun,
how it's Earth's nearest star, and must be monitored,
especially if we hope to set up colonies beyond
the natural magnetic shield protecting
this planet's life and technology
from harmful solar storms.

It wasn't until I said how much
scientists *don't* know
that kids began waving hands
and blurting out question after question,
most for assignments and predictable,
until one girl's hit like a stun gun.
*"Do other stars have the same purpose
as the Sun?"* she asked, iPad open,
ready to record my reply.

Continued on page 31

I flashed on Albert Einstein as a teen,
wondering what it would be like
to ride alongside a light beam.
His query changed reality.

With chills dancing down my spine,
like dinosaurs in a chorus line,
I said, *“Your guess is as good as mine.
Nobody’s really sure what stars are for.
In every age people make assumptions,
based on what they know so far,
as to why everything exists,
from people and wars to moons and stars,
all subject to change as intelligence evolves.
So, maybe a star’s purpose is to support planetary life,
or maybe the answer’s too complex for humans
at this crossroad to grasp, but nonetheless,
what a great question to ask.”*

31

Sensing my sincerity, the teens grinned,
aware their queries truly matter
to a guide attuned to cosmic chatter.

H. Patrick O'Connor

Discarded

In the street, I found a paper heart amidst the detritus of a world that had forgotten it...

I touched its tattered edges

faded face

bleached and waterworn words now illegible

still hinting at the promise it once held for another heart...

A young heart

flushed with the promise of knowing another...

A heart fed on dreamt possibilities, and the reasonless courage of what might be,

A heart waiting at some passed door to hand over two dimensions

of hope to someone and have infinities of love returned

As if it were the key to a universe built just for two.

Now here it lies – its promises forgotten.

Its rash intent rinsed away in so much rain,

or tears, or empty beers and piss.

Old.

Faded.

Fragile.

Failed.

The discarded victim of a thousand nonchalant indignities.

I stooped, and gathered it up with all the reverence one can muster in the heat of the phoenix sun,

thinking I would bring it home to some minor place of honor, because love should never end up in such a place...such a way.

But when I tried to fold it, the ancient paper crumbled in my gentle hands,

As if to say

You cannot save me from fate, foolish bard...I know my place.

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32

H. Patrick O'Connor

H. Patrick O'Connor is a writer, musician and performing artist who has been involved with the Phoenix art scene since the early nineties. Most well known for his contributions to the Arizona belly dance community, in the past few years he has been focusing on a solo music career and writing, always looking for new ways to indulge his talent.

More of his poetry can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/allmyprettywords/>.

33



H. Patrick O'Connor

Marks

just out of reach, thunder mumbles threats at the dusking sky.

in the close quiet between imprecations, I listen to the complaints of my battered body and wonder how different things would be if things were different.

in just the right light, I can see the thousand conflicts of my youth on my patina'd skin and I remember my father's arms, the secrets I could see there but never know.

34

And I – who have students, not children – cannot help but think that no one will ever wonder about the little nick on my knuckle, the smear of burns and faded cryptography of countless cuttings and labored divots that keep the stories of my hurts in the sacred language of scars – a harsh, guttural tongue that everyone must one day learn. The tally of my life's mistakes writ in layers of experience so deep that they can be felt in my skin. Who might ever want to read such a terrible thing?

No matter. Darkness comes behind the storm, and soon enough will hide all things.

© 2017

H. Patrick O'Connor

Planetary

you vex me, Sun...
for all my inertia
I am still caught in your gravity
and the stars, with fusion eyes askance
watch while we dance
uncertainty the rulers distance between us.
but oh my love... Oh the sweet pull of you...
what blissful cataclysm might come
should we fall upon each other,
and become one?

© 2017

35

H. Patrick O'Connor

smoking out back on a first date

A coal glows,
Soft in the dark
Passing gently back and forth between two hearts.
And in the shadowed truths we whispered
that speck of light soared between us
Brief but bright
Like hope.
© 2017

H. Patrick O'Connor

Unable to sleep and dreaming

Unable to sleep and dreaming
a dream of her, always her
on the tip of my mind
a dream of her.
like butterfly kisses
on my cheek,
like butterfly kisses
on my heart
just like butterfly kisses
barely there at all
just a dream
a dream of something sweet
sweet but barely there
like a dream
a dream of her,
always her...
and still I am unable to sleep
and still I am dreaming of her

© 2017

37

Alyssia Pratt

untitled

I'll never let her go
he said
I love the sound of her
VOICE
our memories will never fade

38
Everyday, around noon
they met up in a park
they put their palms together
stared into each other's eyes
with a spark in them
that lit up each other's smiles
and they danced through the flowers by the pond

Until one day
neither of them showed up

He walked down a semi-crowded road down to a theater
She was in a car, driving as fast as she could

SEE

they never talked about their lives to each other
only met up in that park to fantasize
to pretend

Continued on page 39

Continued from page 38

she drove off a cliff
he shot himself in the bathroom stall of that theater

Nothing is what it seems
Reality is just a dream
© 2017

39

Alyssia Pratt

The poet writes: “My name is Alyssia Pratt. I’m 19 years old and I come from the Gila River Indian community. I enjoy writing poems; my favorite poets are Charles Bukowski and Edgar Allan Poe.”

40



Janet McMillan Rives

Finding Poetry

Are you looking for Poetry?
the man asked as I wandered
semi-lost through a maze of classrooms
at the book festival.

I thought but did not say:
Yes, I'm looking for poetry.
I'm always looking for poetry
in every leaf falling on my path
in every solitary star glimmering above
in every word spoken, every word heard.

41

It's right here, he said, in the Kiva room.
But I walked on past Poetry
out into the bright yellow light
into the shadow of towering mountains
into that lonely space where I waited
for poetry to find me.

© 2017

Janet McMillan Rives

Janet McMillan Rives is a resident of both Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Oro Valley, Arizona. She grew up in Connecticut and Tucson and is a graduate of the University of Arizona. She spent thirty-five years as a professor of economics and is retired from the University of Northern Iowa. Her interests in retirement include flower gardening, golfing, reading and writing. She is a member of the Iowa Poetry Association, The Arizona State Poetry Society, and the Tucson Poetry Society. Her poems have appeared in *Lyrical Iowa*, *Sandcutters*, and *The Avocet*. She can be reached at rives@uni.edu.

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Janet McMillan Rives

Blaze

Everyday dull
then suddenly
from within the flat tan
emerge such gems:
the turquoise underside
of a desert lizard,
flaming jasper
on barrel cacti,
yellow palo verde
gone to topaz.

Look!

Our desert's
ablaze.

© 2017

43

Janet McMillan Rives

Code

Could he ever live a wholesome life
after all he had seen, after all he had done?
When he came home from the war
would they bless him in a way
that would cleanse his soul forever?
Would The Enemy Way free him?
Even if he might be healed through love,
he vowed to be quiet, not say a word.

44 Not a word, until a quarter century later
the world would know their story
know how they spoke to one another
in their childhood language
how they kept secrets from the enemy
in a code that would never be cracked,
choosing their words with care
as they would do at home.

They risked their lives far away from
the red canyon walls, some only boys
as young as fifteen fighting in Normandy,
Iwo Jima, Algeria, Italy, enlisting at a time when
they were not even citizens, fighting because
somebody had to defend this country,
somebody had to defend freedom.

Continued on page 45

So few are left today, sixty-eight years later,
so few to claim the Gold Medals
given to thirty-three different tribes.

But Edmund Harjo, aged ninety-six,
is here from Oklahoma, wheelchair
bound on the floor of Congress.

Family members, children and grandchildren,
represent the veterans, their ancestors.

They have come from Florida, Nebraska,
Montana, Arizona, Iowa, New Mexico.

They have come to heal their wounds
restore their pride, come to this public place
so that we might understand more fully
how they have blessed us.

© 2017

45

Janet McMillan Rives

My Red Garden

Every pot in place: Bronze
glaze holding yucca, blood red,
pale blue pottery with one scarlet
geranium, three petunias, carmine,
large blue pot featuring crimson
pentas—a flower new to me—
and one hibiscus, bold red.

46
The first bud, barely visible,
takes on a strange shade of amber
then evolves into blaze orange.
But the tag said *Red Hibiscus*.
Days pass, I fret, the bud swells
till finally this morning I am greeted
by a fantastic six-inch bloom,
a burst of—oh, no—
MANGO!

© 2017

Janet McMillan Rives

Something This White

This desert snow
at once delicate
and burdensome
cannot last.

It is like a new friendship
you sense is somewhat off.

You may try to keep it going
but like snow on cactus
it will melt away
in a day-long drip
gone

as the western sky
bleeds orange.

© 2017

47

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Breathing Under Water, 1

preceding a theme by Gunnar Ekelöf

Lying on your back,
warming chill just under the surface of the brook,
and clinging to enough bankside reediness
to be sure that this will be a respite—
and not a trip but a sojourn,
time for rest and contemplation—

48 you sink just far enough under
that what you see above
is the same dreamscape you see
when you peer through
the ancient window,
the ghost-lens original glass
at the north end of your family house.

Yes, like that.
A cosmic kaleidoscope,
prism of ripples.
And yes,
I hear you repeat that you can't.
Can't breathe.
You'll drown.

Continued on page 49

And I respond that I agree perfectly,
but go ahead and do it anyway,
just like last time
and the time before that.

Don't you remember?
Ah.
Not possible of course.

Remember anyway.
Breathe anyway.
*

Sticks float by, even branches,
as they have floated by since before
the moon chose to evolve for you
from a child's night-mare
ghastly with teeth,
and the sticks bump against rocks and growth
as they have since before those rocks were sucked round

49

and spat out by the destructive and creative glacier
who drifted enormously by
millennia before the trees
sprouted and grew to drop sticks and branches
to float in our common direction,
poke and pique our idle intention.

*

Lie in the stream.
Look skyward, moonward.
Consider.

What the glacier cannot remember,
what the moon *will not* remember,
you and the water above you will remember
and together tend the flow of stream and memory.

Breathe together—
you, the moon, the protean sky.

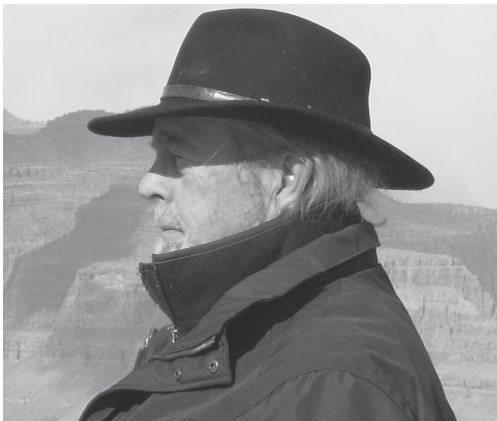
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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Richard Fenton Sederstrom was raised and lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and the North Woods of Minnesota. Sederstrom is the author of five books of poetry, including “Eumaeus Tends” in 2014. A new book, “Selenity Book Four,” has just been published.

51



Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Breathing Under Water 2

avoiding the theme by Gunnar Ekelöf

Now you remember
and you can see what rises above you.
But what?

Let us agree that
above us a blue heron haunts the brook,
that whatever neighbor the heron does not bother to haunt
cannot be aware of the condition *haunted*,
and so becomes anyway
its haunted and haunting prey:

frogs, minnows,
baby birds fallen from their nest and drifting
downstream
toward what none of them can possibly recognize
as beak, as weapon,
as poniard-pointed spring-locked machine,
as what must also be *because*

we are down here under,
watching but also unavailable
to the information I supplied us with just now that we,
you and I and whomever you and I can imagine—

Continued on page 53

only because the instant of mention is the object—
that we also fail to recognize
what stalks above as what drives
below in its appetite to digest
what it spears and swallows:

Us!

The heron having fed to such satiety as it ever can—
the frogs, the minnows,
the struggling baby bird,

the us—

flies away to digest us
or to share us with its own progeny,
giving us another chance at particulate immortality,
some caloric value,
molecular virtue.

53

And those survivors who are left behind,
still lying in the caressing stream
and who have determined not to suffer
what may have and *didn't* happen to us?

We know as well as they that we *choose* to flow
with assembling remnants
in a stream of evolving possibilities,
eons of nothing but sacred wedded particularities.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Among the Water Lilies

1

A crane tips her delicate beak down
down among the water lilies. Green
pads sport yellow white pink buds
like tea-time confections.

And blossoms unfolded.
Lotus morsels offer sweet peace
to the crane among them
and the frogs minnows crayfish

54 she entertains while they all
sleep their idyllic way into her welcoming gullet.
The crane lifts the shine of fine beak
from out the first dream: lotus Eden.

She raises her neck high
to reach even above late summer cattails
and strains her irongray loop of neck

Continued on page 55

2

to crane immense girders and bales of rebar
lordly above the uncontrolled slather
of draining nature, green yellow white pink.
Adjusts to the rightangle of monument aborning,
capital perfection of human genius.

3

Motored along by the refined primordium,
steered by the steady arm of public policy,
she lifts incendiary iron bars like ignorant keys
into a judgment of electric sky.

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55

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Lyric Epic Hearth

An Essay

When you heard the still small voice
it wasn't a god you heard.
It was yourself.
It wasn't a god you heard, small, insignificant, powerless.

It was yourself, small, insignificant, powerless.
It was the voice of the silent passing wing.
Yourself.

56

Listen.
Not too hard.
Ah, not yet.

1

Literary characters, if real enough, animating,
enter the imagination and memory
with energy to compete with the memories of our own past
family and friends,

and even our own past selves,
to bring to us a mould and mortal breath.
Eumaeus redirects his attention to converse with my grandfather,

Continued on page 57

and I am allowed into the conversation, even
to help direct it on those occasions when they allow
that I am old enough now,
“all bigger” now and only for now:

Wealthweow has learned—
taught herself within herself,
which is the only academy for a woman of her status—
that the only way to be in charge is never to need to be in charge.
It is a lesson she needn't teach the men.

What is the virtue of listening to anyone in the throes
of the illusion of power,
warrior to berserker in a swig and an insult,
and back to sanity through her unnoticed gesture?

57

2
Eurydice alive,
Orpheus cannot contemplate death.
Without the contemplation of death
the necessary urgency of poetry
(en-chant-ment)
remains still-born.
And poetry with it.

3
The great emotions are lacerating.
We want to demand of the epic that it tether the emotions so
that we can ride them like ponies.

I am looking at the wound,
sometimes from the inside,
and I want my work to let out the new wild.

Grab the aurochs by the horns and ride.
You.
The past is no more than the past.

The poet writes.
You ride.
(The poet longs to ride, writes the horse and rider)

58
But in calm, when you hear the still small voice
it isn't a god you hear.
It is yourself.
It isn't a god you hear, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is yourself, small, insignificant, powerless.
It is the voice of the silent passing wing.

A passing owl perhaps,
in silent flight through a distant wood,
where you are standing.

Yourself.

Listen.
Not too hard, not yet.

4

. . . the poet's traditional living between
the shaman and the scientist,
participating at the extremes, as intermediary and as interlocutor.

The living demands the natural,
which attempts to unite the extremes—
which are not really extremes anyway

but life between the inhalations and the exhalations,
the verbs that give threat to the long-held breath.

5

It is hard to get lost trying to get lost,
because of the efforts of observing, the need
to discover what is strange (lost)—
the necessary landscape of lostness.

59

We strive for the end of our work and our words—
the embodied silence
from which another might create new noises

almost all our own.

And from which the next noises
become words and the next speaker's silence.

When I close my eyes,
I am expecting,
or at least hoping,
in some trepidation,

for a nuclear light-show glittering about in the vast
and barely visited empyrean
between my ears.

6

On People Who Are Not:

60 . . . names I will have to look up again, and again
and again—
names I will forget again in order to rediscover
the honor of finding them once more—

and to remember the nature of my own names,
one honored by Homer who then kindly forgets—
symbol of my own stature with

Tranströmer's Ileborgh, Mayone, Dauthendy, Kaminsky, and,
in the inevitable rest after the final line of the codex,
Tomas as well.
I shall miss them.
I will be them.

7

Nor do you know,
through the expected welter of heroic mayhem,
the Wealtheow who has learned—
taught herself within herself,

which is the only academy for a woman of her status—
that the only way to be in charge is never to need to be in charge.
It is a lesson she needn't teach the men.
What is the virtue of listening to one in the throes of the illusion of power?

Wealtheow steps again toward the end of her work and her words—
the embodied silence from which she will create *níwe sangas*.
New cantos almost all her own.

61

And from which the next noises
become words first
before the necessary tradition of gesture.

For when she hears the still small voice
it isn't a god she hears.
It is herself.
It isn't a god she hears, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is herself, small, insignificant, powerless.
It is the voice of the silent passing wing.

A silent owl perhaps,
passing among the rafters of Heorot.
Herself.

She listens.
Regards the necessary silence.

8

Notes for Fenton family:

It is hard to get lost trying to get lost,
because of the efforts of observing, the need
to discover what is strange (lost)—
the beckoning landscape of lostness.

We strive for the end of our work and our words—
the embodied silence
from which another might create new noises

almost all our own.
And from which the next noises
become words and the next speaker's creative silence

. . . but life is difficult almost always
and life is always as confusing
as life needs to be for what is almost clarity.

62

9

Hugh Fenton's Story:

(*a theory of fiction*)

So when Hugh hears the Minnie ball whiz by again

you hear it whiz by,

the bee that scared you when you were three.

Or the cannon ball.

You couldn't see it bounce,

one, two, three.

But you could and you did

and it hit you square in the sternum . . .

like when you and your bike fell and the end of the handlebar

hit you square in the sternum.

63

You've heard them both now

and you have felt the terrible blows,

and you can hear now what it is to be scared

and scared near to death.

(The irony about speaking of war

is that there is no irony available in speaking of war.

War is too reptilian to be ironic.

Peace is the playground of irony,

which happens after the blood has petrified

into the innocent sentimentality of *Epic*,

after the poet has dared to return to the people of the hearth—
the warmth of creative peace that is expected to demand
again the hearth-rending culture of war.)

The great emotions are lacerating.
We want to demand of the epic that it tether the emotions so
that we can ride them like ponies.

I am looking at the wound,
sometimes from the inside,
and I want my work to let out the new wild.

Grab the aurochs by the horns and ride.
You.
The past is so much more than the past.

The poet writes.
You ride.
(we ride)

10
. . . the poet's traditional living between
the shaman and the scientist,
participating at the extremes, as intermediary and as interlocutor.

The living demands the natural,
which attempts to unite the extremes—
which are not really extremes anyway

but life between the inhalations and the exhalations,
the verbs that give resonance to the long-held breath.

For when we hear the still small voice
it isn't a god we hear.

It is ourselves.

It isn't a god we hear, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is ourselves, small, insignificant, powerless.

It is the voice of the silent passing wing.

It is Everyvoice in our chorus of mortal breath.

Listen again:

11

Eurydice alive,

Orpheus cannot contemplate death.

Without the contemplation of death

the necessary urgency of poetry

(en-chant-ment)

remains still-born.

And poetry with it.

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65

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

The Room Where We Three Pass

“What a good haunter I am, O tell him”

1

What shall we discover
if we delve
toward the dark lament in the cat

and what feline passion
should try to relieve
from the broken-loved poet

66 his grieved confusion
at the love
and first despair of his life

his wife
who in dying returned
as specter and muse

loved
unloved
loved and feared for one and twenty fatey verses?

Continued on page 67

2

I might have stayed longer
to continue some conversation
but the company was no more than

3

I and, ah . . .
someone had turned
off the coffee pot

the coffee lying thick in the bottom
of the black mug as moon-dead
as the heart of the cat.

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67

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Mason Jar

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning I saw a single Mason jar.

It was a big jar.

And the old zinc lid was a pewter shade that looked galvanized.

It was dusty.

The whole cupboard was dusty.

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning I saw a single Mason jar.

It was a big jar.

A quart jar and I thought I could see the red of tomatoes through the untouched dust.

And the old zinc lid was the same pewter shade and the same galvanized patina.

It was dustier than before.

The whole cupboard was dustier than before.

68

Continued on page 69

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning to look again at a single Mason jar

I saw that someone had taken the Mason jar.

It had been a big jar.

It had been a quart jar but I knew that I had not seen the red of tomatoes through the untouched dust.

It had been too dusty to see into then.

It should have been dustier now than it had been last time I looked.

The galvanized pewter colored zinc lid was gone too.

The whole cupboard was carpeted in dust.

When I opened the big cupboard in the basement where my mother stored her plans for that summer's canning I saw that someone had taken the cupboard.

Someone had taken my mother.

But when I opened my hand I could still see my mother's plans for this summer's canning.

Then I poured the dust out of my hand and I went back up the basement stair.

I turned the key in the ignition of my car.

When I turned round in order to back out the drive onto Rice Street I looked at the faces of my granddaughters.

For only a moment their faces were dust too.

Then they were faces again.

They asked why my own face looked so strange.

I did not speak through the dust.

I turned back and drove down Rice Street.

I wanted to show them the old beach on the riverbank where I had
learned to swim.

I looked out at the river and looking washed off some of the dust.

But I still don't want my granddaughters to see my face.

Not until the dust has dried.

And settled into the patina of my face.

A single Mason jar.

The lid is zinc and it looks like patina of galvanized pewter.

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Bottom of the Manhattan Glass

Stemmed cherry floats
to the bottom of the Manhattan glass
The way dreams sink
almost
perish
but don't actually die

Retrieval is up to the drinker
Fish it out with
ringed finger
Lick it out with
searching tongue
Like a Mt. Everest climber with a broken compass

As jazz flute resonates
try to comprehend
How cherries are just like the ocean
There
Just beyond your reach
Like vacations other people take

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Audrey Sher-Walton grew up on Fresh Meadow Lane. Surrounded by asphalt, it wasn't fresh, a meadow, or even a lane. Still, it was an idyllic childhood during which time she developed a lifelong fascination with words. Audrey is the founder and facilitator of Write ON! Eastside Writing Group. Two of her poems won Pima College's Family Heritage Project Contest. She has been a guest reader on KXCI's Poet's Moment and she penned monthly columns in two Tucson newspapers. Her poems have been published in Zocolo and Aurora. She is the assistant editor of Awakenings Literary Review. Audrey owns Mrs. Audrey's Academic Achievement, a tutoring service. She enjoys swimming laps, reading, playing her flute, and organic gardening, but above all, she loves spending time with her fabulous family. Although a desert dweller, in her mind she lives right near the ocean. Audrey can be reached at: Mrs.AudreysAcademicAchievement@gmail.com.

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Tamed and Restrained

Been tamed and restrained for so long
You unleash my wild streak

I'm not those things you say I am
Daring, crafty—no not me

But something about you
leads me to this aberrant behavior
my sensuality, femininity set free

A part of me is cordoned off—open only to you
A piece of me that no one else can infiltrate
A sliver only recently unearthed

73

I keep you sequestered from the rest of the world
my own private caprice

I send you the core of me, the hidden me
unwrapped
You drink me in
devour me
And then return for more

Continued on page 74

Continued from page 73

Always you appear
A silent voice rippling inside my head
The soft breeze that moves
my curls against my shoulders

Whispers, the hint of your touch
pierces

And you
you've never even inhaled
my perfume

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Maya

He said
I love you, but not like that

I wish he would have said
It's like that
I love you

He said
The usual bullshit
“We'll always be friends.”

That was 40 years ago
And we are
Truly

75

My husband says how lucky he is
that the guy was such a fool
But he likes him just the same

After
our mutual friend's daughter
killed herself
we spoke

He said
Heartfelt comforting things

I wish
He didn't have the opportunity
to be so real and kind

Audrey Sher-Walton

Lifted Mist

When the mist lifts
and
the veil of secrecy is cast aside

You will lay unmasked
Unguarded by the ill-begotten
thoughts you have come to believe
To trust
are real

A fabrication of beliefs
You dare not unwind

Fog shrouds your soul
demanding:
Hide your trepidation
lest you be found out

Afraid to be transparent
Glowing in the haze
Where nothing can reach you
except
fear

76

Continued on page 77

Continued from page 76

Make friends with the fear
you are repeatedly told

How does one shake hands with an invisible force
that paralyzes dreams?
Or embrace a power whose mission it is
to steal pleasure?

Hidden beneath the mist
No one knows

You can pretend
you are not being gripped
by
a fear so consuming
that you are no longer
you

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Morphine Lips

Morphine lips

Cracked

Lined with a suffocating shade of blue

Not the way for a daughter to remember her mother

Lying in bed

an effort for you just to inhale

He blows cigarette smoke in your direction

More toil for your compromised lungs

Always the martyr,

Selfless

now reduced to begging for a swig of that blue elixir

Have to sneak it past Dad, the gatekeeper who

tries insanely to believe

that you're not really dying

I run interference

Bargain for necessities that would bring palliative
care

A walker, a wheelchair, a hospital bed

Each thing an exhausting fight to get you what you need

Each thing denied, overruled,

banned

78

Continued on page 79

Continued from page 78

Every day you battle for your life
Every day I battle him

When it's your turn to die I tell him, you can call the shots
For now let's try to hear what *Mom* wants
My words reverberate against yellowed walls
My pleas turning vapid

The yelps of pain take up too much space in my brain

I ask you what you need What you want You could name a thousand things

Instead you say, "Mamala, just sit and let me look at you."

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Editor's Note

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A while back I started a conversation about how poetry allows us a concentration of experience in a single image, a moment of time. It also allows us a concentration of emotion. I was toying around with the line “Night snapped shut around the bat,” the keyhole to a poem I’ve been working on for a long time. For me, it’s an image freighted with experience and emotion and continues to obsess me. Thinking about the process of writing this poem reminds me of the poet — was it a French poet? — who hung his poems on clotheslines and walked around the room adding lines here and lines there. I have three things in mind as I’m working this obsession: Poet Alberto Rios speaks of writing about an image from all angles, giving it a 360-degree view. In this issue, poet Richard Fenton Sederstrom writes of “the verbs that give threat to the long-held breath.” I could write: “The night snapped shut around the bat like a velvet purse.” (Or: “a velvet coin purse.”) Or just as easily: “Night snapped shut around the bat, black swallowing black.” The poem that’s out there (or in me) ultimately may use both lines or neither lines, maybe not even the original line. The third thing I’m thinking about: For a poem to live, you need to let it exhale, then get out of its way. I’m still working on that, but I’m excited about where it might lead.

Rebecca “Becca” Dyer

Editor

Editorial Staff

Editor: *Rebecca Dyer*

Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Publisher: *Elena Thornton*

Artwork for front and back covers: *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 Thursday of each month, from 5 p.m. to 7 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.

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Coming in October!

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' Annual Fall Festival of the Arts

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

A Call to Poets For Summer 2018

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Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2018 Issue from June 1 through July 4, 2018. 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.

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

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

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

A Call to Writers for the Fall 2017 Blue Guitar

The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2017 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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The Blue Guitar, The Blue Guitar Jr. and Unstrung are nonprofit projects of the nonprofit start-up The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

Meet the staff of Unstrung magazine



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

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

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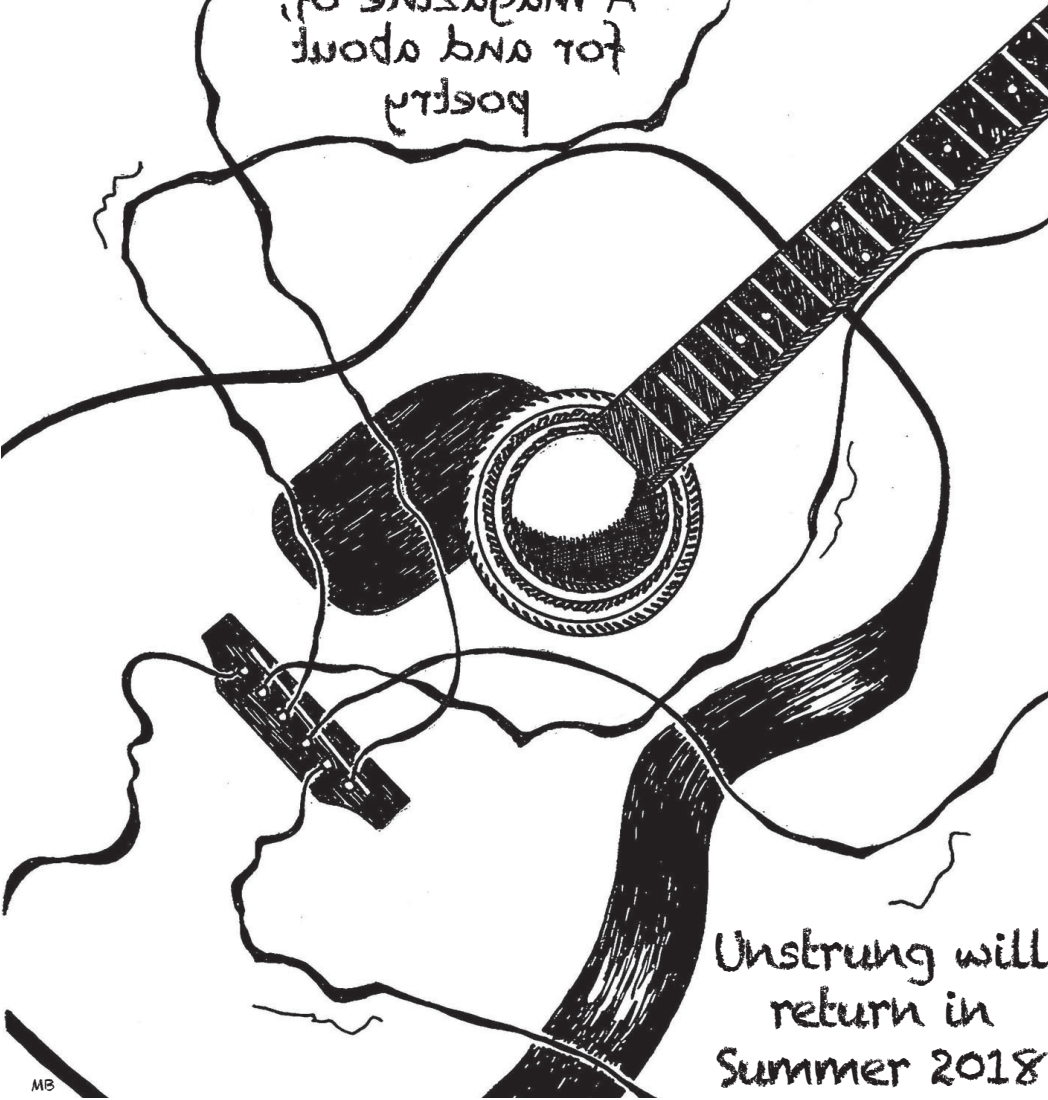
Richard H. Dyer Jr., editor: Richard is the managing editor for two weekly newspapers in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor.

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



UNSTRUNG

A magazine of
for and about
poetry



Unstrung will
return in
Summer 2018