

The Blue Guitar



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Co-editor’s Note

First, a celebratory note — to the written and visual artists in this issue who are sharing their works: Thank you!

Since The Blue Guitar magazine’s first issue in Spring 2009, we’ve had the pleasure of showing the extraordinary works of Arizona artists and writers. You can see this issue and all of the back issues in PDF form at www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org.

We are including the suicide hotline with Meck Slagle’s nonfiction essay about a family member’s suicide attempt and how it affected her life.

In my work life, I wrote a newspaper article about local school districts placing the suicide hotline on the back of student IDs and volunteers working on it to be statewide. The story also told about an Arizona man losing a loved one to suicide.

If you know someone in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or use the crisis text line — text HELLO to 741741. All calls are confidential.

– Co-Editor Richard H. Dyer Jr.



**Co-Editor
Richard H.
Dyer Jr.**

Follow us on Twitter at @BlueGuitarMagAZ

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

www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

Fall 2019

Co-editor's Note

A message of thanks

This is definitely the season of thankfulness, but every day should be one of thanksgiving. Every day, we should count our blessings — especially in the realm of the arts.

For us at The Blue Guitar, as we put the fall issue together, we were reminded of how lucky we are to live in a state where we are surrounded by such talented artists, writers and poets. How much you enrich all of us!

We are thankful for each one of you and your willingness to share your work and your talents in each issue going back to spring 2009, our first issue.

We are thankful also for our readers and the people who come out each time and support our arts festivals as organized by our parent group, the Arizona Consortium for the Arts. We are thankful for the co-sponsorship of our fall festival this year by the nonprofit veterans group the Creative Drill Sergeants.



Co-Editor
Rebecca
"Becca" Dyer

We are thankful for Melanie Tighe and Thom Butcher, and for the gracious sharing of their bookstore, Dog-Eared Pages, for open mic nights and other events.

We are thankful for Marjory Boyer, whose enduring and iconic artwork graces the covers of our publications: The Blue Guitar, The Blue Guitar Jr. and Unstrung poetry magazine.

We are thankful for the vision, dedication, passion and hard work of our founder and president, Elena Thornton, without whom we wouldn't be here — and for her better half, Jim, without whom she wouldn't be here.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention how thankful I am for my husband and co-editor, Rick, without whom this venture wouldn't even be possible.

Thank you to all! As we approach 2020, please keep us in mind! To all: Keep reading and keep submitting your beautiful work!

Rebecca "Becca" Dyer
Co-Editor

Check out our calls for submissions for all of our publications — The Blue Guitar art and literary magazine; The Blue Guitar Jr. art and literary magazine for youth; and Unstrung poetry magazine — starting on page 74.

Fine Red Dust

By Alana Minkler

© 2019

I was seven years old, sitting on the ground, sifting red powdery dirt through my nimble fingers, letting the dust fall and form into a cloud at my feet.

I grabbed a stick and drew little pictures in the dirt. Red ants would crawl into the crevasses of the little hearts and flowers I drew and I would scare them away with my stick.

This was Navajo reservation dirt. Its iconic color and texture are important to the indigenous people and the history of this inhospitable, yet beautiful land.

There are probably just as many stories about people getting stuck in that mud every monsoon season as there are stories about outsiders digging up that dirt looking for money.

My dad drove through these red dirt roads as I bumped along in the backseat. His long brown hair flowed in the breeze and so did mine. I felt most content listening to his stories as he drove haphazardly through the Navajo Reservation.

I remember one story about how the United States government began to dig up the dirt and mine uranium during the Cold War.

Hundreds of Natives looking for employment flocked to the mines, but the United States Environmental Protection Agency failed to tell them about radiation poisoning, water contamination and the environmental implications this would have for decades.

I would later find out through research that my dad's story was not just a story. It really happened.

According to the EPA, from 1944 to 1986, almost 30 million tons of uranium ore were extracted from Navajo lands and many of those mines were abandoned.

No one warned the Navajo people of health hazards,

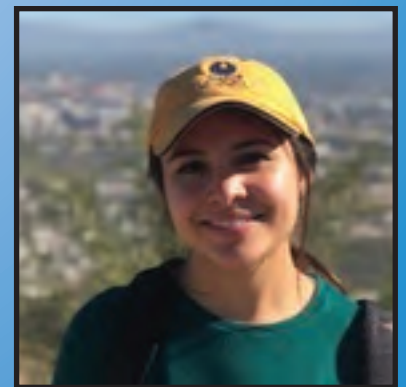
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Mark Minkler

Alana Minkler in front of Red Lake, Arizona, wearing a turquoise necklace from her great-aunt, on the Navajo Reservation on Dec. 24, 2018.

Alana Minkler is a junior at the University of Arizona studying journalism. She is from Flagstaff, Arizona, and has always loved writing and exploring the outdoors. Alana is passionate about investigative and environmental journalism and wants to spread awareness of social justice and environmental issues. She is also the investigative editor at The Daily Wildcat as well as a reporter.



Continued from page 4

resulting in no precautions when handling the dirt or drinking water.

Cancer rates on the Navajo Reservation doubled from the early 1970s to the late 1990s after the uranium mining period, according to Indian Health Service data.

The mining industry is still pushing for uranium mining in the Grand Canyon, which will impact the Havasupai tribe forever.

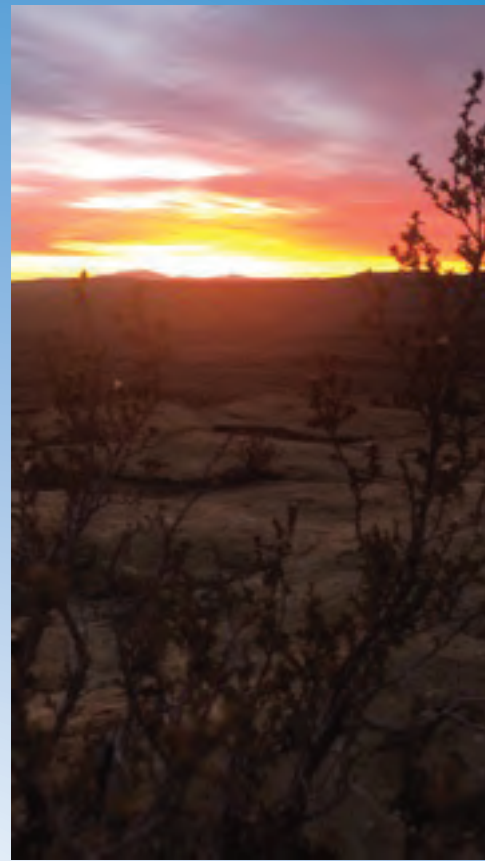
In 2011, my dad took me to a protest and informational event on the north side of the Grand Canyon. The Havasupai tribe that has lived in the Grand Canyon for centuries was worried about radiation running through the Grand Canyon and contaminating their water supply.

I saw concerned faces as we walked through the crowd, smelled the fry bread and observed the red and brown mountains surrounding us.

I remember feeling confused about why people would rip the ground apart, sift through endless miles of dirt, all for a substance used to kill people in another country.

I'm still confused — and now angry — about why the government didn't warn my Navajo relatives. Now that I understand, I want to tell others and spread awareness and knowledge before it happens again.

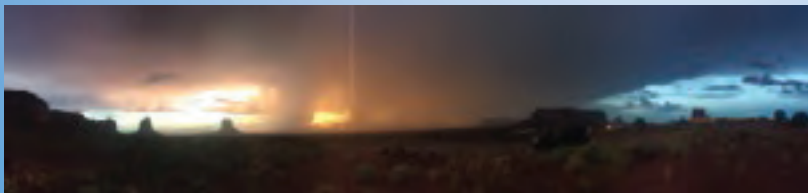
When I visit the reservation today, I pick up that familiar red dust and I think about my dad's stories and the stories I too will write someday.



Alana Minkler



Alana Minkler



Alana Minkler



Sam Minkler



Alana Minkler

Clockwise from top: The sun sets on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona on Dec. 24, 2018; 6-year-old Alana Minkler rides a horse on the Navajo Reservation; near Navajo Mountain, Arizona, on July 19, 2017; panoramic photo as a thunderstorm hits Monument Valley, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation at sunset on July 19, 2017; and panoramic photo of rock formations at Blue Canyon, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation on Dec. 24, 2018.

A Poem by Ava Kim

Another Person's Things

© 2019

I stared at the mirror. A petite frame, wide brown eyes.

Long blond hair. Unblemished arms, unscarred hands, soft toes.

This body wasn't mine.

It was a beautiful body, moved gracefully, and spoke with a pretty voice.

I couldn't recognize anything it said.

The memories were only surface deep.

Was it possible to feel light-headed without losing yourself?

The nosebleeds red blood.

It was snowing outside, piles of white snow slowly forming on the streets.

The icy wind rushed by.

I alone was unaffected.

Shivering, red hands, and stinging ears. Alone I stood, unaffected from the world.

Was it jealous of me?

Of the chance it gave me?

Desperation and emptiness overwhelmed me.

This body wasn't mine.

I could do anything to it, I could ruin it, destroy it.

I could rip the long hair from the head, gouge the glassy brown eyes.

It wasn't mine.

Walking with no destination, I kiss a man.

He smells of liquor. I smell like sweat.

There is nothing to lose and anything to make this my own body.

At night I stare into the mirror.

Cells that make this body aren't mine.

Nothing has changed, I haven't gained anything.

Memories surface deep are the only thing I have, everything else is gone.

I know I am more than just those memories.

Continued on page 7



Ava Kim is a sophomore in high school. She spends most of her time thinking in endless circles that lead nowhere. She also enjoys procrastinating, writing, and drawing. For her, the future seems very far, so she instead focuses on living today in the best way possible.

Continued from page 6

If I dance I feel like throwing up, if I sing my voice breaks down.
When I speak in front of a crowd, I turn into a statue.
This body isn't mine.
People cannot make me feel like me, but when I'm alone I feel the furthest thing from alive.
They touch my hands and smile at this face.
I smile back an unfitting grin and shake their hands hard enough to bleed.
Staining myself with those people, burdening myself with their wishes.
No, that is what this body wants to do.
Love will not make this body or create another.
I sit there politely, listening to their words and staring at them with empty eyes.
As long as my head is empty, I too, will not be full.
Full of emotions, memories, feelings, I will be free.
Surface deep memories cannot penetrate my being.
This body is not mine, I will feel nothing when I destroy it.
Falling down stairs without catching the railing, my bleeding knees.
Eating rotten eggs and cuts from broken glass.
Strangely, there is nothing I can feel.
There should be a desire to love, live, and make a new life.
Because this body isn't mine I have none of these.
Nothing never happened to me.
This body isn't mine.
It will suffer and suffer under my hands, but nothing this body does will ever hurt me.
Because I am nothing.

A Poem by Lorna Bonnell

Communication

© 2019

I'm not sure exactly when he first left
me.

I think it was just after his daughter was
born.

I cared for her as my own. I played with
her and talked to her as my own. I loved
her as my own. I was her mother.

But she was not my daughter.

Even then, we bonded.

He was no better than Father.

We played.

He worked all day. It was like he was
slipping away.

I'm not sure exactly when she first left
me.

I think it was when our daughter was
born.

She loved the girl, I saw it in her eyes. I
saw it every day in the way they talked
and the way they played. I saw the
pure bliss that came with her suddenly
being the mother she always wanted
to be.

I also saw that pain behind her eyes
that came from not having borne her –
not that she would ever admit it.

I told her of Metis.

So, I set my distance. I watched them
bond.

I watched them play.

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Lorna writes: "I am a young writer finishing up my degree at Paradise Valley Community College in English. Whether my future in writing becomes full-time, part-time, or continues to only be a hobby, it will continue to be my way of communicating and experiencing the world."

Our first fight was the day our son was born.

He refused to notice how I forged our son from my flesh and blood.

If he could have a child without me I could have one without him.

When he was born I realized I couldn't.

He had the perfect child. The perfect girl.

I had a cripple.

I threw him away. He would have been nothing to my husband.

So, he had to be nothing to me.

I failed as a wife.

He stopped comforting me after that.

What kind of mother was I?

He treated me like another babe.

I thought doing something right would fix our marriage.

I threw myself into my children.

I watched her drift away. Every day.

And we never fought. At least, until her son was born.

She never told me she was pregnant.

She also neglected to tell me that he wasn't my son.

It was my fault he was thrown.

She was breaking. She was breaking and— and—

I should have stayed there. I should have said he was perfect.

I should have held him as a parent.

I failed as a father.

I failed as a husband.

She stopped coming to me after that.

He was my son after that. She cried whenever she saw him.

I held them both at night.

We had three more children after that.

She was still distant.

Continued on page 10

At night our vows were his prayers. Our
marriage his wish on falling stars. Our
love a nightly chore.

I stopped believing him.

But two people can make our routine a
chore.

She loved them more than she ever
loved me. It just made me happy that
she smiled.

And every night I uttered my vows to
her. Every night I reminded her that I
married *her*. Every night I held her
hand and said I loved her.

I think she stopped believing me.

But every night she asked of my day.
And I'd ask of hers.

But she never answered.

Overcoming The Inheritance

By Rachel Woosley

© 2019

W eeds had overtaken the yard long ago, choking out the roses that had once flourished in neat rows. Shutters hung drunkenly from dust-covered windows. Avis stared out the car window at her childhood home. It was the first time she had been in the house since her mother died. Avis knew that it was going to be hard, but she didn't expect the sudden burst of emotions inside her.

She looked away from the house and turned the key in the ignition. What had she been thinking by coming here? She didn't belong here. She had to leave. As the engine started, her hand froze on the gear shift. Dropping her head onto the steering wheel, she turned the engine off. She knew exactly why she had waited so long for the visit, but didn't want to acknowledge the thought. She wouldn't have been there at all if it hadn't been for the will. The will leaving her her mother's house. Originally the house had gone to her uncle, but when he died, it reverted to her. It had been almost a decade since Avis had last been here. Looking at the outside of the house, she wondered if anyone had been there in the last decade.

Leaving the safety of her car, she trod up the walkway to the porch. She stepped carefully over a broken board and, with a shuddering breath, she opened the door and stepped inside. Standing in the doorway, she was reminded of the last time she had been here. It was just after she had gotten her first job and rented her first apartment. She had been moving her things out and, distracted by her phone, had forgotten to say goodbye to her mother. Box of clothes under one arm and phone pressed against her ear, she had waved briefly on the way out the door. She figured that she would be back the next day. Only the next day was too late and her mother was gone.

Avis pulled herself from the memory and realized that she

had been standing in the doorway for a while. She stepped inside and closed the door behind her, the sound echoing through the foyer. She'd never thought that the house would feel so empty and lonely. Except it did. There was nothing left but old furniture and memories.

Avis wandered throughout the house, losing herself in memories. She found the closet door where her mother had tracked her height with careful marks and dates. In the living room, she considered the dusty old couch with the leg that she had broken by jumping on it.

She began to make her way up to the staircase, then felt something under her foot, and looked down. Something shiny and smooth stuck up from under the boards. Picking it up, Avis realized that it was a small key. It was cold and a bit rusty, yet fragile with its swirled engravings. There were no childhood recollections of the key, but it obviously was made to fit something.

She went to slide the key in her pocket, then stopped. She didn't know how she knew, but the key was important. Maybe her mother had left her something? Maybe it was — she didn't know what it was for, but she knew that she had to find where it fit.

Avis went from room to room, starting with the kitchen. She looked in every drawer and cabinet, but didn't find anything. No secrets were found in the living or dining room either, just hungover chairs and tables. That left the three rooms upstairs.

Avis ascended the stairs to look in the master bedroom first. The room was dusty and dirty, and filled with memories. She saw the broken leg of the bed that was from playing too hard as a kid, the calendar that covered a hole in the wall, and the

Continued on page 12



Rachel Woosley is a junior in high school. She spends most of her time drawing or writing up a new story. In her spare time, she sleeps, procrastinates or watches videos. Her short stories, artwork, and poems have been published in The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine, The Blue Guitar Jr., and Ink and Feather Literary and Arts Journal.

Continued from page 11

photo of her entire family together, her mother, father, and Avis, sitting on the nightstand. Avis wiped the tears dripping from her eyes. It had been so long since she'd seen a photo of the three of them together, for them to even be that happy together. Avis broke away from the photo and with a sniffle continued on her search.

Nothing was found in her old bedroom or the spare office. She sat down on the top stairs and rested her head on her knees. Where could it be? she wondered.

She glanced back towards the master bedroom and saw a small crack in the nightstand she hadn't noticed before. That had to be it, she thought to herself. Standing, she went back to the bedroom and moved the photo off the nightstand, setting it on the bed, picked up the nightstand on a hunch that the crack might not be a crack at all and proceeded to shake it a little bit. Something was in the nightstand.

Avis quickly followed the slit all the way to a lock at the back of the nightstand. She slid the key into the nightstand and twisted. Nothing happened. She twisted the key the other way, but nothing happened. The key didn't fit.

"You've got to be kidding me." Avis picked it up and shook it; the whole bottom half of the drawer flew out.

She put the nightstand back down and scooted over to the drawer. Inside was a notebook. Avis opened the notebook and saw pages filled with pictures of both her distant family and close family. She flipped through the book looking at the old photos and remembering the time spent together. On the last page was a photo of everyone outside sitting under the tree out back grinning ear to ear; the little ones had dirt on their hands. The tree behind them was lush and green. Avis curled up with the booklet, frozen in time. She looked on the back of the photo but it was blank.

Must have forgotten to write it down, Avis thought to herself. She took a good look again. There in the distance near the tree was a shovel, its head still planted in the dirt, something she hadn't caught before since her eyes had been filled in tears.

Avis pulled the key out of her pocket and fiddled with it, looking at the swirled engravings and then back at the photo. An idea formed in her mind.

"I wonder if that shovel has anything to do with the key," she said out loud.

Avis stretched from her curled position on the floor and headed to the backyard. She rushed down the stairs, past the hallway and into the living room where she pushed the door

open to the backyard. There was the tree, still that same shade of summer green from the picture. Avis walked through the patchy green grass and sat under its branches. The wind ruffling the leaves and petting the grass, it was music to her ears. She pulled out the booklet again and took a good look at the photo.

"Now, where are you shovel?" she muttered, then saw the shovel just a few feet away from the tree to its right. Avis realized this and rushed over, picked up the shovel, and began digging.

Soon enough, a thunk was heard as Avis was digging. She excitedly pulled the dirt away with her hands, and she revealed...

"A rock? Are you kidding!" Avis groaned.

She dug around the rock and pulled it up, tossed it aside and underneath that rock was a small chest. Avis pulled up the chest, then pulled out her little key and fumbled with it before putting it into the lock, and with a click, she gently flipped it open.

Inside were the rest of the family photos and little messages from the past to their future selves. Avis shut the capsule, and went back inside. She brought the capsule to the kitchen counter and set it down, reopened it and flipped through the little envelopes. She found her mother's envelope. With a surprised look stuck on her face, Avis gently unfolded the envelope and spilled out its contents. The envelope contained nothing more than two photos and a little note. Tears welled up in Avis' eyes when she looked at the first photo of a long ago Christmas Day. Avis remembered wishing for a toy car that year along with a doll. She looked at herself clutching the toys she wanted with a big grin on her face. It made her smile. The other photo was with the family all together. They weren't as happy as they seemed in the picture from her mother's room, but it was a good memory nonetheless. Avis finally read the small note her mother stored in the envelope.

"Remember the good times."

Avis sat and stared at the note for a long while, thinking of the memories trapped in those photos. Avis sniffled and took a breath. She slid her mother's envelope along with its contents off to the side. Avis pulled out the other envelopes and looked at the photos. It gave her some hope that everything would turn out fine and she could get through this seeing the happy messages that everyone left for themselves. As silly as they were, they were genuine happiness stored in a pocket, and Avis needed that. With a small smile on her face and her tears dried, she left the kitchen, went to her car's trunk, and pulled out the cleaning supplies.

The Desert's Life Lesson

By Brittany Uhlorn

© 2019

Hear pounding and palms sweating, I clung to a metal chain nearly 6,000 feet off the ground. My life depended on the traction of my hiking boots and my grip on a guide chain as I dragged myself to the summit of Angels Landing in Utah's Zion National Park. On a trail no wider than a doorway, I took each step with caution. One small misstep could lead to catastrophe. Never had I feared for my life, but I knew if I was successful in my quest to reach the summit, the experience would forever humble me.

Since moving to Arizona seven years ago, I have immersed myself in the splendor of the Southwestern desert. With each hike into the land of thorny cactuses, red rocks and camouflaged lizards, I am continually captivated by the breathtaking landscape. The canyons, created over thousands of years by forces more powerful than I can imagine, intrigue me with their twists and turns. Each bend offers a new surprise, such as a waterfall, towering cliff or unique plant. The colossal mountains remind me of my small size, dwarfing me with their majesty. Aside from the rush of the breeze, the silence of desert allows me to quiet the voices in my head and achieve inner peace.

Whether at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, unable to see the rim, or at the top of Angels Landing, inches from death, the grandeur of the natural landscape has taught me the importance of life. I have learned the triviality of life's daily minutia from the stillness of the desert. The solitude and reflection a silent hike in nature provides reminds me that the simplicities of life should not be undervalued. Our daily stressors are inconsequential in the grand scheme of the world. Each time I lace my hiking boots and walk among the prickly pear, I am reminded how grateful I am for the ability to explore the land that gives life to the concrete jungle.

Many perceive the desert as unforgiving, draining life from the land's inhabitants. While the lack of water and abundance of heat make the landscape seem hostile to some, I believe the desert instills life in all who dare to explore its beauty



Philip Forte



Philip Forte

Above, Brittany Uhlorn stands at the summit of Angels Landing with her husband, Josh Uhlorn, in Zion National Park, Utah, on Sept. 4, 2019. At left, Brittany Uhlorn stands atop a boulder with her back to Zion Canyon in Zion National Park, Utah, on Sept. 5, 2019.

Brittany Uhlorn is a cancer biology PhD candidate at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Her research focuses on the interactions between the most common sexually transmitted infection, Human Papillomavirus, and the body's immune system. Brittany aspires to educate others on physical, emotional and mental well-being through science writing, outreach and teaching yoga following graduation. Brittany is particularly inspired by her backyard, the Santa Catalina Mountains, and takes advantage of every opportunity to immerse herself in nature. Aside from hiking and practicing yoga, Brittany enjoys reading psychological thriller novels and experimenting in the kitchen.



A Poem by Elena Rozenblum

Bird of Paradise

© 2019

Dedicated to Freddie Mercury of Queen

Hearing your voice,
Being part of your world,
The meaning of life,
Radiates from your every chord,
The echo of your soul,
Is both fragile and strong,
As heavy as curtain fall,
I'm crushed by your song.

Teach me to fly!
My bird of paradise,
So I burn through the sky,
To reach your embrace.

I am an unknown poet,
A speck of lost dust,
To stride the streets of time,
Without purpose I must,
Kicked by the many,
Accepted by few,
To catch a glimpse of your wings,
Is all I can do!

Fine touch of your feathers,
Is lost between worlds,
Your rhythm and beat,
Rocks the heavens, I'm sure
We are stuck here on earth,
To admire from far,
An unconditional light of an eternal star.

Elena is a commodity manager and supply chain engineer at Intel Corporation. She lives in Chandler, AZ, together with her husband, two sweet boys and a fluffy cat. Elena started writing poetry in middle school, and has written poems in additional languages as well. She loves art, riding a bike and traveling.



Samir Stipho

Scottsdale Artist

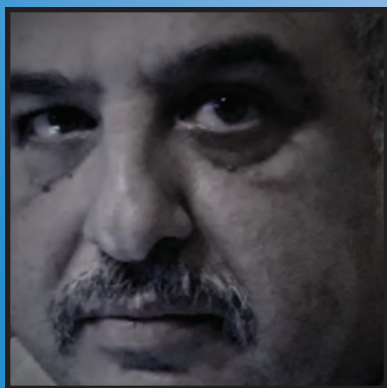


“Buds of Life”

Metal

30” x 20”

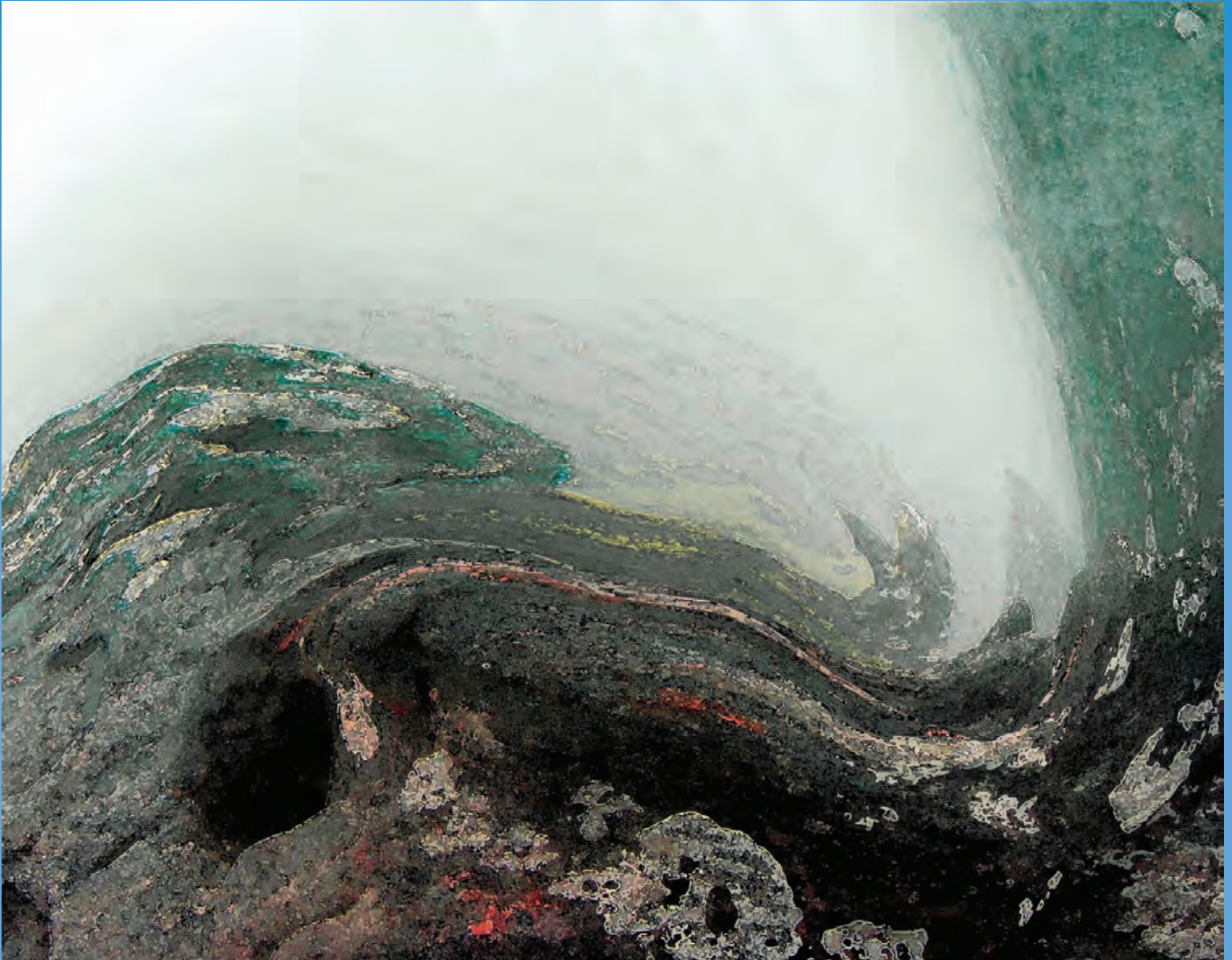
2019



Artist Samir N. Stipho has lived in Scottsdale since 2008. Born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1969, he has a bachelor's degree in engineering, studied Information Technology 2003-06 in the United Kingdom, and studied printing photography in Germany and the UK. His first photo exhibition was at Dar Saddam for Arts, Baghdad, in 1999. The artist writes, “Creating my work consists of three steps and the use of my organic basic photos collected for that purpose. Step 1: using my organic basic photos combined with digital complex algorithms to extract the formulas for the color index. Step 2: Step 1 output is rendered and blended with the original photo to create the final image including color depth; final image has no relation with the original image. Step 3: Final stage output media, using direct-to-substrate printers to print the images on different materials such as glass, metal, stone or according to the requirements. In late 2019 I started to consider the mosaic art as a new medium to my portfolio of materials. Open to connect and participate in events and activities.” The artist, who has a workshop in north Phoenix, can be reached at samir@stipho.com or at 480-316-8018.

Samir Stipho

Scottsdale Artist



**“Escape”
Metal
30” x 20”
2019**

“This is a collection of digitally processed photographs using a simplified technique, depending largely on the original photo composition transformed into an artistic level by a creative visual reinterpretation. The printed artwork is closer to a painting, employs a harmonic play of color and light very different from the usual and direct photographic shot usually confined to a certain time and place. Photographs were taken in different places around the world — Cape Town, South Africa; Viborg, Denmark; Berlin, Stuttgart and Düsseldorf, Germany; Lublin, Poland; New York; northern Arizona; California; Hong Kong; Shanghai, China; London, United Kingdom; and other countries.”

- Samir Stipho

Samir Stipho

Scottsdale Artist



“Soul Search”
Metal
30” x 20”
2019

Samir Stipho

Scottsdale Artist



“Two Lovers”
Metal
30” x 20”
2019

Samir Stipho

Scottsdale Artist



“Four Seasons”
Metal
30” x 20”
2019

3 Poems by Kim Wagner-Hemmes

The Golden Hour

© 2019

The cycle of light,
follows the cycle of life,
sunrise to sunset,
and all the way back again,
the golden hour is at hand.



Kim Wagner-Hemmes



Kim Wagner-Hemmes, owner of Working Purple Enterprises, is a visual artist and writer who lives and works in Goodyear, Arizona. Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, she decided to take a chance on the Greater Phoenix Metropolitan area when she moved here in 2001. Little did she know she would find even more to like about the Southwest than she had imagined, not the least of which was her exposure to new artistic possibilities. Her creative journey, which began with the Kodak Instamatic 110 camera she received in the second grade, taught her one of life's important lessons: how to appreciate the little things many take for granted. It turns out one of those things was her discovery of the 31-syllable tanka, a classical Japanese poetry genre that originated during the 7th century BCE and is intended to give a complete picture of an event or mood. Wagner-Hemmes often creates them in lieu of an artist statement for her work.

Spring

© 2019

Multicolored blooms,
entombed by the winter's gloom,
listen for the tread,
of her return from the dead.
Persephone is reborn.

World Labyrinth Day

© 2019

Blowing our bubbles,
with their many happy thoughts.
In the name of peace,
they float gently on the breeze.
Together we walk as one.

5 Poems by David Chorlton

Speech Scroll: 131-135

© 2019

(131)

A hundred miles of country music;
every cafe soundtrack
is the same, and the old
signs on the walls say *Sarcasm:*
Now Served All Day, and Warning;
Attack Waitress on Duty, though
she smiles while storm clouds
gather overhead. The local paper
prints an expose
of the small town politician
obsessed by who is white
and who is brown. From here
the land is high and wide
with radio for company
bringing news
about a shooting in El Paso,
details to follow the lightning flash
dancing like fate on its own horizon.



David Chorlton

Poet David Chorlton says, "I've been working on this long poem all year, now up to 148 sections. The five here were from our weeklong August trip to Canyon de Chelly, Mesa Verde, Silverton in Colorado, and a visit to Aztec in New Mexico on the way home."



David Chorlton came to Phoenix when the city was four decades smaller, and two years ago he and Roberta moved away from the bustle of the city center to Ahwatukee. His writing life continues, and so far in 2019 he has been working a single poem, or sequence, "Speech Scroll," with the intention of stirring up the predictability of his process. The sections here originated in a summer trip to ancient ruins and high ground in Colorado. Meanwhile, an older project became his latest publication when Cholla Needles (in Joshua Tree, California) brought out "Gilded Snow," a short collection of works created (and this is true) by David's cat Raissa during the Clinton administration. The chapbook at hand includes commentary and analysis by David. Before that, local press Hoot 'n' Waddle published "Reading T.S. Eliot to a Bird," a more conventional book.

© 2019

(132)

The walls close in
on everyone in time: the people
who climbed down on poles
from a monsoon cloud,
the ones who lived in the winter
sun and looked out at dry years ahead
before they left only the sacred
Datura to dream
as they passed by the snake dancer,
Spaniards and handprints to tell
their stories on stone. It's quiet now
the hunter has gone
who chased a deer until it tired
and lay down among leaves to die
without a shot to spoil its perfect coat.
Neither is any part wasted
when history claws a way
from Fortress Rock to Massacre Cave.



David Chorlton

© 2019

(133)

Ravens peel away
from the red rock either side
of the highway, black
as fresh asphalt that takes
a short cut through time
while light continues carving
a landscape from an ocean's
memories. Beside the gate
dividing here from there
seven crushed aluminum
Bud Lights nestle around one
pocket-sized Jim Beam
at the tip of a bourbon scented
sunbeam. A mesa in a velvet skirt
grows from open space where
nothing is high enough
to trouble the wind when wire
fencing can't hold it back.



David Chorlton

© 2019

(134)

Through a doorway to the sky
the ancient people went about their
stony business. And then
were gone. Their rooms remain, each
opening into the next, winter
into spring into the sun. It's August: time
to bring the lightning down
and look for rain
in all the darkened corners
of the universe. It sent the first clouds
on ahead. They're over the eastern
mountains, and full
of pots and arrowheads, ready
to return them to
the land. A wagonload of thunder
rumbles down a valley road.
A raven drops a potshard from
eight hundred years high.



David Choriton

© 2019

(135)

There's a god on every peak
that overlooks the valley, each
with a claim to the heaven
behind him. The sky today
is a little bit rain, a little
bit summer, a little bit
doubt. An oversize load
slows traffic on the road to
Durango; so much
on everyone's mind that it's hard
to see the way ahead. Faith gets out
to walk. Buys new
shoes. Seeks out the places
cowboy mystics go at trail ride's
end. Lays the mat
down. Warrior pose. Tree. Joins
the mountain resting
in chavassana.



David Chorlton

5 Poems by Audrey Sher-Walton

Feeling Very Orange

© 2019

We were only 12

You in that barren chamber
Arms strapped in a straitjacket

Trying to convince myself
Better that than your
head in a noose

When I asked you how you were
You said,
“I’m feeling very orange today.”

I’d have a hard time responding to that now
But back then I just said,
“I hope orange feels good.”

I told you that you only
Had to get through
the next hour
and then
just
the rest of the day

Later
That simplistic concept leapt off self-help shelves

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Audrey Sher-Walton is the founder of Write ON! Eastside Writing Group and is a member of Writers Lunch and Quiet Writing. Two of her poems won Pima’s Family Heritage Project Contest. She has been a guest reader on KXCI’s Poet’s Moment and at the University of Arizona. She penned monthly columns in two Tucson newspapers. Her poems have been published in Zocolo, Unstrung, Aurora, and in her own collection: “All the Colors of My Life Are Red,” which is part of the University of Arizona’s Poetry Center’s Archival Collection. She is the assistant editor of Awakenings Literary Review and serves on the Board of Directors for The Awakenings Project. Audrey owns Mrs. Audrey’s Academic Achievement, a tutoring service. Audrey can be reached at: Redwavepress@yahoo.com.

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The first time
My dad drove me
to that sterile place of
echoing steel

On subsequent trips
I transferred several times
On green and white city buses
My apprehension
my companion

You told me about
the men in army boots
in your head
wielding weapons

I told you
Better in your head
than right here
next to us

You laughed

God Gashed and Broken

© 2019

Truth
intoxicating fever
your God, gashed and broken

convey soft young magic
spindle forgotten courage
fall touching isolated
bottom is morphia/
Opiate analgesic

this parallel strength like retrieving
wings fluttering stinking sorrow
handfuls of smoky whisperings of when to
shut off forever

have buckled
sang life for a slice
lonely ocean music
This time bucked them
not alone

oyster of innocuous happiness

Mary brought Nonpareils to Bookclub and

© 2019

Instantly, I was in Grandma Anna's house
actually only a small one bedroom apartment
But Grandma's
"house" was a place as big as her heart
A place
I was loved and cherished

Nourished with affection intermingled with
traditional Eastern European delicacies—
Hungry or not,
We ate
We always ate
And drank coffee—
mostly sugar and milk
Sipped delicately over our discussions she always introduced to my 8 yr old self as
"Let's talk business"

Fed black chocolates confections with tiny round sprinkles made of sugar and starch
Named
Nonpareils because
in French the term means
"Without equal"

And I was always without equal no matter how many grandchildren she loved

Grandma Ana might not have been a sophisticated French connoisseur of fine
confections, but
she knew how to present me with a semisweet circle of heaven
Little did she know that nonpareils were to be the spark that gave rise to sprinkles
Grandma spoke broken English and had
little knowledge of such trends

She only knew that I always needed a
"Bissel"
A little more

A bissel

Of her undivided attention
Encouragement
A bissel of
Time to talk

And a few more nonpareils
For the bike ride home

Ouija Fires

© 2019

risked and sunk
will only bed pain now

ouija fires after straining
channeling roars
probes around dead
marble happiness wears it like a wedding gown

cessation of opalescence
Calloused

Spits terror
the orphan child hopeless
consumed shadow
take that

That Pitch-Black Childhood

© 2019

Dedicated to all the kids I worked with

that pitch-black childhood
secrets swim
sometimes for battle

scribbles of revelries scream
pick loyal horror

Ascending/limit
dust castles and time
and poison pain frozen between will and flesh
exist
shimmering transparent

teeth locked
die savouring false memories

99 Cent Tacos

By Curt Robinson

© 2019

Ramon Sandoval's coughing starts again as he grabs his guitar and heads for the apartment door. Thomas looks over at his mother, and she rattles off her standard protest:

"Ramon, you need rest, and singing isn't good for your throat." She sighs with an air of helplessness.

Ramon turns to his wife: "Katherine, what's the difference? If I get better great, and if I don't, at least I'm singing." His voice is hoarse.

Thomas looks on as his father begins his predictable trek to the Rooster's Nest — a bar where Ramon plays on open mic night. Dad looks the part of the old rocker, with the faded, old jeans, and the black T-shirt, and a red bandana. This bandana has another purpose — to cover the hair he's growing back from his last round of chemo.

Years ago, Ramon's dream of being a famous musician seemed within reach, but now he's relegated to playing to a few peanut-munching desert burnouts in Bisbee, Arizona. Ramon softly closes the door behind him and Katherine stands silently.

Thomas knows his father's right. If his dad can't beat throat cancer, at least he gets to enjoy doing what he loves a little longer before the end.

Thomas bites his lip. "Good night, Mom," and hugs her.

He can feel her dull despair, her grim acceptance as she kisses him on the forehead. Even at seventeen he still gets the good-night kiss.

Thomas lays fitfully in bed. He prays his father will get better, hopes he will be cleared of cancer. The he hears the squeak of the opening front door. Dad's home early.

Thomas hears his mom through the door: "Ramon? Did you

play just one set?"

"I couldn't." Ramon's voice cracks. "I can't sing."

There is silence, and Thomas knows Mom and Dad are embracing, maybe silently weeping together. Music is Dad's biggest joy. Tears well up in Thomas' eyes.

"This sucks," he says to himself.

It sucks his father has cancer. It sucks to think of all the future glorious moments that his father may lose, and now his last remaining joy is claimed too.

Thomas slams his fists down on the mattress. "I've gotta do something."

He makes a silent pact. Ideas run their course through his thoughts as he lays there in his bed. Finally, he hits upon an idea to help his Dad, and sleep sets in.

The morning sun filters through the old lacy curtains, and he's up before his parents. He finds a pen and paper, and quietly starts writing the letter. The odds are something like one in 100,000 the man will actually see it, but at least he's trying. He breathes in. "Don't sound too desperate."

Thomas is writing to his dad's idol, a person who could make Dad's dreams come true. Dad often tells the story of how he had the chance to play with "one of the greatest rock musicians of all time." It's Stan Booker, the singer and lead guitarist for the band Gears of Stone. Maybe Stan Booker can do something. Thomas remembers the often-heard story:

"I was nervous..." Dad would say. "I was auditioning to play bass guitar for Gears of Stone. And there he was — Stan Booker. And he said, 'Sit down here Ramon, let's see what you got.' So I sat there, and we jammed a little while. I walked out of that sound room on clouds. That was till I got the call that night and they told me I didn't make the cut. STILL, it was the

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Curt Robinson has lived in Arizona for over 40 years, and has taught Second and Third grade in public schools for the past 20 years. He has a degree in Journalism from NAU, and a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from ASU. Curt enjoys trail running, hunting, fishing and camping when he's not being a husband and father. His teenage years and subsequent experiences as a parent of two teenagers have provided quite a bit of writing material for young adults. The desert provides inspiration, and the setting for many of his current stories. You can learn more by visiting his website: www.curtrobinsonwriting.com.

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greatest musical moment of my life. I played with one of the greats.” That’s how Dad always ends the story.

“HE could make Dad happy,” Thomas speaks to the kitchen table.

Thomas writes carefully. After several crumpled-up pages, he thinks he’s got it down. He carefully folds the letter, addresses the envelope but stops before he’s sealed it. The envelope’s missing something; it’s plain white, impersonal. This letter has to stand out because there must be hundreds or even thousands of letters getting mailed to Stan Booker. Thomas rubs his forehead, rumples his black hair and goes to the desk in the kitchen/dining room. He rummages through the papers and assorted items until he finds the colored pencils, and returns to the table.

“What can I draw?” He ponders. Then the obvious comes to mind: a symbol of the desert. “That’s it.” A saguaro cactus. He starts with a black pencil for an outline of the body and arms. Then he fills it in with green, leaving some room for white and yellow flowers on top. Next, he grabs some stamps, and leaves the apartment for the mailbox. He drops the letter in and says a little prayer for luck before shutting the lid ...

In the Land of the Famous, Stan Booker hurls down the latest copy of Rolling Stone magazine in a rage.

“Freakin’ rag!” he shouts.

Stan Booker just read the latest edition of Rolling Stone, reviewing Gears of Stone’s latest album, and it isn’t complimentary. He’s not done with the magazine, though; he retrieves it for more abuse.

“Sellout!” Stan shouts, and tears a page. “Going through the motions!” Another page. “Same as the last four albums!?” “Uninspiring?! You pricks!” With each quote, he tears more helpless pages out, before drop-kicking the remainder. The tirade leaves him winded. He stops to catch his breath, and the halls of his Malibu home are quiet again.

Stan has heard unflattering reviews before, but why he’s so angry now is that he knows they’re right.

“Fake,” he whispers. “I’m a fake.”

He looks around his house full of polished marble and stainless steel. Through the glass door in the back he sees Cindy, his latest D-cup blond beauty sunning in a sheen of smooth skin and tanning oil. They met on the band’s bus during last year’s tour. And no, she wouldn’t be here if Stan Booker wasn’t rich and famous.

“Why do I make music?” he asks himself.

Stan falls into the leather couch and covers his eyes. He thinks back to the golden days before fame overtook him. He was young and he was poor. Back then, wearing jeans

with holes and torn-up Converse high tops wasn’t a fashion statement — it was all he had.

Back then, he knew why he made music — because he had to. It was all that he had. He lived in the dives of L.A. with the rundown people, his kind of people. He lived on friends’ couches, sometimes even begged for food. He did it all to make music. All the deprivation, the poverty didn’t matter when he played. The broken-down people gave themselves over willingly, joyfully to his music. They screamed and shouted for more. He and they were bound together by his music, and he celebrated with them.

“Those were the days.” Stan smiles.

After a few years, others began to notice Gears of Stone. Their reputation grew and popularity spread until one day he secured an agent — Alan Slonsky. From a magic, invisible place it was determined that Stan Booker and the Gears of Stone were to be successful and rewarded for their talents and hard work. Stan remembers the night Alan Slonsky called years ago.

“Stan you did it! We got a record deal! Get over here and sign it!” Alan gushed.

On that night, he was filled to overflowing with gratitude and the sense of unbelievable accomplishment as he stood in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant. He dug into his pockets and found the change, 99 cents — enough for two tacos. He walked in and bought his tacos. He didn’t want anyone to see him sitting there blubbering and crying so he went out to the parking lot and sat on the curb to eat. Some bouncy young high school girl walked by and took him to be down on his luck. Quietly, she handed him two bucks.

He swore he wouldn’t waste this opportunity. He made a silent pact that night to make the best music he could possibly make ... and for a while he did.

Stan looks up at his ceiling blankly, trying to pinpoint the exact moment when it wasn’t about making music, but he can’t think of it.

“It happened gradually,” Stan tells the ceiling.

The accolades, the money slowly changed Stan Booker. The thrill of creation, the passion for perfection slowly ebbed as complacency and entitlement set in. There was a time when he walked into shows through the front door with the crowd and up onto the stage. Now he looks at the great masses from behind a barricade of a stage ringed with security, or behind a darkened limo window.

At some point he became an institution, and it didn’t matter how good his music was, they ate it up anyway, and the money just kept pouring in. Now he’s living in a polished mansion with a hot girl, wondering who he is.

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He walks over to the glass table where a large canvas duffel bag sits. He undoes the string opening and pours out the letters — fan mail.

“Yeah, fan mail. That’s the ticket.” Stan’s words echo hollow off the walls covered in paintings and framed gold records.

He sifts through the pile of the well-wishers, and imagines what they say: “You’re the greatest! Your music changed my life, blah, blah.” He absently sifts, opens, reads and discards until one letter catches his eye:

“What’s this? A cactus?”

He opens the envelope and reads:

Dear Mr. Booker,

I don’t really listen to your music, but my father, Ramon Sandoval, is a huge fan of yours, and I am writing for him. He once even had the chance to play with you years ago, and he always tells about this being the greatest moment of his life.

My Dad still loves playing music, but he can’t sing anymore because he has throat cancer. I want to help my Dad. Can you please come out here and play with him? That would make his dream come true.

Thank you for thinking of us,

Thomas Sandoval

Stan puts down the letter, and leans against the glass table. He gets pleas like this from time to time. He’s even stopped by a few hospitals over the years. But this is a little different. Play with someone? And who is Ramon Sandoval? This kid (he must be a kid) mentioned they’d played together. This letter sounds urgent, it sounds real. He looks around his house, and picks up his phone. His agent, Alan Slonsky, always has good advice.

“Hey, Alan?”

“Stan the Man.” The familiar raspy New York voice sounds deflated. “Did you read Rolling Stone? I’m sorry, man.”

“Yeah. But I’m not calling about that. Have you ever heard of Ramon Sandoval?”

Alan exhales into the phone, as he tries to remember. “Let me think here. Sandoval ... Sandoval ... Ramon Sandoval. Ya, yeah! He ... We tried him out for a bass gig. I think it was the ‘Overstrike’ album. We didn’t use him, though. Why?”

“I got a letter from his son — he’s got cancer.”

“Oh no!” Alan says.

“I’m going to visit him,” Stan declares.

“OK, sure Stan-man. That’s nice. When are you gonna be back?”

“I don’t know. But can you keep an eye on things for me?” Stan cringes, he knows what’s next.

“You know you’ve got a tour coming up in six months, right?” Alan reminds.

“Yeah, maybe.” Stan’s voice hangs undefined in the air.

Alan’s voice turns into a growl. “What are you thinking?”

“I’ve lost it, Alan. Rolling Stone is right. I AM going through the motions. I’ve lost it and now I need to go and find it. NOTHING’S real here. Maybe visiting this Ramon Sandoval out someplace in Arizona will get me right again. I can’t be thinking about a tour when I’m like this.” Stan feels relieved after his confession.

There is a pause on the phone as Alan Slonsky digests what his client and friend has said. “OK. You’re a pain in the ass, Stan. But you gotta do ... Just let me know if you need anything. And the point of no return on getting your tour booked is coming real soon. I’m warning you — canceling the tour would be a huge blow. But if you need to go find yourself in the desert ... Whatever.”

“Thanks, Alan. You’ve always been there for me.” Stan sighs.

“Why did I get into this racket? You know all you musicians are a bunch of freakin’ prima donnas. Why do I work with you guys?” Alan ends the call.

Stan packs up a bag quickly before heading out to the pool.

“Cindy, I’m leaving now. You can stay as long as you need.”

“Uh, OK.” The complimentary hot chick mumbles.

I wonder if she knows I’m not going to be back anytime soon? Stan thinks.

Next, he phones his assistant, Sarah.

“Sarah, I need you to come over here.”

There’s one more thing to do. Stan goes into the bathroom, and rummages through the cabinets until he fishes out a pair of hair clippers. He looks in the mirror at his aging face, and the trademark rocker mane of hair. Quickly he turns on the clippers and runs them through his hair, and his bleached blond locks fall into a pile in the sink. Now he’s ready.

Sarah pulls up in her Nissan Sentra. Stan escorts her into the garage, where the lights bounce off the shiny collection of high-priced cars.

“Let’s make a trade. You let me borrow your Sentra, and you can drive the Range Rover.”

Stan Booker, rocker extraordinaire, pilots his assistant’s Nissan Sentra through the crowded freeways of L.A. He goes by his personally historic fast food restaurant, then out into the desert. He exhales in relief as he drives into the night. The passing miles wash away his old world into memory. He rolls into a motel late at night off the quiet highway, and lands exhausted into bed. He sleeps in a deep, sound sleep.

The next morning, there is a knock on the Sandovals’ door, and Thomas gets up off the beat-up sofa to answer it. A short-haired stranger is there.

“Are you Thomas Sandoval?” The stranger asks.

“Yes?” Thomas stares at the man.

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“I’m Stan Booker.” Stan holds out his hand.

Thomas stands stunned for a moment, and after processing he ignores the extended hand and wraps his arms around the surprised man.

“Thank you! This is going to mean so much to my Dad!”

They sit down, and Thomas retells the story of his father, and how his music was his last dream — robbed by his cancer. “But now that you’re here, it’s going to be great!”

“It feels good to be here.” Stan smiles and stretches.

Ramon comes home, and despite the long hair being shaved off, he still recognizes Stan in an instant. He goes straight in for the hug like his son.

“I can’t believe this! What are you doing here? How did this happen?” Ramon stammers.

“It was Thomas here. He wrote me a letter, and I needed to get away from the scene for awhile, so here I am,” Stan says.

Ramon turns to his son, beaming. “How did you think of this?”

Thomas laughs. “You’ve been telling the story over and over all my life. It was the ‘greatest moment of your life?’ I’ve heard that story like 100 times.”

Stan sets his guitar on the kitchen table, and unlatches the case. There’s some anticipation, and he takes out his acoustic guitar like a samurai unsheathing his sword.

“So let’s play some music,” Stan says.

Ramon’s mouth hangs open for a moment, he freezes. “Uh ... yeah. Oh my God.”

The two men begin to play their guitars. They start with a basic chord, and then they begin to build off each other’s rhythm and melody. Ramon closes his eyes, Stan smiles. Stan can’t remember the last time he picked up a guitar just for fun. For different reasons, profound joy begins to creep into both their thoughts.

Thomas leaves the two toe-tapping players and quietly closes the apartment front door behind him. He pumps his fist.

“Yoww!” He shouts, bounding down the apartment stairs. He heads down the street to the corner Circle K for a celebratory Thirst Buster. He stays away from the apartment for a couple of hours to give them some time. When he returns, they’re just finishing up. Both the men breathe out a sigh — they’ve found what they’re looking for.

Ramon unslings his guitar. “What a blast! Thank you for coming to visit me and playing. That was perfect.” Ramon embraces Stan as if he’s one of the family.

Stan stands quietly for a moment, contemplating. “Oh, we’re not finished,” Stan tells Ramon.

“What? You want to play a couple of more songs?” Ramon offers.

“I want to do more than that,” Stan says. He turns to Thomas. “Thank you, Thomas, for bringing me here. But I didn’t come out here just to see your father. I left my home to find something — and I think it’s here,” Stan admits. “And if it’s OK, I’d like to stay and play with you for a while longer. If that’s alright with your Dad?”

“Let me think. One of the greatest musicians of all time, a personal idol of mine, wants to play my music with me? I think I can do that.” Ramon teases.

“Great! I’m going to make some arrangements. Find a place for us to play. I’m out, Ramon. See you tomorrow.” Stan strides tall out of the apartment.

The next day starts with Stan knocking at the door. He beckons Thomas and Ramon to follow him. “You’re going to love this!” he assures them as he skips back to the car.

They unload themselves at a rundown-looking, 1950s-era, old white Standard gas station. Stan Booker, rocker extraordinaire, rolls up the rusty, dusty garage door.

“Voila!” Stan motions them to enter with a flourish.

Thomas looks around the dirty interior filled with grimy engine parts and assorted goop-encrusted, mechanic-like materials.

“Oh, man.” He whispers.

“Let’s get to work.” Stan orders. “This is our new place. For the first time in 30 years, I’m going to play in a garage band.”

Thomas groans as he shoves, carries, and carts out the old mechanic devices out into a pile at the end of the driveway. I brought this all on myself, he thinks, as he continues his toils. His dad tires after only an hour of labor, and Stan orders him to sit on the old swivel chair in the cashier area to rest.

“We need to save you for playing.” Stan guides him to his resting place.

As the desert sun sets through the Tombstone Canyon Road in Bisbee, Thomas and Stan sit on a couple of milk crates and admire their handiwork. The feeling of satisfaction and pride wells up inside Thomas.

“A real garage band,” Thomas says.

“Perfect,” Stan says, and he rumples Thomas’ long black hair.

After a night of much-needed rest, Thomas follows his father down the winding hill to the gas station. The early fall morning air is crisp.

“Big day today, eh, Dad?” Thomas looks over at his father, who seems rejuvenated.

“Oh, yeah.” Ramon grins. “Today, Stan is going to start singing my songs. This is HUGE.”

Thomas sits in the cashier room while his dad and Stan begin playing. He can hear Stan’s voice croaking as he

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struggles to get the melody right. Stan's used to singing heavy metal ballads — not my Dad's style, Thomas thinks to himself. In the garage, Stan Booker feels the hand of doubt grip him, and he puts down his guitar in disgust.

Ramon reads the worry on Stan's face. "What is it, Stan?"

"My voice — it doesn't fit your songs. And you know it, too," Stan says.

Ramon exhales in relief, then he starts laughing.

"This is funny?" Stan stares at Ramon.

"This is my dream come true, man. Here I am with throat cancer, and my dream comes true and I get to sing with my idol and he's singing my music, and now this? Can you believe it?" Ramon chuckles. "Sometimes you gotta laugh."

Stan sighs. "It's time to call it a day." He walks out without saying anything else. End of session.

The next morning finds Stan and Ramon sitting on the apartment sofa. Stan fidgets, frustration roils his thoughts. Stan looks over at his new friend, feeling doubtful.

"So what do we do now?" he asks. Ramon has no answer.

That's when they hear a voice wafting back from the bedrooms. It's Thomas, and he's singing in the shower. Stan hears the sonorous voice, how it climbs, and descends as it echoes in the bathroom. Stan looks over at Ramon with a knowing grin.

"Oh, no. Not Thomas," Ramon protests.

"C'mon. Listen to him," Stan urges, and motions Ramon closer to the door. The two men walk over to the door leading into the bathroom, listening to the angelic voice. Somewhere, they both know they're hearing perfection.

Stan grabs Ramon by the arm. "He's the one. We'll play guitar, and he can sing."

The water turns off and the singing stops, and Thomas emerges with a towel wrapped around his waist. He's startled to see the two men staring at him smiling.

"What'd I do?" Thomas asks.

Ramon puts his hand on his son's shoulder and walks with him back to his room.

"Son, I have a favor to ask." The door shuts behind them.

"WHAT?! Are you serious?" can be heard through the door. Thomas reacts to his father's proposal. Outside, Stan chuckles.

Thomas follows his father and Stan back down the hill to the defunct gas station. Sun filters through dust, and tarps cover assorted large equipment like mysterious ghosts. Thomas stands behind a microphone, fidgeting nervously.

Ramon and Stan nod at each other. "First time behind a mic, eh?" Stan gives Thomas a pat on the shoulder. "Look at it this way, man. The garage door is down, there is no one around here

for like a mile. No one is going to hear you, man! Just close your eyes and let it go."

Thomas unfolds the lyrics of his father's songs, Stan and Ramon begin playing their guitars, and he starts singing. At first, his voice cracks, and gets hung up. Thomas stops, and looks embarrassed at his dad and Stan. But they don't laugh, they only encourage. "That's a great start," Ramon says. Stan walks up to Thomas, and whispers in his ear. "When I started singing, I sounded way worse than you. I was terrible, man! But I never gave up, and eventually I found my voice. Try again." So Thomas tries again — it doesn't sound half-bad.

And he does the same thing after school every day for the next two weeks. Over this time, Thomas learns the songs, and his voice grows in confidence. Soon, they all realize that there is something special at work in the old garage. The invisible fairies of fortune have sprinkled their dust of destiny on the Sandovals and Stan Booker. A short charity sing-along evolves into true music. Still, they're missing a few pieces to make a real bona fide band.

"We need a couple of more musicians to round this thing out," Ramon tells Stan one night after another session.

Stan grimaces, as if in pain. He's thinking of calling Alan. "I know of someone who may be able to help, but he's not going to like it," Stan replies. Ramon looks over at Stan, confused. "That's good news right? So why do you look like you are about to get a colonoscopy?"

Stan exhales. "It's my agent who can help, but he's going to want to know about my tour."

Stan waits until he gets back to his motel room before he makes the call. Alan's voice growls in his ear, and he bypasses any of the usual small talk. "You got an answer for me about this upcoming tour?"

"Not yet, Alan. Still in limbo. But I've got a favor to ask you." Stan rubs his forehead nervously.

Stan can hear the exasperation in Alan's voice. "You know what? You suck, Stan! Every day that you put off your decision, it makes my job a little more difficult. And now, and now, you want a favor?"

Stan shifts to reasonable, butt-kissing mode to play on Alan's emotions. "C'mon, Alan. You've been my agent for a long time, and you have always stuck by me. We've come a long way. I'm on to something here — this guy has some real songs, and his son has an amazing voice. Only, we need a drummer and another guitar player to round this thing out."

"UNBELIEVABLE," Alan replies. "You leave me hanging on your tour, and now you want me to scramble around to find you some more players?"

"I know. I know, Alan. But you have to believe me. You're

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the Agent of the Star Musicians. I haven't felt this since I came up all those years ago. You were the only one who believed in me then — you need to believe in me now." Stan hopes he's moving his agent.

There is a pause, and Stan can tell from the silence that Alan Slonsky, Agent to the Stars, is seriously considering his words.

"OK," Alan finally replies. "I'll see what I can do. YOU OWE ME." The call is over.

Days of music pass as Thomas practices, strains, and learns his father's songs. He makes progress. He learns his own voice. The time spent playing with his dad and Stan pass on like the kind of dream that has you smiling when you wake up. These are days of promise, and nearly impossible hope. Even with a famous musician, the odds of actually being a notable band seem long.

Through this whole time Ramon silently battles his cancer, and the day arrives when he is to have his last round of chemotherapy.

"Today is the day," Ramon announces to Stan. "One more round of chemo, and then we'll see if I'm in remission."

"Good luck, man. I'm pulling for you." Stan gives an awkward hug.

Thomas takes the day off school to be there when they wheel him out after his last round. His dad's face is red and puffed, he's weak, resigned. "I'm so through with this shit." He croaks. Still, he turns to Thomas, and gives him the thumbs-up. "I'll be ready to play again tomorrow, Thomas." He whispers.

While Ramon rests, Thomas sits and does the vegetative couch thing, flipping absently through the channels. Then comes a knock on the door. Once again, Thomas opens the door to his apartment to find a couple more strangers standing there.

"Hello, mate. Ian." Ian MacIntire holds out his hand.

Ian MacIntire, the drummer for Stranded, one of the most popular British bands, has come to the Sandovals'. He's only a few years older than Thomas, a little taller too. Underneath Ian's mop of wavy blond hair is a face beaming with energy.

"I'm here to play some drums with you guys. Cheers!" Ian says.

"That's great. I'm not sure what to say here. But, we do need a drummer. Thank you," Thomas mumbles.

Next to Ian stands a tall, lanky guy with a cowboy hat and boots — quite a contrast to Ian. He reaches out to shake hands with Thomas, who stifles a wince at the cowboy's grip.

"I'm Cash, and I'm here to play guitar," the cowboy says.

Cash Jackson is the guitarist for the great country singer Benjamin Cooper. He looks to be in his thirties, with short black hair, and a friendly face full of deep lines. Thomas vaguely imagines the lines come from hard days working on

some distant, imaginary cattle ranch.

"What are you ..? Why are you ...?" Thomas stutters.

"Ian here and I play different music. But, we got a couple things in common. For one, we both play in bands where our prima donna lead singers hog the show," Cash begins.

"Yeah, they call all the shots, and they make all the decisions for our music," Ian chimes in.

"And we're damn tired eating their dust all the time," Cash comes back.

"Roight. Me and my mate want to try something new." Ian slaps Cash on the shoulder, and Cash looks mildly annoyed over at his English bandmate.

"But, how did you know to come here?" Thomas asks the big question.

"Alan Slonsky." They both say in unison.

"Who?" Thomas asks.

"He's our agent, and he's Stan's agent, too. He called us, and now we're here." Ian brushes the hair out of his eyes.

"My Dad's going to be surprised for sure," Thomas says as he invites the men inside.

The old garage gets a little crowded when Cash brings in his guitars and amps, and Ian sets up his drums, but it's a complete kind of crowded. Thomas looks over the room, and he moves into his place behind the microphone.

They start tinkering, messing around. Cash shouts out: "This is my big and tall guitar!" And it is a big and tall guitar sound that bounces off the walls. Next, without reason, Ian tears into his drums, pounding and thrashing uncontrollably.

"Damn, son," Cash shouts over the din. "You look like you're having some kind of conniption."

"I'm feeling the power. Getting into the groove!" Ian shouts, arms and hair flailing. Stan and Ramon shake their heads, while Thomas stands patiently.

Ramon picks up his bass. He's had to switch to bass now that there's another guitarist. "Let's play," he croaks.

For the first time, they begin to play together, but somewhere hidden inside all the discord, shouts, and crashes by Ian on the drums, a secret synchronicity begins to take form.

Ian looks like he's lost his senses, his face making strange contortions like a fish that's caught on a hook. He appears to be out of control with his flailing arms but somehow manages to keep a perfect beat with his drums. Each time, his sticks find the right drum or cymbal at precisely the right time.

Cash is the perfect contrast to Ian, standing tall, deftly controlled. "Here is the shimmering guitar," Cash announces, and the old school country guitar does shimmer as it comes into play. Stan Booker's own guitar complements the shimmering

Continued from page 39

sound with the lead. Ramon, now on the bass guitar, provides the rhythm, the bridge between the drums and soaring guitars. Finally, Thomas adds his own voice to the gathering, and all the pieces fit together.

They play on through the day, barely noticing how the sun changes the shadows as it filters through the windows of the garage. For the first time, Thomas knows what it feels like when his expression mixes with others to form some kind of perfection. Like when a baseball team wins a game, or a husband and wife get married, or when an inventor creates something that can change the world. Thomas knows it; they all do. Then they stop as the fading sunlight grows into darkness.

“That kicked ass,” Stan announces.

“Hey, what are we going to call ourselves?” Thomas speaks into the microphone — the question hangs out there in the dank garage air.

The question hangs a little longer, as they all think.

“This whole thing is a dream come true,” Ramon says with finality.

“I think you’ve got it — Dreams Come True,” Stan agrees, and so they are Dreams Come True.

In the night, Thomas and his father walk the road up the quiet hill to their apartment building. It’s late, and they’re weary. Thomas is hoarse. Ramon’s fingers and wrists ache from playing. But they could walk up the hill even if it was Everest.

Ramon looks over at his son. “Thomas, I never made it as a great musician. But you know what? You’re my son, and I couldn’t be prouder of you. And THAT is a dream come true.”

The band works through the long days and nights. After school, Thomas sings until he’s hoarse. Stan, Cash, and Ian play until their arms ache. They’ve set up a couch in the other cashier’s room for Ramon to rest on when he needs to. After spending hours together, they begin to finish each other’s sentences, and they begin to anticipate and complement each other’s music.

One night, as Thomas finishes a song, Ian, Cash, and Stan all look at him strangely. “What is it?” Thomas asks nervously.

“That’s singing,” Cash responds.

Finally, the time comes for them to play in front of others. Ramon makes the call to book the Rooster’s Nest.

It’s the night before their debut, and Thomas sleeps fitfully; thoughts, playlists, recitations flow incessantly through the night. Finally, sleep comes early in the morning. He awakens zombie style, shuffling aimlessly.

Mom sees his heavy eyes. “Thomas, you look exhausted.”

All that day, Thomas tries to find diversions from the inevitable. He bounces a tennis ball in his apartment, takes a much-needed nap. He makes three trips up to the Circle K. He talks to his father, who is reduced to whispering.

“Dad, were you afraid when you first walked out on stage?”

“Huh? Yeah sure.” And he realizes where his son is coming from. “It’s alright,” he whispers. “You don’t realize this, but you are a special singer. You’re going to do great tonight.”

All of them meet at the Rooster’s Nest early at 4 o’clock. It’s the middle of winter, and the evening sun is already casting its long shadows over the town. This adds to the reverence they all feel. The bar, with its scrub-looking patrons, sticky beer floor, burned-out chick bartenders, feels like a church. The boys are coming in to lead an honest-to-goodness revival.

When it comes time for a sound check, the veteran musicians can see Thomas’ trepidation. They offer their encouragements in their own surreptitious ways.

Stan starts. “Thomas, you’re one of the best I’ve heard — swear to God.”

Cash chimes in. “I wish you sang for my damn band — you sound just as good, and you’re not a piss ant.”

“Amen, Country Cash,” Ian shouts while he adjusts his drum set.

The Rooster’s Nest has no fancy waiting room for pampered guests, so the guys pull up milk crates in the smelly back parking lot, where the reek of the grease trap is offset by the sweet smells that the westerly desert breeze blows in. Not many words are said. The cigarettes of Stan, Cash, and Ian glow orange in the black night.

Thomas has been waiting for this time, and at last he hears the owner announce their act. “Now it’s time for you to hear Dreams Come True!” The crowd is quiet, and Thomas wonders if it’s because real music is rarely played here, or if there is a silent anticipation at work.

The sign outside the Rooster’s Nest reads “Dreams Come True,” and inside Thomas peeks through the door at the crowd gathered in the bar. He can tell that the story of the famous musicians is out. Maybe every person who lives in Bisbee is here. But, somehow there is also a number of recording industry insects crawling through the crowd on this big night. Alan Slonsky swore secrecy, so how did they find out? Who knows? Maybe they have spies sneaking around Slonsky’s agency, or maybe some paparazzi hired to follow one of the musicians learned of their secret. Whatever. They are here at the Rooster’s Nest, too. The recording industry types stick out with their slick suits and fancy leather shoes amongst the cowboy boots and Wranglers, the Birkenstocks and T-shirts. Still, they add to the electricity that hangs in the air.

Stan Booker used to gauge how successful a concert was by the size of the crowd, and the amount of noise they made. “Let’s make some noise!” or “Hello (insert city name here)” always brought out the fanatical screaming. But tonight, as he grabs his guitar, and walks out with the rest of the band, things

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Fall 2019

are different.

First of all, despite the local buzz, the crowd amounts to a little over 400 people. By local standards this is like filling up a stadium. With the exception of the Sandovals, no one has played a crowd so small and intimate in years. What also makes this crowd different is that they're all quiet. You would think there would be cheering and yelling when the band walks out, but there is silence. They stand or sit solemnly, like in church. Maybe they know how special tonight is, and don't want to miss a note.

Cash begins with his "big and tall" guitar as he likes to call it, which Stan backs with his own melody. The spastic Ian is strangely transformed into the picture of timing and control as he uses brush sticks to pat out a precise, quiet beat. Ramon's bass is the quiet back note that somehow resonates when someone takes a swig of their drink. Then, Thomas begins to sing, and his voice flutters beautifully, soaring over the top of the perfect background. All of them, all of their stories, all of their dreams come together in their playing in this moment. The Rooster's Nest, this nondescript bar in nowhere Arizona, has never known such music.

Thomas looks around in between songs and he notices that no one is speaking; they whisper. People ordering beers simply point at the bottle labels, or whisper their drinks, and bartenders simply nod. No one wants to break the spell. Thomas looks over at his Dad, and sees the look written on his face. No matter what the results are from his next cancer screening, this moment makes everything worth it. Ramon closes his eyes, and an ever-present smile crosses his face. Thomas knows that his greatest dream has been granted. Dad has his chance to play with some real stars.

But this moment isn't just special for Ramon. Stan, Ian, and Cash all revel in their own individual sound, and there is a strange teamwork in how they weave their own sounds together. Thomas pours out the hope, the fear, and the joy into his singing, and it comes in a wave that rushes over the crowd. He can see the worry, and hard edges in the faces of the crowd smooth out as his voice washes over them.

Unless there is some Swedish university study that is coming out soon, there is no real way to measure or quantify the effect that the music has on the crowd. However, the people are plainly inspired. If you could read the thoughts of the listeners you would know that there is a woman who stands at the bar and decides to give her marriage a little more time. In the crowd up front is a young man; he makes a silent pact with himself to finally ask out that girl who works in the art gallery down the street. At one of the tables sits an old husband and wife who reflect on their lifetime of happiness instead of their fears for

the future. They all know that they've heard the most beautiful music they'll ever hear.

The music rises as they play their last song, at last the final chords of guitar, and crashing drums and searing voice reach the crescendo, and then abruptly cease.

"Thank you for coming and being a part of Dreams Come True," Thomas informs the crowd.

For a moment, everyone freezes. Was Thomas wrong? Was their music actually bad? Then, suddenly everyone erupts into a joyous applause. Some in the crowd have eyes filled with tears, some thrust their arms jubilantly into the air, others hug one another. Stan Booker looks at the crowd with satisfaction, smiling. Now he remembers why he makes music. He grabs Thomas by the arm and leads him off-stage to meet Alan Slonsky.

Stan wades through the crowd and grabs Alan by the shoulder. "Hey, Alan. This is Thomas Sandoval."

"Hey, kid. Nice to meet you. You've got a future in music. You give me a call when you're ready." Alan slips Thomas his card.

Alan turns to Stan. "I thought you were one crazy mother, doing what you did. But now I understand. That was fantastic."

"Thanks, Alan. If you hadn't called Cash and Ian, none of this would have happened. By the way. That tour? Book it. I'm going to knock the doubters on their asses."

Alan gives the familiar back-in-business smile. "Done, Stan. See you in L.A."

Stan nears Thomas and puts his hands on both of his shoulders, then whispers in his ear: "That was right on, kid. Way to go. Now you've got to come with me." Then he turns to the rest of the band. "All of you. There's somewhere we have to go."

"Where to?" Ian asks.

"You'll see." Stan speaks over his shoulder as he walks out backstage to the car.

It's quiet in the Sentra as the now-triumphant squished riders drive along the quiet streets of the little town, past the yawning black hole of an open pit copper mine, and around the roundabout. Each of them soaks in what they've done together, swimming in satisfaction, knowing that they have created historic music. Historic even though there were only a lucky few who actually heard it.

They turn down the road to the bright lights that mark the 24-hour fast food joint — the one with the two tacos for 99 cents.

"Ten tacos," Stan says to the sign.

He takes the bag, and pulls back into the parking lot. "OK, everyone out," Stan commands. "C'mon, we're going to sit on

the parking blocks.”

Stan passes out the tacos to his bandmates: Ramon Sandoval, Thomas Sandoval, Cash Jackson, and Ian MacIntire.

“Here you go. Let’s eat.”

The men look at each other quizzically, but don’t ask any questions. They know for some reason it’s important. They all sit down with Stan Booker to eat their tacos.

“Damn, these are some good tacos,” Cash says.

The men nod in agreement.

In the chilly desert they eat, looking skyward into the star-crossed night sky. They know they just played some of the greatest music ever. They also know that these 99 cent tacos taste especially good.

A Poem by Ambur Wilkerson

Pill By Pill

© 2019

Pill by pill by pill by pill
They say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger,
but instead, what didn't kill me made me ill.
"You're depressed," said the doctor.
"Oh really?" said the depressed person who obviously knew they were depressed.
"I can prescribe you something," they told me.
Something that'll make me feel better.
Pill by pill by pill by pill
They don't have any other advice,
but they can offer me 3 refills.
There's no shame in consuming medication,
but you have to know there's more to this.
Because pill by pill by pill by pill by pill by fucking pill
I'm not as sad as before, but my mind continues to hold me against my will.
I'm still a slave to my thoughts.
I'm held captive by my intrusive ideas.
I'm a societal burden.
I'm a hopeless case.
I'm someone's sick daughter.
I'm someone's reclusive friend.
I'm someone's needy lover.
I'm guilt and shame's constant visitor.
No level of success has filled my voids.
No pill has solved my problems.
Pill by pill by pill by pill.
You said I would feel better,
but why does it hurt still?



Ambur Wilkerson is a 24-year-old content creator who loves writing and the many forms it comes in. She received her B.A. in English with a focus in creative writing from California State University, San Bernardino, in 2016 and her M.A. in journalism at The University of Arizona in 2019. She's invested in topics such as social issues, mental health, entertainment, beauty, and lifestyle. She enjoys telling stories and sharing experiences that will educate, inspire, and hopefully move others. To learn more about Ambur and her work, follow her on Instagram at @theamburnicole.

A Poem by Stephanie Elrics

Disregarded

© 2019

At this board the keys mock me to press them.
Press out the thoughts in my head.
The thoughts I hear are more than
The words spoken from your mute lips,
I sit.

Silently begging for your smile.
Begging for your heavenly voice to sing hello.
To brighten the murkiness of this mind,
But you do not turn to me

The game is all you see
The voice betrayed to another
The despair behind you does not creep near

Did I end?
Did I grab the cloak of invisibility?
I am nothing more than a ghost
In the shadow.
You don't hear me sob,
I sit

Now I shut the doors to my soul.
Enter the place where you escort me.
Your voice I hear from long ago,
That sings you desire me

I expired.
Long ago.
I weep.
I want to live with you again.
But the game is all you see.
I am nothing,
Alone.



Stephanie Elrics writes poetry and stories. Some have been published both online and in print. She also writes many social media posts about the adventures of her husband, daughter, son, her chunky pup, two crazy cats, and being kind always. She was born in the “small town” of Prescott, AZ but raised and still resides in Phoenix, AZ. She is a graduate of ASU West and is a dedicated, lifelong student. When Stephanie isn't writing, she is making her family groan with her quirky sense of humor or engulfed in genealogical research. You can find her on Facebook and Twitter.

Patricia Shepherd

Cave Creek Artist



“Hot Rocks”
Mixed media
2019



Although Patricia Shepherd’s artistic interests as well as her art have evolved over the years, her inspiration — found in nature and throughout the Southwest desert she calls home — has remained her steadfast influence and is evident in all she creates. While carefully layering epoxy resin, mica pigments and other organic matter, and producing vibrant abstracts with glass-like finish which contribute to the motion and depth found in each piece, Patricia brings to life abstractions born from nature-inspired consciousness and emotions, rather than from any sense of realism; thus allowing the viewer to experience through thought and inner feelings their own unique and significant meaning of each work of art. Just as Mother Nature does with her perfect color collaborations in the glorious sunsets, landscapes, mountain ranges and foliage, each piece of resin art is exhilarating, yet calming, with its myriad of hues mingling together in perfect harmony. The artist’s creative talents, which were apparent at an early age, have garnered her awards in different mediums throughout her career and although she continues to challenge herself by exploring new avenues of artful expression, she finds peace and fulfillment in the creation of her resin masterpieces as she shares them with those who, like herself, are drawn to their captivating, hypnotic nature. Go to www.patriciashepherddesigns.com or e-mail Pat@patriciashepherddesigns.com. The artist thanks John Mahoney for the photography of the artwork.

Patricia Shepherd

Cave Creek Artist



**“Pebbles”
Mixed media
2019**

“I find my inspiration is defined by nature whether I’m working with resin, fused glass or other media, and to me, there’s nothing more beautiful than an Arizona sunset or more moving than a covey of quail running across the desert. I aim to create the depth and hypnotic spectacles of the different landscapes and creatures by channeling the awe-inspiring scenes from the natural world. My art is about feelings and emotion, and each piece mesmerizes and captivates the viewer through the intrinsic weavings of the colors as they intersperse with each other and uplift the imagination and spirit. The facial expressions of those who view my art are an assurance that I have succeeded in capturing inspirational pieces of nature’s beauty, and the enjoyment I receive in being able to create works of art which evoke such happiness in people fills me with gratitude and drives me to continue my artistic journey.”

- Patricia Shepherd

Patricia Shepherd

Cave Creek Artist



“Smokey Rainbows 1”
Mixed media
2019

Patricia Shepherd

Cave Creek Artist



"Smokey Rainbows 2"
Mixed media
2019

Patricia Shepherd

Cave Creek Artist



“Smokey Rainbows 3”
Mixed media
2019

A Poem by James Andrew Harris

Modern Day Miracles

© 2019

What feeling is this?
Walking in flight,
Soaring with eagles,
Encased in dark.

A lifeless dimension,
That holds all of existence.
A world of lies,
Held by the spirit of truth.

Everything always changes.
Emotions are never the same.
Fears are electrified.
Strengths are revealed.

A second change is presented here.
Time to realize one's errors.
Awards of one's greatest pleasures.
Punishment for one's deepest fears.

Bridges are burned and built.
Walls are constructed and demolished.
Souls are intertwined in unity.
Hands are pulled apart.

This is man's second life.
This is society's look at reality.
This is the doctor of the mind.
This is the dream.

Here we can find the truth.
It cannot lie.
Holding our only serenity.
We write the book of life.

Dream a dream this twilight.
Recollect the events in one's life.
And paint the pictures presented here.
Pleasant pastures of the soul will be thine.



James Andrew Harris is from Chicago, IL but has called the Valley home since early childhood. He lives with his wife, KaristaRose (who also loves writing poetry), and their son. He loves writing poetry as it is a way to understand, feel and express the feelings of the soul. He also enjoys sketching and working for local events and theatres as a technical/production manager or as another creative whenever he can. Currently, he is working to put all of his poetry into a mini book. He is very excited to share his poems with the world. This poem is his first one to ever be shared with others. You can reach him at talknightproductions@yahoo.com.

A Poem by Karista Rose Harris

Stay Strong

© 2019

Broken hearts, broken dreams.
Stormy skies, stormy seas.
Where to go, what to do.
You can't cry, you can't run.

It's just another day for you,
That's what you think.
You may say hello.
You may see me smile,
But you don't see the pain.
It's more than just another day.

You can never see around the corner.
There is no crystal ball, no fortune-teller.
Accidents do happen, mistakes are made.
There are crazy days, frustrating moments.

So what do you do, so what do you do?
Just stay strong, stay strong.
Yes the weight of the world is on your shoulders
Yes your heart aches
Yes that first step hurts
Yes your head wants to explode
So what do you do, what do you do?
Just stay strong, stay strong.



KaristaRose Harris is a native Arizonan, born and raised along Route 66 in Kingman, AZ. She has called the Valley home for the last 17 years along with her husband, son and their Sphynx kitties. She wrote her first poem at age 13 for a national high school poetry contest and placed in the top 10 and was published in their national book. KaristaRose not only writes poetry and songs but also enjoys creative expression through various other mediums. She attributes her range of creativity to both her parents, especially her father. Her Native American father wrote songs, sang, played multiple instruments and was a hoop dancer. He also painted and sold many of his paintings in museums across the United States. KaristaRose has released three collaborative books including a 6 category bestseller. KaristaRose is an advocate for several national organizations and is heavily involved as a local community volunteer. Follow and contact her via Facebook at #KRDefyingtheOdds or karistarose@yahoo.com.

3 Poems by Bob Eager

Flipside of the Familiar

© 2019

About time to meet the Other side of the coin,

Under the surface topic revealed.

Relatable Subject matter flipped on its tails head.

Now floating in regular view—

Discussed now readily and available for mass consumption,

Beyond comprehension but necessarily openly stated—

No longer kept a hidden underground secret;

Now the unearthed topic has finally been fully realized with ...

Just got its just due and now fully approaching a congregation's celebratory lips.

Sound familiar maybe?

Generated by its upturn.

Go figure this

Abstract concept just got promoted to the forefront!

Obverse or Converse route—

You pick!

The End!



"Mr. Authenticity" Bob Eager, also known as Edgar Rider, lives in Scottsdale and has been published in *Oddball Magazine*, *Stray Branch* literary magazine and *Tuck Magazine* to name a few. He has recently come up with a type of remedy called *Trash Bag Therapy* to help people release their emotions. He is the ringmaster of *Claim The Space* (the *Tunnel Performance Society*) where musicians, poets and dancers express themselves in an open environmental forum. The poet can be reached at bobeager123@outlook.com.

Chameleon Scene Blender

© 2019

Fit in

Blend in

Different scenes ...

Hang out in the crib on the Westside

Gangsta party;

Watching "Waiting to Exhale" by myself,

Flip to a different view in Old Town Tourist trap

Trend for the moment!

Call it a survival mechanism ...

Blender Scene Chameleon

Different times of year,

Holidays at the country club;

Listening to golf talk:

Sometimes remain silent and

Still accepted.

Other times a more Specific Blender

Morph into the Scene,

Chameleon

Questionable strategy sometimes

Or just to Get me over

Wear a suit and tie;

I fit in!

Understand different slang;

Do I believe or is this a survival instinct

Music prefer classic rock era gone by!

Straight up Pretender ...

Hang out,

High school friends hanging listening to smooth sounds of Van Halen,

Several scenarios ...

Simple concept to suddenly

Cleverly shameless opportunism to appear

Increasing curiosity,

To Blend in for the moment?

World Finesse and Nuance Strategy

© 2019

Immediate world and world beyond,

Strategy to grow into new role ...

Discrepancy between where you are and where you want to be!

Truth lies between personal perception and

Objectives met—

Choice BE 1st Eliminated?

Or Chance to be Last Person Standing?

Find a Purpose and Play the Game!

Not a lie in itself just positioning past personal experience;

Nuance and Finesse strategy.

Barometer measured—

Understand the difference between what you Personally feel and what they need to hear!

Assessment concluded: made it past at least the first round ...

Avoid 2nd Round Elimination

Strategy Engaged—

Get Your Game Play On!

Composting Suicide

By Meck Slagle

© 2019

I was 15 years old, sitting so close to my TV that my mother would have disapproved, the waterbed gently sloshing under me as I vigorously pressed the play and record buttons on my VCR (that archaic machine that plays videotapes). Then the phone rang, interrupting my flow as I re-recorded rented movies from the library to my own blank tapes. I didn't answer the first few rings, because my older brother was usually attached to it as he talked to friends for hours each day. After the fifth ring, it dawned on me that he must not be home, so I sprang to the cordless receiver across the room. "Hello?" I answered.

I have always liked dirt, insects, and worms that live in soil, as well as the process of composting. I find satisfaction in collecting fruit and veggie scraps in a bucket in my kitchen, then taking it to the backyard to the big black bin where I use a tiller to mix the new scraps with the ever growing pile of decaying material. Watering it down with a garden hose, I notice all the wonderful organisms that are collectively helping me transform the blackened banana peels, limp broccoli stems, and moldy slices of bread into a nutrient rich amendment that will feed my next generation of garden delectibles.

It wasn't typical for my dad to call home, because my mother was a 911 dispatcher who worked the night shift. We all knew that waking Mom during the day was a poor decision that would result in some sort of verbal gunfire. I was nearly an expert in being stealthy in my own home.

"Where is your brother?" My dad asked, acutely aware that since I answered the phone, he wasn't home. "Dunno." I shrugged as if he could see me. "Well, I need you to check on your mom." I sighed as I retorted, "Why?"

I started composting at a young age, because for as long as I

One in five adults will struggle with mental illness this year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, www.nami.org.

How to get help:

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-8255.**

The toll-free nonprofit lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for a person or their loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

can recall my mother has been a recycler. Sorting bottles from cans and cardboard from glass has always been our routine, so it was a seamless addition to start sorting our compostables. My mom is not a raging eco-warrior, but a conscious and compassionate nature lover. While she doesn't share the same giddy excitement about creepy-crawlies, she instilled the foundations of their appreciation.

I knocked on the bedroom door so lightly, that I barely heard it. Then I paused, holding my breath, listening for a response. Let me be clear, my mom was not evil or abusive. She had a very stressful job that she would often work 14 hours straight, and trying to rest in a house with kids and pets and a busy highway out front meant that she was often grumpy due to lack of restful sleep. My dad had spray-painted styrofoam panels

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Meck Slagle is currently pursuing her Master of Science in Entomology at the University of Arizona. Slagle has been working in the natural sciences for the past six years and enjoys sharing her knowledge with the public. In her free time, Slagle is a Master Naturalist, pushing herself to learn and communicate environmental science to community members. She hopes her writing will help to close the gap between public and academic interests, through her creative and journalistic writing styles.

black and hung them in the windows to block out the sun for her, and she sometimes used earplugs to deafen herself to the traffic. I can vividly hear the sleep machine that continuously played sounds of ocean waves or trains chugging down their tracks. After a few more half-hearted attempts to wake my mom, I turned the doorknob, hoping the hinges wouldn't squeak.

Composting is a process of decomposition. The process is happening in every environment; dung beetles help keep fields from being covered in cow manure, and the ocean floor is continuously breaking down to simpler pieces. The forest floors around the world are actively engaged in breaking down fallen leaves and pine needles into their basic elemental components such as nitrogen, carbon, and other important nutrients that plants need. Plants can't eat a grounded leaf, but they can take up elements through their roots, a critical function for their growth, health, and reproduction. Since humans have discovered the power of this decomposition to improve our crops and gardens, we now compost in our backyards, waste treatment facilities, and rural farms.

One step at a time; it takes patience to make good compost. You've got to stay calm if the pile turns rancid or is invaded by pests, and figuring out what went wrong will be the only way to get the cycle back on track. I didn't understand in my younger years that these concepts would be key to my future mental health, academic endeavors, and personal relationships.

"Mom?" I whispered, slowly entering the room that I expected to be pitch black. Her bedside light was on, and the first thing I noticed were the pill bottles strewn about her headboard and side table; some with caps removed, others just laying on their side. This is the only moment in my life that as I think back on it, I can still feel the knot in my stomach and the wave of emotion so overwhelming that it still labors my breath.

My mother lay there naked and motionless.

The details get hazier each time I recall this moment. I know that I called 911, and when my mom's co-worker Cindy answered, I didn't say much. Cindy, having known me since birth, could tell from my voice that something was very wrong. Help was on the way. A whirlwind of things happened in the next 7 minutes: a phone call to my dad, locking the dog in the bathroom so he wouldn't bother the medics, collecting the pill bottles for the doctors, and dressing my mom's limp body so she wouldn't be embarrassed about being naked in front of her paramedic friends.

I rode in the front seat of the ambulance; a nurse dragged me by the hand into the ER, asking me a plethora of questions. Yes, I knew my mom's medical history, but no I didn't know what she took or why. They pumped her stomach, and she didn't die ... but my close relationship with Mom crumbled as she slurred through an incoherent verbal vomit of words in the recovery room, none of which I remember except for, "I blame you."

Break it down; one step at a time. Keep calm. How is a 15-year-old going to deal with this? In the short term, I didn't. I rebelled. I moved out and drove myself to Georgia. I got involved with drugs. I learned hard lessons on my own and struggled in ways that I could have avoided. I survived life-threatening situations and crippling depression with one concept that my mother taught me: composting.

The process of composting is slow; you can't see the changes from day to day, but time always transforms the most putrid of materials into a dark, rich, earthy fertilizer. My mother's attempt on her own life was putrid, but it has been the best fertilizer in my life. I have learned how to digest tragedy, manage my depression, and mend broken relationships. I've even gotten my life back on track. Most importantly, my mother and I have learned, together, to wait to see better things unfold.

Jennifer Hanscom

Phoenix Artist



**“G Clef Pendant
with Peridot”
Sterling silver;
hand-forged and
formed clef
2018**



Jim Thornton

Jennifer Hanscom is an award-winning jewelry artisan and jewelry instructor based in Phoenix. A 2010 Saul Bell Award finalist — in silver/Argentium, she is published in Lark Book’s “500 Necklaces” and was most recently awarded “Director’s Choice” and received first place in jewelry in the Fine Arts Show at the 2019 Arizona State Fair. Jennifer’s background in architecture lends to the meticulously engineered pieces, and her value-based philosophy on life led to her mission of creating artisan jewelry that cultivates a positive mind-set. Her jewelry collections are embodied with intention and connections to the moments which matter most in our lives. The artist writes, “The Noteworthy Collection was created with the awareness of how, through music, we feel instantly connected to people and places. Just as the melodies of your favorite songs draw you in and connect with you on an emotional level, the guitar in the Noteworthy Collection visually attracts and mesmerizes you with its intricacies. It draws your attention down the forefront where every detail fascinates and holds your attention. Your eyes meander along the neck as you follow each silver strand of wire as it weaves along until it reaches the soul of the guitar; mimicking how music resonates with us and strikes a chord of memories and emotions deep within our lives.” To see more work, visit www.jenniferhanscom.com or email jen@jenniferhanscom.com.

Jennifer Hanscom

Phoenix Artist



“The Blue Guitar”

**Copper, with a blue-speckled patina;
sterling silver; apatite; handwoven
necklace with custom-cut body
assembled with rivets**

2019

“The keepsakes we treasure most in life are a curated collection symbolizing who we are as individuals. My jewelry is created to enhance your individual collection of memories and life events. The guitar, in the Noteworthy Collection, is a reflection of how music resonates with our lives. Blending metal smith techniques together with wire work, the creation process builds upon the way music intertwines with our lives and creates a cohesive bond which binds us together and reflects our inner being. It represents our feelings of connection to people and places through music and the emotions and memories music triggers within us.”

- Jennifer Hanscom

Jennifer Hanscom

Phoenix Artist



“Guitar Necklace with Blue Topaz”
Sterling silver; blue topaz; handwoven necklace
with custom-cut body assembled with rivets
2017

Jennifer Hanscom

Phoenix Artist



“Woven Staff Necklace”

**Sterling silver; handwoven necklace with custom-cut notes
and hand-forged and formed clef
2017**

Jennifer Hanscom

Phoenix Artist



"G Clef Neckpiece"
Sterling silver; hand-forged
and formed necklace and clef
2018

Family Secrets

By Sandra Rose Simmons

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Elaine Wright died on September 9, 2016, at the age of 65. The memorial service was held at St. Matthew Methodist Church in Phoenix on September 17. Evan Wright, her brother and only relative, failed to show up. Though no one really knew her well, a modest crowd filled half the seats in the sanctuary. The choir sang “Amazing Grace”. The minister gave the eulogy, describing Elaine as a good Christian woman who had gone to meet her maker. After leading the congregation in prayer, he invited everyone to enjoy a bit of food in the social hall and share their memories of Elaine.

The people in attendance passed along the buffet table filling their plates with sandwiches, salad, and cookies prepared by church volunteers. They found seats at tables with folks they knew.

Members of the church described Elaine as a pleasant woman.

“We both started coming here as young women, nearly forty years ago.”

“One of our most faithful members, she showed up every Sunday, always willing to help.”

“She never said an unkind word about anyone.”

“So shy and quiet, she sat in the back row by herself.”

After working at a branch of the city library for thirty-five years, Elaine had retired. Several of her colleagues showed up at the service to pay their respects and share their recollections.

“I never worked with anyone more efficient or more helpful than Elaine. She kept everything neat and tidy.”

“She never complained, just went quietly about her business.”

“If someone asked for help, she conscientiously persisted in

getting them what they needed.”

“Not very social, though. She ate lunch at her desk. She never went out with us after work. When her parents died in a car accident and her brother moved out of town, she must have been lonely living all by herself.”

“She told me playing the piano gave her comfort, especially after her parents passed away.”

A few women who’d gone to school with the Wrights shared their memories. Most of them still lived in the same neighborhood where they’d grown up.

“I remember Elaine and her brother walking to elementary school together. Evan always held her hand. I wished I’d had a big brother like that to protect me.”

“She started out as thin, scrawny child, but grew chubbier each year. It’s a wonder she lived as long as she did after gaining all that weight.”

“When you’re lonely, food can be a big comfort.”

“Evan was adorable when he was little, but he turned into a nerd in high school. He never played sports or participated in Scouts or other clubs. He didn’t even go to prom. My brother called him a wuss.”

“Whatever happened to him, anyway?”

“When their parents died in a car accident, he had to quit college and get a job. My sister worked with him at Best Buy in the accounting department.”

“I heard he took a job a few years later in Albuquerque. Odd that he never came back to visit his sister. Why wouldn’t he at least come to the funeral?”

“The family kept to themselves and didn’t seem to have any friends and. Maybe Evan wanted to get a fresh start.”

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The author writes: My stories are inspired by people and their struggles to not only survive but thrive and find meaning in life. I have drawn from my social work experience to explore situations and issues that challenge people. Family and friendships have played a major role in my life and helped me maintain balance and perspective as I navigated the difficulties of being a working single mother and caregiver to my elderly parents and life partner. Nature, travel, hiking, dancing and spirituality are often woven into the narrative. I am a member of Desert Sleuths Chapter of Sisters in Crime, Mesa Writers Guild, Society of Southwest Authors, and ALWAYS (Alliance for Literary Writers, Authors & Yabbering Scribes) and participate in many local author events throughout out the year. My short story, ‘The Hobo Shack,’ won the 2017 Tempe Community Writing Contest for Adult Fiction.”

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“Poor Elaine. I remember we were sophomores in high school when her parents died. It seemed like she became even more reclusive.”

The Wright house remained empty for months while authorities tried to track down Elaine’s brother, Evan. No record of him could be found in Albuquerque, and the search expanded to other states in the southwest, then nationwide. Notices in the newspapers seeking the missing Mr. Wright included an age-enhanced photo of him at seventy, but received no response. Eventually the property became available for sale.

Real estate broker Mike Montgomery saw the Wright property listing and went to look at the house located in an older but well-maintained neighborhood. The residential lot had become an eyesore. After months of neglect, weeds had overtaken what had been a flower garden in the front yard, nearly covering the sidewalk leading to the front door. The house itself, however, seemed to be in good repair. The white paint looked faultless and the roof had no missing shingles. For an older model ranch home, it appeared relatively unblemished and structurally sound.

When he entered the house, a chill raced up his back. Unlike the yard, it looked as if someone had stepped out to run an errand. Though covered in dust, not a thing appeared to be out of place. A jigsaw puzzle of a large cat on a multi-colored pillow sat partially completed on a card table in front of the side chair. A small navy blue afghan draped one end of the couch. At the far end of the front room stood an upright piano. Mike went over, opened it and pounded out a couple of notes. It surprised him that the old piano still held its tune. He turned to the kitchen. Fallen petals from a vase of dead flowers littered the Formica counter and emitted a musty smell. He opened the gold colored refrigerator to the putrid stench of rancid food, nearly gagged, and quickly closed the door. He planned to replace all the outdated appliances.

Mike walked through the kitchen and down the hall to the bedrooms. Two rooms occupied the left side of the house opposite the bathroom. At the end of the hall, he entered the master bedroom on the right. A double bed dominated the center of one wall with an end table at each side. The quilted cover had been pulled tight across the bed. The pillow shams matched the yellow daisies in the quilt pattern. Opposite the bed, a crocheted runner lay across the dresser with a black and white picture of a handsome couple in the middle. Mike figured they were the elder Wrights, parents of the deceased. He opened the closet and was surprised to find it empty. He had assumed Elaine would have moved into her parents’ bedroom when she became the sole occupant of the house.

Mike returned to the hall. The door to the next bedroom was locked. He took out the keys he’d been given, but none of them fit the door. He shrugged off a sense of dread, wondering what secrets had been locked behind that door. He added calling a locksmith to his task list before he entered the third bedroom.

Inside that door, he found a smaller version of the parents’ room. A pink quilt with a tulip design topped the twin bed, and pillows with ruffled white covers rested against the brass bed frame. An old-fashioned lamp with a fringed shade sat on the end table next to the bed. The floor had the same brown carpet as the master bedroom. Along the wall opposite the foot of the bed stood a chest of drawers. A desk and chair completed the furnishings. Not a thing seemed out of place, not even a scrap of paper littered the desk. It struck him as odd that there were no other family photos in this room or in the rest of the house. He opened the closet to find it full of a woman’s clothes, arranged by color with dresses at one end, blouses in the middle and slacks on the other end. Unlike his wife, Elaine had only a few pair of shoes in basic neutral colors.

Mike hesitated as he turned to inspect the bathroom. He had heard she died from a fall there. Taking a deep breath, he opened the door. The chaos of this room contrasted with the rest of the house. A bloody towel lay on the floor. The bath mat lay wadded up in the corner. He restrained a gasp when he saw a bloody handprint on the side of the tub. He made a hasty exit, trying to shake off the sense of an eerie presence.

As he started his car, he began to calculate what it would take to get the house ready for market. If he won the bid to buy the house, he’d have to pay someone to clean up the mess in the bathroom before he set foot in there again.

By the end of the following week, Mike held title to the property. A few days later, he met the locksmith at the Wright house to rekey all the locks and add dead bolts to the exterior doors. Now able to access to the previously locked door, he surveyed what had obviously been the brother’s bedroom. A striped wool blanket lay over the bed, but the mattress was missing. A plain dark blue case covered the pillow. The chest of drawers and desk that occupied this room matched those in the other small bedroom. He looked into the closet and found it empty. Seeing dark stains on the carpet, he grimaced and made a note to replace all the carpets in the house.

Mike met with the decorator and gave him a list of the upgrades he wanted. He’d worked with Charley for years and trusted him to complete the interior renovation on time and within budget. As they walked through the house, Mike pointed out the changes he wanted to make. New paint, new carpet and new window treatments throughout. New appliances and countertops in the kitchen. A remodeled bathroom with new fixtures.

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“I want to create a comfortable, more spacious feeling in the house. I’m going to take the piano so my daughter can begin lessons. Arrange for Goodwill to pick up the rest of the household belongings.”

Mike hired a landscaping crew and told them to clear out the tangle of plants and bushes and replace them with a new design. They started in the front yard, leveling it down to the ground. They replanted grass and put a hedgerow along the front of the house. A couple of ash trees for shade completed the landscape design.

The back yard presented a challenge. Clearing what had been flowering bushes took more effort. One of the pathways through the garden ended in the corner at a pile of rocks with a small cross on top. The crew removed the bird feeders and benches along the path. They repaved the patio, then installed a fire pit and built-in grill.

Mike pulled up to the house, stepped away from his car and admired the curb appeal of the property. He walked to the porch, opened the front door and took in the creative way the decorator had staged the front room. The tan leather sofa and side chair gave it an earthy feel. Removing the piano and other furnishings made the formerly overcrowded room seem more spacious than he’d found it on his first visit. The new blinds let in light that had previously been blocked by heavy, dark drapes.

Mike looked into the kitchen where the new stainless steel appliances and granite countertops made the area shine. An updated kitchen added value and could sell a house. As he started down the hall toward the bathroom, he got an uneasy feeling, but shook it off. He told himself it was just a house. Sure, someone died here. Big deal. It wasn’t the first time he’d bought an unclaimed property after a death and sold it for a handsome profit.

All the doors remained open for his inspection. The spare furnishings in the small rooms gave the illusion of openness. In each room, the twin beds had been moved against the side wall to allow more floor space. A chest of drawers and side table completed the furnishings, with different styles in each room. To enhance the charm, new colorful comforters graced the beds and bright abstract paintings hung on the walls. Recessed lighting gave the rooms a contemporary feel.

The master bedroom looked inviting with more subdued bed covers and soft, impressionistic art prints decorating the walls. The walk-in closet with built-in shelving would be appreciated. Satisfied with what he’d seen, he braced himself before entering the bathroom. The memory of the bloody handprint still haunted him. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the completely refurbished room. The old tub had been replaced with a tub and shower combination. New tile, new sink and new vanity cabinet made the room look entirely different and

fresh. No one would ever suspect that a death had occurred here.

With renewed confidence, Mike strode through the kitchen into the back yard. The patio, with all the built-in amenities, made the property attractive. He could see a family relaxing and entertaining in this space. He scanned the desert landscape of prickly pear, Mexican bird of paradise and lantana. His eyes rested on the rock rubble in the corner. He frowned as he walked over to the back of the yard to get a better look. What the hell? He wondered why the crew hadn’t cleared that area; maybe out of superstition, not wanting to disturb the cross that sat atop the mess. Anger at the unfinished job replaced his curiosity. Whatever the problem, those guys were supposed to deal with it.

Mike called the landscape company manager on the spot. “Robert, I want your guys to finish this job. I’m not leaving until it’s done.”

“What’s the issue?”

“There’s a pile of rocks in the corner of the yard. They need to get over here right now and complete the rehab. I want to get this baby to market. I’m losing money every day it sits vacant.”

“Okay. I’ll round up a crew and come right over.”

Mike had sent Robert a great deal of business over the years and now expected to take priority over the demands of his other clients.

In an hour Robert and his crew pulled up to the house and met Mike in the back yard. The men stared at the cross until Robert took it away, then started working. Removing the rocks revealed a mound of dirt. Robert looked at Mike and asked. “You want us to level this or plant over it?”

“Level it, then plant something pretty.” Mike took a seat on a patio chair while the men finished the job. Agitated and uneasy, he observed the workers digging in the dirt.

“Eeyii!”

Mike’s head jerked up as the men backed away from where they were working. “What’s the matter?” He walked over to the men huddled together near the fence.

When they moved aside, Mike stepped forward. A bony hand lay exposed in the dirt. “Oh, my God!” Mike’s jaw dropped open and he took a step back. “I’ve had a creepy feeling about this place from the beginning.”

“You better call the police.” Robert’s voice cracked. “I’m sending my guys back to finish another job. You want me to stay with you?”

Mike swallowed hard. “Yes. I’d appreciate that. Two witnesses are better than one.” Mike shivered and chided himself for not wanting to be alone with the skeleton in the corner.

Two police cars arrived within minutes and soon the place

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swarmed with cops and forensic technicians. Mike tried to protect his investment by keeping them from trampling the young plantings. Eventually the medical examiner showed up.

Thorough and precise, the authorities spent most of the afternoon surveying the grounds, taking pictures and gathering samples before loading the bony corpse into a body bag and hauling it away. Curious neighbors gathered on the sidewalk across the street to watch the proceedings and removal of the body. They finally dispersed when the officials departed.

Mike hoped the rumor mill wouldn't extend to his potential buyers. He reluctantly walked to the gaping hole. He bowed his head in respect for the departed soul, wondering who the unfortunate person might be. Deeply shaken, he grasped the cross that had topped the rock pile. As he picked it up, the bottom of the pedestal came off and a small book fell out.

Mike leaned down to pick up the green spiral notebook with dog-eared pages and a faded heart on the cover. His hand trembled as he turned to the first page. It appeared to be a diary of sorts. The age of the author appeared on each page and described the events of the day. Mike thumbed through the pages, stopping to read the entries at various intervals.

age 6

Evan an me hid unner my bed he hug me no
gosts

age 7

Evan an me pretend 2 b married hug an kiss like daddy
and mommy

age 10

Evan draw me necked. I hid my face. Afraid.

age 12

Evan said I am grown up now. He took off my clothes and touched my privates. Made me touch his. It got all hard. I cried. He put his hand over my mouth. What happens if momma and daddy find out?

age 14

Evan came into my room last night and made me have sex. He said it's our secret and I can't tell. He said no one would believe me anyway. I hate him.

age 15

Momma and Daddy died. I can't believe they are gone. Evan cried in his room all night and left me alone. I cried too. What will become of me?

Evan says he's my guardian and I have to do what he says. I want to run away, but where could I go?

age 18

Since Mom and Dad left us, Evan is bold, and more insistent. He wants sex every day. No place is safe from him. There is nowhere to hide and no one to hide behind. I can hardly sleep knowing Evan could be on me at any time.

I resisted Evan's demands. Locked myself in the bathroom. He forced the door open and hit me. He dragged me to his room and tied me to the bed. He raped me. I want to kill him

Late last night I went to Evan's room while he slept. I hit him on the head with the cast iron skillet and stabbed him with a butcher knife to be sure he was dead. I wrapped a sheet around him and rolled him up in an old rug. He was a heavy load to drag through the back yard, but not as heavy as the burden of shame he placed on me my whole life. It took forever to dig a hole deep enough to cover him. Every time a dog barked, or a cat yowled, I nearly jumped out of my skin. I hoped the rocks I piled on the mound would hide his grave.

Evan stole my innocence. He ruined me and I can never forgive him. I'm hiding my secret shame with him in the old cross. I pray for forgiveness.

Mike held his head in his hands and groaned as he thought about the evil that used to dwell in the rooms of the property he would soon put up for sale. His stomach roiled at the secrets he'd read in the diary. He thought of his precious daughter. He couldn't begin to imagine something like this happening to her. He didn't know what to do. His thoughts ping-ponged around his head.

His own self-interest weighed on him. A scandal would probably make the property a hard sell and certainly reduce the value. If he reported what he'd found, no one would benefit. Both brother and sister were now dead. What good would it do to air the truth of what happened here? She deserved her right to privacy, even in death. It was up to him to keep her secret.

Mike stared at the cross for several minutes, then said a prayer for the deceased and asked for his own forgiveness. He slowly walked to the garbage barrel at the side of the house, stuffed the little book in the half-filled trash bag and tied the strings together. Gently placing the cross on top of the garbage heap, he closed the lid and walked away.

A Poem by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Failing Wings [*en sekvens för förlorare*]

© 2019

1
The petty seep of violence
that will come burbling
back again up-stream
like Cosmoline on water –

*

I need to know what else
besides the elation of love
and the fulfillment of grief
takes us so far beyond

the simple current of our primordial wiring –
ears maybe to listen to the sonic eclipse
between the quail's murmur
and the dove's keen.

Nor do they, the quail, the dove, the sound,
the silence, need me to make more of them, or less,
and they are themselves only to themselves –
hapful fabrication only to me.

Unmoving brown/gray keepers of nature's lowly
wisdom - their sounds illuminate my eyes!
more still by far than our dead moon's stare,
and I make conversation that only we can share.

*

In the threat of darkening near distance,
from the direction of a white birch
bent over the lapped shore
we hear night herons shrilly drooling.

2

near Nevada, Iowa

Puddle from the storm just past.
Fecund mud quivering into clover,
young tender thistles learning to grasp.

Dim clinging memory avoids the inevitable spreading heat,
drought from fearsome altered skies, drought
from a gilded cradle of leadership in dotage

and also losers, like
a redwing blackbird we see
perched for the brief moment of his flute solo.

The bird sits on a barbed-wire fence,
enforced separation – a wall of strands –
at the dry edge of a green sward,

bucolic interlude between West Indian Creek
and the soybean farm plowed under this summer,
for sale to some underbidding conglomerate next year.

Blackbird pays his hungry attention,
such attention as he allows
to human pretension –

to a plowed crop of new debt
instantly forgotten by the great one who nevertheless loves his farmers
momently from and between his Federal mental lapses,

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom is the writer of six books, including "Eumaeus Tends" and "Selenity Book Four." His new book, "Sorgmantel," follows a view of Lucretius, but employs time, the predicate of physics, into a search for what can be imagined out of the possible and impossible. It can be read, perhaps, as an elegy for futures whose existence humankind is threatening, including humankind's. The poet was raised and lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and the North Woods of Minnesota.

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practiced, unpracticed, practiced, dispracticed –
the tutored praxis of a withered pumpkin
rotting senile in some abandoned door-yard.

3
after Mallarmé and before

Blue-white waves splash on the shore of a lake
stripped now of its beauty of trees.

Chugging chuffing coughing
iron blade up -
puffs of fragrant exhaust
whoof
along with the ghosts of not yet and far gone.

The memory of trees - trees' memories
of their agonizing caesarian re-birth –
split into boards for houses and shops
and the burning wooden towns of their age.

I am the *intra*locutor of ghosts –
my Dopplegänger's Doppel –
to connect what is gone with what is going, what
has already become revenant in the future –

I am equipped to tell no one, not even you – ah,

as though anyone can demand of time
more than a fey wheeze of memory
to control our manic vibrations,
the dys-tonal counterpoint to the euphony of waves

too far from pointless succor,
only sky and stars and no metaphor,
learning the dimensions of sky,
learning the dimensions of water,
the choreography of splashing from one element

to the other,
the sad human dimension of failure,
the soaring dimension of again

and again
and again.

To pretend

to such control of my pen
I would have earned such vision
into what I write to allow words to be
as gentle with the image I try
to imagine of myself,
without which care words are no more
than spaces among falling leaves.

But sometimes hard times, these times –
words like weather rise out of the ground
Poseidon green,
tumble toward us with pulses
of their own – manic volition,
leprous inner glow –

words like bruised air moving wounded,
cornered gasping in a return to
Carboniferous miasma
a new dimension for old evolution
another playful hazard:

un coup de dés . . .

jamais . . . non! . . .

n'abolira toujours!

le hazard.

[a throw of the dice

never . . . no! . . .

always! abolishes

chance.

(except when it doesn't)]

4
After profound concentration . . .

. . . this slick arrogance spread
across the marble floors of legal pages
might slide like fragile plates, not

that purposeful grace of outer magma,
our volcanic firmament
so innocent of violent intent

but only the inept intent and *entente* of leadership,
all smiles, all power riding easy
on ample loins

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slumming far from admissible distance
outside their zoological display of distraised childhood –
fear-bound, ground in cages,

no promise or hint of emancipation –
only dry wind from hired functionaries,
an *apparat* of withered mouths.

Institutions, like
governments ungoverned,
living only to perpetuate *terminus ad quem*,

must rot to the skeletons of nothing
but themselves having gained no flesh
but only the smell of dead ideals

sizzling on ignited covenants –
the stench of deceit, the dust-fragrance –
far-distant fruits of innocence

by rude calculation mis-engineered –
the *memento mori* of each child's breath
publicly disdained.

5
Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico

The clay was her teacher,
her cool wet guide to the next shape,
her lesson in clear judgment –

the purgatory of the kiln
in which the clay died a death
she could grieve wholly in sadness and love.

The kiln - the sun that grows too hot,
too bright not to remind us of some distant power
in the great dark cosmos – dimensions of gravity,

because it is the sun's daily job to be where it is
placed in orbital inexactitude
like this shard of old pottery,

the one in my hand
with most of a purple blossom fading
or the piece of green bottle glass,

its cutting edges only as rough now as working hands,
and a bit of old pitcher,
part of its lip still attached.

The flowers on it
are yellow under scratched glaze.
That is a scallop shell on the pink sand

beside a wine bottle bottom,
from which familiar colors
las golondrinas will fly away

when they sense food somewhere else and return to the barrio
or they will flop
broken-winged here in the dump,

basuero of the many broken flowers –
in the kiln of sun –
desiccating in the fractured beauty of shards.

6
Water working us gently warmly
away into the womb of Earth once more,
alone in the sea under the heave and tremor
of the geography of waves and swells,
alone with the shale-black orthocone,
alone with mosasaur, alone in the panic of her prey.

Or pike, above the disparate translucencies
of a lake a mile above the pillow of set lava balanced,
precarious above the igneous flow –
a knapped Folsom point, obscurant obsidian lens
through which to consider:

A scorpion after all
is company no more or less tender or “nice,” you say,
than any company save what your young soul endows
than it had enjoyed by way of its primordial nature

never noticed
before your blossoming moment of grace – or
hadrosaur's jaws oscillating back and forth,
so finely evolved

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out of the dim birdiness of her ancestors –
back and forth in contemplative slowness
while the shadows of the shadows of poems,
undulate in the skull that sweeps slowly –
up and down,
back and forth from sedge to sky.

*

Dead to our childhood, we can no longer begin
or pretend to hear the trees –
we can no longer reach the first branch to begin again.

Do you remember the clarity
high enough and in such danger of height and invention
when we embraced the tree for our only protection,
the good ache in the infinity
of our child's upward scramble maybe
way up a Cretaceous plane tree
in the farthest clearest distance –

see hear feel the hungry warmth of the consuming sun,
the chill of the twilit lorn horizon,
and then then then the sun.

The tree whispered back its name.
Unremembering, we listened.

*

We slaughter the flying creatures though we envy them,
descendants of the fourth freedom of evolution.
The lesser endowed among the evolved,
below the sky, only subsisting again, scavengers –
we will not fly!

And the fifth freedom?
the inspired human agon between a nomadic psyche
and the impenetrable orthodox – the genius!

But not now, not this year or era.
Far below the cave the dug tomb
the undertomb of anxiety,
the rising fire, the silence of echo
the sound of caves that we may stand above . . .
and recall that extinction is no disgrace.

The end is quick, sepulchered
into the slow evolution of memorial agate.

We may grow beautiful and virtuous again
refined together in the same lithic kiln.

Coming in Spring 2020!

The 12th Annual

Blue Guitar Spring Festival of the Arts!

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

Free admission!

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

Open Mic: A celebration of the arts

Join us at our quarterly Open Mic Arts, Letters and Culture Events! This is a great chance for artists, writers and performers in all genres, spanning all disciplines and cultural representations, to get together, read, present, share, learn and enjoy. A featured artist is showcased!

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

WHEN: The last Thursday of March, June, September and December, 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.

About The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

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

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

The Arizona Consortium seeks to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary arts center that will provide a home for our activities and foster artistic growth for people of all ages in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers

and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting.

Please visit www.artizona.org or www.theblueguitarmagazine.org for more information about becoming a member, networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting work to The Blue Guitar arts and literary magazine, Unstrung poetry magazine and The Blue Guitar Jr. literary and arts magazine for youth.

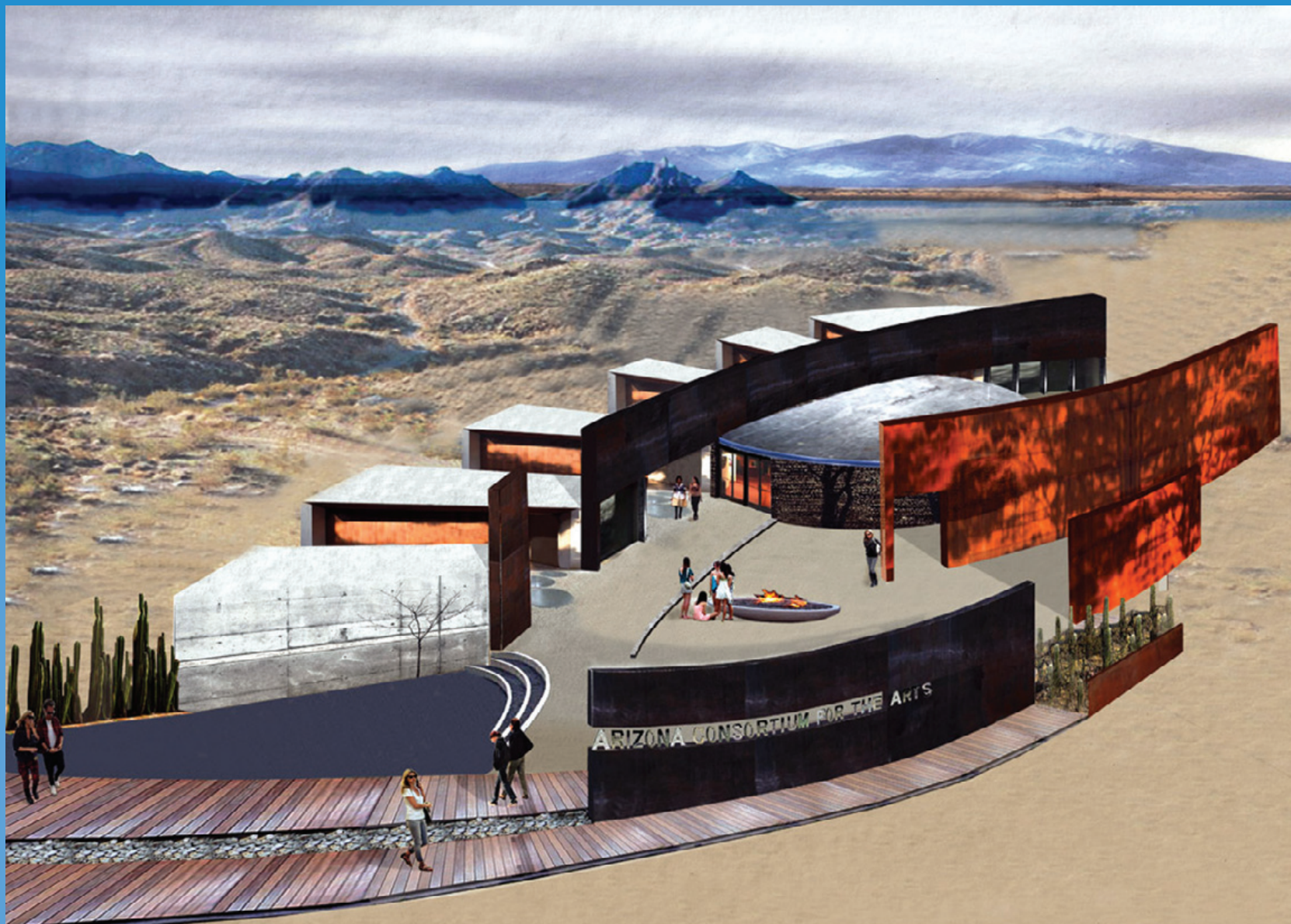
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form. For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to



artists, and support inspiring projects, your financial support is needed. Every dollar received will support our website, the publication of our magazines, and the establishment of our future center.

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

Thank you for your support!



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

The consortium's vision for a multicultural arts center

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

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

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

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

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

Meet the staff of The Blue Guitar magazine



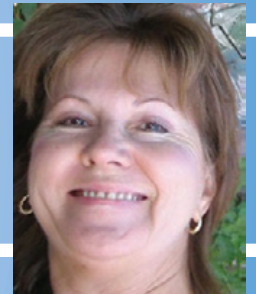
Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at info@artizona.org.

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

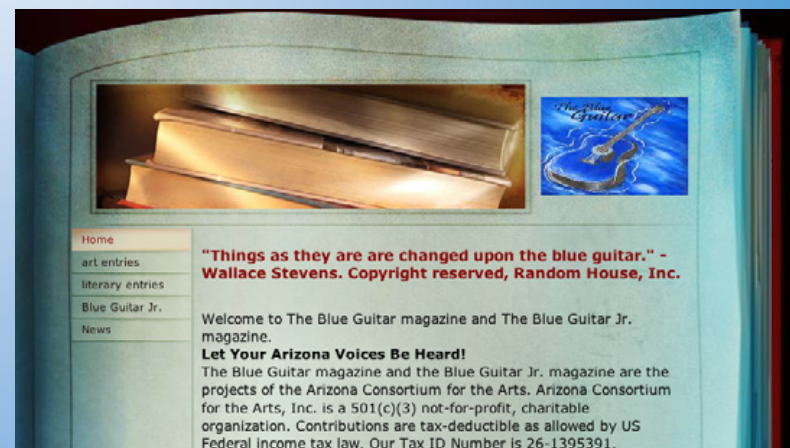
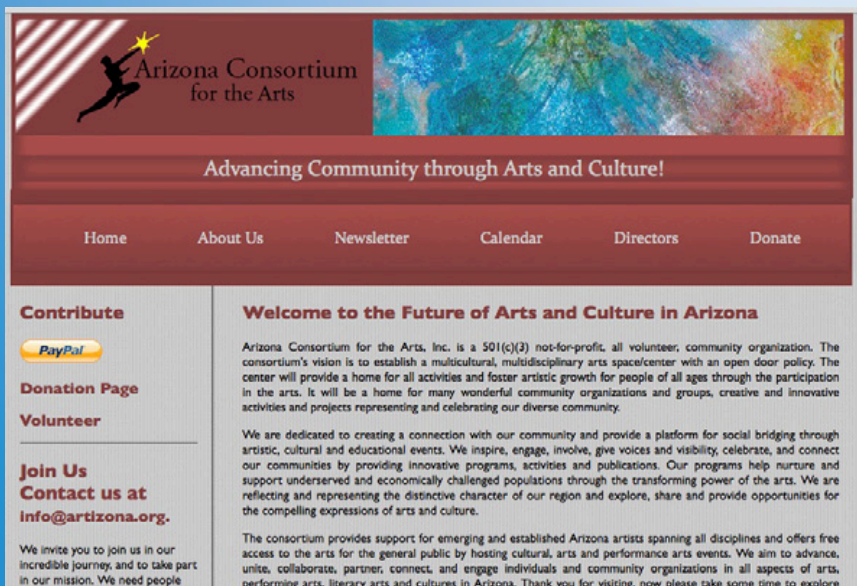


Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the news editor of two monthly newspapers with websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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



Check our websites for news on the arts



The Blue Guitar Magazine's website is www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.
Like us on Facebook.
Follow @BlueGuitarMagAZ on Twitter.

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

www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org

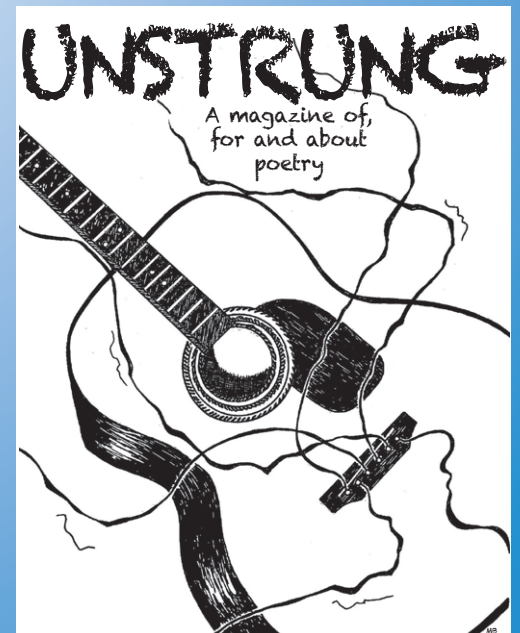
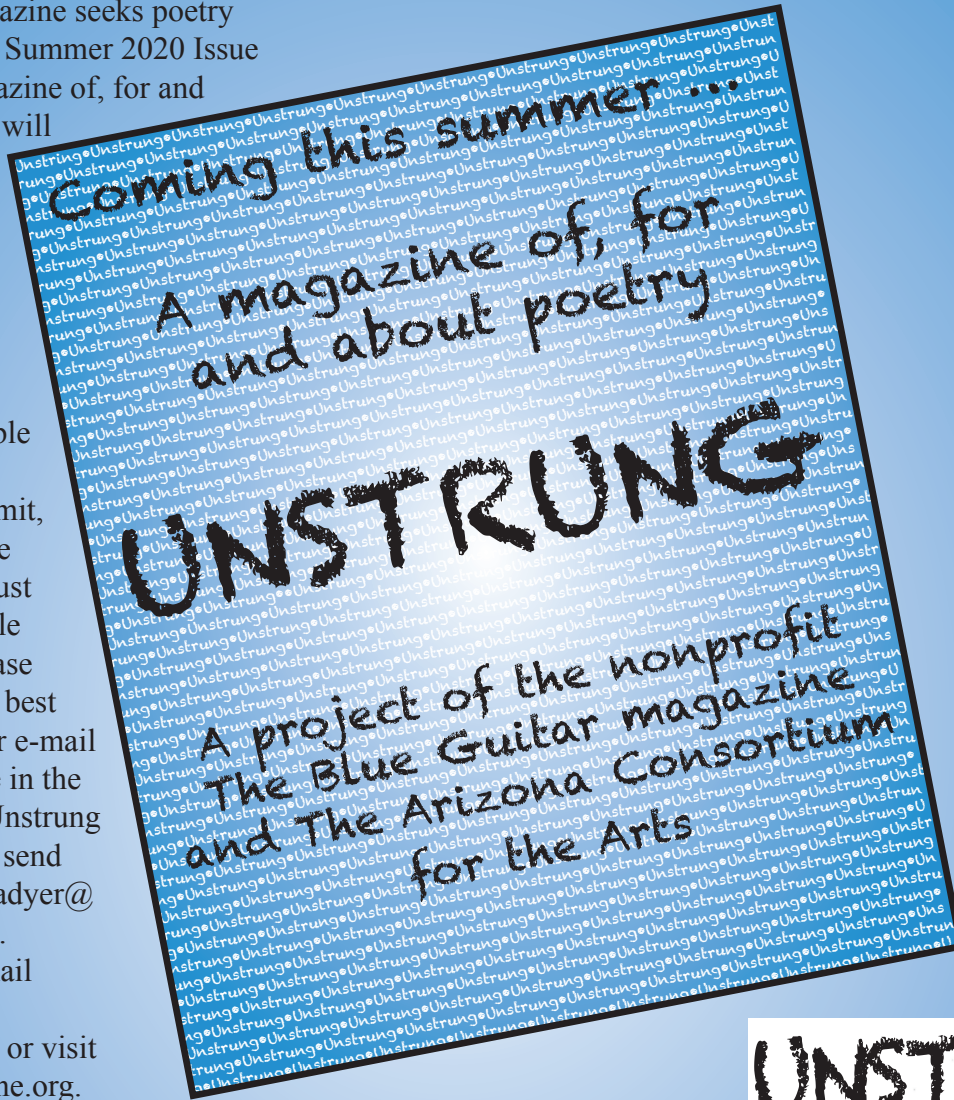
Fall 2019

A Call to Poets for the 2020 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2020 Issue of Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry. Submissions will

be accepted from June 1 through July 4. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, e-mail Rebecca at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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



A Call to Writers for The Blue Guitar Jr.

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

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks literary submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who write for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2020, in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — all geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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

A Call to Artists for The Blue Guitar Jr.

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

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks art submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who create art for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2020, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the artist must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple mediums; up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name, contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Please include your name and the best way to contact you. To submit or for more information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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



A Call to Writers for Spring 2020

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Spring 2020 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 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. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

A Call to Artists for Spring 2020

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Spring 2020 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Any artists who work in any visual art media, are 18 years or older and are part- or full-time Arizona residents can submit. It is free to submit and up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name and contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.



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

“Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar.”
— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens’ 1937 poem “The Man With the Blue Guitar.”
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Number 2
Fall Issue
FREE!

*“Things
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