

The Blue Guitar



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Editor’s Note

On a Saturday in April, I watched a Poetry on the Corner performance by Suzanne Steinberg.

I met the Arizona artist for the first time the weekend before at the 11th Annual Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts, held at Desert Ridge Marketplace, where I learned she would be reading her poetry at a traffic light across from a coffee shop on East Roosevelt Street in downtown Phoenix.

I arrived early. There are four corners there, and not knowing which one to wait at, I drank a cup of hot coffee at a table on the south side of the street and watched as people came and went.

When Suzanne arrived, she propped up a sign at the base of the traffic pole on the southwest corner of Roosevelt and Third streets. She stopped passers-by; some would say they were in a hurry and head off down the sidewalk or cross the street and others stopped for a while and listened as she read poems and sections from an upcoming book.

It was freeing watching art spring from a street corner.

A similar sentiment is felt when work on *The Blue Guitar* magazine over weeks changes from submissions to a compendium blossoming into a showcase for Arizona writers and artists. I hope you enjoy this one, Vol. 11 No. 1, as much as my wife and I did in putting it together.

– Co-Editor Richard H. Dyer Jr.



Co-Editor
Richard H.
Dyer Jr.

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Spring 2019

Blood Sisters

By Roxanne Doty

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The 19th Hole strip club over on West Van Buren's a pile of broken up stucco and roof tiles enclosed by a chain link fence. The neon logo's shattered into big chunks, but you can see the outline of a woman's torso and legs. A sign says Panera Bread coming soon. I still feel the energy of old Phoenix beat beneath the rubble of places like the 19th Hole, demolished motels and apartment complexes torn down for new upscale condos. It rises from cracks in the concrete, the summer heat and dense dusty air when the monsoon comes. Phoenix is different now. You can barely see the mountains any more for all the new high rises. I woke up one day no longer young. Forty years had passed, the city razed and renewed. But nothing completely goes away.

I was twenty-one years old in 1976. Hippy girls sold flowers on 16th Street and McDowell. Waylon Jennings played at JD's over at the Salt River bottom in Tempe. And my friend Chris worked at the 19th Hole. I used to hang around while she bartended, kept her company when I didn't have anything better to do. Sometimes I filled in for her when she had trouble getting a sitter for her two kids. It was a tiny place, barely enough room for a stage. Easy to miss in the daytime but at night blue neon flashed the outline of a nude woman in stiletto heels, one leg wrapped around a pole.

July 4, 1976, most of the customers had stepped outside to see fireworks shoot into the air from the state fairgrounds. Jack, the owner, was behind the bar fiddling with an old lava lamp. Bronze and orange colored wax had settled at the bottom.

"I think that thing's had it," Chris said.

Jack wrapped the cord around the bottom of the lamp and set it on the back counter next to the liquor bottles. The new

stripper sauntered over to the bar wearing a Grateful Dead T-shirt over a red lace G-string. Chris fixed her a sloe gin fizz. I wouldn't have known her but for the eyes. Green, the shade of bark on a palo verde tree. I'd never seen eyes that color. We had attended Central High a few years back and experienced a brief friendship. Her name was Sandy then, skinny as a stalk of reed, auburn hair chopped off short and jagged as if someone took a blunt razor to it. She wore stiff push-up bras, fake leather miniskirts and loads of Maybelline eye make-up. Everyone in high school knew about her reputation and added in their own sordid fantasies. Even the teachers. But she had grown into herself, hair long now past her shoulders. Chris introduced her to me as Shandy.

"I changed my name to Shandy," she said as we recognized each other.

The air conditioner in the 19th Hole left a lot to be desired, perspiration beaded around her hairline like tiny diamonds.

"Cool."

"Because of the Kris Kristofferson song. *Perfect Disguise*."

"I know that song."

"It's not a song. It's a fucking philosophy."

I remembered the way her eyes penetrated, like she could see through any bullshit. I could appreciate her point. The song said something about day dreams and nightmares and truth. A philosophy. The word made me think of a night class at Glendale Community College, where my academic career began and ended. "It's experience that counts most for jobs anyways," my mom said. "That's what they look for. Work experience, not some philosophy class."

Shandy and I hadn't been real close over a long period

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The author writes: "I live in Tempe, AZ and teach at Arizona State University. One of my short stories ('Turbulence,' Ocotillo Review) has been nominated for the 2019 Pushcart prize for short fiction. Other stories and poems have appeared in Forge, I70 Review, Soundings Review, Four Chambers Literary Magazine, Lascaux Review, Lunar Review, Journal of Microliterature, NewVerseNews, Saranac Review, Gateway Review and Reunion-The Dallas Review. Two other stories were finalists for the 2012 and 2014 New Letters' Alexander Patterson Cappon Prize for Fiction. I have recently completed my first novel, which is not yet published."

of time, but there were a couple of things that stayed with me. Like skipping out of school senior year. We took the bus to Park Central, smoked Virginia Slims extra-longs and sipped black coffee at J.J. Newberry's lunch counter while she told me about Kenny Geere and his two buddies. He took her to a big desert party west of Phoenix. She said she thought she was dating Kenny but her misperception became clear when the three of them took turns with her.

"I guess it's okay to rape a slut," she said.

I got a strong sensation she didn't want me to respond, just listen. I may have been the only person she ever told and I never said a word to anyone because in truth she wasn't all that far off the mark. Nobody would've cared.

The weekend after she told me about the rape, I had spotted her off by herself at a big party of underage drinkers who spilled out of a house in Maryvale into the yard and street. The left sleeve of her blue denim jacket was rolled up above her wrist, a lit cigarette dangled between two fingers. She held something between her right index finger and thumb. It glimmered when the dim light caught it at a certain angle as she made swift close movements across her left wrist. Blood trickled in thin threads down her palm beneath the swirl of cigarette smoke, then to the ground to mingle with butts and Budweiser pop-tops. I moved closer and passed her my paper cup full with rum and coke. She stopped the jerky movements and put the piece of glass in her pocket like a pack of matches or keys, something she'd take out again later. She showed me the old scars and new scabs up and down her arm. She swayed.

"Wanna be blood sisters?"

I hesitated, touched my own wrist.

"It won't hurt. I promise."

The rum and coke and sinsemilla pot swirled in my head as I held my left arm out to her. She took the piece of glass out of her pocket and I closed my eyes. Her hand wrapped around my wrist and pushed up the sleeve of my winter jacket. In one quick move, she scraped the shard of glass across my wrist, then pressed her own wrist against mine. The moisture of our blood felt warm against the cold night. I opened my eyes and she dropped my hand.

"Now we're sisters," she smiled. "Blood sisters."

That was the last time I'd seen her before the 19th Hole.

Shandy danced on weekends and Wednesday nights. One particular guy came in nearly every night.

"His name's Hank," she said. "Big tipper, friend of Jack's."

I watched him slide rolls of bills under her G-string, let his fat fingers linger awhile.

"You gotta expect that in a place like this," she said. "He's a pig, but there's worse."

I admired Shandy because I didn't have the guts to stand up on that little wooden stage and hope guys like Hank got turned on enough to leave a good wad of cash but not enough to get out of hand. And Shandy could really dance. I liked to watch her. Some of her moves approached the artistic, as if she was on a theater stage or someplace where classy people went. She could have danced at a fancy club if she'd had the chance, maybe even in Las Vegas. I'd had a fascination with her in high school and it came back to me. She seemed to exist on the brink of something far from our mundane lives. I felt beckoned to her world. But, I couldn't bring myself to leave the lipstick line at Resplenda Cosmetics.

I packaged the pure glosses in a cavernous room where florescent light exploded over assembly line workers. Rainbows of hot colored liquids; purple, plum, orange, fuchsia, pink, and a myriad of red shades poured from metal machines into plastic tubes that travelled through a tunnel to be cooled and capped, then branded with Resplenda labels. I placed the pure glosses into square foot cardboard boxes for shipping or the stockroom. Five other stations packaged the semi-gloss, matte finish, satin, creamy and sheers. The work numbed the mind, the only way to survive was with substances that altered your head a little but didn't call undue attention to yourself.

"You're lucky they hired you," my mom had said when I got the job. "They've got good benefits. And you get that free bag of cosmetics every month."

Kramer, the supervisor, made his rounds every morning when my shift began at 7 AM. He walked up and down the lines and said, "How are my girls?" His upper lip twitched when he smiled and he looked like he was on the verge of an accidental orgasm as he leaned in close and put his hands on girls' shoulders.

A few weeks after I had reconnected with Shandy at the 19th Hole, my co-worker on the semi-gloss line slid two small white capsules over to my workstation after lunch.

"What are these?"

"They'll give you a little buzz. Speed things up. Break the fucking boredom."

The whole assembly area vibrated. Psychedelic lipstick colors shot like liquid lightening into the tubes and flew down the assembly line to my station. I had three, four, five arms all reaching out to get the tubes and place them in the boxes. My throat was parched. We weren't allowed to have water at our workstations. I couldn't find any gum in my purse. Kramer watched, his eyes wide at how fast I packaged the lipsticks.

"Let's get these to the stockroom," he said, pulling a cart over to the end of the line.

I stacked the boxes on the cart and wheeled it down the

Continued from page 4

hallway towards the stockroom. Kramer walked beside me, twirling a large metal circular ring with one key. He unlocked the door, looked at me like he was some big shit in charge of important stuff. Rows of shelves lined the walls of the stockroom, full with boxes of lipsticks, eye make-up, foundation, nail polish, expensive perfumes and lotion. The shelves reminded me of the library at Central High except for cosmetics instead of books. A ladder on wheels stood in front of the shelves.

“These boxes need to go up there.” Kramer pointed to a couple of empty shelves almost to the ceiling. He told me to climb the ladder.

“I’ll pass them up to you.” He placed his hand against my back.

When I got several rungs up I looked down at him. His lips, quivering little pieces of flesh, half smiled, half smirked as if he might jerk off right then and there. He passed me a box and I put it on the shelf. He passed me the next one. When all the boxes had been shelved, I came back down the ladder. When I reached the bottom rung, Kramer stood in front of me and didn’t move. I smelled his stale breath, felt its heat. He put his right hand over his crotch, looked at me, then stepped back. I moved in front of him and ran out of the stockroom and back to my station. My insides were like the Mohave Desert by the time afternoon break came, my tongue a piece of sandpaper scraping the insides of my mouth.

I filled in for Chris at the 19th Hole that night. On busy nights, customers waited for their drinks at the bar. But this was a slow night, maybe five or six people, and I took drinks to them at the tables. Hank sat at a table with his buddy who left after a few tap beers. Hank drank shots of tequila and beer chasers. When I brought him his third he placed a fifty-dollar bill under my skirt’s gold hip hugger belt, the way he did with Shandy. He pressed it against my skin, opened his palm wide and kept his hand there, hot and damp, pumped his fingers into my skin. I backed away. The stuff from my co-worker had wired me up. I felt on edge.

Shandy stopped her routine at eleven thirty. The only customer left was Hank who looked like he’d had three too many shots of tequila.

“Last call,” I said.

He motioned for another. I brought it to him and started closing up. The Doors’ *Love Her Madly* played on the jukebox while I put clean glasses on a shelf behind the bar. Out of the corner of my eye I saw someone walk behind the bar toward me. At first I thought it was Shandy, sometimes she’d help me clean up after she changed. I turned around. Hank stood inches from me, his polo shirt wet under the arms, his belly hung over

his beige shorts. He pushed me against the shelf behind the bar, ran his hands through my hair and pressed himself so close I could barely move. When I squirmed, he pushed harder. I didn’t see Shandy, only the neon orange outline of the cowboy hat on a Jack Daniels wall sign by the entrance. Hank was drunk and unsteady but strong. He reached for the bottom of my miniskirt, yanked it above my waist. He pressed into me. As he fumbled with his belt buckle, I freed my right arm and reached to the counter behind me. My hand closed tightly around what I thought was a liquor bottle.

“Fuck off!” Shandy yelled.

Hank took a step back. But I lifted the bottle and broke it against his head. He grabbed for it but I hit him again. Fragments flew and a jagged edge dug into my palm. Hank put his hands to his head. I slammed what remained of the bottle against his head. Over and over.

“Jesus Christ, stop.” Shandy’s voice soft and calm, nearly a whisper.

I stopped, out of breath, looked at my cut hand and broken glass. It wasn’t a liquor bottle, but the lava lamp. I dropped it and it smashed to the floor. My hand was bleeding. Not bad, but along with the blood on Hank’s face it made me nauseous. Shandy handed me a towel, put ice in another one and held it to Hank’s left temple where blood spurt out.

“Let’s get you to your car,” she said to Hank and reached into his pocket for keys.

He let out a groan. “Fucking little bitch.”

I followed them. She unlocked the back door. Hank stumbled in and lay across the back seat.

“We’ve got to get him out of here.”

“You think he’s okay?”

She shrugged. “I guess.”

“What are we going to do?”

Shandy told me to clean up and lock up. I obeyed like a kid, swept up the broken pieces of the shattered lamp. Picked up the squishy, colored wax with some paper towels and emptied it all into the dumpster out back.

Shandy sat in the driver’s seat of Hank’s car.

“Follow me,” she said.

“Where?”

“We need to get him away from here. Far away.”

I followed in my old Chevy. We took Interstate 10 west, past the city. It felt like we drove for a long time, but I didn’t wear a watch and the clock in my car didn’t work. I didn’t know where the hell we were. Shandy exited onto a paved road. On the highway, tiny tail lights moved through the night, a sliver of moon hung from the sky, but the road around us was black except for our lights. She drove several more minutes then

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turned onto a dirt road which disappeared and became desert scrub. My car bounced and jerked over the rough ground. Finally, she stopped. I parked behind her and got out. Hank still lay across the back seat, the towel by his head soaked red. I felt dizzy when I looked at it. His fat belly rose and fell.

“He’s breathing.”

“Yeah.” Shandy reached under Hank’s side, found his pocket and pulled out his wallet.

He moaned but didn’t move.

“This story doesn’t get told to anyone.”

I nodded.

“He left the 19th Hole a little while before we closed up. That’s all we know.”

“Right.”

After my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I saw the outlines of jagged mountain spikes to our left. Shandy gazed at them as if mesmerized. Standing there in the silent desert, the 19th Hole and Hank and all that blood in the backseat seemed a bad dream. Then it hit me, why Shandy chose this place, when plenty of desert lay closer to the city.

“Is this where it happened?”

She just looked at me. I imagined Kenny Geere and his friends. And Sandy before she became Shandy. Her skinny, little high-school body. How scared she must have been. I walked over to Hank’s car and looked at the ignition. She had left the keys in. I took them out.

“What are you doing?”

I didn’t answer, just threw the keys into the black desert night as far as I could.

Before we got into my car, Shandy counted out \$160 in cash from Hank’s wallet. She reached for my hand and held it for a couple of seconds. I noticed the old scars along her left wrist.

“Everything’s cool.” She laid half the money in my palm.

I put the cash in my glove box and we drove back to the 19th Hole to get Shandy’s car. Then I went to the Golden Coach all-night diner. It was 5 AM and my shift at Resplenda started in a couple of hours. I sat at the counter and drank black coffee. When I was a kid, my grandma had an hourglass in her duplex over on Roosevelt and 22nd Street that fascinated me. The glass was all cracked and dull, but I loved to watch the sand sift through the neck when you turned it over. Slowly at first, then those tiny particles picked up speed until the last grain fell

and settled on the bottom. I’d turn it over and over like I could control time.

It was real hot out in the desert where we left Hank, the air felt like a furnace. I couldn’t remember if Shandy let the windows down in his car, or left the doors open. I couldn’t even remember for sure how far into the desert we left him. Maybe he’d come to and find his keys. Maybe a hiker would find him. I waited for the day to begin, swallowing bitter coffee until I thought I would gag. Finally, the first gray light of morning seeped in through the dirty windows.

The next night I was back at the 19th Hole and told Chris I’d accidentally knocked the lava lamp off the counter and broken it. A week went by before Jack said anything about Hank.

“You girls seen Hank in here lately?”

“Nope,” Chris said. “Unless he’s been here while I was off.”

I shook my head.

“He hasn’t been around for a while,” Shandy said.

Jack shrugged. “Weird.”

People disappear all the time. The Arizona deserts are full of skeletons. Maybe one of them is Hank’s, maybe not. Shandy quit the 19th Hole that fall just before Thanksgiving and I never saw her again. I used to think she made her way out to Vegas or Los Angeles or someplace where she could really dance. I quit Resplenda and got a job at one of the defense companies. It wasn’t much different except we made parts for missile systems instead of lipstick and mascara. The same long dim corridors and florescent lights over the assembly lines.

“You usually end up where you start out,” my mom had said when I got my first job at the lithium battery factory before Resplenda. “First job in an office, you’ll end up in an office. Start out in a factory; you’ll be in a factory twenty years later.” Eventually the defense companies left, except for a handful. Now, it’s all restaurants and banks and upscale coffee shops. Swank and sparkle. And chains like Panera Bread.

I’ve been coming to the Golden Coach all these years. It’s changed owners a few times, a paint job every now and then, and they added twelve booths when Gaslight Liquors next door closed down. But it’s not much different from forty years ago. I don’t know any customers personally, but it feels like sort of a community. I still have a tiny scar across my wrist from when I became Shandy’s blood sister. After all these years, it’s nearly invisible but I can see it. Sometimes at night I sit at the booth by the window and watch planes lined up in the sky waiting to land at Sky Harbor. They look like the moon’s been sliced up into little pieces that hover above the city.

A Poem By David Chorlton

From “Speech Scroll”

#15, #16, #17, #18, #19, #20

© 2019

Red light, haircut, green light:
the traffic stops and starts
while a man steps out in front of it
with a twelve-by-eighteen card
upon which the offer is
for eight ninety-nine at the barber
set back in the arcade.
Trucks pass him by,
and sports cars and
motorcycles, sedans and a jeep,
and every now and then
a lone pedestrian. The Earth turns,
the universe expands, the noonday sun
turns cartwheels over
the golf course pond. The unemployment
rate comes down, goes up,
and the hourly rate
for leisure stays the same.

On a gauzy night
with the eclipse behind a curtain
the Earth’s shadow moves
across the sky
and tides are pulled
through a mystery’s eye.
There’s only a sliver
to see while the rest creates a pact
with darkness to withhold
its secrets the way a pass-
or curse-word keeps its power
when it remains unspoken,
until the ice light washes
back down on the trees, the grass
and the water where the moon
came down to drink
and turned into a Snowy egret
at the edge of morning’s reeds.

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David Chorlton is a transplanted European, who has lived in Phoenix since 1978. His poems have appeared in many publications online and in print, and often reflect his affection for the natural world, as well as occasional bewilderment at aspects of human behavior. A recent collection of poems is “Bird on a Wire” from Presa Press, and The Bitter Oleander Press published “Shatter the Bell in My Ear,” his translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant. A new book, “Reading T.S. Eliot to a Bird,” is out from Hoot ‘n’ Waddle, based in Phoenix.

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It hurts. Every day the aches
wake up, and the pains never went
to sleep. It hurts
when the weather changes and
Oxycontin only makes it worse. The ocean
can't cough up the plastic
it's been forced to swallow, while nitrates
have given the Ohio River a migraine and all
the medications on television
don't help. The side effects
keep flowing, state to state, across
the world. Britain suffers
from amputation with no anaesthetic
while Yangquan's lungs
have become a cloud. We'd put ice
on the wounds, but it's melting
fast and depression
moves into its place.

The sky drinks back the starlings
from the grass behind
the house. National unrest
remains the order of the day
but the skyline waits calmly
for the mail, which competes
with the night to be first.
No sign of the truck, just fading
light and a rustling
when the rats come out from
underground. They are such
gymnasts when they balance
on the edge of darkness
and run for the next
few minutes of their lives
with noses in the future,
tails in the past and the now
held tight in their tiny feet.

Today weighs lightly on the mountain's back.
A thrasher on the mailbox
waits for news.
The trees along the street soak up
what light remains
now that starlings have stripped
the feeder to its metal frame
and the president is lonely
with nothing but his power
for company. Drops of sunshine
hang from the palm fronds' tips
and a gilded moment rests
between the saddle and the walled-
in shadows where
the last doves peck the ground.
Talks resume tomorrow.
Cats at the window want what they can't reach.
The dark world awakens.

Three stars and an evil spirit
shine in the morning sky
as the peaks on the horizon shake
off the dust from night. Yesterday's
unfinished arguments resume:
a woodpecker defends
his suet from the starlings, a militia
defends a few yards of the border
and the Cooper's hawk
is panic when he glides
and lands in a place to survey the sudden
emptiness before him. He's gray
and graceful, with a spark
of adventure in his eye. He casts
a shadow wider
than he could ever be, and shows
how when a fence is built
fear can still perch on it.

Sahitha Vuddagiri

Chandler Artist



“Lucky to Be Alive”

Oil

August 2018

The artist writes, “I’m Sahitha Vuddagiri, a 14-year-old girl, a freshman at BASIS Chandler. Recently I started an organization called Easel Arts Inc. that raises and donates money through art instruction, weekly classes, workshops and selling art. In 2017 and 2018, I donated over \$6,000. I hold week-long workshops over fall and spring breaks, make greeting cards and sell them, and teach regular private lessons to students of all ages. I’ve been passionate about art from a very young age and realized that I could turn my hobby into a means of helping others. My goal was to start an organization that would raise money through art education, with the proceeds donated to outreach programs assisting others locally and in other countries. I have been painting from an early age, and over the years I mastered a variety of techniques and mediums. My goals this year are to expand our outreach and double the funds earned and donated last year, teach at community clubs, schools and retirement homes on a regular basis.” More details are at easelarts.com.



Sahitha Vuddagiri

Chandler Artist



**“Define Beauty”
Oil
July 2018**

“As an artist, I work hard to create paintings that speak both to me and others about the hidden beauty of certain things that can only be revealed in the right atmosphere. In my process, I make sure to spend extra time on a certain part of the painting to create depth and show meaning. I do not want to just capture the image with my brushes but give it life with careful strokes.”

- Sahitha Vuddagiri

Sahitha Vuddagiri

Chandler Artist

“Blinding”
Oil
January 2018



Sahitha Vuddagiri

Chandler Artist



**“Nobody Knows”
Oil
January 2019**

Sahitha Vuddagiri

Chandler Artist

“Before You Lie”
Inks, spray paint,
acrylics, oils
March 2019



2 Poems By David Njagi

{Denouement}

© 2019

Lie still my wavering soul.
This is your end.
Wishes yearning for the past.
To relish in a dream of what once was my failed intellect.
Now adrift in a world unknown to me.

Swallowed by the sands of time.
The clock is broken but still ticks.
Taunting my last embers forever.
An infinite loss against this waging war.
Sleep and you'll find your small peace.
Dejection forever engrossing my frayed soul.

The frail being that is my creature.
Shall churn into the ash that fills this place.
Hands blackened by passion.
One with the land.
This is my home.

Forlorn glares turn to me from the nil.
Remnants of a veiled collective.
This is my penance.
And I am their graveless wanderer



David Njagi was born in Georgia, 19 years ago. His parents are originally from Kenya. When he was 8 years old, he moved to Arizona and has been a resident since then. Funneled through strong emotions, his writings are inspired by musical genres such as metal core and djent metal. The song, "Agora," by Invent Animate was a major inspiration for some of his writings. He is in the works of building his own computer and has experience with stained glass. His recommended music are bands such as Motionless In White, Oceans Ate Alaska, and Spiritbox.

Ebb & Woe

© 2019

I think that was the day when you were born.
Slight whisper turned into an abhorrent sight.
A bi-product of this endless cycle.
No one knows you exist or where you hide.
It hurts to know there is no one there.
But I can still feel you.

Left staring into the universe.
And yet my eyes are still frostbitten blind.
Sunken in his hole.
What have I become?
What is left of me?
Tell me where am I.
For I can't see.

You helped me survive the timeless night.
But my charm slowly rotted away.
I question myself everyday...
Was it worth it?

Lost within the confines of my mind.
Torn from my place on this Earth.
Silently watching.
Losing my sanity.
Understanding that it's all just madness.

Nothing to offer for the ones who remain.
Nor anything worthy to lose.
Just a forlorn creature.
Growing tired of the abuse.

Emotions burnt to ash.
The voices gently turn to screams.
Memories I can't control.
Waves of self loathe rolling into my skin.
What broke me?
Will I ever know?
I no longer ponder the same.
The flooding winds over my stagnant body will never wither me away.
Forever a monolith.
Nothing will break the stillness.

3 Poems By Miguel Leal

Heavenly Father

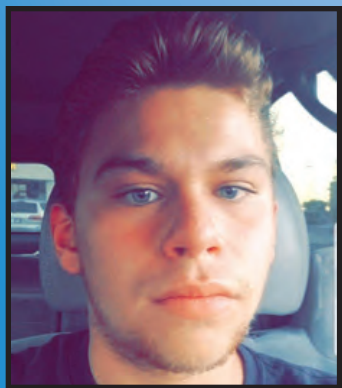
© 2019

Heavenly Father, please hear me tonight. I need so much guidance to live my life right. Sometimes the pressure is so hard to bear. I often wonder if anybody cares. How can I wake up and face a new day, knowing I must live my life in this crazy way?

Heavenly Father, forgive all my sins. Give me strength to resist the wild fire, which I desire. Help me to escape temptation and the fire ... please help my family, whose eyes silently plead for me ... help me not to do wrong and help them pray for me. God bless our mothers, who cry every night, worrying we'll be killed by someone in a fight.

Heavenly Father, please answer my prayers. Please let me know that you're listening up there. When will it end? What's it all for? To prove to my homies that I'm down, hardcore? Sometimes or a knife in my side?

Heavenly Father, please hear me tonight. Show me the way, Lord, show me the light. Give my heart peace so I won't have to fight. I thank you for forgiveness. I thank you for hearing my prayers.



Miguel Leal is a recent resident of Mesa, originally from Los Angeles. He is 19 years old and became fascinated with the Hip Hop of the '90s at the age of 2. He listened to musicians such as Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Eazy E, and Tupac. His best friend, "King Lil G," told him to never give up on writing because "writing will get you somewhere great in life." Leal uses writing to communicate his story of being in a broken family, under a single-parent household, and his experience with street gangs. His message to his readers is to "Never give up on your dreams, because your dreams can come true if you let them."

Choices in Life

© 2019

I don't think I let the people in my life down by making the wrong choices. I think I let them down by convincing myself that I didn't have a choice to begin with.

Brotherhood

© 2019

Don't call me brother unless you know its meaning ... Don't call me brother unless we are brothers. Just because we might have things in common, doesn't mean we are brothers. Brothers have simple rules to live by. We don't lie or steal from a brother. We will never leave a brother behind. We constantly watch out for each other. If I know you have my back, rest assured, I will always have yours. Call on me any time that you might be in need and I will come ... even if I have to bust through locked doors. I will fight for you or even give up my life to save yours. Those that say "you can't choose family" don't understand the meaning of "Brotherhood." I choose to call you "my brother" for life, through good and bad times.

We Are Next

By Thomas Hulen

© 2019

Feb. 21, 2019 — Somewhere in drought-stricken North Africa

The sun was blasting down on the parched barren landscape. Swirls of dust rushed past the people as they weaved between the dead goats. It was too hot and dry for the flies, and the beetles to be out. The goats were shriveled masses of hair covered with dust and sand. Fur-covered goat mummies! It was too hot and dry for the goats to rot. The smell of death was faint.

In the distance, dust devils danced across the plain to the sound of the wind striking the ears of the people as they traveled. There were no vultures twirling overhead; no dogs tearing at the dead goats; only the people were alive.

One person, a shepherd, led the others. As he spoke, he slowly and deliberately moved his hands to add emphasis to his story. After what seemed like hours, but was only minutes, the people approached a dirt basin carved out of the earth.

This had been an earthen tank or reservoir to store runoff when it rained. It was strewn with dead animals. Before many of them died, they tried digging for water as evidenced by the numerous narrow, hoof-shaped scrapes. This is where the dogs died.

“The rains are late, too late for our goats, too late for us,” reported the shepherd. No one said anything as the winds picked up speed and gusted past them. The gust was strong enough to blow the hat off one person. Another person hacked to clear their throat of dust.

The shepherd told the others that he and his family have experienced droughts before. They would lose a few goats, but not all of them. “This time, all the goats are gone,” he said.

While pointing with his hand towards a distant mountain, the shepherd explained there was water. He said, “We can get water for ourselves there, but without the goats and money, we cannot buy food.”

He looked at the dead goats and said, “We are next.”



The author writes: “I am a lifelong Arizona resident who loves the outdoors, and has explored much of Arizona. I studied life sciences, anthropology, and philosophy at university and graduated from Prescott College. Most of my career has been at museums and with environmental and conservation organizations. I have written extensively on environmental topics. I live in Tempe, AZ.”

McKenna Ring

Avondale Artist



**“Flower Girl 1”
Gelatin silver print
2018**



McKenna Mai Ring was born in Phoenix, AZ, but was raised in the city of Avondale. She currently attends Estrella Mountain Community College and will be graduating in the fall of 2019 with an AA and an AAFA. In 2017, Ring worked to produce a hand-painted umbrella that was to be auctioned by the Umbrella Project to help build up youth programs in low-income communities. She has shown her work in the Agua Fria Show of the Arts in 2017, the Estrella Mountain Student Juried Art Show for two consecutive years, and will be featured in a student art show at the Avondale library in April 2019. Her work has also been featured in the Mariposa Literary Review in 2018. Ring currently works as a sales associate at As You Wish, a pottery painting studio located in Glendale, AZ.

McKenna Ring

Avondale Artist



**“Flower Girl 2”
Gelatin silver print
2018**

“I took my first film photography my senior year of high school in 2017. What followed was an obsession with capturing the human body interacting with its surroundings, especially plants. I have always found the human body fascinating, beautiful and unique. This is evident in my other works of art, such as my paintings. My desire to share the beauty of the human body directly relates to my loathing of how society views beauty. I have seen how society’s standards of beauty can directly affect the way that young people view themselves negatively, particularly in young girls. My work is meant to reflect the natural beauty of the human race. I try to depict a range of races and body types in my work, so that there is no shortage of representation. This theme has then made its way into my photographs. I prefer to photograph people with flowers because it brings another level to the piece. Humans and flowers are both of nature, though one is seen as perfect. I want to make people see that humans and flowers are the same: beautiful and unique.”

- McKenna Ring

McKenna Ring

Avondale Artist



“Flower Girl 3”
Gelatin silver print
2018

McKenna Ring

Avondale Artist



"Reflection"
Gelatin silver print
2018

McKenna Ring

Avondale Artist



**“In The Sun”
Gelatin silver print
2018**

4 Poems by Betty Mermelstein

Taormina

© 2019

Aging lenses sweep down the terraced hills
Supporting patios of couples lingering over wine,
Opening up to pebble beaches offering sea blankets to cover their closeness.
Focus shifts to tulle and lace lightly running to bliss below.
Musicians on the piazza cast their notes into the hearts of the crowd
As wedding pairs come into view posing under Mt. Etna's trailing smoke,
Spewing uncertain future mixed with the thrill of anticipation.
Ionian moonlight is not lost on the one alone at the rail
Accepting the role of observer.
The allure is for all.



Betty is a retired Mesa teacher, living in beautiful Gold Canyon with her husband. She has had various articles, poems, and short humorous essays published, as well as having self-published ebooks for children and adults. Her writing is showcased on her website: <https://www.punkynotes.com/>. Betty is passionate about her family, traveling, and ballroom dancing. She is a volunteer through dancing and by being a Citizen Archivist with the National Archives Catalog.

All That is Believable

© 2019

All that is believable
is absorbed in my mind
spurring determination
presenting possibilities
bringing hope for accomplishment
then blurred by misstatements
choked in impediments
fragmenting the potential
until the single truth is
All that is believable

All that is believable
Is seen in this little countenance
With eyes sweeping inside me
To grasp my knowledge and
Convictions
Trusting in a lifetime of acceptance
And assurance
The goodness of the earth
Amplified in this little face
Becoming
All that is believable.

Message Missed

© 2019

joy in loving
seeing and giving
but falsely returned
piercing the living—
never enough were the
words of the heart,
unrecognized,
then torn apart
to swirl and echo
hoping to be heard,
no acceptance
is only assured
but as time directs
perhaps they'll be missed
and remembered as true
too late, dismissed

The Sunflower

© 2019

The tournesol lifts its face to rays
upon the fields,
waving in grounded companionship,
seeking warmth to nurture its roots.
Unaware of its status as an icon of
the land of the twisting Dordogne.
Playing to those seeking soil to soul
and tempting returns with its image.

A Poem By Paula Ashley

The Chicken, The Cat & the Coyote

© 2019

& don't forget the hawk.

It was a cool December morning in Phoenix
when my husband called to me
still lingering in bed
to come quick to the kitchen
where a big white chicken was clinging
to the window sill
pecking urgently at the window.

I swung my legs over the side of the bed
pulled on my cozy blue fluffy robe
& slipped into warm slippers.
Meanwhile the chicken
was flapping frantically about the back yard.

We knew she belonged to the neighbors
across the equestrian trail behind our house.
My husband opened the back gate
but the chicken refused our chasing
& shooing her in that direction.

It was getting late.
He had to leave for work.
I thought, oh my, the back gate is unlocked
there is an unruly chicken out here
& I am not dressed.

Continued on page 30

Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer who earned her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She lives in Glendale, Arizona, with her husband and an abundance of birds that hang out on the solar fountains in their backyard. Paula has had poems published in numerous journals and has poems in the anthologies "Poetry and Prose for the Phoenix Art Museum" by Four Chambers Press, "Weatherings" by Future Cycle Press, and "Our Community" by the ASU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Her award-winning sonnet, "My Son," is included in the "Better Than Starbucks" print edition for January 2019.



Continued from page 29

Back inside
I heard the tap-tap of chicken feet
on the roof. Looking out
where I usually gaze at a rise of black
basalt strewn hills, I saw
a coyote gracefully sidestepping
along the top of the backyard wall.

Up in our old ash tree
the feral cat who adopted our yard for shelter
a good ten years before
was balanced on a limb. I had never seen
that cat in the tree before. On the limb
above the cat, perched a huge hawk.

As had happened once before
when my mind was hijacked by a computer intruder
the pain which ratchets down my spine into my hip
& slides on down my thigh into my knee
& on down to my ankle & right foot was gone.

One orthopedic guy, I shall not acknowledge him
with the appellation of surgeon, yanked my leg
into a totally untenable position
causing me to cry out for him to stop
told me I needed an immediate hip replacement.

Chicken shit, I thought.
I had not been able to sit in the lotus position
for at least ten years but
there had not been any pain before.
I just wanted the pain to stop so I could
walk my two miles a day out my front door
down to Skunk Creek where I could
sit in the shade on the bank
& watch the hummingbirds dip noisily
into the penstemon growing there.

Continued on page 31

Continued from page 30

I did go out for my morning walk
shorter now around the neighborhood.
Neighbors & the mail lady
had sighted the fowl banging
on their kitchen windows
swimming in their swimming pools
frantically attracting their attention.

Back home I found the cat still up the tree.
Every couple of hours it carefully
turned itself around & looked down
the trail in the other direction.
Night passed. Morning found
white chicken wings strewn across
my neighbor's front-yard lawn.

The hawk had given up & left the scene.
The chicken was dead.
The coyote left the neighborhood.
The cat, who had already exceeded
his nine lives, who had watched & waited,
came down from the tree.
My hip, still painful, was still mine.

Kathryn Uster

Lake Havasu City Artist



“Colorado River Morn”
Paper collage
2015



A country girl, raised in the Berkshire Mountains of Connecticut and in the Hudson Valley of Upstate New York, Kathryn Uster has a great affection for the natural world. Upon moving to Arizona in the mid-1980s, she worked to obtain a master's degree at Northern Arizona University while teaching full time. As an artist and an educator, she has taught from preschool to college level. She has been president and a board member of Havasu Art Guild. She also teaches art privately at Cisco Studios, a shared space with her musician and video-editor husband. Kathryn is currently creating in various mediums such as painting, graphic and digital arts. Uster's Fine Art of Collage Studio is in the desert of northwest Arizona in Lake Havasu City. Kathryn is a member of the International Museum of Collage, Assemblage and Construction and has an abstract 3-dimensional piece in the permanent Fluxus collection and included in their book, "The Secret Lives of Artists," by collage artist Cecil Touchon. She has also been juried into the Arizona Art Alliance and the National Collage Society. Her works have been exhibited at the Phoenix Museum Gallery at Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix and was in The Arizona Valentine Exhibit for the state's 100th birthday. Learn more at www.UsterCollageArt.com.

Kathryn Uster

Lake Havasu City Artist



“Havasu”
Paper Collage
2009

As man’s sense of progress destroys, Kathryn works to bring about beauty from the ruin. Working from her mind’s eye, each paper is torn or cut, then placed and adhered. Each one-of-a-kind paper collage impression is painstakingly created by reusing, repurposing or painting found papers. Discards become the palette from which bold colors and a unique style emerges. With small pieces of papers, Kathryn tries to draw the viewer into her perspective to take a “mind hike” into areas that are so quickly disappearing. Her choice of color palette was inspired by the late 19th century painters of the Fauvist Movement. Exhibiting her art across the tri-state area, her work is collected nationally and internationally. Always with a love of the natural, Kathryn developed her collage work starting in 1987 using the paper emanating from precious trees and discarded without care, to create beauty from a disposable society.

- Kathryn Uster

Kathryn Uster

Lake Havasu City Artist



"Summer's Rage"
Paper Collage
2006

Kathryn Uster

Lake Havasu City Artist



“Morning Has Broken”
Paper Collage
2002

Kathryn Uster

Lake Havasu City Artist



**“Pan’s Retreat”
Paper Collage
2001**

A Poem By Lauren M. Weinand

Farewell

Why
 return to
 memories of pain

When
 I can remain
 in bliss

How
 do apologies heal
 if they are missed

Whose
 ego ever made
 a man whole

Where
 peace is found
 therein lies my soul

What
 then is there
 left to say

Farewell
 God gives
 when He takes away

Farewell

Reflecting on relationship trauma and healing, Lauren M. Weinand is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Arizona College of Medicine-Tucson. Her poetry has been published in the American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal. The author thanks her late friend, Meikil Addie Berry, for her profound love and formative, poetic mentorship.



5 Poems by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Saint Francis in Biology Class

© 2019

under-and-overheard

*Why intone the tedious,
well meaning, "Bless you"
when the sneeze itself is a gift,
reminding that we are here,*

*alive, vulnerable,
modestly shamed maybe,
momently and uncontrollably,
humanly*

*noisy and already blessed
by and for some holy purpose.
We are charged
to evolve!*

*

Two Students Observe:

*"The Scorpion
is all he needs
to be
and
no more"*

"Like Jesus?"

*

*—all we need
to be
and no
more*



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.

The End of Thinking

© 2019

responding to some poems by Louise Glück

How hard to think.
How much harder
when you suddenly discover
that you are the rear end
of the severed worm.

Or the severed thumb
of a starfish—
and how did you know
which of the five points
was the thumb?

And even if you think
you're sure about the issue
what have the distractive
possibilities of the question done
to your treasured sense of discrete identity?

How hard to think
when you suddenly discover
that you are the front end
of the severed worm,
because you find yourself

altogether bumfuzzled
by the anatomical probability that
you should be able to miss the hinder half
more than it is able to miss you.
But you don't, can't, know.

Now, embrangled in refrangible questions,
you surrender what you might have thought
was your abiding identity to some wriggling shadow
of someone else's scattered ends of incarnation.
Poet that you are, you discover for yourself
the lachrymose end of the annelid.

The Fourth Deer

© 2019

Carol whispered from among
the season's last raspberries,
and we stopped in honor
of three velvet-antlered stags,
themselves stopped in timid
honor at our attention.

They moved on, or seemed to.
Had almost dissolved
when Carol stopped us again.
Like a new dimension, a fourth stag!
But the others had gone beyond
the rise to the next privacy.

So we stood here, Carol and I,
in the midst of raspberry bushes,
birch, aspen, time, and quandary.
Was he one of the first three,
or truly another, now gone too?
Were there three or four?

Were there no deer at all
where three or four will always be?
Do those features obscure time
for a time of trance now,
or obliterate an end to time itself?
How can it matter, to us?

How can it matter to *our* deer,
who did not cavil over
a count of *their* humans?
I suppose we will never know
how many stags possessed us
in those few minutes.

It matters only that they *are*,
maybe waiting for us
to stay with them still,
who kindly taught us for a moment
how to forget our intrusive tally
for the gracious matter of silence,

Continued on page 41

to re-create out of the bounds
of memory our common elders'
shared decorum, to abandon time
to landscape shared, to share
the supple courtesy and make
moments of perfect language—

Not a word.

But then the benediction
of such sound as the deer have shared
with us—a shuffle in the undergrowth—
white tails like numena disappearing
offer us a sign of evolved deceit:
acknowledge appropriate dignity.

Invite the visiting predator—
honor us with the chance to attack,
misdirect us to miss the mortal heart.
To arm us with a potential of intent
unintended is to invite us to share
the touch of common fate.

Bison Head in Datil

© 2019

Mid-August, 1962

An annual stop in Datil,
another burger, greasy fries—
greasy food-and-fuel-stop
defacing in human desperation
the raw beauty of an abandoned
stretch of desert.

Another summer visit
with the buffalo head mounted
on the smoke-blackened wall by the door,
sweat-shiny
with years of griddle-smoke
since its petty execution

by some city-hunter with a rifle
and just enough space
between technology and the beast
to get a shot off into the Pleistocene heart
a few sunny yards away—
a cringing broadside.

Dad's '58 Fleetwood,
as misnamed as the buffalo is,
the car a bison-*manque*,
lumbering on Firestones
that flobber and slip on
soggy shocks and tarmac.

Jack gets to hold tight
to the over-reamed battery cables,
tight to the terminals—
Don't touch the metal!—
dead dangerous game so close
to dead dangerous game,

the miracle of the bison's agility
and its impossible strength and will—
the lumbering
morbid-obese Cadillac
desiccating with us
in the petrified grime of industry.

In Security Malignant

© 2019

He doesn't smile,
this child behind the fence rails,
small boy whose face fills some part
of me with my own face,

unsmiling and perfectly—
something like
but not really
happy.

Happenstance—
a property of grace.

He looks through the fence rails,
the boy who needn't smile.
I look through the rails—
wrought iron

decorated at the top of each rail
with a black acorn I think, or pineapple—
something innocent, menacing—
petty decorations fading . . .

*

I do not remember.
I haven't looked that far into the wider gloom for . . .
I don't remember beyond
the single focus that . . .

*

I look through the rails.
I approach the face of the small boy
whose unsmiling face
is a glory of degrading peace

and as I approach,
the fence decorations recede
into some ether beyond my narrowing range of sight,
and the rails close in on his face and on my eyes.

Continued on page 44

Continued from page 43

The rails thicken in my approach,
or the approach of those rails toward me
and thicken.

They thicken, I see, say, into bars

thick, black, corroded
like the two faces in the poem
that dissolve with the poem
behind the malignant smear of bars.

*

Of wall.

Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



“Rose”

Digital art with Samsung Tablet-Sketchbook
January 2019



Angikar Sarkar, 31, is professionally a software engineer and an arts and music aficionado. He is originally from India and completed until third year in fine arts at the Indian Academy of Fine Arts. In 2009, he came to the states to pursue graduate studies at Texas. Since 2013, he has been staying in north Phoenix for professional connections. His wife, Samayita, is the biggest motivation behind his arts. Whenever he gets spare hours, Angikar involves himself in fine arts, poetry and music. Acrylic and watercolor are his specializations, but he also finds immense pleasure in charcoal art, sketching, pastel touches and tempera. He believes that music and rhythm exist everywhere in this universe, maybe in different forms and shapes. As an artist, he wants to explore that symphony and correlate that rhythm with lives, myths, mythologies, objects and nature. Symphony brings happiness and happiness breeds excellent artworks, which is where his arts are coming from. The artist can be contacted by email: thisisangikar@gmail.com, or phone: 409-210-9116. He is also reachable by Facebook: [facebook.com/angikar.sarkar](https://www.facebook.com/angikar.sarkar), where he also showcases different albums of his artworks.

Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



“Nature always wears the colors of the spirit,” Ralph Emerson once said. It is true, indeed. It is actually impossible to portray the actual beauty of nature in a mere canvas with a few colors and brushes in hand. The vastness is more than that. This is therefore a very miniscule effort to depict the beauty of nature. “Every flower is a soul blossoming in nature,” and rose is the queen among them.

- Angikar Sarkar

“King of Good Times”

Digital art with Samsung Tablet-Sketchbook

January 2019

4 Poems by cat mac mechanical tin cans

© 2019

emily watches ten channels simultaneously
turnips in her ears she's blown

her reptilian circuits her head moves her

*there is a number i've got and an actual
person answers and tells you what the weather is.*

locating herself cars high-tail

pyrogenics.
at English Bay
blow herons from their nests
emily cannot hear her self-

hypnosis tape jabs in another shellac-laden sweetie
downs tea with maltitol sorbitol
anything at all at all

feels like a feedlot everyone
tailgating

the herd trapped in their mechanical tin cans

chewing the ferrous taste of blood on emily's tongue.



Catherine "cat mac" McNeil has been on tour with her first book of poetry "under the influence" published by Bedazzled Ink in September 2016. Her second book, "emily and elspeth," is looking for a publisher. She has been widely published throughout Canada, the U.S. and England (Event, Sinister Wisdom, Queer Chroma, Room). She rainbirds in Arizona and summers in Vancouver with her birddog and cat. She is also a singer-songwriter, and her music can be heard at catmacmusic.com.

in the middle

© 2019

emily's tires smack the pavement
pulls off Highway 101
heading west in her wet purple Honda
she knows the etiquette

of the highway drives in the middle of the lane squawks

at anything at all off center glances rearview for
the man with the cam panning

terrified of cars flying around her she's been hit
more times than she can count

her car rises as her right front tire pulverises roadkill shit
probably a cat they'd be better off at home declawed

fur and feathers under tired tires birds pigeons squirrels
how many has she buried this year?

glad she's not paid to be a dead critter-ridder
scent of critters roasting on Great Northern Way
the driver in front of her put on the drag emily honks

em loves her horn car ahead screeches to a halt
churlish yellowbeard climbs out.
marches towards her bellowing pointing

emily rolls up her window puts her car in reverse cracks
into the vehicle behind her

blackbeard climbs out shaking fist

brakes. against

© 2019

emily was brought up in the Rockies
where mountain women jammed “up on rocky top”
drank from a nearby stream

now she flaps her wings
head down grass in her good ear
mustard seeds the other

voices her right temporal lobe all set
to go go

everyone familiar to her brakes against the
sound of a semi shooting up Barclay brrr floats

above her street is deposited within her three walls
her house tells her what to do bladder of the sky

breaks open frogs smack the

telegenic delivery girl head shaped like a speaker phone
skateboarding down Barclay

sizzling pizza in a box melts
her left paw em awakens

her right hand
a clawhammer

clenched

Holy Week

By cat mac

© 2019

Holy Thursday

The five o'clock sun strikes the side of the Mathesons' East Vancouver home. Beyond the house, blue mountain ridges, like sleeping lions, cradled the city's North Shore. Twelve-year-old Barbara runs through a sprinkler while her twin Scott hangs back, not wanting to make the worn patch of grass bigger. He'd probably be blamed. Barbara runs up to the hose, disconnects it from the sprinkler and chases Scott with it.

Downstairs in the Mathesons' basement, Shelagh, older than the twins by a year, vacuums under a chintz-covered couch. She hates vacuuming but her dog Chip's hair is everywhere. The place looks a shambles and she knows it won't get done unless she does it. She wonders, there was a glass like this under the couch last week. She bites the skin on the inside of her right cheek and sniffs the contents of the glass. Alcohol. Yech. She shivers. Dad must have left it there when he was in a rush. It reminds her of last summer when the family were leaving for church on Sunday morning and her dad hadn't come home the previous evening. Shelagh was the first person to the car that morning. When she opened the front door, there he was, asleep on the front steps, his head on his shoes for a pillow, a liquor bottle with a bit of gold liquid left inside it resting on its side beside him. Shelagh imagined shrinking her father, putting him into that bottle, sticking a cork into it and pushing it out to sea.

She pours the contents of the glass down the laundry room sink and heads upstairs to the kitchen to see if she can coerce any of the other kids to help her clean downstairs.

"Mo-o-o-m," Shelagh whines from the base of the staircase. "Why isn't Scott helping me?"

Her mother drags on her Rothmans, slowly exhales. Smoke tumbles from her nostrils, cascades from her mouth. Mrs. Matheson has a love-hate relationship with cigarettes. She'd love to quit, but can't seem to, so she smokes whenever she can. Last year she had a throat operation in which they removed nodules from her vocal chords and that didn't stop her. She sat outside the Heather Pavillion at Vancouver General Hospital with patients that had visible holes in their throats from cancer and smoked. She desperately tried to quit for Lent last year, during the spring of 1970, but when her husband came home with smoke on his breath on the first day, she gave up. She'd wanted Lent to be different this year. She wanted to go to mass every day during Holy Week and here it was Holy Thursday and

they were only now getting to mass for the first time that week. She would have taken the kids without Mark if their second car hadn't been repossessed. She wanted her kids to understand the true meaning of Lent — how Christ fasted in the desert for forty days before he was crucified, died and was buried for their sins. The least they could do was give up one of their habits for forty days in memory of him. Oh, when could Holy Thursday be a holy Thursday, Good Friday be a good Friday and Easter Sunday be a celebration of their earthly sacrifice and Christ's resurrection?

"Scott! Barbara!" Mrs. Matheson shrieks. "Do you want to be grounded?" Two pairs of damp, nymph-like footsteps bound through the backdoor.

"Dad said we could turn on the sprinkler if our homework was done!" Scott shouts up to his Mom, who is wrapped in fine clouds of smoke and disappointment. Her eyes are floating, one eye in the chimney, the other in the pot, as Shelagh's dad would say. She squints at Shelagh through her thick glasses. A second cigarette burns in the ashtray.

"When did he tell you that?" she mumbles under her breath. "Last Christmas?" She continues out loud, "I told you the rec room had to be sparkling by five tonight!"

At that moment, Shelagh hears her father wheel into their driveway, brakes groan into a halt. Shelagh bites the skin inside her cheek so hard that she tastes the metallic ooze of blood. Mrs. Matheson stomps down the stairs to meet her husband, grabs him by the hand and leads him to their bedroom. She can see her Dad biting his nails. When the door closes behind them, Shelagh knows her Mom is bawling him out. From her bedroom next door, she hears, "And what if Father smells it up on the altar?"

Her father says, "Don't worry about it, Moira. He'll be drinking wine himself!" He exits their bedroom and yells, "C'mon kids! Pile in. Last one in's a rotten egg!"

No one can mistake a Matheson in mass. Each of them has flaming red, curly hair; the boys have large round heads like Charlie Brown and the girls, pear-shaped bodies. They follow their father's pigeon-toed footsteps, trying to straighten out their own feet (their mother's reminder). Shelagh follows the train of redheads up to the altar and opens her mouth to receive communion. Back in the pew, she bows her head, closes her eyes tightly, prays for people on earth and in heaven, especially her own family. She thinks about days walking to school crying and how sometimes she'll be sitting in her desk in class and she'll

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cry. She doesn't know why. She feels the dry host mingle with her saliva, melt like candy floss. She imagines the body of her Lord Jesus Christ entering her body. The bread of life feeds her soul and fills her with spirit. For a moment, all is well. Shelagh leaves her body. Shelagh is an angel.

That night, Shelagh watches the moon outside her bedroom window. It has a ring of rainbow light around it. She remembers what happened when she was admiring the full moon last year; how her father took the guns off the wall and tore down their street. She remembers the smell of the cheap beer on his breath, how the moon lost its lustre that evening.

Good Friday

Good Friday is an unusually warm day for the month of April. The Matheson children are enjoying their spring break from school. Shelagh is checking on the roast, excited because the kids are going to stay home by themselves that evening. No babysitter. Shelagh's relieved.

Just before departing for choir practice, her Mom says to her, "Keep an eye on your father for me, Shelagh. Let me know if he has anything to drink while I'm gone." Shelagh nods but she's pissed. Her Mom certainly watches what her Dad drinks, but she's never asked Shelagh to.

Shelagh goes to her room, but in her mind she's gone back to Papa and Nanny's and is sitting in the fort up on the mossy hill above the bay. Shelagh goes there a lot when the coast is clear.

She pops back into her body when she hears her Mom's Chevy pull out of the driveway. That's when the guilty footsteps creek on the staircase and her dad sneaks into the kitchen.

There's a box of cheerios on top of the fridge, a crucifix on the wall above the telephone, a calendar picturing Christ waving palm fronds, an artificial glow around the statue of Our Lady (as her Mom liked to refer to her) plugged into an outlet. "Are you not feeling well, Dad?" Shelagh asks. "Can I make you a cup of tea, give you a backscratch?"

"That's okay. Thanks, dear."

His hands tremble as he reaches down into the cupboard he isn't supposed to be reaching into.

"Da-a-a-d," she starts to grumble.

"You fuck off."

"You know that's not going to help you."

"You mind your own business."

"It is my business." Shelagh stands in front of the liquor cabinet.

"Move away, Shelagh," he says, shaking a finger at her. She continues to block access to the cupboard.

"God damn you, Shelagh," her father shouts. He tries to push her out of his way with his thick hands. Shelagh won't budge.

Her father pushes her aside. He's pouring himself a drink, spilling it, his hands quaking, sweat streams down his forehead.

"I told you not to cross me, Shelagh." He stumbles up the stairs, his glass practically full in one hand, bottle of Glenfiddis in the other. Shelagh's crying, sitting on the kitchen linoleum. She pats Chip with one hand. He licks her other.

When Mrs. Matheson returns home, she can't wait to slip on her new deerskin slippers with the rabbit fur trim. "Ahce!" she shrieks when she checks the basket of slippers beside the front door. "That damn dog has hidden my slippers again! Twenty-five cents to anyone who can find them."

Shelagh knows that Chip likes to hide slippers near the beds. She looks high and low, under and over, even inside everyone's bed. She finds a clear green glass with some alcohol in it, but no slippers. Downstairs in the kitchen, her Mom is handing a quarter to Scott. "Where were they?" she spews, grinding her teeth together.

"They were under your bed," Scott pipes up proudly. Shelagh's ears burn. He's lying. She knows the slippers weren't there. She'd scanned every inch of that dust-balled carpet. Damn that Scott, she thinks. He lies and then gets paid for it.

That night, Joyce, a friend of Shelagh's, joins the Mathesons for dinner, because Shelagh did what her Mom asked. When Joyce arrives, the smell of roast cooking all afternoon hits her. Shelagh and Chip are standing near Mr. Matheson who is carving the roast. They're hoping he'll toss them a fatty piece of steaming prime rib as he flings a chunk into his own mouth, the Sunday night ritual.

"Shelagh Margaret!" Shoot. Her Mom saw them.

"Leave your father alone when he's busy. Your friend's here." Shelagh's Dad hucks a nice slice of meat Shelagh's way and Chip waddles out of the kitchen after her.

"Kids! Dinner!" Her Mom calls. The four children swarm around the tiny kitchen like rabbits in a warren, arguing over who gets the metal bar in the booth to rest their feet on. There is less elbow room tonight with Joyce over.

"Should we give her the treatment, Dad?" Shelagh whispers. Her Dad nods and winks at her.

Everyone is seated ready to begin the "Bless us Oh Lord, for these are our gifts ..." when Shelagh reaches above her and flicks the lights off and on. The other kids grab their silverware and begin to tap against the china as they chant imitation mantras. Shelagh's Mom sees Joyce's appalled expression between flashes of dark and light.

"C'mon, you guys. That's enough," she says.

Mr. Matheson breaks in. "Have you brought money to pay for the dinner, Joyce?"

Joyce's eyes grow large, wrinkles up her forehead. "Oh, um,"

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she stammers, "I didn't know I was supposed to." She glances nervously at Mr. Matheson's furrowed brow.

"Oh don't worry about them, Joyce dear. They're full o' dickens." Her Mom distributes the portions when Shelagh's Dad rises to help her. What's he up to now? Shelagh herself wonders. He places a bit of potato, a pea, a small brussels sprout, a sliver of beef, and a daub of gravy on a plate and hands it to Joyce.

Joyce is at a loss now. She peers upwards. Barbara starts to snicker out of nervousness. No one else laughs. Not even Mr. Matheson. Mrs. Matheson grabs the bare plate away from Joyce, gives it to her husband and hands Joyce instead a brimming plate of food. "How does that feel, dear?" she asks Mr. Matheson.

He shrugs his shoulders and asks Joyce if she has ever seen a dog dance. "No." She shakes her head. Shelagh's Dad then pours a bit of steaming tea on Chip's back and hoo boy, does he dance. Mrs. Matheson dries the dog's back off just before Mr. Matheson puts the dog in his lap and pulls at the skin on his stomach. He tells Joyce that he is looking in Chip's pockets to pay for the doggie dinner.

"And now for hot dogs." I thought we already witnessed a hot dog, Shelagh mumbles. Mr. Matheson places Chip into a roasting pot, sprinkles salt and pepper on his back and slides the pot into the oven with Scott's help. Shelagh's Mom starts hollering. "I'm sure Joyce knows where she won't be coming for dinner again. Get him out a there, Scott." Scott carefully lifts the pot out of the oven. The adults retire to the living room to read *The Sun* and have a smoke.

Shelagh sees her Mom and Dad light one cigarette after another, filling up the living room with cirrus clouds of smoke, trapped in the four corners of the room. Only the spark of a match, the turning of a newspaper can be heard. Shelagh's mother dares to enter the silence. "How was your day, Mark?"

Mr. Matheson is taken aback by the unfamiliar tone of his wife, Moira's voice. It reminds him of when he first met her, when she was the hottest thing in North Burnaby, before they were plagued with kids and bills and house payments, before they discovered how little they had in common.

"Oh, it was O.K." He takes a slow drag of his Players filter, thinks back on his afternoon at the Number Five Orange, on Willy, with his fat lip, sticking his tongue out at the dancing

girls on the stage right in front of his wife, who had a black eye. And, Sam, who got fired from the CN over a decade ago and lives in a hotel over Hastings, near Carroll Street. There was Sally in her psychedelic greens and pinks, polyester pants and gold go-go boots, her belly as big as her breasts: She never covers up much of either. Willy and his wife had a knock-down, drop-dead fight. Mr. Matheson tried to come between them but the police threw him out of the way. Mark threw up before he left the bar, and had to walk to U-tow because his car was impounded. It took a good chunk of all that was left of his paycheque to get the car out. He figured he was ready for the L.R.U. (the last round up) anytime, and it didn't matter.

"Moira," Mark said, "would you mind if a few of the boys come over tonight before we go out."

"It's O.K. but when are they coming over?" she answered.

"At seven."

"Yeow, that's in a half-hour!" Moira squishes her butt into the pile in the ashtray. From dust we come and unto dust we shall return. Damn, she wishes she could quit before she ends up looking like the contents of the ashtray.

Shelagh's Mom went with the men out to the horse races at the P.N.E. Shelagh manages to slip a few of her dad's cigarettes into her shirt pocket before he grabs his pack and heads out the front door to warm up the car. As the car is warming up, he warms up his own stomach with a good couple of swigs of whiskey from the bottle hidden under the car seat. Inside, Mrs. Matheson gives Shelagh a quick peck on the cheek with her Revlon lips and says, "Would you mind cleaning up those few glasses in the kitchen, darling?"

Shelagh doesn't mind. Anything to be home alone at last. This is only the third night that her parents have left them home alone without a babysitter. She takes one of her Dad's cigarettes out of her pocket and lights it. Carefully she drags on the smoke until her lungs are full. She removes the smoke from her mouth, opens it and coughs, spitting, sputtering. She reaches for one of the glasses that the company left behind and slugs it down her throat. She shivers and shakes her head at the god-awful taste, but she likes the burning sensation she feels as the liquor slides down her throat, warming it. She takes another tentative drag of the cigarette and this time, inhales. Wow. She tries a different drink, refreshing with a lemon twist. She polishes off six of the seven drinks. She is sweating, feeling dizzy and wants to laugh. Bells are ringing. So this is the feeling that her dad likes so much. "I dig it," she thinks, smirking. Mmmmm. She takes another swig.

A Poem By Myra Lawson

Watchers

© 2019

A glimpse
The second slipping
From time a slow smudge
Every moment stopping
No breath
Watching
From the now
Colors intensify
In sharp contrast
Sunlight and shadow
Linking time
With the watchers

Myra Lawson is a member of the Scottsdale Artists League and a juried member of the Arizona Arts Alliance. Myra feels that art like breathing is not separate from the natural world. Drawing inspiration from nature, the spirit of the desert inspires her visual journeys of light, line, and color. This poem inspired a series of paintings.



Myra Lawson

Lake Havasu City Artist



“From Time A Slow Smudge, Colors Intensify, Every Moment Stopping, From The Now, With The Watchers”
3 x 6 x 2 3/4
Oil
2017-2019

Myra credits her early inspiration in the arts to her grandmother, an accomplished ceramic artist and painter. Later travel and exposure to the historical artists, galleries and churches in France fueled her desire to work with the medium of glass, in innovative ways. Her stained- and fused-glass career spanning 20 years included several years teaching at Mohave Community College. In pursuit of a more immediate and flexible medium, Myra has been exploring water-based oil paints. She regularly exhibits with Scottsdale Artists League and is a juried member of Arizona Art Alliance.



Myra Lawson

Lake Havasu City Artist



“From Time A Slow Smudge”

2 x 4 x 2 3/4

Oil

2017-2019

The spirit of the natural world inspires Myra’s inner visual journeys of light and color. She considers herself a semi-abstract, multimedia artist and invites you to observe and imagine. In the words of Albert Einstein: “Imagination is everything; it is the preview of life’s coming attractions.”

- Myra Lawson

Myra Lawson

Lake Havasu City Artist



"A Glimpse"
2 x 4 x 2 3/4
Oil
2017-2019

Myra Lawson

Lake Havasu City Artist



"The Second Slipping"
2 x 4 x 2 3/4
Oil
2017-2019

Myra Lawson

Lake Havasu City Artist



“Shapeshifter”
16 x 20 x 1
Oil
2019

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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.

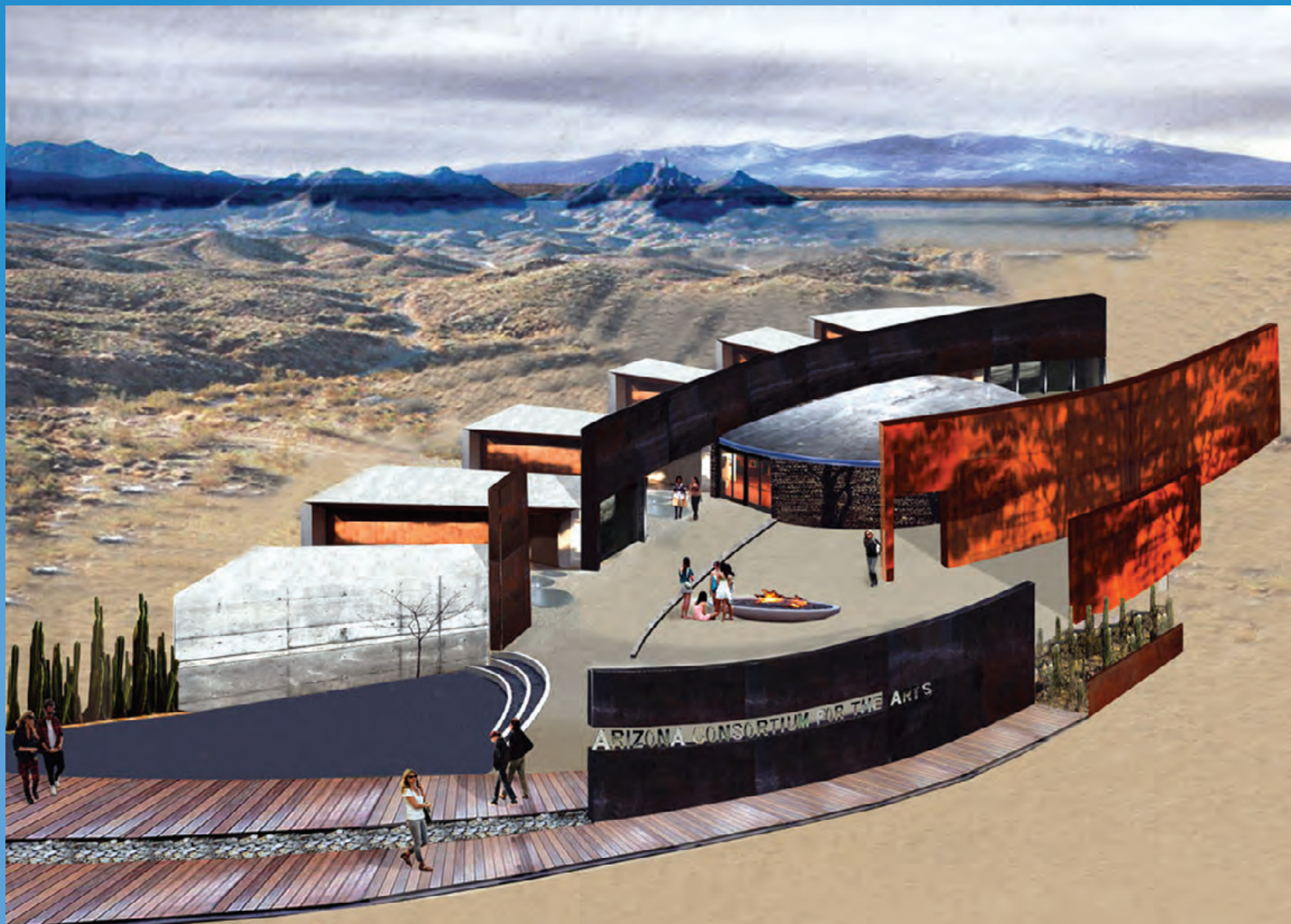
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form. For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to



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



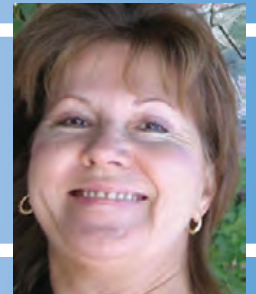
Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at info@artizona.org.

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.

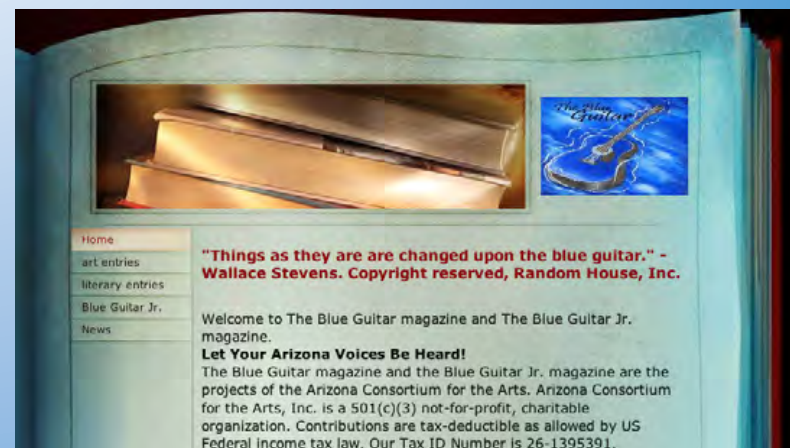
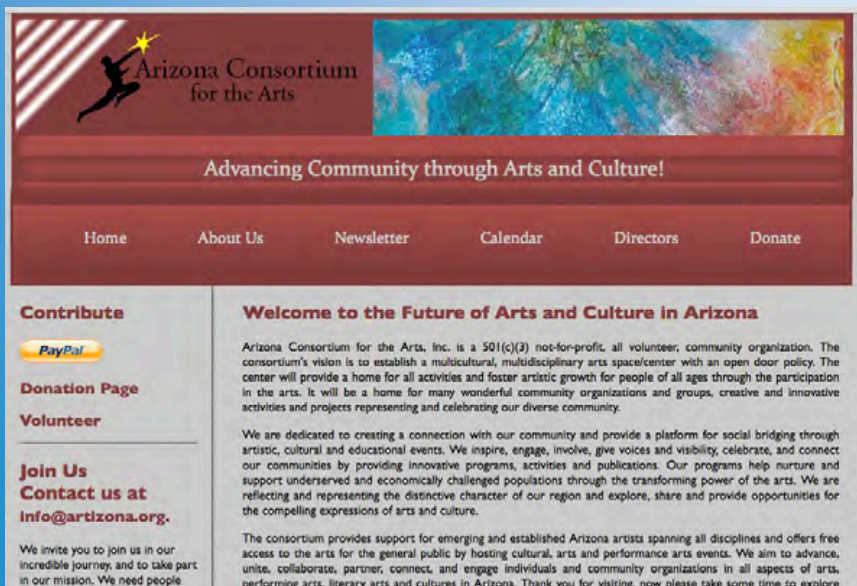


Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the news editor of two monthly newspapers with websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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



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Check out The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website, www.artizona.org. There, you can sign up for an e-mailed newsletter.

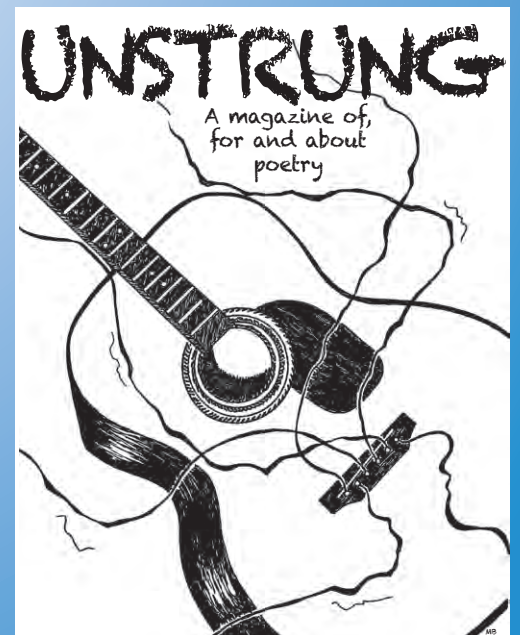
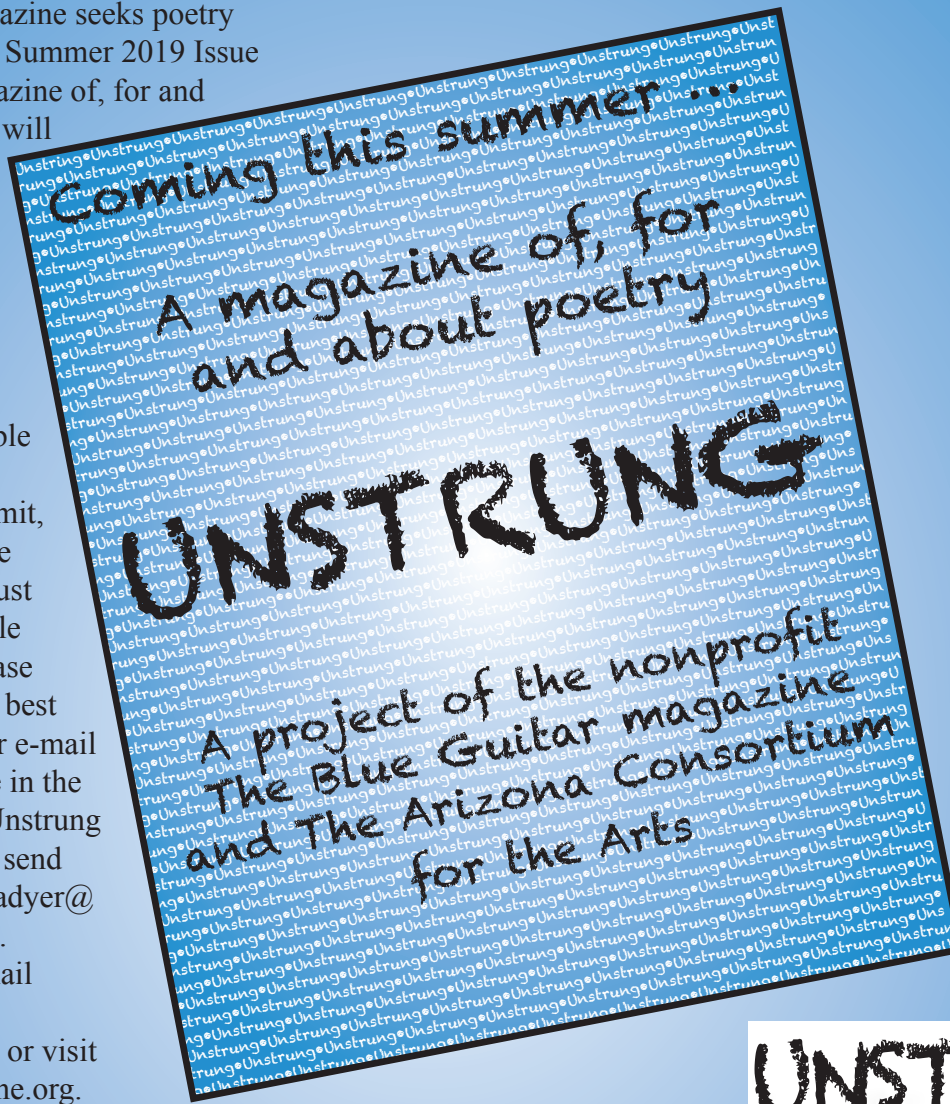
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Spring 2019

A Call to Poets for the 2019 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2019 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, 2019, 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, 2019, 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 Fall 2019

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2019 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. 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 Fall 2019

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Fall 2019 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 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.



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“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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Volume 11,
Number 1
Spring Issue
FREE!

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