

UNSTRUNG

A magazine of,
for and about
poetry



Summer 2018

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Hosking

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and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

Unstrung • Summer 2018

Audrey Sher-Walton

Here is Tranquility She Said

Here is Tranquility
Poured from a tiny bottle
Sitting on a dimly lit shelf

Here is Tranquility
Diffused in the warm air
Dripped on a forehead
Massaged into glistening skin

Here is Tranquility
A tincture manufactured
Absorbed, inhaled, dispersed

As if
As if Tranquility could be bought
and decanted
Onto a weathered soul

To magically bring forth
calm
Where none exists
Where none can exist

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Audrey Sher-Walton grew up on Fresh Meadow Lane. Surrounded by asphalt, it wasn't fresh, a meadow, or even a lane. Still, it was an idyllic childhood during which time she developed a lifelong fascination with words. Audrey is the founder of Write ON! Eastside Writing Group as well as a member of Writers Lunch. Two of her poems won Pima's Family Heritage Project Contest. She has been a guest reader on KXCI's Poet's Moment and she penned monthly columns in two Tucson newspapers. Her poems have been published in Zocolo, Unstrung, Aurora, and in her own collection: "All the Colors of My Life Are Red." She is the assistant editor of Awakenings Literary Review. Audrey owns Mrs. Audrey's Academic Achievement, a tutoring service. Audrey can be reached at: Redwavepress@yahoo.com.



Audrey Sher-Walton

Somebody's Son

Pull into the nearby gas station on a blazing hot Sunday
With a neatly typed to-do list and
Too many boring destinations in mind

Sun-drenched filthy man lies flat on his back
Near the unshaded bus stop
On the burning concrete
No one stops or

Cares
Or calls
Or checks

This is somebody's son, I think
He could be dead
Obviously ailing

Someone will call 911, my husband says

Who?
Who will call 911?

I leave our car with doors ajar
And venture closer with my phone

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

This facsimile of a man
is
Covered in layers of dirt
So deep I can't make out the color of his clothes
Or the lines in his creviced face

Angry scabs
mark his skin
Open wounds contribute to his putrid smell

Don't worry, says my husband

But I keep thinking-
He's somebody's son

6

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Audrey Sher-Walton

My Daughter, the Bride to Be

Through the haze of silk and sateen
you emerge

from the bridal store's
fitting room

pale opal
surrounding
shimmering azure eyes

You want me to focus on
Sweetheart necklines
Pearl buttons
And 5 ways to create a bustle for
your train

7

through the lace and 3 way mirrors I'm
pulled back to moments just
after your birth

Calling Grandma who sat anxious by the yellow trimline phone

"Can you believe I have a daughter?" I said

I want to stay in that moment
Of rejoicing your birth

Continued on page 8

And then recap the myriad of
scenes that
have brought us to this
time and place
I went to relish and relive all those memories

But with your size 2 body ensconced in
a size 12 dress
You want me to take cell phone shots from
90 different angles

8
Snapped back to
Now
And the exquisite woman you've become

With your
Quiet wisdom
Drive and dedication

If Grandma were here
I'd call this time and say,
"Can you believe how lucky I am that
Shayna is my daughter?"

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Audrey Sher-Walton

Let's See What the Jews are Up To

She reaches into her carry-on and casually says
Let's see what the Jews are up to
as she unfolds the most recent issue
of The Jewish Post
Her friend, who chants and thinks fish is bad for you
Laughs, yet
thinks this is a brusque remark

But no
Once raised a Jew
Our interest is piqued

9

Has Israel magically settled its dispute with Palestine
Have they created a new recipe for kugel
Who has recently become a Bar Mitzvah

Even if you've left the fold
And disavowed allegiance
to the guy in the sky
with the Book of Life
who you're told
holds your destiny
every Yom Kippur

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

The need to learn
doesn't dissipate
The way anger fades away
after sex

Questing to know
how Republican and Jew can both be adjectives
to describe the same individual
an oxymoron she can't quite
wrap her head around

Tired of still not getting answers
she says

10

Let's see what the Buddhists are up to
As she opens a recent issue
of Lion's Roar

Her friend who hates turbulence
and chews organic pecans
Laughs, yet
thinks this is a curt remark

But no
Once raised a Jew
We question
everything

© 2018

Audrey Sher-Walton

I Am Darkness

I am darkness
Feel me with you
Changing nature's flow

From sun-streaked thoughts
I cast a murky shadow
Slowly swiftly
Creeping gently

Nighttime looming
Jasmine breezes wafting

Crimson sky
shading duskier
to
Steely gray

I am in you
Darkness am I

Steadfast lifelong

Not perplexed or questioned
As to which way to turn

I never fight the day
Just calmly turn it
Into
ME

B.M. Di Gregorio

About the poem

The poet writes: “Living Cascades: A Poem Sequence” are sequences of poems from the last year of my life, roughly sorted by feeling. Many of them are very short, meant to capture a fleeting moment or thought, while others are longer ponderances on prolonged states of strong emotion. A few are just silly. Beginning in a state of conflict and indecision, the sequence follows varying yet connected states of mind that morph into different versions of their predecessors. “Icarus” struggles with the simultaneous fear of and impulse to chase desires, while “21st Century Entertainment” points out the ease and comfort of menial distractions to avoid answering the most pressing questions. This then sets the theme and structural trend for the next several “snippets,” or as I like to call them, “poems for the short attention span,” that follow. “Movement” grapples with the fundamental inability to comprehend time and the emotions intertwined with its passing. “Grounding” alludes to the attempt to find footing in external location when little is found from within. Then it devolves into nonsense as anesthesia is once again chosen. The final four poems touch on the temporality of genuine human connection and the ultimate separation of the people and things we love from their actual presence, creating static reflections of who and what they are as to unconvincingly comfort ourselves in the face of time, change, and death.

Agathokakological (adjective): composed of both good and evil, light and dark.

B.M. Di Gregorio

Brandon Di Gregorio was born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, the largest town in the state that is still only 15 minutes away from very rural hollers and rugged wilderness. After attending school at Earlham College in Indiana (during which he spent a semester in and out of Mexico and Tucson), Brandon decided to return to the Southwest due to a combination of magnetic draw to the area, and a desire to return to the places and people that gave him drive and made a formative impact on his young adult life. Contact Brandon at his current work email, brandon@higherground.me, or at his personal account, bmdigregorio@gmail.com.

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B.M. Di Gregorio

Living Cascades: A Poem Sequence

Impulse

Icarus Survived on a Desert Island

Although Icarus fell,
I'm jealous he had the courage to fly at all.
Or maybe he just wanted to taste the ocean?
Should I try to fly?
Or pass my wings to the next in line?
In return – they can tell me what the ocean tastes like.

I'll stand by the shore
As they lick their salty lips.
“Isn't the ocean delicious?”
I'm sure it tastes better than sand,
But I'm still getting used to the water.
It's always hardest when it splashes against your navel.

“Wax and feathers?
Sounds more like tar and feathers to me,”
I'd say proudly,
Stepping out of the water.
Should I try to want to fly?
Or let the feeling pass me by?

If the wings need ambition
And the sun desire,
Who wants the sun in the first place?
“Not me,” said I.

Continued on page 15

But the ocean knew better.
Should I fly, but taste the ocean?
Or let myself stay dry?

The sun is timid.
It doesn't want to burn our wings –
It leaves that up to us.
There is a lot of air
Between the sun and the ocean.
“Too much” said I.

And the wind is unpredictable.
The gusts are mean.
They are friends with the ocean.
Should I try to ride and sail them?
Or let them blow on by?

15

“I’m no fool,” says I proudly,
“I know I’m no bird.”
But the wind caressed my face
And these feathers were all aflutter
And though it ain’t for the better
I hoped it would never cease.

If the wings need ambition
And the sun desire,
Who wants the sun in the first place?
“Not me,” said I.
But I knew better.
And so did the sun.

Should I try to reach that light?
Or let it stay in the sky?

Anesthetize

21st Century Entertainment

Oh, how easy it becomes
To anesthetize yourself
with distraction

Attention Span?
Less than a fraction
Of a
Second

Continued on page 17

The Slower Days

I have a book of poetry
I have a notebook, too
Got half a pack of nicotine
And half a mind to use

A pen in hand, a thought in place
A paper mostly blank
A tired arm to trace the lines
And fill the slower days

When days are long, I tend to sigh
Look forward to my bed
But when they're short, I can't deny,
I fear I'll soon be dead

The sun is up, the sun goes down
I'm glued right to my chair
The page still gapes up from its place
And gives a nasty stare

A pen in hand, no thought will stay
A paper mostly blank
A tired arm to trace the lines
And fill the slower days

Movement

The Colder, The Longer

You mark the passage of time
With your hair
Longer –
Shorter –
Somewhere in between –
You change with the seasons

Oversized and Understood

18 You gave me a T-shirt
a long time ago.
It was too big for me.

“You’ll grow into it,” you said.
I never quite did.

I wear the shirt around
and feel the space
between you and me

Continued on page 19

Unexpected Reminiscence: A Haiku

Empty, sunny court
Reflections of days far gone
Burning your sneakers

Last of the line

I am the last male heir of my surname
Should I continue the line?
And give some unsuspecting kid
 A bundle of neuroses –
 Large eyebrows –
 And a slight overbite?

19

My parents would love my neurotic children
Just like they loved
 their neurotic son
And I'd watch them grow
 to give their children –

Hopefully just large eyebrows
 and a slight overbite.

Continued on page 20

Grounding

Valley Town

The sound of bare feet slapping against the tile floor –
A fan on a low hum –
The night, swift and breezy –
The distant howl of traffic
 (Or coyotes, you were never quite sure) –
The rattle of bike gears whizzing by –
Strange caws from dark birds overhead –
Blood pumping through thin veins –
 (Hearts knocking on thin chests) –
Thoughts loud enough to wake the neighbors –

20

These are the sounds of this valley town.

Haiku for Nighttime in San Diego

Heard a sea lion
Earlier, but I did not
See the goddamn thing

Continued on page 21

Haiku Sequence #1: In the Old Backyard

Impossibly green
Loud and vivid like church bells
Bore a hole through me

Kicking over trees
Making bridges, running trails
Heroes in our way

Metal music stands
Middle rods as makeshift swords
Fighting and bruising

The air, thick and warm
The bugs were full of lightning
In the old backyard

21

Continued on page 22

Thoughts to Throw Away

The Bottle

It sits there on the shelf
 Beckoning
I sit here in my room
 Pondering
How long should I sit here
 Before getting up to retrieve it?
Or should I just leave it?

You better believe
 I'll leave it today, buddy.

22

(Gulp).

“I’m not an alcoholic.”

All I had to eat today
 was a couple tamales
 and a bottle of gin

A small bottle.
Not a big one.

I’m not an alcoholic.

Continued on page 23

Newborn Delicatessen

What if they discovered
that babies taste delicious?
And so they built a conveyor belt
in every maternal ward
of every hospital
That randomly took half the newborns
directly to fast food kitchens
whenever anyone was born.

What would the half that lived
grow up thinking?

They'd call us the lucky ones.

23

Continued on page 24

Agathokakological

Dagger On Fire

Her personality is a dagger on fire
Warm to the touch –
 Sharp at the edges –
 Consistently inconsistent –

She is a dagger on fire
 in a strong wind
 just before the rain

Her gait is a sapling on fire
Uneven and wobbly –
 Weighted yet light –
 Spritely yet dull –

She is a tree on fire
 in a strong wind
 just before the rain

Her words themselves are on fire
Pointed and sly –
 Heated yet cold –
 Tragic and temporal –

She is a person on fire
 in a strong wind
 just before the rain

24

Haiku Sequence #2: “Before”

Crudely formed lover
So many pieces of you
I will never see

Curious and kind
With a pulsing sore inside
That never leaves you

Sometimes I touch it
I feel the pain and wonder
How I can do this

Do you feel like me?
Warm to lie next to at night
Alone in the day

Tell me tomorrow:
How much love is there to give
Before pain arrives?

25

Continued on page 26

Epidermis

We drew from memories
and peeled layers from our skin

Amid breaths and fumbling looks
In a dim and sterile room
The walls were staring
Keeping our secrets

(Neuroses kept intact
but temporarily suspended
in willful disbelief)

We drew from memories
and stared not out, but within

26

Continued on page 27

Elegy for the Loved

I love you forever
I'll keep you beside me
In the morning when I go out
At the bedside as I sleep

In the notebooks I write you
You come alive so real
From the speckles in your iris
To your cheek, soft to feel

And after all of this time
With heads wedged in the clouds
My heart beats around you
Still incredibly loud

27

I love you forever
I'll keep you beside me
In my thoughts, if not in person
'Cause you're so hard to see

And in the morning when I go out –
At the bedside as I sleep –
You'll be hovering over –
 Haunting –
 Like a dream.

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David Chorlton

The Car at 3 am

The three o'clock darkness is thick
enough to stir. Interrupted dreams
fly up to roost
in the attics of houses
along the street where a car
feels its way slowly to the point
at which it must turn back
into the land of wakefulness.
The animals who descend

28

from the mountain after dusk
are threading their way
between our sleeping lives.
They are ancient
in a city edging toward the future
without knowing which god
to follow. There are so many

books, and a different answer
in each one; the driver
cannot know which direction to take
as the headlights burn
holes in the silence. The unsolved

Continued on page 29

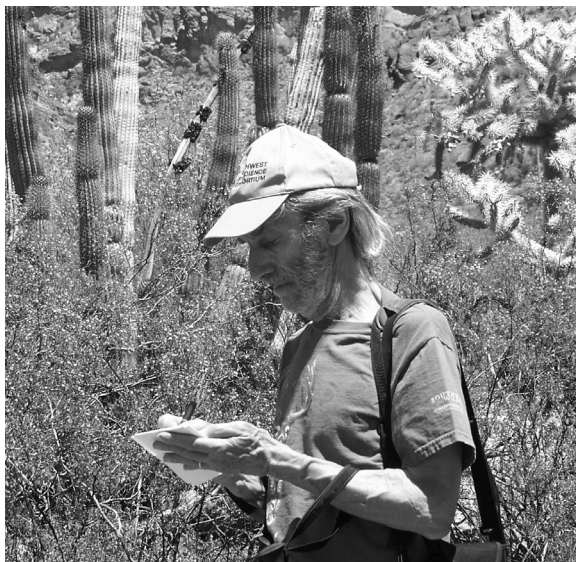
mysteries surround him. He is
undecided. The GPS system
doesn't apply to Heaven or Hell.
But it's beautiful here; waiting
for the desert slopes to rise
into the light at dawn; listening for
the first bird to call out
that he is still alive.

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David Chorlton

David Chorlton has lived in Phoenix since 1978. Born in Austria, he grew up in Manchester, close to rain and the northern English industrial zone. In his early 20s, he went to live in Vienna and from there enjoyed many trips around Europe. In Arizona, he has grown ever more fascinated by the desert and its wildlife. “Selected Poems” appeared in 2014 from FutureCycle Press, and his “A Field Guide to Fire” was his contribution to the “Fires of Change” exhibition. His newest collection is “Bird on a Wire” from Presa Press, and The Bitter Oleander Press published “Shatter the Bell in My Ear,” translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant.

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David Chorlton

Night Upon Night

*“Do things look in the ten and twelve of noon as they look in the dark?
Is the hand, the face, the foot, the same face and hand and foot seen by
the sun?”*

– Dr. Matthew O’Connor, “Nightwood” by Djuna Barnes

Beneath jasmine scented stars
a mountain settles back
upon the heavy Earth
while night opens its wings
and coyotes spill from the moon
to slake a day’s long thirst.

31

Moths peel away
from a movie screen sky
and into the real world
just as a silver glow
begins shining from inside
desert rocks inscribed
for those who enter darkness
with directions to the soul.

Continued on page 32

Nighthawk by nighthawk
the last minutes of light
tick away from the roofs
of houses, and sink
beneath the surface of the pond;
down, down, to where
time is not measured
but preserved.

32 When the moment
comes for bats to shake off
the dust from attics in the suburbs
to fly between knowing
and unknowing, they bring
secrets too intimate for daylight
and each of them has
the face of a fallen devil
and the purpose of a god
seeking someone to believe in him.

An owl's claw snags
on a mouse's breath
as it cuts the velvet open
and reveals
a drop of blood inside it
the color
of absolute silence
and a soft shadow passes
across the face of the moon.

A breath or sigh can separate
one instant from the next
when the fang burns
in a snake's mouth
and constellations rush
into a milky swirl.

On a cottonwood stripped
bare, or sycamore
whose white
limbs shiver in the dark,
Turkey vultures sleep with backs
hunched against a summer rain
waiting out the time
before waking
when they strip a morning's bones.

At the most remote
points on the clock face,
when numbers don't follow
in order, when three
is the predator and midnight
is the prey,
the jaguar pulls free
of the stone into which
his image was carved in the long,
long ago when men
sought spirit enough to guide them
from dusk to dawn
and imagined
themselves possessing
a jungle's heart.

All sounds here are in the key
of infinity: a forest
speaking as a million insect
trills; ground alive
with moisture until a hiss
and slither in the mud
sink back
into primeval silence;

Continued on page 35

into the original dark
before the first comet
left a trail of sparkling dust
as it continued along its trajectory
to where even wolves
could not follow.

*“As for me, I tuck myself in at night, well content because I am my own
charlatan.”*

– Dr. Matthew O’Connor

Upon the endless highways
traffic tires
but will not sleep.
With caffeine in the fuel tank
trucks move according
to their orders, coast
to coast, and powered by
a heart that will not die.
To a steel guitar soundtrack
their drivers steer through
miles of history without
ever leaving the present
moment in time
with its radio glow and
the rumble a country makes
as wheels devour it. Their world
is all electric, and the ice glow
from headlights

35

sweeps the road ahead
while the sky hums in sympathy
with the distances
that comprise a life when it takes
directions from the stars.

In the stillness offices
become when business
goes on hold, the cleaning staff
waltz buckets
and brooms to the tune
of minimum wage.

36

The ice cube in a gin glass
is melting slowly down
while someone's aunt in Dallas
all alone
watches prophets on the TV screen
offer one-eight-hundred
promises that she'll
be saved.

Continued on page 37

In alleys
back of restaurants, under bridges,
in the parks,
beside multi-story
parking structures, with blankets
pulled up to their chins,
the indigent lie
with no medicine to cure
what ails them; only night
as the pill
to dull the impact of each day.

Ambulances travel faster after
sunset, when every fear becomes
an emergency. They scream
all the way to
the hospitals, racing bad luck
and traffic lights
as they carry old wounds
to be treated
by an intravenous drip of memories
from a happy time
while the patient lies unconscious,
being monitored until
dawn shines brightly through
the plastic blinds.

37

While the monk
prays a stone silent prayer
in Cistercian cold
the constellations sharing
Heaven with his god
reflect interstellar fantasies
for spirits so lost
they can't find
home on the Earth,

but there is always the veil
that falls between the seer and the seen
that turns whatever is mundane
by day into a mystery at night:
the illuminated theaters where gas
is pumped; the dragon's tail of rear lights
along a highway; the cats
who rub their fur
against starlight, and the approaching
freight train with an eye
so bright it sees
the future.

© 2018

Janet McMillan Rives

Ahead

after Georgia O'Keeffe, "Pedernal 1941-42"

A yellow ribbon of trees
stretches along a river
we cannot see,
traces a path
we cannot know
into a future
we cannot imagine.

A yellow ribbon of trees
invites us on a journey
whose destination
remains a mystery.

A yellow ribbon of trees
beckons.

© 2018

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Janet McMillan Rives

Janet McMillan Rives resides in Oro Valley, Arizona. She grew up in Connecticut and Tucson and is a graduate of the University of Arizona. She spent thirty-five years as a professor of economics and is retired from the University of Northern Iowa. Her interests in retirement include flower gardening, golfing, reading, and writing. She is a member of the Iowa Poetry Association, the Arizona State Poetry Society, and the Tucson Poetry Society. Her poems have appeared in Lyrical Iowa, Sandcutters, The Avocet, Unstrung, and Voices from the Plains.

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Janet McMillan Rives

Kindred

In memory of Charles W. Littlefield (1887-1945)

Two
bright orange
in a narrow vase
Poppies
like the Poppy
I never knew
the one who died
the year after
I was born
the one who
never knew me
Poppy
who loved flowers
my mother said
who passed along
this single gene
I love flowers
Poppy

41

© 2018

Janet McMillan Rives

Sceloporus Magister: My Lizard Caddie

You wait for me at the base of the rock
all green and glisteny,
sun bouncing off your purple patched lats.
Where have you been all winter, kid?
Where did you hide that sturdy body
those gold-flecked shoulders
that turquoise underbelly?
And what's with the pushups, pal?
Are you trying to show me up?

I walk up to the ninth tee box
full of bravado. I'll show you.
I'll hit a majestic drive
straight down the middle.
Play it safe, you say.
Aim for the trap on the right.
You'll never make it that far.

Thanks, buddy, I answer, not knowing
whether to take your words
as advice or insult.

© 2018

Janet McMillan Rives

Vantage Point

I move my desk
to avoid distraction
from a neighbor's wind spinner.

I had no plans to redecorate
nor desire to alter this room's
perfect *feng shui*.

Now I find myself angled east
toward the mountains.

Flowers color my view:

kangaroo paws, poppies,
blue anemone,
Mexican honeysuckle.

Pusch Ridge caps tile roofs,
a tiny lizard scales the orchid tree,
hummingbirds suck aloe blooms.

So much life.

© 2018

43

Jeff Hall

Battlefield's Edge

I took a train to battlefield's edge
A nurse to heal the sick
Grenades destroying men asunder
No choice with who to pick
Skin like paper fragments rip
A razor's edge is keen
Lives destroyed, widows made
A worst summer I've never seen
The birds all eat from carrion fields
The leaves the color of blood
The flowers all trampled down to the ground
bodies covered in mud
a bonfire burns the bodies to dust
the illness to destroy
when in the corner, my sadness deepens
at sight of a fatherless boy.
Back onto the train away from this place
a haunting of things I have seen
back to my home among normal things
back to a lawn that is green

© 2018

Jeff Hall

Jeff Hall came to Phoenix in 1984, the son of an Air Force Veteran. Born in Warner Robbins, Ga., he made his early homes in South Carolina, Mississippi, and even Okinawa, Japan. Arizona has become his true home, and he loves the diversity in landscape that it offers. Winters in Arizona do not hurt either. He is previously unpublished, but has been writing poetry since about 1996.

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Jeff Hall

Rulers

We will rule the world
Though others have doubt
We are not the strong
We don't rise up and shout
We create the changes
The world wants to arise
Gaining in power
And see though our eyes
Knowledge and wealth
Those are our fame
Soon you will know
And speak of our name
Movies and games
Media and shows
We hid in the shadows
Then we arose
No longer in fear
Popularity grows
We seeded the future
With what we did sow
Your future is here
No more shall you seek
For the answer my friend
Is the simplest. The geek!

© 2018

Jeff Hall

A Haiku: Valley of the Sun

Valley of the sun
Rises out of the desert
It's our Oasis

© 2018

47

Michelle T. Simon

Camelback Mountain

Not many miles from my bedroom window in perpetual rest
Stretching towards the lofty sky to an impressive crest
This comfortable camel sculpted from granite and sandstone
Tempts those who to rugged adventures are prone

48 “Come scale my haughty, heedless heights if you dare
But beware my temper, of my moods take extra care
For I have been known to conspire against those
Yes, for want of mischief, I may be inspired to impose
A lesson in humility upon those needing to be taught
The consequences of foolish lack of careful forethought
I take no responsibility, can spare no sympathy, nor ever abide
Those who won’t see when they’re beaten, or swallow their pride
Oops! They stumble, they tumble, crash upon my pointy shoulder
Or have to call for help while desperately clinging to a boulder.”

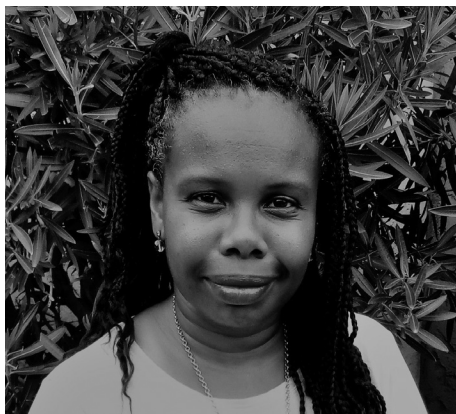
Come you and come he there’s a ton of fun to be had.
In the flaming heat of the day, it’s not really *that* bad.
Leave with a tale of having conquered danger and disaster
If this heartless hunk of mountain you manage to master.

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Michelle T. Simon

Michelle Simon is a mother of two teens and a poet/writer out of Scottsdale, Arizona, who has aspired to write poetry (among other creative literary works) from a very young age. Still, she has only recently begun pursuing this passion to a more active degree. Thus far, three of her pieces have been published on the Society of Classical Poets website, one of which appears in their 2017 printed journal as well. Several more of her poems have appeared in issues of the weekly *Avocet* – a journal of nature poetry. The poems “Homage to My Lips” and “Surgeries (a haibun)” made the list of finalist and semifinalists in the Faulkner-Wisdom Competition of 2017. She also writes essays — two of which have made it to the short list in the same competition (2016, 2017). Using the pen name C. Billie Brunson, she has written and published a novel of mainstream fiction, “Heart of Malice” (2015). Additionally, she’s completed another mainstream fiction novel, “Six Strings,” which, when published, will be under the same pen name.

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Michelle T. Simon

Failing as a Mother

Mama, you know how you would always whup
Me, sometimes for any small way I slipped
Up, neglected to carry through as told?
Well, this “Mama” did not rule as bold

Mama, my son wants only to play games
On the PS4, the Xbox and blame
Truth’s burning light for his lack of deep love
For a God waiting with open arms, above

so

Mama, my daughter may soon leave this nest
Make her own way, give fake lovers her best
My only hope is she’ll never neglect
To raise righteous hell and dodge my regrets

Oh, what will befall a blithe boy and girl
When faced with the empty joys of this world?

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Michelle T. Simon

Mankind

Where is the 'kind'?
Where is the we're-all-in-this
-together? Why do souls strangle
Each other, instead of hugging?

She used to be his force of nature
He, her fleshly rapture—the only
Rapture she believed in. Then,
One morning she woke up and saw
In his eyes something broken sticking there
She reached up to pick it free
But he smacked her hand away.

51

Where is the 'kind'?
What happened to hearts that used
To beat in sync with innocence?
In the beginning, nothing could turn us
to frenemies or push hatred down our throats
Until we become bloated with the funk of it
Drunk with the junk of it. So many years ago
Someone like God attempted an intervention
but we misinterpreted his
intention for dogged charity.

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Where is the 'kind'?

It is in the helping hand during
a disaster, the unanimous, spontaneous
burst of laughter; the sharing of tears and pain
with strangers.

It is where we stop revenging
and embrace forgiving, in learning the truth—
the truth that *everyone's*. Life. Matters.

It flashes brightest where fear is rejected
in favor of tolerance and, in learning so,
never. letting. go...
never losing sight of who
we are meant to be—Mankind

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somewhere beneath
boot-trampled snow
a rosebud

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Michelle T. Simon

Morning Run Through Chaparral Park

I put on my shoes and step out the door
Just as I've done time and times before
What aerobic jousts might for me be in store?
Soon I shall see. For the run is never a bore
In my ears there blasts brisk beats from iTunes
My nose picks up smells from a myriad of blooms
The sun above incinerates any lingering gloom
Fresh air brings a smile, conquering mean doom
Need not go so fast, better is slow but steady
For heaven's sake, am I sweating already?
But I can't be bothered by this problem so petty
Bring on those endorphins that make me feel heady
Ahead there be a tall fellow of considerable weight
Hard not to ogle at his waddling gait
I give him props for his daring come late
But move these feet swifter lest I gain his fate
Pass by that old lady who's always feeding the ducks
Seeing the posh life they live... I kinda envy their luck
Though someday, maybe, someone might pluck
Their feathers. Serve them up like their cousins who cluck.
OMG! The hunk coming towards me is stunning
My heart rate surges, but it ain't from this running
Bare chest and a six-pack are mindfully numbing
Come over here honey. Let me play with your plumbing

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He nodded at me and sent me a smile
That horny vibe kept me going for a while
I'm lovin' this sport, this marvelous trial
Humph. I might have to add an extra mile
Yikes! Here comes a girl who is frightfully thin
For sure, she'd go tumbling with the slightest wind
And here she is running. This has gotta be a sin.
Got some advice I would like to extend
Go home and sit down. You must be more astute
Eat ice cream by the gallon. Don't raise a dispute.
If you move a muscle somebody should shoot
Such a body is mortifying, horrifying, anything but cute
At McDonald I circle 'round the dog park
A few of the pooches see a reason to bark
Their imagined pursuit give my pace a spark
For all of ten seconds, it was a useful lark

Back where I started. Feeling strong but light.
Looks like the rest of the day might be as bright
In the shower I reflect on things brought to my sight
All fuel for the flame, fodder for the poems I write.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

In Silence

How quiet the anguish of surviving now,
gentle murmuring of the young living only a shade
above the silence they grieve, a ticking and a sighing
of bereaved consonants and vowels, lonely

on television only a few feet from my ears. I can't hear
what any words are that might break this quiet
into the treacherous meanings of language.
Can they hear themselves, and does it matter?

(The president stares into his twitter machine,
waiting for a chance to comfort, himself perhaps,
to be a star if not a king. He recommends arming
teachers—add straw to the murderous pyre.)

55

I hear my grandfather's voice again, whose sounds
I haven't heard for half a century, some of it still lonely.
"Hold your mouth right," he jokes again, his voice . . .
sounds I still long for in eternities like this.

His words meant nothing, almost, but the sounds
still say without saying, "I'm here for you.
I always will be." I would share the meaning
with these young people, broken-hearted, comforting

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one another, and me. But I'll shut up, lest the words
interfere with care. Today, this hour, words are only
noise—I a witness, all I can be, in gratuitous verse.
They whisper to one another. Some touch lightly,

necessarily, say to each other in sounds before
and beyond the bounds of attention, "I'm here for you.
I always will be." Sometimes, we cannot help it,
we hold our mouths right, and we hold together.

© 2018

Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Richard Fenton Sederstrom was raised and lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and the North Woods of Minnesota. Sederstrom is the author of five books of poetry, including “Eumaeus Tends” in 2014. “Selenity Book Four” was published last winter, and a new book, “Sorgmantel,” is forthcoming.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

“My life is a key that has finally found its lock,” Part One

The older man deals in cars.
Vermont wry, under-and-soft spoken,
he sports the cornerless integrity
of the Yankee peddler.
He disguises his honesty
to protect the distraction
his fair offer might incur.

58

Today he pretends to rest a deal's success
on the drear fate of a toss-off bet:
“You wanna go double or nothing?”
when either double or nothing
could be part of a ritual comedy
to liven a contract already arranged.

At his side the guileless witness,
the bewildered new son-in-law—
newly attuned to the fascination of dire chance
and daily enthralled with the easy dash
of his newly mantled Ur-Father—
will fail to notice the unwritten
agreement between dealer and dealt-to,
old friends pretending antagonism,

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not see that the actual bet,
nodded over and winked to,
entails no more than the post-deal drink,
when sacrificing a cheap “double-or”
promises another season’s worth
of Yankee sacrament and the splendor
of the next year’s gleaming model:

“Powerglide”
fuels a man’s longing for speed in grace,
feeds the son-in-law’s for,
if not mythos,
at least something manly and free
in his domestic novelty,
his shaky future—
his hope that he will play at least a bit part
of all that he may never learn to meet.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

A Change of Ownership

The hawk lit with unstudied gentleness
onto a branch of its mesquite, the tree
that had been our mesquite

a few seconds before
in what had been our back garden
a few seconds before—lit with the gesture

of the remains of a dove it had killed
somewhere else in another of its gardens,
by our timid standards darkening now.

Perched on that mesquite branch
the hawk finished the dove as dessert
on a gray bed of feathers and bits of bone.

The hawk profile that had posed itself
before Pharaoh and high potentates,
its red Egyptian eye, one profile one eye,

displays the bird's ownership of ages
and the mesquite's ownership of ages
and we know now how the mesquite,

is its own mesquite in spite of our receipts,
which life it is kind enough to share
with us who once owned, only borrow now.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Eumaeus Old and the Magpie

I thought I saw a magpie.
Came out of a pine tree.
Black and white.

What other bird
might be hereabouts
that is black and white?

I think it was black and white.
It was that fast, and the forest so thick.
Like the rest of life.

61

I would fly off with the black and white bird.
I would fly off with the bird that is not
black and white. That never was.

I would fly off with a bird of no color.
I would fly off with no color.
No bird.

Old age brings passive recklessness.
I ignore the name of my pilot.
Aiee Karos he seems to declare through his flames.

So he is a magpie, after all.
Brash ash-and-charcoal.
Good company for a wagtongue's waning days

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Bed

Blanket hanging out on a window ledge,
sheets scattered like faded cumuli—
if clouds could withstand a Bendix washer—
Aunt Nancy's bedstead and mattress
is exposed to its history and its geology
and a promise of painful demolition,
should the current victim awaken.

62 The lathed abraded spindles of head and foot
rack the tortured frame of Nancy's mattress.
Black and white ticking in narrow stripes
count themselves down from end to end,
like sullen angels with dirty faces.

Black and white stripes seem to bend
around the lumps in the mattress like
plow furrows in Nebraska hills on a day
that beckons a leprous green thunderhead.

Untenanted, the mattress fails to betray
the pinball field of freed spring tips,
but I know as much of where they are
that when I lie down tonight I will not
need to think ahead where I will curl my body
to avoid the bare point that, avoided,
will give me to dream in a pattern

Continued on page 63

of falling that gives the idle dream purpose,
the flight for freedom among piloting clouds.

And I do dream, and I do set myself free
from the bonds of what the mattress
has no choice but to mean for me.
But I also dream that it will come time
for me to dream at last of what will come
of my wings when the next spring
sizzles into my discoloring horizon.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Schubert's Second Cello

Chironomid midges in airborne shoals
find sheltered corners in corners.
Corners defined by buildings.

Corners described by angles
midges might notate, choreograph
from tree trunk to tree trunk.

Then they find corners
where there are no,
cannot be, corners,
where they swarm
to pantomime angles
in the very middle of bare air ...

Like the violin
that slips round the corner
of the imagination
where the phantom soul
of the second of the two cellos
augurs the sad honey
of the day's climax and lorn completion.

Continued on page 65

The night though ...

The handprint on the cave wall
prefigures nothing
but the meaning we try to give it.
Let it signify no more than its presence,
the silent adagio for what is always
about to be heard round the corner.

Like the midge, we are blessed.
Having no adequate word for “never,”
the present never ends.
One day will we somehow be compelled
to search out a meaning
for “present”?

65

And like the Quintet,
like the shadow of a pantomime,
like the notes left in the mind
after Schubert’s final adagio,
a midge will live for no more
than the fluttering shoal
of the present day.

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Richard Fenton Sederstrom

After Time After

After we have gotten to know each other for a few
more decades
or sometime impossibly geologic maybe

then we can walk together,
look at the colors, shapes, or what is shapeless
to any other creature but still recognizable.

The woods we have gotten to know so well or not so well.
Talk about, perhaps, that showdown
between the fox and the groundhog

and what genius protected the one from the many
and the many from the one, the nature of standoff
that in the absence of love saves the potential.

Or wonder together why the language of crows
seems so different today when nothing else is different.
Or so we had thought

before the crows thought to remind us
and remind whatever is so silent
down there in Fenton Fen

Continued on page 67

where we had got used to the spring peepers
peeping in impossible decibels

for love love love !!!

and while we let the conversation enter
the common silence,
we can start

*

to gesture toward the shadows looming in our direction.
Take Ithaca, the gesture offers.
Welcome to the next dust

*

and start to get to know each other as well
here or Ithaca or, no no no!:
both, neither and therefore when/wherever.

67

© 2018

Robert Feldman

Easter in Birdland

(for Charlie Parker and Patti Smith)

Mr. Yard Bird...
cognac reed soaked up tight
hangs on from some silver wire
then glides off
pregnant with another fantastic egg

and all the day long
sporting some improbable floppy hat
unattached to his head,
goes bopping...
soaring

raindrops drip from my St. Lucie roof...
while I, self-ensconced so perfectly,
reflect on another hip image of the world,
and after the shower
abducted by a bed of drenched Pascua daisies and sunflowers
a family of butterflies deliriously drink deeply from within

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somewhere, some soggy park bench
rests,
blessed again by Mother Oak,
enduringly waits for the sun
while we children innocently sniff at Yardbird's fleeting bop bubbles,
unbroken bones
made obsolete by each exact moment's loss

and so too a hovering polar baby bird
enchanted every minute by her fledgling life,
carries on
the breath's improvised
extraordinary flight for freedom

4/1/18
Easter Sunday

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Robert Feldman

Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Robert Feldman was inspired by members of Paterson's literary tradition, most notably Louis and Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams. While living in St. Louis, he organized poetry readings, produced and hosted a community-issues news hour and a biweekly bebop jazz radio program on KDNA-FM. His interest and admiration for the Beat Generation flourished. Robert was instrumental in publishing some of Arizona's most influential writers such as Drummond Hadley and Michael Gregory, and in 1980, collaborated with Lawrence Ferlinghetti on his Bisbee publication, "Mule Mountain Dreams." During the '80s and '90s, he participated in dozens of poetry readings around the country. He continues to write, paint, and play tabla, besides workshoping with young poets across south Florida and throughout the country. The body of Robert Feldman's writing and painting can be accessed at www.albionmoonlight.net; he can be reached at rffeldman@gmail.com.

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Robert Feldman

fallen angels

disparate
divergent souls
breathing in
each other's winds
exhaling knives of ice
slashing innocent hearts
chunks of forgotten sweetbread

disparate
disembodied souls
emptying each other's mouths,
buried treasures of
once long ago deep kisses,
sheltering one another's arms
defending a forbidden embrace

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fallen angels
stifling each other's eyes
now vanished, joyless,
pregnant with wariness,
hearts ashen
baffled
vanquished
severed
crestfallen
sealed shut,
now ever mistrustful of each other's gorgeous light

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Unstrung • Summer 2018

Robert Feldman

impostor

“a single rip is harder to bear than a hundred ones”

— Nicole Krauss

dust
swelling my heart,
swept over by careless promises
bitter shards of glass
orange peels, pits,
insincere moist handshakes
counterfeit vanilla hugs

72

an impostor's hand now considers my headstone...
an impostor's hand now uncovers my final resting place

dust
choking my heart,
buried by mounds of abandoned memories
bits of clay—
unformed
eroded
then quickly discarded—
backyard crumbs scattered for blackbirds

Continued on page 73

an impostor's hand now carves my headstone...
an impostor's hand now digs my final resting place

dust
conquering my heart,
questions squelched
questions without end,
answers fabricated from habit
pledges broken
eyes flinched
tongue crooked, twisted,
breath superficial, transitory...

an impostor's hand now plants my headstone...
an impostor's hand triumphantly earths my final resting place

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Robert Feldman

the haunting

ghosts of Medgar Evers and Malcolm
haunt me still
as do targets Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman
victims Bhapu Ghandi and Ko Ni
innocents Asia Bibi and her lawyer Salmaan Taseer...
their hearts excised
their bodies ripped apart
their families scattered and forgotten...

their ghosts haunt me still...
lives plundered by bullets and ropes
white sheets and crosses,
plundered by deprived reptiles disguised as humans
smugly clinging to some bullshit god
the temerity to play god,
stubbornly clinging to some perverted revisionist past

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their ghosts haunt me still...
my eyes moisten
my heart wells with grief
these tragedies cannot be swallowed
and down there in Parkland another explosion pounds my head senseless
this profound shame of humanity again witnessed...
defense of skin color?
arrogance of archaic ideas?
mistrust of diversity?
and what exactly is an infidel?

their ghosts haunt me still...
the hate that exists for reimagining a life lived
persecution and torment badges worn proudly,
choosing martyrdom over Light
scorning those sipping water through thicker lips
vilifying those with noses that may be pointier
mocking those using the left hand to wash their asses...
or persecuting meat eaters
or lighting Shabbos candles on Friday night
or blessing a child from a river
or uttering a distant dialect—
so where exactly does some “dominant” language come from?

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yes, their ghosts haunt me still
tears me up while chopping broccoli
shatters my heart while brushing my teeth
confounds my years of practicing empathy...
why must our children endure this rampant assault-weapon hatred?
why must the oppressed become the oppressor
abandoning the struggle like some burning coal
saluting only those with the same perspective
donning the same shabby blood-stained uniforms
horrific enough to bury one's humanity
drunkenly celebrating suppression
reaching for some rope
loading yet another gun
sharpening yet another knife
mixing yet another vat of acid
threatening walls and fences
once again preparing to destroy humanity's audacity to hope
another's right to dream
another's curse to feed from the thinning fingers of hunger
another's choice to sit anywhere on a public bus
another's choice to sip wine alcohol
another's choice to play the ponies or blackjack
or to marry or unmarry,
to breathe from the nose or from the mouth,
another's choice to express one's sexuality
to love blendedly
to sleep alone forever
backwards or sideways
right or left...
yes, ultimately, to freely choose one's own eulogy

their ghosts will forever haunt me still
until the homeless souls join hands with those of us somehow left behind
together creating a majestic wave
great enough to wash away those barbaric footprints
and once and for all cleanse this land of ignorance and tenebrosity
so that all may begin again...
yes, start over from the same innocence we were born into,
of sharing kindred visions
of cherishing one colossal heart—
to Life!

© 2018

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Veronica Hosking

Heat Island

Phoenix

Metropolis

Sprawls across the valley

Urban landscape dotting desert

Ersatz

© 2018

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Veronica Hosking

Veronica Hosking is a wife, mother and poet. She lives in the desert southwest with her husband and two daughters. Her family and day job, cleaning the house, serve as inspiration for most of her poetry. She was the poetry editor for MaMaZina magazine 2006-2011. “Spikier Spongier” appeared in Stone Crowns magazine November 2013. “Desperate Poet” was posted on the Narrator International website and reprinted in Poetry Nook. She has had several poems published by Silver Birch Press. In 2018, one of her haiku was chosen for the “Arizona Matsuri” ebook, and several haiku have been featured on the “poetry pea Haiku Chronicle Podcast.” Follow her poetry blog at <http://vhosking.wordpress.com>.

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Photo by Shawn Hosking

Veronica Hosking

My Zip Code, the 85392 Poem

Phoenix, Arizona known as
Valley of the sun
Solar heat
Creates renewable energy
We love

© 2018

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Veronica Hosking

Untitled Tau'ku

Hot, dry winter longs for

Monsoon

Summer storms quench thirsty desert

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Editor's Note

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Possibly one of the tougher things to deal with when a loved one passes is that we can no longer make memories with them. As I've grieved the loss of my father the last two years, I've thought a lot about the idea of memory. I realize this is where death and memory enter the realm of poetry. A poem can capture a memory for a greater truth. It can help us bridge the language of the living with the language of those who are no longer physically here with us. It can bridge the language of the now with the language of memory. Rather than having memory trapped in amber, like a fossil, a poem allows us to keep the memory organic, keep it alive, as it joins the broader dialogue of the living. Poetry won't bring back our loved ones, but it can celebrate the memory of them and keep the memories of our time with them alive.

Rebecca "Becca" Dyer

Editor

Editorial Staff

Editor: *Rebecca Dyer*

Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Publisher: *Elena Thornton*

Artwork for front and back covers: *Marjory Boyer*

Open Mic: A celebration of the arts

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

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

When: Every last Thursday of each month, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

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

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

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Coming this Oct. 28!

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

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

Admission is free!

For more details, visit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website,
www.artizona.org

A Call to Poets

For Summer 2019

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, will seek poetry submissions for its Summer 2019 Issue from June 1 through July 4, 2019. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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

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

A Call to Writers for the Fall 2018 Blue Guitar

The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2018 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

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

Meet the staff of Unstrung magazine



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

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



Richard H. Dyer Jr., 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.

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



UNSTRUNG

A magazine of
for and about
poetry



Unstrung will
return in
Summer 2019