

Pinesong

Awards 2025

North Carolina Poetry Society
Founded 1932

Pinesong

Awards 2025

Volume 61



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EDITOR'S NOTE

It is spring again. The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

My maternal great-grandmother, Charlotte Hooten Green, could hold an audience performing poetry “recitations” in a slow Southern drawl. Her voice rose and fell in a natural rhythm, the words arranged in a cadence much like musical notes to the ear. There is a certain magic shared in such a recitation. The earth shares its magic each spring as we awaken from the dark days of winter. May is again the perfect month for meeting at Weymouth to hold ceremony and offer praise for the poems tucked between the pages of this anthology. Each of these poems is well worth being honored and waits ready to be read aloud. I know these poems, they feel like old friends, and I understand their magic and look forward to hearing their voices. These last few moments alone with them are spent knowing there is a deadline to meet and a new publisher waiting to send these friends into the world.

Sherry Pedersen-Thrasher, Editor

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2025 PINESONG DEDICATION

The 2025 North Carolina Poetry Society Pinesong Dedication Committee is proud to present its dedicatee, Malaika King Albrecht. *Malaika* means *angel* in Swahili, and Malaika, born of Peace Corps parents who served in East Africa, is a person of exemplary conduct and virtue. She has spent her life ministering, nurturing, and serving—people, animals, art.



Malaika lives in Warsaw, Virginia, on Freckles Farm with her family, which includes horses, a mini donkey, and many other two-legged and four-legged animals. She works as a yoga instructor, a Reiki practitioner, and an equine specialist in mental health and learning, working with the nonprofit Horses and Health, which she co-founded. She's been able to merge healing and poetry in various ways, offering poetry therapy while working as a rape crisis counselor and merging yoga with poetry prompts and writing time in a workshop on the farm and elsewhere. She has taught poetry classes like *From Survivor to Thriver: Write Yourself* at many venues, including at the Split This Rock Poetry Festival in Washington, DC.

After moving back to North Carolina nearly two decades ago, Malaika has given her energetic and inspiring presence to various roles in the North Carolina Poetry Society, from board secretary, to membership co-chair, to the first Lena Shull chair, to President from 2019 to 2021. She is often active behind the scenes and still serves when and where needed—and her commitment to poetry expands well beyond the North Carolina Poetry Society.

She has also served on other literary boards, such as the Poetry Council of North Carolina (which created the NCPS Lena Shull Book

Award), the North Carolina Writers Conference, and the Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities, chairing their writers-in-residence program and creating a weeklong writers' summer camp for children. Nationally, she was an original member of the Furious Flower Advisory Board, accepting the position in 2009. Furious Flower has produced internationally- recognized events in celebration of Black poetry and is the nation's first academic center for Black poetry. As an advisory board member, she participated in events like *73 Poems for 73 Years: Celebrating the Life of Lucille Clifton* and *Sheer Good Fortune: Celebrating Toni Morrison*. A highlight for her was reading one of Ms. Clifton's poems on stage with some of her favorite poets, including former United States Poet Laureate Rita Dove.

Malaika is, of course, a poet herself. *The Stumble Fields* (Main Street Rag, 2020) was a finalist in the 2021 Eric Hoffer Award. Her book *What the Trapeze Artist Trusts* (Press 53, 2012) won an honorable mention in the Oscar Arnold Young Award and was a finalist in the 2012 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. Her chapbook *Lessons in Forgetting* (Main Street Rag, 2010) received an honorable mention in the Brockman-Campbell Award and was a finalist in the 2011 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. Of her second book *Spill* (Main Street, 2011), a reviewer wrote, "Intense, emotional, real, Malaika King Albrecht shrinks from no truth."

Her poems and essays have been widely published in anthologies and literary magazines, including *Best of Pirene's Fountain*, *Kakalak*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Quarterly West*, *The Banyan Review*, *SWIMM*, *Verse Daily*, and many, many more. Her poetry has been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and won awards at Press 53, Salem College, and elsewhere. In May 2024 she attended an international writer's residency at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Ireland.

Malaika has helped other poets find a home for their work. In 2008, she started *Redheaded Stepchild*, an online magazine that only accepts poems that have been rejected elsewhere. With *Redheaded Stepchild*, Malaika has hosted nearly weekly online book launches since March 2020.

Malaika also served as the inaugural Heart of Pamlico Poet Laureate

from 2018 to 2021. During her term as poet laureate, she facilitated many workshops for eastern North Carolina (ENC) and hosted a website featuring ENC poets, including her friend Marty Silverthorne, for whom she later co-edited his posthumous book of new and selected poems (St. Andrews University Press, 2021).

She's been a guest editor for other magazines and anthologies like *Pedestal Magazine* (issue 84) and *Kakalak* (2018), a judge for numerous contests, including for the Poetry Society of South Carolina and the Silver Arts Competition, and a semi-finalist and finalist judge for NC Poetry Out Loud. After years of co-hosting a monthly reading series and open mic in Fuquay-Varina, she also was a co-editor of *The Best of the Fuquay-Varina Reading Series* (Main Street Rag, 2012). She and the editorial board at *Redheaded Stepchild* are working on an anthology of the best rejects published at *Redheaded Stepchild*.

In her poem "Genealogy," Malaika writes, "My mother's mother and her mother / sent a dark blood to flame my veins, / prayed I'd be woman-strong." And strong she is. A mother, a metal artist, a poet, a wonder. A flicker of red hair, a beaming smile. A light in any room she enters.

To recognize her service to poetry and particularly to the North Carolina Poetry Society and in gratitude for her light and life, we dedicate this 2025 volume of *Pinesong* to Malaika King Albrecht.

Alana Dagenhart
David Radavich
Celisa Steele
Nancy Dew Taylor

POET LAUREATE AWARD

Poet Laureate Judge: Jaki Shelton Green

Jaki Shelton Green, Ninth Poet Laureate of North Carolina is the first African American and third woman to be appointed as the North Carolina Poet Laureate. She is a 2019 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow, 2014 North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame Inductee, 2009 North Carolina Piedmont Laureate appointment, and the 2003 recipient of the North Carolina Award for Literature. Jaki Shelton Green teaches Documentary Poetry at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies and was appointed the 2021 Frank B. Hanes Writer in Residence at UNC Chapel Hill. Additionally, she received the George School Outstanding Alumni Award in 2021. Her publications include: *Dead on Arrival*, *Masks*, *Dead on Arrival and New Poems*, *Conjure Blues*, *singing a tree into dance*, and *breath of the song*. *Feeding the Light* and *i want to undie you* were published by Jacar Press. On Juneteenth 2020 she released her first LP poetry album, *The River Speaks of Thirst*, produced by Soul City Sounds and Clearly Records.

Judge's Comment

The first-place poem, "Women's Wartime Ways Bolster Days of the Great Depression," demonstrates an effective use of primary sources and poetic devices for reframing numerous narratives inside of a historical event. This documentary poem vividly delivers the themes of economic hardships, emotional despair, family troubles, and the communal landscape of the Great Depression.

Contest Process

The Poet Laureate Contest followed a two-step blind judging process, with preliminary selections of ten finalists by Adult Contests Coordinator Jim Zola and final selections by Poet Laureate Jaki Shelton Green.

Jim Zola is a recently retired children's librarian. He grew up in upstate New York and has lived in Missouri, Michigan, and now North Carolina for the past thirty-two years. Past occupations include teacher at the school for the Deaf, security guard, and toy designer for Fisher-Price. His poetry books include *One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher, 1990), *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich, 2014), *Monday After the End of the World* (Kelsay, 2020), *Erasing Cabeza de Vaca* (Main Street Rag, 2020), and *It's the Unremarkable That Will Last* (Redhawk, 2024), winner of the Lena Shull Book Award.

POET LAUREATE AWARD

Winner

Lynda R. Myers

Women's Wartime Ways Bolster Days of the Great Depression

after Donald Justice's "Pantom of the Great Depression"

The men return, but some things stay the same:
rationing, Victory Gardens, Meatless Mondays.
After World War I, Bessie clings to wartime ways,
making do, taking in wash, baking scones.
Bessie's crafts double-crust pies, uses a ringer-washer.
She does not take to malaise.
Time has faded wartime struggles; we children see
local baseball games, enjoy snow cones.

WWI gone fourteen months, Bessie keeps
wartime ways: cuts costs, makes her aprons.
She tiptoes into Depression's daily, one predawn
at a time; her heroic ordinary blooms.
We know satiated bellies and simple shelter
in five-room, brown-shingled Craftsman.
Wartime struggles fade; we five kids relish
baseball games, 10-cent Crown Park snow cones.

Bessie tiptoes into daily one predawn at a time,
her sacred ordinary blooms.
Before and now, her latticed berry pies star
at mealtimes, antidote to stew of honeycomb tripe.
Time has faded wartime parting, toil;
we kids relish baseball games, 10-cent snow cones.
Old snapshots missed women's grit to grapple
the grind in wartime, unsettled times.

Before the war and from 1929 to 1939, Bessie's
scratch pies are a neighborhood sensation.
Few Taylor Avenue families find themselves
in Oakland's ramshackle Pipe City camps.
Old snapshots miss the grit to grapple with wartime lives
or the toll of the Great Depression.
Bessie takes in laundry, ironing, sells eggs, jellies,
staves off bread lines, soup kitchens.

Few Bay Area families land in Oakland's
ramshackle Pipe City camps.
In wartime and beyond, neither rickets
nor malnutrition visits our home.
Bessie takes in laundry, ironing, sells chicks, eggs,
staves off bread lines, soup kitchens.
Aprons, housedress mask drudgery; wartime
or in later decades, Bessie will not succumb.

Pellagra, rickets, marks of malnutrition,
don't descend on Alameda's thresholds,
nor are we at risk for taking up a San Francisco,
Hooverville residence.
Apron, house dress mask drudgery:
wartime or afterwards; Bessie doesn't fold.
Papa appears with second cat-o-nine-tails;
Bessie resumes her pre-war practice; it vanishes.

Due to Mama Bessie's frugal, make do ways,
we escape residence in a *Hooverville* camp.
Front yards, porches are neighborhood markets;
Bessie trades tomatoes, plums for pasta.
Papa chases, swats us kids with strap;
Bessie hides the thing; papa cannot find it.
Lush hydrangeas, geraniums; begonias,
hanging baskets of lobelia, hush a tragic saga.

On front yards, Pestoressi's, Wassermans,
first generation, trade tomatoes, lemons for pasta.
Van, veteran of European theatre, picks tomatoes,
plums; Bessie irons, makes jelly.
Lush hydrangeas, geraniums; begonias,
baskets of lobelia, conceal tragic saga.
We kids draw a breath. The cat-o-nine-tails
is no more. Papa's strap is history.

Back from the Western Front, Van mows,
plants, plucks; Bessie takes in wash, ironing.
Papa trades tomatoes, onions, apricots,
for lasagna, enchiladas, avocado.
Bessie sells eggs, chicks; makes cloths, aprons,
toys from patterned sacks of flour.
Mrs. Wasserman makes bread, kreplach dumplings;
Señora Velasquez, mole poblano.

Papa exchanges tomatoes, onions, apricots,
for dumplings, avocado, Spanish rice.
There is no end in sight.
We keep our needs few, our belts tight.
Mrs. Wasserman makes bread, kreplach dumplings;
Signora Pestoressi, eggplant with olives.
Our souls wear scars from World War I,
the Great Depression, like barbed wire's slice.

After wartime, our family champions
through the Depression, our belts tight, our needs few.
Mama Bessie never wavers: takes in wash,
lengthens hand-me-downs, lowers hems.
On porches, stoops, neighbors gather, trade multiples,
divvy up culls, split or bruised.
Use it up, wear it out; make do or do without
is the wartime women's Depression anthem.

Poet Laureate Award Finalists

The North Carolina Poetry Society wishes to extend congratulations to the following finalists of the Poet Laureate Award:

Confidence *by Morrow Dowdle*

Counting Time *by Brook Blaylock*

The Mahalakshmi Blesses *by Aruna Gurumurthy*

Breaking the Hen *by Claudine R. Moreau*

ADULT CONTESTS

ALICE OSBORN AWARD
POETRY WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN
Judge: Erica Goss

First Place
Richard L. Matta

Spread Your Wings

Imagine you join a bird flock flight
birds to the left and birds to the right.

A wingspan's gap between front and rear,
but the biggest surprise you're yet to hear.

You're not a bird of this flock's feather,
and they'll be many asking whether

you're a spy learning new aerial tricks
or maybe you were always out sick.

You thought you knew how they flew—
changing lead birds to freshen with new.

Their foraging methods, their fair song
how they sit and feed—you were wrong.

While many wonder, you now see
mixed flocks are smart as can be.

Some see better, or have better hearing,
working together they'll be less fearing.

Tomorrow fly in a flock of your choice
and sing your birdsong as you rejoice.

**ALICE OSBORN AWARD
POETRY WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN**

Second Place

Donald Wildman

Enjoying Your Mosquito Bite

It itches.
What pleasure
your fingers
and leg share
scratching.

It's there
like the moon,
on your leg, proof,
you are part:
you're food.

It's a new hole in
your skin. The world's
flowing into you
like spring water
into a stream.

ALICE OSBORN AWARD
POETRY WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN

Honorable Mention

Brewer Eberly

I Want to Be Right Next of You

I want to be right next of you
he says as brightly as he can.
I want to be right next of you.

This use of *of* is better than *to*
for you are of me and I with you
and you are *right*, after all,

curled up next to me,
between every fall, and every morning
staring at books you'll soon be reading,
and still when you've grown tall and true,

I will want to be,
and will to be,
right next of you.

**ALICE OSBORN AWARD
POETRY WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN**

Honorable Mention

Les M. Brown

Mycology

I heard the mushrooms talking
as I walked the wild path through
dark overstory, oak and pine
and the low dark laurel and rhododendron
The turkey tails laughed
when the oysters
made fun of their names.
Jellies jiggled
and giggled with them
from their damp log perch.
The ear mushrooms listened,
said nothing but thought
the porcini and chicken of the woods
were just as funny.
Honeys were just too sweet
to make fun of their names.
The puffball beside the path
swelled up, indignant
at all of their banter.
A beautiful white destroying angel
tipped her cap, raised her veil,
tempting me to take her home,
sauté her, taste her lethal beauty.
The chanterelles, truffles and boleti
stood by quietly as I passed.
The morel said, "Listen carefully
on your walk in the woods.
You may hear my friends.
They don't appear long,
but they are fun guys."

**ALICE OSBORN AWARD
POETRY WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN**

Honorable Mention

Jane Schlensky

Huggable

Old Joe carried that boa around for years,
it wrapped around his shoulders, his neck
draped in its muscles, fleshy, cool,
its head testing the air along his arm,
a curious hungry gaze. Clara, he called her.

Old Snaky Joe could make us children scream
although he and the snake were both serene.
We crept close and quiet, formed a line,
and he would sit festooned in snake, let us run
our hands along smooth muscle, cool as satin
glinting in sunlight, its tongue flicking, playful.

He taught the word *constrictor* by slowly
squeezing our forearms in his big hands
until it almost hurt. "It's like a hug gone wrong,"
he said, and I thought of Grandma hugging
too tight, unwilling to let go.

Just once we watched Clara devour a mouse,
swallow it whole, then rest inert, digesting
in her terrarium. Joe petted her head touching
the lump of mouse moving along her length.
"Imagine being hugged to death," the old man said,
his gentle smile more frightening than I can say.

KATHERINE KENNEDY MCINTYRE

LIGHT VERSE AWARD

Judge: Chapman Hood Frazier

First Place

Nick Sweet

10 Minutes till SHOWTIME !!

My father's favorite drive-in film was "The High and the Mighty,"
I wore my pajamas, my sister in her nightie
It featured Dad's dual deities, John Wayne and aviation
Mom preferred romantic shows, charming assignations
Favored flights of fancy, love and liting laughter,
Silly spats and pillow talk, not airborne disaster
My sister fell asleep before the plane was in the air
Our bumpy backseat cover made her face a prickly pear
I saw, soon after takeoff, a fierce windstorm unfold
My father gripped the steering wheel like Wayne held the controls
Their tandem motions tickled me, I chuckled at the scene
My dad: the mirror image of the pilot on the screen
Tackling the turbulence, the twosome roughly swerving
Our Plymouth rocked, mother found the sudden shifts unnerving

Stifling my giggles, I snorted in my sleeve
"I fail to see the humor," said Mom, a little peeved
I ducked behind my father's seat, my laughter came in peals
Mom was staring daggers but Dad still clutched the wheel,
Navigating crosswinds, damaging and cruel,
The left wing caught on fire, the tank was leaking fuel
But these brave aviators would not accept defeat
The pilot in the cockpit and the one in our front seat
Realized instinctively there was only one way
For a successful touchdown, to finally reach the runway
Passengers pitched luggage out, decreased the aircraft's weight
Their destination, now in sight, relied on prayer and fate
The Duke and Dad land safely, all faith in flight restored
At Circle Drive-In's Family Night in 1954

KATHERINE KENNEDY MCINTYRE
LIGHT VERSE AWARD

Second Place
Don Ball

Algebraic

In my windowless
high school algebra class
Train X leaves Philadelphia
for New York at 60 mph at 1 p.m.—
it's July, a molten 95 degrees—
the engineer, Preston, is heartbroken
because Delilah, his girlfriend,
has “jumped the tracks” on him—
his heart drops at the rate of one-
memory-per-second (OMPS).

Meanwhile in New York, a second Train Y
has been stolen by his now ex-girlfriend's
sister Maud, and—secretly longing
for Preston herself—her throttle is wide open
and roaring for Philadelphia at 70 mph
on the same track. Preston is bereft
and weeping as he accelerates blindly
out of a curve. Maud's golden hair
streams behind her—she is weeping too,
but happily. How long before they meet
without braking and where?

(show your work.)

KATHERINE KENNEDY MCINTYRE
LIGHT VERSE AWARD

Honorable Mention

Lauren Caddick

The Ballad of Linda Kane-Pippin

Young folk may see their elders, think they're sound of mind, then see—
beneath the guise of age may lie untamed insanity.

In fact, a woman once known as a “teacher extraordinaire”
instilled the arts within young minds, yet she was not all there.

Her name, Linda Kane-Pippin, is a name most don't forget.

Her students say her classroom was a dizzying roulette.

She painted in a manner she was sure Degas once did,
but Degas didn't spend an art class painting blindfolded.

The orange on her palette matched the color of her hair,
She'd joke like the Mad Hatter and wore muumuus everywhere.

Her past, revealed in parts, showed as her name concealed within:
a synthesis of lives did make one Linda Kane-Pippin.

She grew up with a mother who still lives and is quite old.

A shock, for she believed paint thinner cured the common cold.

This can't have helped young Linda, who was wild from the start.

She left for California where she tracked down drugs and art.

A “beatnik” of her time, she wore all black and beat a drum.

She lived by Kerouac, preferring poems to income.

Then a man named Kane she wed, but sadly not for long.

He broke code for the U.S. and was killed in Vietnam.

I've joined her stories piece by piece, but now one is amiss.

Two decades pass without remark. What I presume is this:

After the death of one she loved, authority she blamed.

Her grief was weathered underground with those she'd never name.

But times they were a changin'; answers blowin' in the wind.

White fences replaced picket signs, a new life settled in.

She married one of clever wit, the ever-honest Steve.

He filled the gaps past lives had left. Her side, he'd never leave.

Such total opposites they were, uncommon tones made like.

As Linda mused and rambled on, Steve'd laugh and puff his pipe.
She's still the local wrecking ball of her small town's art scene,
like a Tasmanian devil with a large dose of caffeine.
I can't predict what new life will replace the one she's in,
but, I dare say, I quite enjoy *this* Linda Kane-Pippin.

KATHERINE KENNEDY MCINTYRE
LIGHT VERSE AWARD

Honorable Mention
Steve Kendall

My Dog

I found a dog that had two tails,
a head on neither end.
He followed me, at least I think
that's what he did intend.

At any rate he backed up to
the place that I call home.
I've kept him with me ever since
and call him Palindrome!

KATHERINE KENNEDY MCINTYRE
LIGHT VERSE AWARD

Honorable Mention
Deborah H. Doolittle

Clueless in Clueville

That day, I played Colonel Mustard, paunch
belly, mutton chops and handlebar
mustache. Blustering my way through each
room with my Lee-Enfield rifle from
the Boer War. Refused to pick up
the lead pipe or candlestick. Miss Scarlet,

my sister, played a side game of Twister
with Professor Plum, a brother who
couldn't stop fidgeting between turns.
We planted clues like seeds in the room:
between cushions, under the carpet,
tucked into the frame of our recent

family portrait, behind Prof. Plum's
band-aid that covered his skinned knee,
inserted like bookmarks in leather
bound books. Three alone in the cookie
jar. Each time we checked, our mother would
call out from a distant room: *Get out*

of the cookie jar! We agreed that
the game would not end, that the murder
would remain a mystery, become
a cold case, except for the clues that
kept popping up all over the place,
day after day, with less and less sense.

BLOODROOT HAIKU AWARD
Judge: Michael Dylan Welch

First Place

Edward Cody Huddleston

Mom's trowel—
the dinosaur bones
we never found

BLOODROOT HAIKU AWARD

Second Place
David Green

deep snow
he shortens his stride
to match hers

BLOODROOT HAIKU AWARD

Honorable Mention
Rowan Beckett Minor

deep shade
a double-dog-dare
to eat one worm

BLOODROOT HAIKU AWARD

Honorable Mention

Martin Settle

lightning bugs rise from grass
the night rich with candles
and champagne

BLOODROOT HAIKU AWARD

Honorable Mention

Mary Hennessy

our hands are all sky.
My hydrangea fingers
hold little bits of this.

BLOODROOT HAIKU AWARD

Honorable Mention

Karin Hedetniemi

one broken cookie
the barista says
this one is free

POETRY OF COURAGE AWARD

Judge: Ray McManus

First Place

Mara Lee Grayson

“For now, you’ll need to cope and compartmentalize,”
said the therapist

I dreamed him up a butterfly & gave him fifty
milkweed leaves to help him through the summer.

By milkweed, I mean feeding tube. Butterfly
means butterfly. He was defiant & unconscious,

like a Polish forest filled with trees that bend
north at the base. I bent inside his gaze.

There are better ways than dreaming
to compartmentalize the dead. We forget that

what we know is not intrinsic to our nature,
no more than palm trees are indigenous

to Southern California, or concrete &
cobblestone are made for, not by, our feet

& hands. I watch the sky a lot till August,
lying on my back. A different man

calls me exotic then flips into a headstand
in the park. He means my face perplexes him,

he can’t place my ethnicity, he is flirting with me.
The writer should insert something here

about how language is constitutive, like
With words, a writer can reorganize her world.

Like, *the writer knows the Monarch is endangered*
but when a body's whittled down even June

creates a chill that makes a writer fantasize
of flying south. Once the writer *was* exotic,

meaning I kept secrets. I locked up my life
like Coney Island's funhouse, filled with mirrors,

closed down for the season. Surrounded
by my selves, I discover keeping secret means

to keep a secret *from*—the writer learns
to play along. Yes, I have been a man's

terrestrial weapon of destruction.
I have been his landmark, crater, scar.

I filled a cavity with water siphoned from the muck
of Sheepshead Bay. Back & forth I swam.

Your chest's wishboned-

out from the robe,
& closed
I am paler in this light.

scar peeks
flexing open
as you breathe.

Notice the shadow, eating

Mare Crisium—the Sea of Crisis.

You say, *We've never looked
more frail.*

I say, *The Moon is about 240,000 miles away,*

& recedes 4 cm/year. What I do not say—

eventually one side of our ignited
planet will always face the Moon,
double tidal lock.

Half of us will no longer whisper
about falling in love in moonlight.

The other half, in terror,
not of drowning
in the ice melt,
but
loved something
we crushed

of how we were like children,

so blindly

every b o n e

[[[(inside of it)]]].

POETRY OF COURAGE AWARD

Honorable Mention

Jenny Bates

Virga

Every raindrop panics me now

long before it arrives

I feel like an old Dog who hides

in the bathroom sniffing grey skies

I go out walking anyway make

myself brave but I really don't want

it to rain

I want fear to evaporate like a virga

line I want to become a cloud dropped

full of reflection and affection

when I listen to rain I hear echoes

of your voice not in my ear anymore

asking under any circumstance

will you want to make love again?

POETRY OF COURAGE AWARD

Honorable Mention

Ralph Earle

The Song About the Rodeo

We are working on the country tunes
that remind him of his Texas childhood.
This week it's *Amarillo by Morning*
but his voice breaks, he gets ahead of the beat,
forgets the lyrics, says *Let's try again tomorrow.*

We set up side by side, computer on my lap,
mic on a tripod, to take another go
at the rodeo cowboy, divorced and battered,
driving into dawn for one more county fair.
I ain't rich, but Lord, I'm free.

He hunches forward,
counts out the beat. His voice soars
like a hawk in the light of the high window
above the mesas of the Llano Estacado
we are driving driving now
and we make it all the way to Amarillo.

**BRUCE LADER POETRY OF WITNESS AWARD
CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OR ISSUES
Judge: Matt Donovan**

First Place
Michael Loderstedt

Rodanthe

You watched the cottage
pitch and yaw on its stilts

writhing in video frames
until it slides sideways

into the surf, you said
Why do people build there?

A fair question given
a rising sea. Next day's sun

comes bathed in lavender,
dolphins chase each other

across the living room's picture
window, terns dive feeding fish,

tiny sea-turtles wriggle
from warm sand behind

the garage. You can only dream
this life, this view, this broad ocean

of where you've come,
screaming that fiery

breath, beckoning you
home, stepping through the glass-

door to ride down
this swaying deck, down,

down to the licking crests,
slipping beneath

the darkest water.

BRUCE LADER POETRY OF WITNESS AWARD CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OR ISSUES

Second Place

Kelly White Arnold

November 6

*Why as a woodcock to mine own springe. . .
I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.*

—Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (V, ii)

Consider the waxwing, libertine of avians, gorging
itself on fruit ripened to rot, berries murky with too-sweet
nectar, pips past prime, all softness and syrup. Then, drunk
on fermented juices, they fall where they feast, oblivious,
vulnerable to claws of prowling housecat next door,
feathered leaves scattered on suburban lawns.

And the blue jay—brash, aggressive, bully of birds, scourge
of my sun-dappled backyard. He spouts noise all
day long, swoops in to terrorize what infringes on his space.
Tyrant seeking victims, starving competitors at the feeder,
stealing eggs from nests before they hatch. There's a hawk
perched warily in the black walnut above. He doesn't notice.

Or the Carolina wren, visually unremarkable, tiny.
She nests in the fake foliage on my front porch and crashed
headlong into my living room window this morning. Surely
she sees the barrier there—we haven't Windexed in months.
What does she fly toward with such frenzy, and why, when
she wakes, stunned, does she careen toward glass again?

BRUCE LADER POETRY OF WITNESS AWARD CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OR ISSUES

Honorable Mention

Suzanne Simons

Instructions for Erasure

after Gordon Hirabayashi

Call the prison Honor Camp.
Locate it in the desert, near the base
of a mountain. Arrest issei, nisei,
even those with only one Japanese-American
great-grandparent. Charge them
with conscientious objecting,
immigration (!) violations. Imprison them

in barracks on concrete slabs that hold
the chill of too many nights. In desiccating
heat, make them build a road to the top
of the mountain with pick axes, shovels.
Force them to build the superintendent's
house on a hill overlooking the barracks,
landscaping terracotta rocks into enduring

terraces. When a persistent and honorable
prisoner arrives—on his own accord—do not
let him cause trouble. Keep extra eyes on him,
watch for signals. Do this for years.

After the war, fill the prison with young men,
mostly black and brown. Keep the prison going
for decades. Eventually, close Honor Camp.
Demolish all buildings to their foundations,
bury any reminders. Repurpose the land
into a campground, horse corral, trailheads.
Bring back to honor the honorable prisoner,

whom a shrewd president apologized to,
40 years later. Build a kiosk with historical
photos and text, but away from the campground
where few will see it. Post a sign at the road
the honorable prisoner helped build. Attach
his name to the sign. Call it a recreation site.

**BRUCE LADER POETRY OF WITNESS AWARD
CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OR ISSUES**

Honorable Mention

Mary Spadoni

Post-Apocalyptic Apology Tour

I need you to know that we really tried.
We marched clutching shields of handwritten signs
knitted our fury into pink-eared hats.
We boycotted, we organized, we screamed
into a bottomless digital void
desperate for someone to affirm our tweets.
Yet here we are treading rising waters
underneath a blazing sky. Do you know
we used to hear birdsong? It's true! Every
morning birds would wake and greet the sunrise
with trills and chirps and warbles. I would think,
c'mon birds, it's too early, go back to sleep!
Now, I spot a plastic bag in a tree
and for a moment, think it's a cardinal.

**BRUCE LADER POETRY OF WITNESS AWARD
CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OR ISSUES**

Honorable Mention

Lucinda Trew

Things in Need of Watering

tulip bulbs and almond trees,
the stretch of stone soup, marjoram
on windowsills

touch earth and you know thirst

also, panting dogs after summer
walks, runners crumbling paper cups,
artesian wells and textile mills

these too, know thirst: babies in Gaza,
crying without tears, Syrian refugees
in Lebanon, young men keening

at borders, crossing from El Salvador,
touching fingers to lips and the unforgiving
earth that brings them here

CAROL BESSENT HAYMAN POETRY OF LOVE

Judge: Lola Haskins

First Place

Claudine R. Moreau

The Athiest

Her playground shoes
teem with sand and mulch.
She kicks them against
the passenger seat,
floorboards anointed
by the debris of recess.

From the altar of a booster seat
she asks who I love more
her or Daddy,
as she wraps
a clutch of gold hair
around a hooked finger—

its end a wet fireless wick.
I tell her I love them both
more than anything.
She is fast
with first grade
scripture—

how *Haley* says you
must love God more
than anyone.
I reach for her knee,
that sprig of branch.
Through

tears
she says she loves
me more, too.

CAROL BESSENT HAYMAN POETRY OF LOVE

Second Place

Laura Alderson

Front Hallway

Nine births
eight named
if only
for a day
six
children living
laughing bickering squealing
muddying up the house
on the table there
between the bible's leaves
a whisper
of hair
a sunny towhead
the memory
too
fragile
for a name

CAROL BESSENT HAYMAN POETRY OF LOVE

Honorable Mention

Ann Herlong Bodman

Winds Can Shift, Tides Ebb

From the marina my husband and I watch
boats float away and into the far horizon,

sails sparkling like goddesses in the white,
calm air. Only fog to fill our solitude.

He opens the tool compartment and I wonder
how long this will last, this space

between us, but soon a power boat
sweeps in, gunning its engine. Fishermen

swarm down the docks, tasting honey
in their Buds and Coors. Gulls scatter.

terns squawk. We putter like Sunday
afternoons in the early years of sailing.

There's work to be done, aft lights
to be replaced, boom vang sanded,

purpose to be found in the sound
of steel against steel—the inevitability.

This is the hardest part of the marriage:
knowing. Watching the dolphin leap

and dive, knowing. Watching the sun
fall low and lower. All afternoon we toil,

knowing. All afternoon it grows: the silence,
the words we want to say but can't.

with a line from "Sunday Radio"
by Dorianne Laux

CAROL BESSENT HAYMAN POETRY OF LOVE

Honorable Mention

Pam Baggett

Where Mom Is Now

She's a nice girl, Mom says about the doll
in her lap. *She has three sisters. And three boyfriends!*
We're in the Man Cave at her memory care home,
brown plaid sofa, antique license plates, a plastic bass,
no men in sight. I tell Mom *she* has three sisters,
not mentioning they died in recent years,
ask if she has that many boyfriends. She hangs
her head, pokes out her bottom lip, *I don't have any.*

I didn't mean to upset her, so I remind her
about dating the florist's oldest son,
which makes her happy until I carelessly add,
before he left for the war. *They all left*, she says.
The sad lip again. Those Pennsylvania Dutch farm boys
who knew milk cows and corn fields, shipped
to the South Pacific because the government thought
their German dialect meant they might turn spy.
She's forgotten my southern father,
the flirtatious guy she worked with at a factory
that built equipment for the boys overseas,
Dad stateside because he'd flunked his military physical,
surprised to find he only had one kidney.

Mom holds the doll to her cheek,
says, *Give Mama a kiss*, holds her to mine
and says the same. *This is a good baby*, she says.
She never cries. I'm still picturing marriages
postponed, sweethearts who never came home.
I wonder where Mom is now, her life a car she drives
without headlights on a road rife with detours,

ever-deepening potholes. Sometimes when I leave
I'm exhausted from the zigzag turns,
though I keep coming back, remembering
I was once her good baby, that this is what it takes
now to be a nice girl.

CAROL BESSENT HAYMAN POETRY OF LOVE

Honorable Mention

Brooke Lehmann

Dumb Luck

Heavy berries have fallen
to earth, yellow blinks of July, steady.
At night rain bursts, urgent, as if the air
says, *this this*. Fruit trees are lined
in stark green throws of summer, emptied.
We kneel in the sunshine, bow over cucumber
beetles munching on small flowers, alive
and unwavering, you hold my hands.

**CHARLES EDWARD EATON AWARD
FOR SONNET OR TRADITIONAL FORM
Judge: Nicola Caruso Garcia**

First Place
Duncan Smith

Allegiance

I am a white, gray-haired, senior, gay male
partnered for four decades, married for one.
Sundays, I kneel down at the altar rail
rise renewed and restored by the Son.
The Bible is more Spirit than tome.
Those who left my Church because of me,
I hope they find their God and church home,
one who loves them and just lets me be.
I cannot follow stars and stripes, stars and bars.
My flag shows equal bands, rainbow shade.
Our difference isn't something that mars
but the key to how whole countries are made.
What words make the pledge of a nation,
where I keep my faith, orientation?

**CHARLES EDWARD EATON AWARD
FOR SONNET OR TRADITIONAL FORM**

Second Place
Jane Schlensky

Thoughts to Warm Cold Nights

Each winter can remind me to take note
of birds that stay, of sunny days, of hope,
sweet simple beauties always in my view,
and loving souls that keep me sane and true.
And when compassion is in short supply,
when mercy and humanity defy
the daily headlines hazarding my mind,
I search for evidence of a design.
Perhaps longing for warmth on coldest night
kindles a need in me to seek new light:
a slip of moon, a scattering of stars,
the blinking green of fireflies caught in jars,
small candles lit by flames passed hand to hand,
small inklings when I think I understand.
Each winter still reminds me when I doubt
that love unseen beneath my feet can sprout
one kindly day, and everything I know
may yet bloom beautiful, and grow, and grow.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON AWARD
FOR SONNET OR TRADITIONAL FORM

Honorable Mention

Theresa Yuschok

Zaspivajme! Let's Sing!

When Lemkos meet, they sing and toast a round.
The more they drink, the better voices sound.

We Americans sing for them a Lemko song.
Mnohaya Lita, a blessing for the day.
The host convulses sobbing. What is wrong?
“We thought you all forgot our language and ways.”

They sing a mournful ballad in our honor,
how they missed their brothers who left home.
They heard about the sweatshops, soup lines, miners.
They prayed their kin did not die alone.

Perhaps in the stratospheres of our Lord
our songs met, embraced, and harmonized.
Across the years and ocean there are chords—
and cords—remote relations do not realize.

MARY RUFFIN POOLE
AMERICAN HERITAGE AWARD

Judge: Christine Potter

First Place
Brooke Lehmann

Sierra Glow

*this flower is the supermodel of the dahlia world.
Tall, elegant plants with long, strong stems.
—Natalie Slade, "Dahlias"*

We didn't mind the small birds,
their beaks or pronged feet
on our leaves. Horsefly
wings tickled our bare necks.

Sister, we welcomed them all. Speckled
fawns and white-tailed hawks
pecked at our seeds.

Under the quilted sky, ladybugs
marched labyrinths around our petals.
Cucumber beetles climbed us,
our long-green-limbs.

In the evening, vespers of fireflies calmed.
Stars careened the darkness,
cornstalks swayed.

Then the hours were long, a recurring dream each night.

It was awful to retreat to silence,
live only as stems in rootstock, holding
us deep in gritty dirt.

What did our lives matter? Alone
in his cage called *garden*, a prize—
only to be gazed, then wither, jolted
by the howl of coyotes.

What hurt their ears so badly?
The wind raging,
go, go, go.

MARY RUFFIN POOLE
AMERICAN HERITAGE AWARD

Second Place
Martin Settle

The Wild Garlic Manifesto

the underground
difficult to exterminate
pockets of bulbs and bulblets
with skins that defy
killing chemistries

wild garlic is the resistance
erupting in the midst
of fascist lawns
spoilng the effect
of deadly conformity

the plant's tough tendrils
make a fist of opposition
to monocultures
save eyes blinded
by ganzfeld fescue

diversity is wild garlic's slogan
its soul democracy
wild garlic rallies around
lifegiving ecologies that do not require
military round-up
or mower mass beheadings
to keep order

the garlic's revolutionary message
is bitter but sustains hearts
unlike grass
it's edible
a spice in melting pots
with mixtures of philosophy

MARY RUFFIN POOLE
AMERICAN HERITAGE AWARD

Honorable Mention
Joyce Compton Brown

April Bloom

The peonies are budding—
their glossy leaves, tight-packed buds
on lush green stalks bend to carry
white blooms tattooed with bloodred streaks.
They cluster on stems burdened by their weight,
beauties from the East which once held
myths from Paeon, healer of the gods.
Someone who loved them lived here,
someone who knew she was passing on a gift,
waited for that season when buds would open
hard hearts, emerge tight-round, then spread,
soft wide and white, drop petals like bridal trails.
Peonies are slow starters, wait, then spread
their billowing blooms.

Once they commit, they'll probably
outlive us, offer a feast for our souls
as we kiss them goodbye. Black ants
attend the process, nudge sepals,
devour oozing nectar, crawl through openings
to gentle fluff. The healing beauty offers
its power to give, ours to receive.
Some say they'll last a century if properly loved.
Bless the next gardener who waits
for a woman, a man, a flower
billowing white and soft. Bless the woman
who props up the glossy leaves, the opening buds
and teaming ants, the newly moved who
receive the gift of another's tending.

ROBERT GOLDEN AWARD

Judge: Robert Dodd Lee

First Place

Brooke Lehmann

Green River

Those summers we spent the afternoons rolling down the levee by the mud brown river. We blew dandelion seeds and helped my grandmother pick rhubarb from the small patch of garden she kept behind her shack. We fell in love with what rural poor people have: sunlight and sky, the work of their hands. My grandmother taught me how to live with mice, their unsuspecting necks snapped while bacon fried in her pan. She was not sentimental of mice or men. She told me it was as easy to love a rich man as a poor man. She told me that the Kentucky rain poured over her garden, over the *ugly river* because she missed her daddy's farm. She braided my hair while we listened to Judy Garland sing and skip her glittery heels down the yellow-brick road. I never felt richer than when I was in her lap, her calloused fingers rubbing my ears, practicing my spelling bee words. C-h-r-y-s-a-n-t-h-e-m-u-m, rolling over my tongue like a tiny thimble. *Honey, you're going to leave this place one day.* Her needle and thread nearby. The tired Singer machine propped on the kitchen table.

ROBERT GOLDEN AWARD

Second Place

Pam Baggett

Election Night

Tonight, I tell myself what matters
is that my mother eats the ground chicken,
tender carrots cut in tiny pieces,
chocolate chip cookie soaked soft in milk.
That she's happy afterward as we sit
in the lobby of her memory care facility,
Linwood, Serena, John, and Johnny shuffling past,
John with no shirt, Johnny missing a shoe.
I say, *It's a real parade in here tonight,*
and Mom asks, *Is it a real parade?*
I point to Nannie in her purple jogging suit,
warbling "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"
off-key as she clings to her walker,
to Ilene, searching behind a door for parents
she claims were kidnapped by the FBI.
Distracting Mom as Mary wheels down the hall
strapped to a stretcher.

What matters is that it's after eight,
so I take Mom to her room, tuck her into bed
with the blond-haired doll she believes
is a living child, watch her kiss the baby's forehead
before lifting her up for me to nuzzle.
I kiss Mom's forehead too, tell the nightly lie
that sings her to sleep like a lullaby,
that I'm going to bed in my room down the hall.
She asks, *Do you think you'll make it a habit?*
Sleeping? I say, *Yes, I think so,* and she agrees
that maybe she will, too.

I walk out into the starry dark,
twenty miles of interstate before the exit
that takes me to the two-lane leading home,
past the giant Trump for President sign
lit by a junked car's headlights, parked in a field
opposite the local gas and cigarettes store.
I'm listening to the radio, frightened
by what will happen to the old and sick,
the poor, my mother weeks from needing Medicaid,
peace slipping away as the election results
start tilting toward disaster.

ROBERT GOLDEN AWARD

Honorable Mention

Caren Stuart

What Are My Answers to Questions Conjured as Death Rides a Tarot Card Among Flowers?

bluets! if only... with even a hint of their blooming,
i am seduced by the whispered hope in their un-
blinking eyes... yes. yes. pleas. I've received many
gifts such as these (bluets!) from time to time and
i've missed The Door in The Mountain i think (the
first go 'round at least) but doesn't every mountain
allow many journeys up & down, around & through?
I am never actually through as in finished. What i
fear might be revealed in my cards is Truth. Isn't it?
This life is all about re-visioning and showing up
and whittling into the depths of whatever surfaces...
I still have my smooth, green Girl Scout pocket-
knife... (Mumbly Peg, anyone?) Daddy taught me
how to play... (and that *is* "whatever comes up")
bluets, meadows, streams (of consciousness such as
this Now...) What surfaces often materializes...
on paper from rivers of ink or lead (rhymes with said)
led (rhymes with fed) by hand with pen or pencil
in hand. What surfaces often is light (of course) and
the music of Poem (rhythm and rhyme without any
ifs... ands... buts... about it... & no oars for shooting
through the rapids... only just the current itself...)
What... ever do the Cards' Re-Visiting Images want
of me? Acknowledge... and Admit? Yes! Confess
whatever IS and allow it *IN*... meaning: i must
acknowledge the meaning of what i am gleaning
and allow that meaning *IN* to me. Yes. Please.
(pleas...) The returning cards are always speaking:
Own This Truth, this secret i've been trying to
hide (from my Self). Death as a card is so many

different kinds of death which are always so many
different kinds of Paths. And... Death is Alarm
Clock—more tick & tock than alarm, more *dis-*
arm than alarm... more opening up to *new* than
burying *knew*... (as in... what has been known).
It's not always someone we mourn. *Sometimes*
it's *something*. Each mourning brings a new day...
New evening. New night. Go to sleep perchance
to dream to dream perchance to awaken a new anew.
Poets dive dissect divulge divest...dye (with a why)
so many shades to pull down into Night / to raise
up into Day (into Light). What I want to nourish is
my Empathy. Too, what I want is to reap. More.
Light. What I want is to reap more Light (as in *not*
a lessening of weight but yes, a lessening of wait).
Understanding. Now. And Gratefulness. Joy. And
Love. Receiving and Giving. Expanding. I want to
reap *Shine*. I want to *shine* Shine.
Yes. Yes. Please.
bluets...

*This after Angela Dribben's Two Dog Tarot "Turn
the Card, Spin the Line" Tarot & Poetry workshop*

ROBERT GOLDEN AWARD

Honorable Mention

Joanne Durham

The Pulaski Skyway, 1970

I drove that massive maze, high as its trusses,
to make it out of New Jersey to New York's smoky clubs,
to sit a table away from musicians soon to be stars.

You had to trust your gut to maneuver over that shoulderless
bridge in a banged-up blue Ford Falcon
with its sticky clutch I could barely shift into gear,

looping over and under concrete cloverleaves someone
in the 1930s designed with a skewed view of sanity. I should
have guessed they'd name it after a hero who lost

his life in the Revolutionary War—remembering
how we jumped from war to war in US History, no bridge
to understand what flowed between. Outside

of classrooms I learned battles weren't always won
by the righteous, boys I knew were drafted to fight a war
none of us supported. Never mind I couldn't pick

a guitar string or hear an A flat from a C, I fantasized
a rock band named *The Pulaski Skyway*,
loved the rush, the feeling my friends and I thought

was freedom. Fear blasted out rolled-down windows
into frosty night air, riding something called
a skyway, close to moon and stars we still believed in.

ROBERT GOLDEN AWARD

Honorable Mention

Erika Takacs

The Women Who Worked in the Whitman's Chocolate Factory

for Nana

They were told they could eat whatever they wanted—caramels and buttercreams, bittersweets and mint marshmallows. New girls

spent their first day grabbing every new shape that slid by, snatching seconds when they found a favorite. By suppertime, they'd made themselves sick,

which was, perhaps, the point. Most of them would tell you they never ate another piece off the line. Instead, they tossed out Messenger Boys

with broken corners, tucked walnut clusters into pillow-soft liners, tied red satin bows around every golden box. After Pearl Harbor, the boxes

were traded in for tins—no need now for ribbon and tissue paper, not when every shard of brittle would be loaded on a warship beside rifle shells

and hand grenades. The women packed those tins with tears in their eyes, picturing red-cheeked boys with dirty fingernails passing them reverently

around a frozen foxhole. When their bosses weren't looking, the women slid notes in with the Jordan almonds—a prayer, a joke, a kiss in Victory Red—

then spent their shifts daydreaming about the men who would find them, wondering if they were blue-eyed like Sinatra. The ones who sent addresses

sometimes found out. They all grew up, grew old, became women whose granddaughters asked them to tie the bows on the back

of their Easter dresses, because their bows were always perfect, like a storybook, like a fairy tale about a woman who married a prince

with chocolate on his lips, a woman who, to the end of her days, could tell which candies were which just by the shape of the swirl on top.

ROBERT GOLDEN AWARD

Honorable Mention

Eric Weil

Answers I Wanted to Give, But Didn't

One of my students flunked his ROTC command training summer course and asked me, his English prof and advisor, to recommend him for a second chance before a review board. When the colonel asked if I'd ever served in the military, I could have said I spent one day in the custody of the U.S. Army during the last year of the Vietnam draft, taking tests and having my heart, lungs, nuts, and ass examined to see if they qualified for getting shot up. The sergeant said if we failed any test on purpose we'd be inducted that day, probably a lie, but why take the chance? I hoped my scores in math and English would balance not knowing a carburetor from a generator or an oil pan from a brake shoe on the vehicle parts recognition test. I'd asked my dad if I should worry, and he said, "Why? The war is winding down. You're barely five-four and you weigh a hundred pounds soaking wet. They'll have you typing triplicate forms requesting more triplicate request forms at a base miles from combat." In WWII my father played in bands and staffed the prophylactic office, handing out condoms and shooting penicillin into guys that spent their leave in Paris picking up the clap. Chief Arranger and tenor sax player for the 179th General Hospital Band, he had to develop a cynical attitude, as he entertained GIs at dances, guys who'd thought they'd never see another living woman,

and he healed their fear-acquired VD
before they got thrown back into the line
against the Nazis. Shell shock was a weakness
then; honorable PTSD was decades away. He recalled
a lifer sergeant telling him the United States
needs a war every few years to provide the Army
with a fresh supply of combat-tested noncoms
because they're the leaders that win wars.
Whatever else he saw in that hospital,
he kept it to himself, never shared a hint,
which was in itself a powerful hint.
A doctor said, "Are you a homosexual? If you lie,
we'll find out." I said, "No!" He said, "That's No
Sir!" I said, "No Sir!" "Then move along, son."
I came out labeled 1-H, ready if needed. My
lottery number was 56, but they drafted only
to 38. I should have told that ROTC colonel
I did exactly what my country asked me to do.
Did my student get his second chance?
Of course not. They busted him to sergeant
in the National Guard, and he became
an English teacher one county to the west.

**JEAN WILLIAMS POETRY OF DISABILITY,
DISEASE, AND HEALING AWARD**

Judge: Stacy R. Nigliazzo

First Place

Mary Hennessy

Like Locusts and Famine in Pearl Buck

Many
things come in waves.
Hellos,

goodbyes,
the salt tides—
unable to think on their own,

their moon-mind—
first this way, hello,
then that.

Waves of grey geese v-ing across
a blank sky,
Not one turns to look back.

Waves of dry leaves scrape
the concrete. Pain comes
in waves, as grain does. Nausea,

too, breath and sobs. The flame
in the Saint Jude candle
shapes and reshapes itself,

as though in a storm.
Husband, you touch the wound
that is my leg—

The Good Earth, the old movie tonight—
and out of a fathomed sleep,
I remember how beautiful

you are. On screen, in black
and white waves, the rice farmers ignite
a fire-line between their bodies

and the locust swarm,
turning it away, this once,
from the sacred fields.

JEAN WILLIAMS POETRY OF DISABILITY, DISEASE, AND HEALING AWARD

Second Place

Peggy Heitmann

Still Life with a Gutted Thing

I eat blue tulips for breakfast.
Seems fitting to me
the day before my mastectomy
as I coerce a smile for my husband.

After breakfast, we walk,
an attempt to maintain
our daily routine. My arm links
through his as we step together.

No, we don't step, we glide
until we come to a bridge
the same one we pass every day.
But today, a broken piano

sprawls near the stream below.
Wires sprung, keys strewn,
legs broken, lid severed at the hinges.
Blue chicory springs up between flats and sharps.

My husband and I gasp
when we see the gutted thing.
He says, *I hear*
the ghost of her beautiful music.

I hold onto his arm more
tightly than before.
We don't look at each other.
We walk home in silence.

JEAN WILLIAMS POETRY OF DISABILITY, DISEASE, AND HEALING AWARD

Honorable Mention

Jennifer Weiss

Madame Butterfly

“Mom looks great,” my brother proclaimed
on a quick visit after she had endured
pneumonia and sepsis.

Maternal astronaut orbiting
the son, she ignored her tubed tether,
the hiss and click of oxygen concentrator
at apartment’s center, and served
weak tea and sweet biscuits
before alighting on a chair,
delighting in his quips.

.
A monarch-embroidered kimono,
porcelain foundation and blood-red lipstick
masked her sallow visage, haggard physique.

When we were little, she fluttered
through the house each evening,
tidying rooms, readying her face,
donning heels, before our father’s headlights
shot through the shutters like lightning,
and thundering, he flung
open the door.

JEAN WILLIAMS POETRY OF DISABILITY,
DISEASE, AND HEALING AWARD

Honorable Mention

Lora Hawkins

Poppy

Grief is just love with no place to go

—Jamie Anderson

I loved you before I knew you.
We both did.
We'd dreamt of you—
spiral curls, like your father's;
a too-big laugh, like your mother's.
We imagined you kicking a soccer ball,
which is why I wouldn't let your father till the lawn—
garden beds be damned.
We were nine days into y(our) pregnancy
when I found the lump.
You, the size of a poppy seed,
the choice already impossible.
Some days, I still look out at the lawn,
but now,
instead of imagined soccer games,
I picture flowers—
miles and miles of red blooms.

**JEAN WILLIAMS POETRY OF DISABILITY,
DISEASE, AND HEALING AWARD**

Honorable Mention
Richard L. Matta

Widow Maker

Unexpectedly an eddy forms,
a beaver builds a dense dam.
The stream slackens and stops.

My spirit starts a journey as if
on a quiet conveyor belt.
In the starry sky, infinity pulls

like a black hole's hunger. I will
tell you there's no guardian at
the boundary, no guardrail, and

no sinister song of ghosts. Just
a sense this isn't an illusion but
the terminal choice to enter

or exit. Then in the faintest voice,
I didn't think he was coming back.

STUDENT CONTESTS

TRAVIS TUCK JORDAN AWARD

Grades 3-5

Judge: Gideon Young

First Place

Mary Grace Dixon

4th grade, Uwharrie Charter Academy Elementary School
Asheboro, NC

ADHD

I am flexible and fragile
I wonder what a mortgage is
I hear my tap shoes tapping
I see squishy stuffed animals talking
I want to never take a pill again
I am flexible and fragile

I pretend to be a YouTube star
I feel like my face is too round
I will touch Saturn's rings
I worry my maw maw will get sick again
I cry when my friend's dad doesn't show up
I am flexible and fragile

I understand my mother loves me
I say I am the best artist in fourth grade
I dream math class disappears
I try to concentrate during school
I hope my ADHD goes away
I am flexible and fragile

TRAVIS TUCK JORDAN AWARD

Second Place

Deetya Singh

5th grade, Alston Ridge Elementary School, Cary, NC

Gymnastics Class

I go to
gymnastics
meet my friends
do flips, turns, and
twists on the
beam and floor,
the floor looks like
lava and the
beam is peach like
a skin tone
and at the end
of gymnastics
I drink water
and go back home.

TRAVIS TUCK JORDAN AWARD

Third Place

Juliet Geracitano

5th grade, Audrey W. Garrett Elementary School, Mebane, NC

Fear

There I stood upon the water
Looking out to foreign lands
Separated by the oceans
I take a breath and clench my hands
I take a step and close my eyes
And jump across to the other side
I land in all the sandy rubble
And I looked back and saw a puddle!

TRAVIS TUCK JORDAN AWARD

Honorable Mention

Emmalyn McCuen

4th grade, Carpenter Elementary, Cary, NC

Imagine

Small
gray little stone
smooth with a
dragonfly
on one side and
one word
on the other,
Imagine.
Once held by my Nana
then another from my mother
now just me,
Can you imagine?

JOAN SCOTT ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Grades 5-9

Judge: Malaika King Albrecht

First Place

Chandramouli Sunkara

5th grade, Alston Ridge Elementary School, Cary, NC

Beneath the Whispering Tree

I walked beneath the old oak tree,
whose branches whispered songs to me.
Its leaves, like pages, turned to dust,
the ground beneath it cracked and rust.

The river that once ran crystal clear
now whispers softly, filled with fear.
The fish, they hide, and birds go low.
They seek a place that's safe to go.

But in the soil beneath my feet
a silent promise starts to beat.
A seed of change, of life once more,
waiting for hands to plant, restore.

The Earth speaks softly in the breeze,
in flowers blooming, in the trees.
It calls for hope, for what can be,
if we all listen—can we see?

So let us plant, and let us grow
together, where rivers flow.
For though the sky may seem to cry,
there's still a chance to heal, to try.

And as the sun begins to set,
the Earth whispers, don't forget,
in every breeze, a song of grace,
to heal the world, to find our place.

JOAN SCOTT ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Second Place

Akshaj Singh

8th grade, Alston Ridge Middle School, Cary, NC

Our World's Song

The Earth is more than rock and soil,
A living home that we could spoil.
From forests deep to oceans wide,
Nature's wonders, side by side.

The trees reach high, their branches spread,
A shelter green above our head.
They breathe out air, so pure and clean,
A quiet hero, tall and green.

The rivers flow, so fresh and free,
They carve their path down to the sea.
A world alive beneath the waves,
A precious gift that we must save.

But smoke and waste cloud up the sky.
We're asking Earth, but wonder why
The glaciers melt, the waters rise,
Our world changes as we close our eyes.

So let's protect and not ignore
The world we live in, and so much more.
With every step, a choice to make,
For the future's sake, let's stay awake.

JOAN SCOTT ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Third Place

Lillian Skolrood

9th grade, Sparrow Academy, Cornelius, NC

The Reservoir

The sky has emptied itself, curving in cloudy
porcelain over the few dwellers, here,
trembling
and the small pieces of bare water
settle beneath.

Beside the bridge to Highway 73
(we've driven by it every week this November)
a heron bends double

with the draggled trees, ribs of logs soft with rot,
over everything the film of silt like
skin, exposed.

The reeds
and the heron's feathers
and what's left of the water
flutter with the dark wind.

The sky cannot protect them from this—
a huddling in the newly foreign crevices beneath
the upturned bowl.

Sometimes I think that the world pours out
all that it has—all of itself—on us
and still it is not enough.

JOAN SCOTT ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Honorable Mention

August Gordon

9th grade, T.C. Roberson High School, Asheville, NC

A World Made

My phone tells me that the weather
is terrible for a run, but I go anyway.
The trail is coated in snow, slush, and ice:
the first two little more than a nuisance,
the last a danger
that my swim coach would yell at me for risking.
But I am not a swimmer.

I am cautious at first: careful steps,
slowly taken. Breaths labored as too-sharp air
burns my lungs. Fingers curled
into my sleeves, icy.
But the numbers on my watch tick upward,
and I begin to forget.

Gradually at first: one step
without cursing my aching feet. One breath
that I don't regret the second I draw in the biting air.
I start to feel like a bird,
or the wind maybe:
something completely and utterly free.

My steps loosen, lengthen;
my breaths come easier;
my fingers peek, wary, out of hiding.
The shock of the cold air like waking up to a world
made of color, when you have only ever lived
in black and white.

JOAN SCOTT ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Honorable Mention

Avery Shalda

7th grade, Emerson Waldorf School, Chapel Hill, NC

Two Leaves

Two leaves still clung to
the limbs of an old oak tree
not wanting to fall, drop, and
with the wind, flee. When the
autumn gales blew they still
clung tight. But it was winter's
blustery gusts that sent them
flying in the night. And both
that morning equally lay
on the ground, on the path,
in the clear light of day.

JOAN SCOTT ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Honorable Mention

Juliette McCandlish

6th grade, Fletcher Academy, Raleigh, NC

Wonderful World

Do you ever yearn for the spicy sweet smell of the autumn breeze?
Or the rustling of the critters hidden in the leaves?

The start of the fire? The crimson flame?

It is a wonderful world we live in,
So why not treat it with love, right?

The earth has a spark.
Let us add to the light.

No matter where you look, you can find a way to help.

Mother Nature is calling.
Why not answer?

Sure, take no action, nobody will come for you,
But what about the sweet smell of flowers?

The beautiful lakes and streams?
Every part of nature is a queen or king.

So next time you pick a flower, or squish a bee,
Think what the world will become, one day from now, one week,
one year maybe.

The world is always changing, but with help and time, maybe the
change won't always be as bad.
Even when times are sad.

It's a wonderful world.
Let's keep it that way.

MARY CHILTON AWARD
Grades 6-9
Judge: Chris Abbate

First Place

Lillian Skolrood

9th grade, Sparrow Academy, Cornelius, NC

Dusk Walk

The punctual streetlights snap on
and our two-dimensional
selves—you, me, and the dog

are black against the asphalt.
Even the cultivated Chevrolets and orderly flower
borders attain mystery in pools of dark.

Trivialities die in air—how neat, how elegant,
to walk with the dog sniffing and bumbling,
to walk without words. Then,

crossing to avoid headlights and
a slumbering construction,
how elegant—

a dappled pattern of mimosa leaves
and there, a skunk picking her precise way
across the grass

MARY CHILTON AWARD

Second Place

Maxwell Wei

7th grade, Marvin Ridge Middle School, Waxhaw, NC

Aftermath

I.

In Boone, she walked back
into her trailer Helene wrecked,
40 years of her family's history,
to where her mother died,
to son's Covid death certificate
soaked in four feet of water,
to the view of the rubble
along the narrow road,
the only way in and out.

II.

In Asheville, watching the flood
on their disappearing roof,
her son called out for help.
They got washed downstream
with her son being torn away.
She held on to vegetation
tangled by roots and trees,
then came down to find
her parents were gone.

III.

In Chimney Rock,
piles of splintered wood,
what's-left-of-roofs,
float in Lake Lure
with empty sedans.
Unaccountable dreams still exist
as America's flag flies
high on the rock.

MARY CHILTON AWARD

Third Place

Bridget Reid

9th grade, Junius H. Rose High School, Greenville, NC

Unrequited Love: The Echo of a Heart

Like *waves that reach but never touch*,
I chase a love not meant to be. Your laughter rings, a melody,
That lingers softly within my chest.
Yet every note reminds my soul—
That *I am loved far less than best*.

I trace the stars with weary hands,
As if they hold a fate more kind,
But fate is blind to whispered prayers,
And *love is deaf to hearts confined*. I watch you,
dance in golden light,
Your smile is a sun I cannot keep.
For I am but the silent night,
Who loves while you, unknowingly, sleep.

Each glance you cast, *a fleeting spark*,
It illuminates, then fades away.
I reach for warmth, but grasp the dark—
A shadow lost in the break of day. If love were fair,
you'd turn to me,
And see *the fire behind my eyes*.
But some must burn and never shine,
And some must ache while others rise.

So I stand, an empty hand,
A heart that beats yet beats alone.
For love unreturned is love that stays,
A sorrow carved into the bone.

MARY CHILTON AWARD

Honorable Mention

Juliette McCandlish

6th grade, Fletcher Academy, Raleigh, NC

Waiting

Waiting, waiting for the sun to rise, waiting

The days were brutal but all they had freedom to do was wait,
Even though *Arbeit macht frei* was the camp's motto.

They worked, waiting to be set free, like the motto promised.

The bread was stale and the beans were chalky,
They were waiting for the next meal time anyway.

Dita was brave,
She hid the books while they were waiting for the
inspection to start.

Arbeit macht frei,
Work sets you free. Liars.

They were waiting to be set free. Some of them never were.

Waiting, waiting, waiting.

Until they were truly let go.

Soon, planes started flying over Auschwitz.
Was it a sign of freedom or capture?

Then some prisoners were forced to move to different locations.
Why? The younger ones wondered.

And then, finally the waiting was over.
The 5 long years were finally over.

MARY CHILTON AWARD

Honorable Mention

Akshaj Singh

8th grade, Alston Ridge Middle School, Cary, NC

City Nights

The city hums, a steady beat,
Of cars and lights on crowded streets.
A blur of faces, fast and bright,
In pulsing streams of neon light.

Skyscrapers reach to brush the skies,
But vanish where the fogbanks rise.
A million windows start to glow,
Like fireflies, they flicker low.

I wander through this endless haze,
Alone yet wrapped in a night's embrace.
A place so vast, it makes me small,
Yet somehow fills no void at all.

There's magic in the city's breath,
In every sound that stirs beneath,
A restless pulse that pulls me near,
And lifts me up, but keeps me here.

MARY CHILTON AWARD

Honorable Mention

Emma Dobre

6th grade, West Millbrook Magnet Middle School, Raleigh, NC

Waterfall

Waterfall

Starting as a raindrop

Ending as a waterfall

Flowing in a river

Flying out of a mountain

Falling in a pool

Floating in the air

Starting as a raindrop

Waterfall

SHERRY PRUITT AWARD
Grades 10-12
Judge: Pat Riviere-Seel

First Place

Kiran Singh

10th grade, Cary Academy, Cary, NC

Amber Alert

Inspired by Amber Thurman's story

Dear Momma,
There you lie, writhing in pain. Grieving. Praying.
Nearly a day you were abandoned in that hospital bed, inching
Closer to a death you knew was avoidable. Was
Inevitable. They knew it too, but they chose
To fail you as your body failed you, organ
By organ. They just
Waited and watched and listened for its
Heartbeat
To go out before acting, just a
Heartbeat
Too long, losing two lives in the blink of an eye.

Dear daughter,
I wonder if they told you it was out of their hands
I wonder if they told you they were bound by law
It's a man's world, honey
They expected you to accept this fate because failing me
Was better than failing their faith
I had faith, but that was taken from me too...
Do you know what a nightmare it is
Knowing I'm leaving you behind?
I'll never get to raise you, never
Get to see you smile again, but
What haunts me the most is
How the nightmare won't end
With me.

SHERRY PRUITT AWARD

Second Place

Gracen Hiatt

12th grace, Watauga High School, Boone, NC

Jesus of East Tennessee

baptized in the light of stained glass and white walls
you liken holiness with suffocation.
in your sanctuary there are rules
typed out and printed on laminated paper,
placed on every pew.
i found your god sitting on the steps of your Tennessee church
he told me he wasn't allowed in.
your god cried out to me
as you beat him with your newly translated leather Bible,
your name engraved on the front.
with salvation in mind,
you turn your eye
so i took your god to the Dairy Queen.
i told your god he could give up his responsibility
every prophet is still human
and i wouldn't blame him.
in this Bible Belt, your god holds no power.
he can't argue his own divinity
but maybe he could try politics.
i asked your god how he handles the fame
he downs it quick, like a shot
you wouldn't see him if he was staring right at you.
your god thanked me for my righteous sacrifice
as i paid for his burger and fries
and left him on a throne of red polyurethane.
he came to your funeral,
hesitating against
the back wall of the church you commanded for twenty some years
he couldn't save you from a disease of meaningless suffering
even when you swallowed your pride
and said you'd change your mind.

SHERRY PRUITT AWARD

Third Place

Vicky Teng

10th grade, Marvin Ridge High School, Waxhaw, NC

Fly Me to the Moon

There's war in Ukraine, chaos in Gaza,
while I sit at the piano, looking at the keys.

It's just practice, nothing to worry about, but
my eyes start to burn. I think of leaving, not

coming back. I look at the pages and look
at the teacher, ready to move on. I try

to sight read but can't shape my hands
fast enough, left in the notes and chords.

The tempo is too fast, the piece once sung
by Sinatra. No tears come as I find the notes.

In another sky, I know there are missiles,
to destroy concert halls and opera houses.

After, I walk through a desert into the dark
abyss, shot by starlight, to a melancholy song.

SHERRY PRUITT AWARD

Honorable Mention

Jayla Barnes

12th grade, Innovation Early College High School, Greenville, NC

Rotation

Like the sun that day, my father—
a distant body, benign and bright.
How small was I back then,
looking up as if at the earth's light.

Distant, his body benign and bright,
my father stood in the doorframe.
Looking up as if at the earth's light,
I saw him more clearly, with searing eyes.

My father stood in the doorframe,
as if to watch over me, as I grew.
When I saw him—scorchingly clear—
he was already setting, leaving to go.

Once he watched over me as I grew.
How small I was. Back then,
he was already turning to go, setting
like the sun that day—my father.

SHERRY PRUITT AWARD

Honorable Mention

Samantha Kawalec

10th grade, R.J. Reynolds High School, Winston-Salem, NC

I Would Bleed

I want to be a wild thing
And soar high on feathered wings
I want to scar the dirt with heavy claws
And watch a vulture feed

I want to be untamable
And bite the hand that feeds
I want to escape this poison air
And I want to scream

I want to be the loudest beast
And roar louder than a waterfall sings
I want to stomp and dance without rhythm
And I want to breathe

I will be a guardian
And keep the tall grass green
I want to see the stars again
And for that I would bleed

SHERRY PRUITT AWARD

Honorable Mention

Maya Kodali

11th grade, Providence Day School, Charlotte, NC

War

At once,
Blood mosaics stain our fractured sidewalks.
Combat calls our children turned to soldiers.
Damned be what we lose amidst the chaos.
Echelons align like brawny trees as
Flaccid flowers wilt on graves unsightly.
Glory, no, it trails the quest for pride, and
Honor, no, it speaks to sacrifices.
Innocence expelled far deep in battle.
Justice stands infirm against our fate, which
Keeps its sharpest edge when least expected.
Loyalty is wavering, we stand by.
Memories of yore mythologized as
Nightly fleeting dreams of sweet nostalgia.
Oh, but silence follows after storms, not
Prophecy or destiny or mercy.
Quelled attempts of ending stricken struggle,
Ravaged homes and reddened terra firma,
Silent words immortalized on tombstone,
Tears replenishing exhausted rivers.
Underneath the sky, we prophesize the
Vows we rightly hold to one another.
Whence did we forego our solemn promise?
Xanadu is lost at mankind's great toll;
Yoke and suffering at fault for our greed;
Zenith rises as morality falls.

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD

Judge: Maureen Sherbondy

First Place

Sophie Taylor

Junior, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Self-Portrait as a Fish in Bed

I take in gulp after gulp
Of air until my stomach
Rolls with pockets of breath.

If I lay my knuckles on my eyes,
Maybe I'll stop and my sheets
Will untwist like a net unravelling.

My soft palate is a burp of the ocean.
A memory of anemones and porous
Coral reefs. I peer over the edge of my bed.

I swallow at this lump in my throat
Like a bit of bait. A hook in my cheek
Tugs the string, a twang in my belly.

I'm being pulled inside out.
My mouth gasps open and pink,
One wild eye trained on the ceiling.

I'm not supposed to be here
My fear like the dark bottom of a boat
And these fishermen with no faces.

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD

Second Place

Masha Dixon

Sophomore, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Pelmeni/Russian Dumpling

It is New Year's Eve, and I am making *pelmeni* and thinking only of you.
Russian dumplings, I used to watch my mother fold them; delicately and properly.
She never let me do it.

I fold the flour into the dough, and it swirls in a cloud, landing on my shirt.
I am nineteen, but with this powdered coating, I am seven, and ten, and twelve again.

How do I love you?

I never learned it. It was not something I could watch my mother do.

I did not watch her and know how to touch. How to hold your hand, to grab you and say
I love you I love you I love you; can you feel it?

I blunder through, an attempt to be gentle, but I am butchering it.
The meat is falling out of the dough, red against white. Flesh-like.
Is this what my heart looks like to you? Exposed? Unnatural?
My mother said if I don't pinch the corners hard enough the entire *pelmen* will explode.
Let me patch it back up. Let me hide it away.

I place the finished ones onto a plate. They sit with a resoluteness that seems final.
'Yes, here is my place on this plate.'

Oh, little dumpling, if you only knew the boiling pot that waits to greet you!
You will hiss as you enter and sink silently to the very bottom.

I plop the dumplings in, and a droplet of boiling water flies out and lands on my arm.
I jerk it away, instinctual.
How do the *pelmeni* do it? Hiss, and die, and resurface?
How much bravery in one small pocket?

I do not know how to ask for you.

I sit, *pelmen*-like, waiting for you to read my thoughts.
Waiting for you to understand the extent of my want.
How deep is it buried? At the very bottom of the pot?

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD

Third Place

Sydney Baker

Sophomore, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Male, 18, Straight

“Looking for some delightful short-term fun.”

My pick-up line mentions no summer day

When a fine lady makes my skin crumble.

Her tongue tastes praise: “Hey mamma, sexy bae.”

She’s buckets of honey, buzzes, Bumbles.

Sometimes it’s too hot, my heart, Tinder-dry;

It needs a match, a clandestine swipe right,

A message, some flirting to help me get by.

When I’m in bed, bored, I slide in at night.

But this sun-soaked, bleached blonde will never fade,

Her uncontained beauty a door with no Hinge—

My July sun, I wander in her shade.

A poetic DM says “hot.” She says “cringe.”

So long as horny men crave—dating app fiends—

So long lives sweet dumb love, through cracked phone screens.

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD

Honorable Mention

Ananya Solanki

Sophomore, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

The Song of the American Woman

There is a bluebird that sits on Pennsylvania Avenue,
and if you ask her to stop singing—
she warbles on, on, on.

There is a bluebird that sits on Pennsylvania Avenue,
and if you throw your arms up to scare her—
she flies up, up, up.

There is a bluebird that sits on Pennsylvania Avenue,
and if you look away for an instant—
she will return again, again, again.

There is a bluebird who has claimed her spot
who bends like a willow: seems to yield for a time,
but ultimately will never compromise—
her territory is drawn, her role is made, shaped—
vivacious song bursts from her chest: unrestrained

Your fists only make her float higher and
your temper only serves to give her wings,
she will outlast, outwit, outshout your cruelty,
her music is inevitable—she will *win*.

(You walk past each road: “There is Fifth Avenue” you say.
“Over there—my capitol.” And oh, well—
“Yes, there she is. Yes, that is her Pennsylvania Avenue.”)

(...will you march down her street?)

There is a bluebird that sits on Pennsylvania Avenue,
and when you acknowledge her with peace,
she trills the loveliest song.

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD

Honorable Mention

Shaun Kawalec

Freshman, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC

Midday

after lunch we took off running.
we ran down the hill,
past the water,
through the tall reeds,
and into the woods.

the world breathed deeply.
in every gust of wind,
our voices joined the rustling leaves.
the trees watched as we placed stories in the dirt,
and tossed them high into the canopy.

we carried them down sandy hills,
pushed them past dusty rocks,
dragged them through sparkling clay,
and flung them into the highest plateaus of the heavens.

we were part of something that began long ago
and could end any moment,
sublime indifference.
the quiet knowledge in all things,

under every stone,
and beneath every pine,
an answer.
a story.

somewhere in the distance
voices called us back
to the crowd.
we took off running again

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD

Honorable Mention

Gugma Vidal

Senior, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Birdsong

A day so light I hear it carried
On the wings of birdsong.
When we laugh it vibrates between us
Moving faster and faster
Until it shakes like a trembling leaf,
Abandoning the vine
To go where all days go.
A bird becomes a dream
Suspended in light.

ADULT CONTEST JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Alice Osborn Award: **Erica Goss** is the author of *Landscape with Womb and Paradox*, forthcoming from Broadstone Books in 2025, and *Night Court*, winner of the 2017 Lyrebird Award from Glass Lyre Press. She has received numerous Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations, as well as a 2023 *Best American Essay* Notable. Recent and upcoming publications include *The Colorado Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Oregon Humanities*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Gargoyle*, *Spillway*, *West Trestle*, *A-Minor*, *Redactions*, *Consequence*, *The Sunlight Press*, *The Pedestal*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Critical Read*. Erica served as Poet Laureate of Los Gatos, California, from 2013-2016. She lives in Eugene, Oregon, where she teaches, writes, and edits the newsletter *Sticks & Stones*.

Katherine Kennedy McIntyre Light Verse Award: **Chapman Hood Frazier's** *The Lost Books of the Bestiary* was published in 2023 by V Press LC. His work has appeared in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, and has won numerous awards. Currently a Professor Emeritus from James Madison University, he lives in Virginia co-managing Bellfield Farm LLC, a writer's retreat.

Bloodroot Haiku Award: **Michael Dylan Welch** likes to be surprised by empathy and gratitude in haiku, has been active with haiku for more than forty years, and joined the Haiku Society of America in 1987. He founded his press, Press Here, in 1989, edited *Woodnotes* from 1989 to 1997, and *Tundra* from 1998 to 2001, co-edits *First Frost*, and serves as haiku editor for *Pulse: Voices from the Heart of Medicine*. Michael co-founded the Haiku North America conference in 1991 and the American Haiku Archives in 1996, and founded the Seabeck Haiku Getaway in 2008 and National Haiku Writing Month (www.nahaiwrimo.com) in 2010. Michael has won first place in the Henderson, Brady, Drevniok, and Tokutomi haiku contests, among others, and his poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in hundreds of publications, translated into more than twenty languages. His website, devoted mostly to haiku, is www.graceguts.com

ADULT CONTEST JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Poetry of Courage Award: Ray McManus is the author of four books of poetry: *The Last Saturday in America*, *Punch*, *Red Dirt Jesus*, and *Driving through the Country before You Are Born*, as well as the coeditor of the anthology *Found Anew: Poetry and Prose Inspired by the South Caroliniana Library Digital Collections*. Ray's poems have been published in numerous journals, such as *Crazyhorse*, *Prairie Schooner*, *POETRY*, and *The Birmingham Poetry Review*, to name a few. In 2023, Ray received the South Carolina Governor's Awards for the Arts, the highest honor the state gives in the arts.

Bruce Lader Poetry of Witness Award: Matt Donovan is the author of four books and two chapbooks, including, most recently, *We Are Not Where We Are* (an erasure of Thoreau's *Walden* co-authored with Jenny George), and *The Dug-Up Gun Museum* (BOA 2022). His work has appeared in numerous journals, including *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Believer*, *Kenyon Review*, *The New England Review*, *Poetry*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. He is the recipient of a Whiting Award, a Rome Prize in Literature, a Creative Capital Grant, a Pushcart Prize, and an NEA Fellowship in Literature. Donovan serves as Director of the Boutelle-Day Poetry Center at Smith College.

Carol Bessent Hayman Poetry of Love Award: Lola Haskins' latest poetry collection, *Homelight* (Charlotte Lit Press, 2023), was named Poetry Book of the Year by *Southern Literary Review*. The one before that, *Asylum* (University of Pittsburgh, 2019), was featured in *The New York Times Magazine*. Past honors include the Iowa Poetry Prize, two NEAs, two Florida Book Awards, narrative poetry prizes from *Southern Poetry Review* and *New England Poetry Review*, a Florida's Eden prize for environmental writing, and the Emily Dickinson prize from Poetry Society of America. She has served as Chancellor for the Florida State Poets Association since 2016.

Charles Edward Eaton Award: Nicole Caruso Garcia's full-length debut *OXBLOOD* (Able Muse Press) recently won the International Book Award for narrative poetry, and her work appears in *Light*, *Plume*, *Rattle*, *RHINO*, and elsewhere. She serves as associate poetry editor at *Able Muse* and as an executive board member at Poetry by the Sea, an annual poetry conference in Madison, Connecticut. Her poetry has received the Willow Review Award, won a 2021 Best

ADULT CONTEST JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

New Poets honor, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Visit her at nicolecarusogarcia.com

Mary Ruffin Poole American Heritage Award: Christine Potter is the poetry editor of *Eclectica Magazine*. Her poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Grain*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Mobius*, *ONE ART*, *The McNeese Review*, and *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*. Her time-traveling young adult novels, *The Bean Books*, are published by Evernight Teen, and her most recent collection of poetry, *Unforgetting*, is on Kelsay Books. Christine lives in the Hudson River Valley with her husband, Ken, an indulged and chonky cat named Bella, and a few ghosts; her house is very old.

Robert Golden Award: David Dodd Lee is the author of thirteen books of poetry, including two full-length volumes forthcoming in 2025, *The Bay* and *The 574 Area Code's Been Hit By the Blast*. *Dead Zones*, a book of dictionary sonnets, is also due to appear in 2025. His poems have most recently appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Ocean State Review*, *Guesthouse*, *Southeast Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Nation*, and *Willow Springs*. He writes and makes visual art in Northern Indiana. He is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University South Bend, where he is also Editor-in-Chief of 42 Miles Press, as well as the online literary magazine *The Glacier*.

Jean Williams Poetry of Disability, Disease, and Healing Award: Stacy R. Nigliazzo is a nurse, an MFA fellow at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program, and the award-winning author of three poetry books (Press 53). She is a founding member of the Humanities Expression & Arts Lab (HEAL) at Baylor College of Medicine. Her work has appeared in *JAMA*, *Ploughshares*, and the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, among other publications. She was a finalist for the 2024 Patricia Cleary Miller Award for Poetry (*New Letters Magazine*).

STUDENT CONTEST JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Travis Tuck Jordan Award, 3rd through 5th grade: Gideon Young is a member of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective, the Carrboro Poets Council, and the Orange County Arts Commission advisory board. A Fellow for A+ Schools of North Carolina and a stay-at-home dad, his debut haiku collection *my hands full of light* was published by Backbone Press (2021). A former Title 1 elementary school teacher, Gideon is the 2025 & 2026 Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet for the Eastern North Carolina Region. Discover more at www.gideonyoung.com

Joan Scott Memorial Award, 5th through 9th grade: Malaika King Albrecht served as the inaugural Heart of Pamlico Poet Laureate and is the author of four poetry books, including most recently *The Stumble Fields*, which was a finalist in the 2021 Eric Hoffer Award (Main Street Rag, 2020). She's the founding editor of *Redheaded Stepchild*, an online magazine that only accepts poems that have been rejected elsewhere. Living in Virginia on Freckles Farm, she works as a yoga instructor, Reiki practitioner, and equine specialist in mental health, and is an award-winning metal artist.

Mary Chilton Award, 6th through 9th grade: Chris Abbate's poems have appeared in numerous journals. He is a two-time nominee for a Pushcart Prize and has received awards in multiple North Carolina Poetry Society poetry contests. His first poetry collection, *Talk About God*, was published by Main Street Rag in 2017. His latest collection, *Words for Flying*, was published by FutureCycle Press in 2022. Visit him at chrisabbate.com

Sherry Pruitt Award, 10th through 12th grade: Pat Riviere-Seel is the author of four poetry collections, including *The Serial Killer's Daughter*, winner of the Roanoke-Chowan Award. She taught for fifteen years in the University of Asheville's Great Smokies Writing Program and served two years as the NCPS Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet for the state's western region. She once served as

STUDENT CONTEST JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Poet in Residence at the North Carolina Zoo. Her poems have been widely published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. Her most recent book, *Because I Did Not Drown*, poems and prose, was published by Main Street Rag Publishing Co. in 2025. Before earning her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte, she worked as a newspaper journalist, publicist, editor, and lobbyist. Find more about her at www.patriviereseel.com

The Undergraduate Award: Maureen Sherbondy has published twelve poetry collections. Her forthcoming poetry book is *THE BODY REMEMBERS* (October 2025, Unsolicited Press). Her work has appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *European Judaism*, *New York Quarterly*, and many other journals. Maureen lives in Durham, North Carolina. www.maureensherbondy.com

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Laura Alderson writes in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her poems have appeared in *Kakalak*, *Pinesong*, and *Flying South*, and a chapbook, postcard, and broadside were published by The Bellevue Press. Journalism, freelance writing, and book editing laid the foundation, and poetry comes through the door.

Kelly White Arnold (she/her) is a mom, writer, teacher, and lover of yoga. When she's not scribbling in notebooks or wrangling teenagers, she's planning her next tattoo and daydreaming about traveling the world.

Pam Baggett is the author of *Wild Horses* (Main Street Rag, 2018), which received an honorable mention for the Brockman-Campbell Award. Other awards include a 2019-20 Fellowship in Literature from the North Carolina Arts Council. Recent poems appear in *Atlanta Review*, *Kestrel*, *Poetry East*, *Salt*, and *Tar River Poetry*.

Don Ball lives in Raleigh and is a graduate of William and Mary. He received his MA at East Carolina University under Dr. Peter Makuck. Ball has a PhD from the University of Florida and is a retired English professor from Wake Tech. Recent poems have appeared in *Tar River Poetry* and *Pinesong*.

Jenny Bates has written seven poetry books and been published in numerous North Carolina and international journals. She presented at the 2023 Ecopoetics and Environmental Aesthetics Conference in London. She was a judge for the Poetry in Plain Sight contest in 2024. *ESSENTIAL* (Redhawk Publications, 2023) was a nominee for a Pushcart Prize.

Brook Blaylock Born and raised in western North Carolina, Brook Blaylock credits the unique people and experiences of her Appalachian childhood as inspiration for much of her writing, her penchant for gothic tropes, and her dark humor, an inherited trait. Her work has appeared in *The Asheville Poetry Review*, *Kakalak*, and *SEISMA*.

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Ann Herlong Bodman's poems appear in a variety of journals, including the *Atlanta Review*, *The Cortland Review*, and *The South Carolina Review*, and she has won awards from the Poetry Society of South Carolina, among them two Dubose and Dorothy Heyward Society Awards and the 2023 Audubon Prize.

Joyce Compton Brown taught at a small university and has published several books. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee.

Les Brown is from the North Carolina mountains. His writing appears in many journals, including *Pinesong*, *Kakalak*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Still the Journal*. A Pushcart Prize nominee and winner of the NCPS Poet Laureate Award in 2014, Les has two books of poetry and a short story collection, *A Coming of Storms*, (Redhawk Publications, 2024).

Lauren Caddick is an artist from Durham, North Carolina. She received her Bachelor and Master of Art + Design from NC State University, where she was a Park Scholar and a recipient of the Mathews Medal. She now works as a designer for Kantar and enjoys making art of all sorts.

Deborah H. Doolittle has lived in lots of different places, but now calls North Carolina home. A Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of *Floribunda*, *No Crazy Notions*, *That Echo*, and *Bogbound*. When not editing *BRILLIG*: a micro lit mag, she is training for road races or practicing yoga.

Morrow Dowdle is a Pushcart Prize nominee and the author of the micro-chapbook *Hardly* (Bottlecap Press, 2024). They run a performance series in Hillsborough, North Carolina, called "Weave & Spin" which features BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices. They are an MFA candidate at Pacific University and live in Durham, North Carolina.

Joanne Durham authored *To Drink from a Wider Bowl*, winner of the Sinclair Poetry Prize (Evening Street Press, 2022) and the chapbook, *On Shifting Shoals* (Kelsay Books, 2023). Her poems appear widely in journals and anthologies. She lives on the North Carolina coast, with the ocean as her backyard and muse.

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Ralph Earle's poetry collections are *Everything You Love Is New* (Redhawk Publications, 2024) and *The Way the Rain Works* (Sable Books, 2015). A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he has a Ph.D. in English from UNC-CH and co-manages the Poetry Series at Flyleaf Books in Chapel Hill. He lives in Cary.

Brewer Eberly is a third-generation family physician practicing at Fischer Clinic in Raleigh, North Carolina, and a McDonald Agape Fellow serving the Theology, Medicine, & Culture Initiative at Duke Divinity School. His scholarship focuses on the philosophy of beauty, the moral formation of medical trainees, and the nourishment of weary clinicians.

Mara Lee Grayson, whose poetry has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Tampa Review*, *Nimrod*, and other literary journals, has been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart Prizes. Grayson is the author of multiple books of nonfiction.

David Green has had haiku published in *Modern Haiku*, *Frogpond*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Presence*, *Confluence*, and other journals. One of his poems won third place in the Haiku Society of America Gerald Brady Senryu Award.

Aruna Gurumurthy, a creative thinker, has published seven poetry collections since 2015. Her prose poems, sestinas, and free verse capture beauty and art in the world and appear in *Penguin Random House* (forthcoming), *Appalachian Journal*, Michigan State University Libraries, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *storySouth*, *South 85 Journal*, and *The Penwood Review*.

Lora Hawkins is an assistant professor of English at Appalachian State University. Her work has been published in *English Journal*, WhirlyBird Press's *Anthology of Kansas City Writers*, and Helicon 9^{th's} *In the Black and in the Red*. She has taught for sixteen years and earned degrees from Columbia, Brown, and Warren Wilson.

Karin Hedetniemi is a writer and poet with a love for the haiku form. Her poetry has been published in international haiku journals and anthologies, and commended in contests. In 2024, Karin's haiku was awarded Best in British Columbia in the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Invitational.

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Peggy Heitmann is an award-winning poet who received a 2024 Pushcart Prize nomination from *Gyroscope Review*. She has published poems in *Gyroscope Review*, *Wild Word Poetry*, *Remington Review* and *Atlanta Review*. She considers herself both a word and a visual artist. Peggy lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with her husband and their two cats.

Mary Hennessy has been a nurse most of her adult life. She returned to school late and fell in with a community of word-crazed, generous people. Her poems have appeared in journals and anthologies. A Pushcart Prize nominee and veteran Army nurse, poetry is the only thing that makes sense to her anymore.

Edward Cody Huddleston was born in New Jersey and raised in Georgia, where he now works as a radio DJ. His poetry has appeared in more than one hundred publications worldwide and won dozens of awards. His debut haiku collection, *Wildflowers in a Vase*, is available from Red Moon Press.

Steve Kendall is a retired teacher, father of three, grandfather of seven, and, with his wife Deb, travels the world and visits grandkids as often as possible. He taught American literature, composition, journalism, graphic design, and photography. Writing, reading, and woodwork projects fill his “spare” time.

Brooke Lehmann's poems have been featured in *Poet Lore*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Pedestal Magazine*, and others. She was longlisted for the 2022 Palette Poetry Sappho Prize for Women Poets, and her chapbook manuscript, *Pillar of Exquisite Sorrows*, was named a finalist in Tusculum Review's 2023 Chapbook Prize. Her poem “Thanksgiving Psalm” was awarded first place in the Charles Edward Eaton category of the 2024 Pinesong Awards and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her debut collection, *Of Salt and Song*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in 2025.

Michael Loderstedt's first book of poems, *Why We Fished*, was published in 2023 and received the silver medal from the UK Poetry Book Awards. Recent works have been published in *Naugatuck River Review*, *Muleskinner Journal*, *Kakalak*, and the *North Carolina Literary Review*, receiving the 2021 James Applewhite Prize for Poetry.

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Richard L. Matta's poetry has appeared in *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Stirring*, *Gyroscope*, *ONE ART*, *Molecule*, *Watershed Review*, and haiku journals including *Modern Haiku*, *Heron's Nest*, *Acorn*, and elsewhere. He was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and is an award-winning short form poet.

Michaela Mayer (she/her) hopes to excavate hidden stories through verse. When not coping with hypervigilance, she writes poetry, the occasional essay, and works in education. Her writing can be found on her website and in multiple online journals. She has a PDF chapbook out with Fahmidan.

Rowan Beckett Minor (they/them) is a disabled Melungeon writer, editor, and activist from Prince, West Virginia, who currently resides in Cleveland, Ohio. They have poems featured in numerous international journals and anthologies, including three winning poems in the 2023 Trailblazer Contest. Rowan currently serves as Midwest Regional Coordinator for the Haiku Society of America.

Claudine R. Moreau was born near Michigan's Saginaw Bay, but was raised in the coal mining country of southwestern Pennsylvania. She is the author of *Demise of Pangaea* (Main Street Rag, 2024). Now residing in North Carolina, Moreau teaches physics and astronomy at Elon University.

Lynda Myers is a late bloomer, lifelong learner, and a poet in perpetual apprenticeship. Words, figurative language, poetic forms, poems, and poets captivate her. Her in-process manuscript shares the voyages, fittings, shifts, betrayals, hardships, and trials (literally) of her mother's forebears. Lynda has a chapbook of poems on wildfowl caring and Harkers Island, Down East, North Carolina, forthcoming in 2025.

Martin Settle has taught English for thirty-two years, the last seventeen at UNC Charlotte. Mr. Settle has published a teaching memoir, an art design book, a joke book, four poetry books, and a forthcoming early-years memoir.

Jane Shlensky, a veteran teacher and musician, holds an MFA from UNC-Greensboro. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize four times. Her recent poetry and fiction have appeared in a

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

number of magazines and anthologies, including *Pinesong*, *Kakalak*, *moonShine review*, and *Nostos*. Her chapbook is *Barefoot on Gravel*.

Suzanne Simons believes in the power of poetry to connect, heal and transform. Her north stars include nature, spirituality, social justice, and her grandsons. Faculty emerita at The Evergreen State College, she lives in Olympia, Washington, and Sneads Ferry, North Carolina.

Duncan Smith grew up on a farm in southeastern North Carolina in the 1960s in one of the nation's historically poorest counties. Duncan published his first poem at the age of twenty. Decades later he published his second poem and has reclaimed writing and poetry as a recovered passion.

Mary Spadoni is a writer, photographer, and event manager whose work has appeared in *Pinesong*, *Poetry in Plain Sight*, and *Newtown Literary*, among others. She lives in Durham, North Carolina, and spends her days planning her next vacation, perfecting her pour-over, and taking long walks around the neighborhood with her husband, daughter, and dog.

Caren Stuart joyfully lives with her husband in Chatham County, North Carolina, where she reads poetry and writes SOMETHING every day. She frequently attends/hosts/organizes/helps with all manner of poetic/artsy goings on and creates her own poetry, prose, art, and/or craft as close to daily as possible.

Nick Sweet, a freelance stage director since 1977, has directed more than 150 productions for theatres in Oklahoma, Texas, Alaska, and Georgia. Included is the Oklahoma outdoor historical drama, *Trail of Tears*. The Amy Kitchener Foundation named him Senior Poet Laureate of Oklahoma (2010) and of Texas (2013).

Erika Takacs is an Episcopal priest, teacher, musician, and poet. Her writing has been published in *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Earth & Altar*, and *Braided Way*. Outside of work and family, her three great loves are the music of J.S. Bach, books, and baseball. She lives in North Carolina.

ADULT CONTEST WINNER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Lucinda Trew is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee and recipient of *Boulevard Magazine's* 2023 Poetry Contest for Emerging Poets. Her work has been published in *Susurrus Magazine*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *storySouth*, and elsewhere.

Eric Weil lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. Recent poems are in *Kakalak 2024* and *The Louisville Review*, and forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, and Redhawk Publications' anthology to raise funds for Hurricane Helene relief. Journals ranging from *The Greensboro Review* to *Red Planet* have published his poems, and he has three chapbooks in print. Theatre companies in seven states, in addition to North Carolina, have staged his 10-minute and one-act plays.

Jennifer Weiss (Cary, North Carolina) was awarded the 2022 NC State Poetry Prize. Her work has been featured in the NCPS Poetry in Plain Sight series and in *Qu Literary Magazine*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, and *Minerva Rising*. She works as a literacy tutor and loves reading to children.

Donald Wildman is a retired English Instructor, having worked most of his career at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina. His poems have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Tulip Tree Review*, and the *Bedford Competition Anthology* (England).

Theresa Yuschok has been published in *Seventeen Magazine*, *Christian Century*, *Carolina Woman*, and *SouthWritLarge.org*. A psychiatrist, she serves as President of the Jung Society of the Triangle Area. She lives in Chapel Hill with her husband Lee and two dogs, Ziva and Maya.

DEDICATION HISTORY OF THE *PINESONG* ANTHOLOGY

1987	Christine Rose Sloan
1988	Carolyn S. Kyles
1989	Sallie Nixon
1990	Leon Hinton
1991	Samuel LeRoy McKay
1992	Gladys Owings Hughes
1993	Margaret B. Baddour
1994	Shelby Stephenson
1995	Sam Ragan
1996	Ron Bayes
1997	Sally Buckner
1998	Mary Belle Campbell
1999	Elizabeth Grier Bolton
2000	Ellen Johnston-Hale
2001	Marie Gilbert
2002	Ray Dotson
2003	Ruby P. Shackelford
2004	David Treadway Manning
2005	Lois Riley Holt Wistrand
2006	Marsha White Warren
2007	Susan Laughter Meyers
2008	Ann Deagon
2009	Sharon Sharp
2010	Libby Campbell
2011	Bill Griffin
2012	Guy & Carolyn York
2013	Bill Blackley
2014	Sara Claytor
2015	Pat Riviere-Seel
2016	Scott Owens
2017	Kathryn Stripling Byer
2018	Kevin Morgan Watson

**DEDICATION HISTORY OF
THE *PINESONG* ANTHOLOGY**

2019 Ruth Moose
2020 M. Scott Douglass
2021 David Manning
2022 Lenard D. Moore
2023 David Radavich
2024 Accountability and Restoration
2025 Malaika King Albrecht

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