



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE POETRY SOCIETIES, INC.

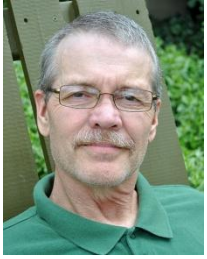
An educational and literary organization dedicated to the writing
and appreciation of poetry in America.

Strophes

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James (Jim) Barton
32nd NFSPS
President

Dear NFSPS Poets:

My wife recently received a package that contained samples of “essential oils”.

One of my sons asked, “Why are they essential?”

I explained that this use of the word did not imply that these oils were necessary, but rather that they were made of the essences of certain things. In the same way, I consider myself a sensual poet: not in the context of romantic or physical love, but rather in my dependence on the

senses to gather inspiration.

From the moment my creative writing teacher responded to my short story with the words, *You may have written that piece as fiction, but I read poetry in it*, I was hooked. That night, the poet in me woke up. My life became a living, breathing experience in full-blown color. The scenery I had passed a thousand times on my commute to work seemed fresh and new. Every day, I noticed new details, in taste, sight, hearing, touch, smell and imagination. Life was a poem in progress.

I was transformed from a chemical plant worker who dabbled in poetry to a poet who worked at a chemical plant. I was a lab tech at the plant seven 12-hour days every two weeks. I was a poet 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. To be a poet, you must live the life poetic. You must think like a poet, release the inner muse, the fountain of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, pleasure and pain that makes life’s journey worth the trek.

A poet sees the world with a different eye, discerns the tiniest of details, the grandest of plans. Poetry is one of the oldest forms of communication because it speaks to the inner self, the soul. Ancient civilizations passed their histories down by word of mouth using verse. They spread news and warnings, personal information and death announcements through poetry. They celebrated great military victories and tragic disasters through poetry. In short, poetry was (and is) the language of the people.

Today, as much as ever, we need poetry in our lives. It seems that the world is closing in on us at times, that there is no relief from the constant torrent of information, the incessant noise of the business of living and surviving, the grind and drudgery of making a living. Everywhere we turn, we are bombarded with requests and demands for our time, resources and efforts.

Poetry is the soothing bubble bath that allows us to slip away for as long as we like. It is a warm fuzzy blanket on a winter’s night, a shelter from storms, a familiar, loving hand to hold onto in times of grief or distress. Poetry is a candle in a cave, a star shining through the night clouds, the one smiling face in an indifferent throng of humanity.

When do I find time to write poetry? I ask myself *When do I NOT have time to write poetry?* instead of attempting to set aside a certain block of time to write during my hectic days,

I write whenever the inspiration strikes, as long as I’m not in the middle of a critical task such as changing lanes on the interstate or mixing two hazardous chemicals at the lab. I always have pad and pen handy. I always look for inspiration rather than waiting for it.

Why do I write? I write not just because I feel I have to write, but because I feel I have something unique to say about things. I feel that my body of work is a lasting statement of who I am. I will live on through my poetry—for my children, *[continued on page 8]*

NEW NFSPS SPOKEN & HEARD CONTEST

Have a Slice of BlackBerryPeach

An exciting new major contest will begin in 2017 thanks to former New Mexico State Poetry Society presidents Fil Peach and Shirley Blackwell, who worked with former NFSPS President Eleanor Berry, to develop a new NFSPS major annual contest for spoken word/performance poetry. This new contest, the BlackBerryPeach Prizes for Poetry: Spoken & Heard, was approved unanimously by the NFSPS board at an electronic meeting in August. The contest will have its debut in January, 2017, with prizes awarded in time for the annual NFSPS convention in Texas next June.

There will be three cash prizes, based on available funds, but with the following minimums: 1st Place \$1,000; 2nd Place \$500, 3rd Place \$250. The winning poets’ poems will be combined in a perfect-bound 6” X 9” chapbook to be published and sold on Amazon.com. The chapbook will contain transcripts of the spoken poems of all three winners, for a total of 12 poems. Winners will receive 25 chapbooks that they can sell at the convention or keep for their own use. NFSPS will post their performances on YouTube. The winners may be videotaped at the convention or they may submit their own videos if they are unable to attend.

NFSPS President James Barton appointed newly elected Vice President Joe Cavanaugh to be the first chair of the new contest. Joe stressed the need to continue to grow together as an organization and to reach out to all poets, including young artists, by recognizing stage poetry in its many forms as a legitimate poetic genre. By welcoming all poetic voices, NFSPS hopes to expand its membership and gain a much larger, more youthful audience in which to promote its mission.

Joe also pointed out the benefits of recognizing the popularity and importance of poetry performance among today’s youth, whether in the form of Poetry Out Loud or the San Francisco-based slam organization, Youth Speaks (200,000 youngsters ages 13-19). He sees NFSPS as the entity that initiates the next step in the elevation of oral poetry, which has matured significantly since the advent of hip-hop in the 1970s and slam in the 1980s, but still has room and impetus to grow and diversify.

As well, Joe hopes to bring together *stage* and *page* poets under the auspices of the NFSPS so that both traditionalist and today’s populist poets can benefit from what the other group offers--respectively, knowledge of poetic craft and skill in presenting one’s own poetry. He sees the opportunity to offer a relevant new tool for recruiting new members for existing NFSPS chapters and to provide an incentive for state poetry societies that are not currently affiliated to join NFSPS. He welcomes your help and support in getting this exciting new adventure off to a great start.

Contest guidelines will be posted to nfspd.com which will provide a link to NFSPS’ submittable.com site for submissions to this contest.

THE ART AND SOUL OF POETRY

Just as soon as you get a new 2017 calendar, be sure to mark June 29 - July 2 for the NFSPS Convention, hosted by the Poetry Society of Texas at the Historic Hilton in downtown Fort Worth. Join us as we celebrate *The Art and Soul of Poetry* deep in the heart of Texas, with art, music, dancing, and drama, seasoned with a little cowboy flavoring—it’s Texas, after all, y’all—and stir up a feast that is sure to feed your soul!

MANNINGHAM TRUST STUDENT POETRY CONTEST

Rules: 2017 annual competition

1. There are two divisions: Grade 6-8 (Junior Division) and Grades 9-12 (Senior Division). Each state may submit ten (10) top poems in each division. Poems may have been printed and/or have won previous awards. Contests at state level may have occurred anytime in 2016 or 2017.

2. The competition is open to all USA students in grades 6 – 12. Public, private, and homeschools are eligible for entry by individual NFSPS member states.

3. Submit two copies of each poem. Put the division (Junior or Senior) in the upper left corner of both copies. One copy must have the student's ID in upper right corner. The ID information is student name, school name and address, student grade level, and the student's language arts/English teacher's name. The second copy must not have ID information. Do not send a copy with any other marking - there should be no indication of prior award granted by the state.

4. Each poem must be neatly typed or computer-generated, and have no more than 30 lines with no line having more than 50 characters including spaces and punctuation. If a poem continues more than one page, staple the pages together. Do not staple the two copies of the poem together. It is suggested that each state representative keep a copy of poems entered.

5. There should be no large or unusual fonts or illustrations. Times New Roman is the suggested font. No font larger than 12 point should be used. Winning poems are scanned for the award anthology and large and/or unusual fonts impede the process.

6. Each entrant must make a declaration of originality. The statement should appear on the bottom of the ID copy only. The form below is acceptable:

I certify that this poem is my original work, and has not been copied in whole or part from any author's poems in print or posted on the Internet.

Signed:

7. Separate poems into respective divisions. Within each division separate the ID copy from the anonymous copy meant for judges. Include a cover letter identifying the Manningham (Youth) Chairperson to whom the report on the contests will be mailed.

8. Entries must be received by March 1, 2017.

Send entries to: Budd Mahan, 7059 Spring Valley Road, Dallas, TX 75254

Ten prizes will be awarded in each division: First Place - \$75, Second Place - \$50, Third

Place - \$40, Fourth Place - \$35, Fifth Place - \$30, and five Honorable Mentions - \$10 each. All winning poems will be published in the Manningham Trust Poetry Student Award Anthology. Winners will receive complimentary copies. The schools of each winning student will receive a complimentary copy for the school library. Notice of winners report will be sent to each state's Manningham (Youth) Chair no later by May 20, 2017. Awards (certificates, checks, anthologies) will also be mailed to the state chairperson. Each state is responsible for distributing prizes to winners and winning schools. The top winning poems will be read to NFSPS members at the Convention held in June, 2017.

Entries by individual students are allowed. No individual entry will supersede a state's collective entries, but in cases in which a state has no NFSPS affiliation or sends no entries, an individual entry may qualify for judging.

NFSPS looks forward to each state's participation in the Manningham Poetry Trust's annual contests. Questions may be directed to the chairperson:

Budd Powell Mahan
Manningham Trust Student Poetry Awards Chair
7059 Spring Valley Road, Dallas, TX 75254
972-788-4944 ~ buddmahan@att.net



2017 NFSPS CONVENTION CONTEST

Focus like you're playing TEXAS HOLD'EM and enter your **unpublished** beauties in the 2017 NFSPS Convention Poetry Contest.

* Prizes: 1st \$100, 2nd \$75, 3rd \$50, and three (3) HMs \$25 each.

* Open to convention attendees only!

* Winners will be announced at the convention.

* Enter as many times as you want. \$10 entry fee for each group of three (or fewer) poems.

* Make checks payable to Poetry Society of Texas.

* Any subject. Any form. 36-line limit.

* Postmark by March 15, 2017.

* Send two copies: one with Name, Address, Phone Number, Email Address, State Society Membership; one with no identification.

* Snail mail entries only!

* Send to J. Paul Holcomb, Convention Contest Chairman, 235 Shady Hill Lane, Double Oak, TX 75077-8270.

NFSPS MEMBER SOCIETY NEWS

POETS' ROUNDTABLE OF

ARKANSAS' Jim Barton was elected President of NFSPS in June. Jim is an award-winning poet, published author, and popular speaker. The Roundtable of Hot Springs branch will host PRA's 2016 Poetry Day conference on October 21 & 22 at the Comfort Inn. We'll have a sing-a-long, a read-a-round (one poem about membership in PRA, any form), an impromptu contest for a poem of 24 lines, subject - "fall", any form; winner to be decided by vote of those present. Pat Laster will serve as Poetry Day Contest Chair. The main speaker is Kai Coggin, a poet and author of two poetry books: *Periscope Heart* and *Wingspan*. In June the PRA Board voted to add a new tab on the website to help members promote their poetry books. The website will list only PRA member authors, only poetry books, and links for potential buyers to deal directly with the authors. PRA will not be involved with the buying or selling. We said farewell to another long time PRA member, John Madison Fewkes of Dundee, Mississippi, who passed away in April. John was a member of the Delta Poets of Helena. ~ Laura Loughridge, Secretary

CONNECTICUT POETRY SOCIETY

has had a very busy 2016 celebrating spring and National Poetry month with many readings and workshops. Many CPS members attended our spring poetry blast in Manchester. David Epstein presented a fascinating session on "Revising Emily Dickinson: Comparing Her First and Final Drafts." The Connecticut Coalition of Poets Laureate shared poems on the theme of Planes, Trains, and Automobiles. P.O.P. (Poets on Poetry), sponsored by CPS and the Hartford Public Library, ended the 2015/2016 season in style with member John Stanizzi's stellar presentation on Edna St. Vincent Millay. Many attended this fascinating talk. P.O.P. was started and is run by Christine Beck and features a presentation on a different poet every two weeks for three months in conjunction with the Hartford Public Library. A new chapter in Willimantic brings our total to nine. At least 50% of our members belong to a chapter that sponsors monthly workshops. Our Summer Picnic featured readings by members who have published books within the last year. In April we surveyed members on how to improve our services. Our contests run all year long; as well we conduct the Connecticut River Run Contest. We are now using submittable.com to accept online submissions. See ctpoetry.net. ~ Tony Fusco, President

FLORIDA STATE POETS ASSOCIATION looks forward to our Fall Convention to be hosted by the Live Poets Society at the Plaza Resort and Spa in Daytona Beach October 21-23. Keynote speaker will be Lola Haskins. She will also be crowned with the laurel wreath as our newest Honorary Chancellor. Also in attendance will be Florida's Poet Laureate and FSPA's and NFSPS' Honorary Chancellor Peter Meinke. Workshop presenters will include Janet Watson, Judith A. Lawrence, Dr. Stephen Caldwell Wright and Mary Rogers-Grantham. Entertainment will be provided by Cheryln Bush and Robert Blenheim, founder and President of Live Poets. With all this, new officers for 2017-2019 will be inducted. For a finish, Noir Jente (Kevin Campbell) has organized and will present the Spoken Word competition. We invite everyone to join us for this exciting event. Information and registration forms may be found on our floridastatepoetsassociation.org. ~ *Mary-Ann Westbrook, Secretary*

ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY'S selection committee and editors have been busy preparing members' poetry submissions for our forthcoming anthology, *Distilled Lives Volume 3*. A reading will be given by participating poets in November. Program plans have been completed for our Gala on November 5th at the Park Ridge Illinois Country Club. A continental breakfast, lunch, and four programs will be offered for this all-day event. Brewed Awakening coffeehouse in Westmont continues to host the ISPS poetry readings with featured poets on the fourth Sunday of every month. October 15 is the deadline for this year's poetry contest with seven category choices—Free Verse, Formal Verse, Music, the Arts, Celestial, Compassion, and Haiku. Please check illinoispoets.org for more details. ~ *Susan T. Moss, President*

MASSACHUSETTS STATE POETRY SOCIETY hosted its annual Summer Picnic Meeting at Saugus Ironworks on August 6. MSPS meeting attendees included members and guests from all across the state to join poets, potluck and poetry. President Jeanette Maes officiated the meeting. The workshop theme was "Then & Now." Afterwards, members were invited to read up to three original works. Member Ray Whittier, unable to attend, sent his son to represent him. The young man read his father's work very well and stayed for the entire meeting. Bravo! One of the Rangers took photos and suggested we write poems on the Ironworks or nature, which would then be on display at the Visitors Center. Christian Reifsteck and

Mary Miceli shared poems from their latest published books of poetry accompanied by photographs. Louise Bogan Chapter members shared poems written for a workshop on responding to a hypothetical postcard message. Winthrop CREW Poets, in authentic Colonial costume, shared poems and a formal portrait for their program on historical artifacts from the museum at Winthrop Library. Elayne Neal read a poem entitled "Dash"—that horizontal mark representing one's life between dates of birth and death. Her subject was her late father, Thomas Scott Sr., for whom she has sponsored an award in the National Poetry Day Contest. The next meeting, hosted by Waterfront CREW Poets, will be held at the Winthrop Public Library on October 15. ~ *Patricia Bruen Tacelli, Reporter*

MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY had our annual Spring Festival in Ridgeland. Central Branch member Linda Watson Owen and her daughter, Mary Owen Prince, presented a valuable workshop entitled, "Poetry in the Digital Age." They shared how to make "poetic videos," and gave step-by-step advice. We celebrated Shakespeare's 400th birthday with refreshments and entertainment by storyteller Doris Jones—an artist and teaching artist. A highlight was our keynote speaker, Mississippi's official Goodwill Ambassador, Patricia Neely-Dorsey. Our Poet of the Year, Dr. Emory Davis Jones, read from his chapbook, *Reflections: A Book of Poems*, and signed copies. Dr. Jones has been appointed NFSPS National Contest Chair. Dorothy Rogers won the coveted MPS first place award. We would like to congratulate South Branch members, Judy Davies and Brenda Finnegan, who both had award-winning poems accepted for publication this year. Next spring's festival in Southaven is on the weekend of April 29-30, 2017, with a pre-festival gathering on the evening of April 28. Information about the place and time will be announced in *The Magnolia Muse* found on the MPS website: www.misspoetry.net. Information about the spring contest will also be announced on the website. ~ *Michael Shelton, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF OKLAHOMA may have celebrated National Poetry Day, the annual mass celebration of poetry and all things poetical, by the time this *Strophes* issue is received! This year National Poetry Day is on Thursday October 6th with the theme being Messages. PSO will celebrate on October 1st with our own annual Poetry Day Contest results and awards, a luncheon, and members will share their favorite poems and why each poem is a favorite. In July, PSO held an In-House Workshop at Twin

Hills Country Club. We had several interesting exercises. The results of the PSO July Contest were announced, awards were presented, and a good time was had by all. November 30th is the deadline for all entries in our PSO Annual Spring Contest. For more information go to angelfire.com/poetry/ps/. PSO members are looking forward to our Christmas Banquet on December 10th at Twin Hills Country Club to celebrate the holidays and the end of another year. ~ *Patti Koch, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE'S only meeting in the summer months is a reading. Past President JoAn Howerton hosted the group in mid-August. It was a very enjoyable potluck. By the time this article is published, our big annual event, the Mid-South Poetry Festival, will be history. Attendance appears about average this year, and enthusiasm is high, as usual. Pat Durmon of Poets Roundtable of Arkansas (PRA) is the speaker; her subject, free verse. Judges from a number of other state societies assisted; we welcome this chance to thank them again. We have exciting plans for National Poetry Month (April). President Russell Strauss is booking a state-wide poetry reading making use of Skype. Randy Stoker of the home chapter (Memphis) will handle technical matters on our end; another expert will handle things for our PST-NE chapter on the other end of the state. This means we will get to see and hear each other during the event. We hope to start a new (third) chapter in middle Tennessee soon. We have a relocated member to that area now who is motivated to help us make that happen. We will really be happy campers when we have chapters in the three major areas of our lengthy state. And we are always happy to welcome new members. ~ *Florence Bruce, Corresponding Secretary*

POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS' Summer Conference was held July 14-16, 2016, at the Hilton Garden Inn in Allen, north of Dallas. "Passport to Poetry" was organized by PST President Catherine L'Herisson. Presenting a variety of programs and workshops were Amanullah Khan, Diane Glancy, Barbara Blanks, Susan Hanlon Ferrer accompanied musically by Maria Nelson, and several PST chapter presidents: Birma C. Castle, Richard Weatherly, Michael Baldwin, Alice Parker, Daniel Ramos, Michael Owens and Patricia Gibbs. Budd Powell Mahan, winner of the William D. Barney Memorial Chapbook Competition sponsored by the Fort Worth Poetry Society, a PST chapter, read selections from his chapbook, *Names in a Book*. Susan Maxwell Campbell, winner of

PST's 2015 Edwin M. Eakin Memorial Book Publication Award, read selections from her book, *Anything You Ever Wanted to Know*. Thursday evening's dinner entertainer was musician/humorist Doc Gibbs. On Friday evening, Beth Turner Ayers presented musical entertainment and a continual slide show of travel photos provided by PST members. That evening, the banquet speaker was Jim Barton of Huttig, Arkansas, President of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc. The winners of the conference's "Passport to Poetry Contest" were: 1st Place - Lisa Salinas, 2nd Place - Barbara Blanks, 3rd Place - Patrick Marshall, 4th Place - Linda Banks, 5th Place - Christine Irving and 6th Place - Marilyn Stacy. Voting by attendees in PST's "You Be the Judge" poetry contest resulted in a 4-way tie, the winners being: Barbara Lewie Berry, Budd Powell Mahan, Robert Schinzel and Sharon Martin Turner. ~ Nancy Baass

WYOPOETS in April had Wyoming Poet Laureate Rose Hill lift the satin veil from WyoPoets' latest publication, *LABYRINTH: Poems From Wyoming and Beyond*. The 2016 chapbook was introduced to the members at the spring workshop. This latest volume contains thirty-three poems of courage, stark reality and stunning landscapes; tales from wagon train survival and the immigrant experience. The featured poet is Rose Hill, celebrated author of *Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory: May 31, 1866* and *A Mom Becomes A Poet*. *LABYRINTH* can be ordered from WyoPoets, P.O. Box 155, Douglas, WY 82633. When the State Legislature convenes in March, Governor Mead will introduce the new Poet Laureate, Eugene M. Gagliano, retired teacher, resident of Buffalo, Wyoming, and a long-time member of WyoPoets. He is well known for his love of children and his visits to schools across the state bringing poetry into their classrooms. Eugene is a Delaware Diamond's Book List Award winner, the author of children's storybooks and two children's books of poetry, *My Teacher Dances On The Desk* and *The Magic Box*. His collection of Wyoming poetry is *Prairie Parcels*. See WyoPoets' website at wypoets.org for the guidelines for our National Contest opening on October 1, deadline November 30, 2016. ~ Lee Ann Siebken, Reporter

CONTESTS

Redrock Writers' Chaparral Poetry Contest entries postmarked Sept. 1 through Dec. 1, 2016. Chair: Marie Tollstrup mariect@infowest.com. Guidelines at redrockwriters.org.

WYOPOETS' 2016 EUGENE V. SHEA NATIONAL POETRY CONTEST opens October 1; deadline December 1, 2016. Prizes: 1st \$100; 2nd \$50; 3rd \$30; 4th \$20.00. Up to five Honorable Mentions. Fees: \$3.00 entry fee, plus \$1.00 per poem. No maximum number of entries (eg, 3 poems for \$6.00). Checks and money orders made out to WyoPoets. Requirements: Poems, published or unpublished, any subject, any form, 40 lines or less (including title and line breaks). All poems must be original work of entrant. No pornography, racial or sexual slurs, or language considered obscene by an average broad-minded reader. Requirements: poems, except for Oriental forms, must be titled; must be typed or computer generated; in English; 8-1/2 by 11" white paper; minimum font 10 point, preferably 12 point or larger; one poem per page, single or double-spaced; one side of the paper only. Photocopies okay if clear and legible. Submit two copies of each poem, one copy for the judge with no identification on it, one copy showing name, mailing address, email address, and phone number in the upper right hand corner. No limit on number of entries. No electronic submissions. Include SASE for winners list to be mailed by April 1, 2017. After October 1, 2016 get guidelines at wypoets.org. Submit both copies of poems together with entry fee to: WyoPoets Contest, Attn: Susan Mark, 3822 Dey Ave, Cheyenne, WY 82002. Rights: Winning poems may be published in our spring newsletter ONLY with the poet's written permission. All rights remain with the poet. Be sure to keep copies of your entries as poems will NOT be returned. For additional info and questions email: wypoets@gmail.com.

POETRY ARTICLES

On Being a Poet

By Ron Weber, Poetry Society of Michigan

Being a poet strikes me as a rather intriguing element in our lives. Not everyone's life, of course, but those of us who have unabashedly reached the point of internalizing this literary art form to the degree that our inner voice says, "Yes, damn it, I am a poet and my poetry is serious, even when a bit humorous. And I can and will defend who I am, if need be, and my craft as well. I do not have to understand engineering to respect the importance of engineers. By the same token, I expect and will not accept any less than the same." When I reached this point many years ago in my own life, I knew that I was a poet and I no longer carried any self-doubt.

Irrespective of how long you have been writing or how young or old you are, you can probably identify with this if you

believe poetry is, should be, or is becoming central to your life. I'm assuming here—and hoping—that there is a diverse experience level with those who are reading this, or that it will perhaps find its way into their hands by those of us who have already made that journey.

Occupation poet? I hardly think so. And if that's the only desire you have as you ply your craft, then I would question your title, for it is more the poem than the poet. To a certain degree art is an expression of self, but to a much more significant degree art is a transcendence of self. Is your poetry likely to be meaningful to others on some basic human level?

If you garner a large audience in the literary marketplace through publication and books, terrific! Keep in mind that most of the poets we are familiar with, present and past, paid their bills and made a living doing something besides just writing poetry and commiserating with the muse. The four-book deal poet Billy Collins got from Random House is an extreme exception that truly proves the rule.

As Robert Graves said a long time ago, "There is no money in poetry; but then, there is no poetry in money either." He also pointed out that, "To be a poet is a condition rather than a profession." I also don't feel poetry is as much a career as it is a hustler's game and a crap shoot. T.S. Eliot took this position: "No honest poet can ever feel quite sure of the permanent value of what he has written: he may have wasted his time and messed up his life for nothing."

The poet's challenge and most relevant function is to make his imagination a beacon or searchlight, if you will, in the mind of others. To assist them in living their lives. I like the way Robert Penn Warren put it: "And in the end, the poem is not a thing we see—it is, rather, a light by which we may see—and what we see is life." And Robert Frost's analogy holds such vivid accuracy: "Like a piece of ice on a hot stove, a poem must ride on its own melting."

Some of the best poetry experiences I've had came from people I never knew or knew of. Maybe you've experienced the same. No matter what part of the country you're in, if you go to enough "open mic" readings at libraries, pubs, bistros, galleries, and slams, you eventually have an epiphany. Some of the best poets that are writing and reciting are ones you would never have heard from otherwise. You find yourself saying "Holy cow! Why haven't I heard about this person?" It's because they're busy being a nurse, or waiting on tables, or driving a school bus, or being a teacher, mechanic, sales rep, or any number of other responsibilities in making it through life.

But every one of them is a poet. I am convinced that some of the best poets in the country are unpretentiously walking among us at the local and regional levels, and they are every bit as good as the ‘big names.’

My favorite quote from Ezra Pound is, I believe, somewhat prophetic: “It is important that great poems get written, and it doesn’t matter a damn who writes them.” Literature conveys man’s joy, heartache, hope and despair, and it is one of the leading ways man turns knowledge into wisdom.

Generally Agreed-Upon Qualities of Good Poems

By Rick Kempa (as published in a recent quarterly newsletter of WyoPoets)

- * Voice (Develop your own. Don’t hold back!)
- * Precision (Aim for the right word in the right place.)
- * Economy (Make everything contribute: no slack.)
- * Vividness (Find the words for the world. Use fresh images that appeal to the senses.)
- * Clarity (Challenge us, stretch our limits with language, but aim to be understood.)
- * Development (Be willing to push the poem forward, to keep exploring.)
- * Music (Make the poem’s music somehow suitable to the subject.)
- * Fittingness of form (Make the poem’s shape — stanzas and line-breaks — mirror the meaning or the tone of the poem.)
- * Surprise (Break the patterns. Delight us. Give us a twist.)
- * Subtlety (Employ the light touch: a little bit goes a long way.)

Panning for Poetic Gold

By Valerie Martin Bailey,
Editor Emeritus, *Encore*

How do we pan for poetic gold? First comes exploration and discovery. Panning for gold is usually done in a stream in gold country, so go to your “stream of consciousness” where gold has been discovered before. Dip your pan into your memories, observations, places, ideas, dreams, faith, philosophy, experiences (happy and unhappy), people (those you love or admire and those who annoy you), events (exciting or dull). Remember that humor often comes from things we did not enjoy. You will write better where it is quiet. Take your tools: your laptop or notebook, a thesaurus, dictionary, rhyming dictionary, your notes if you journal or jot down ideas. A gold miner fills his pan with all kinds of material. When shaken, the lighter worthless material rises to the top and is washed away in the stream, while heavier gold sinks to the

bottom of the pan. After you’ve found your gleaming idea, pick through words until you find golden nugget words gleaming among the prosaic rocks and soil—treasured words that shine with the exact meaning you need. They don’t have to be difficult words, just the best words for what you have to say. Make sure words actually mean what you think they mean. You might be surprised. I judged a poem recently in which the poet said a man was “*waiving* his arms.” He spelled the word *waiving* instead of *waving*. He inadvertently had the man relinquishing his rights to his arms. Do not, for the sake of rhyme, pick out a word nugget that does not precisely convey your meaning. That is fool’s gold; it will ruin your poem. Don’t use Spell Check only, use a dictionary as well. Spell Check would have accepted *waiving* because it is spelled correctly. Spell Check cares only about spelling, not about meaning in context. Misspelled words will most likely keep your poem from winning.

How do we refine the gold? This is the time for pondering and listening to your muse—that inner voice that tells you “This is it!” When you know you’ve selected the right word nuggets, melt them in the crucible of your passion and understanding. Now pour in the acid of scrutiny and critique to clarify the gold. Purifying gold is a long, detailed process, as is writing a perfect golden poem. When you know you have pure liquid gold, it will be time to mold the gold and allow it to solidify.

How do we mold the gold? This is the time for creating structure. You now choose the ingot mold into which you will pour your liquid gold. Use a structure worthy of your gold. Will it be a certain form such as a sonnet or a villanelle, or will it be free verse? Shape the words you’ve chosen into well-crafted phrases and sentences, divided into pleasing lines that perfectly express your thoughts. Will you use punctuation or not? If you punctuate, do it correctly and consistently. If you don’t use punctuation, then use careful phrasing to prevent misunderstanding. If it rhymes, then it must also have meter. Choose one meter and stick to it and do not use trite, meaningless, or irrelevant rhyme. Sometimes near rhymes work, but strive for true rhyme, make sure meter is precise, not rough. Whatever you do, be consistent. Let your poem sit. If you read it later and find that it is misshapen, remelt and re-mold it. When it is finally set, give your creation a wonderful title. The title is the first line read—make it worthy of the poem beneath it. Let it entice the reader to read your poem. You name your children, so name your poems. They are your intellectual children.

How do we share the gold? We share at workshops, conferences, contests, and meetings. We share in books, chapbooks, magazines, anthologies, newsletters, websites, and Facebook—everywhere printed words are shared. We even frame poems and give them as gifts. When you read a poem, speak clearly with expression. You spent a lot of time crafting your poem, don’t blow it now—don’t look down and mumble. Read your poem by glancing at it and make eye contact with your audience. Practice reading your poem. Try not to stumble over the words, but if you do, correct yourself quickly and go on. Don’t make a fuss over it. If there is a microphone, use it correctly, put it close to your mouth and don’t be afraid of it. Don’t hold it at chest level or away from your face. Breathe from your diaphragm and speak up, you have gold to share.

The Whole Harmonium: The Life of Wallace Stevens by Paul Mariani

Book review by Ginny Lowe Connors,
Connecticut Poetry Society newsletter editor

Paul Mariani, author of *The Whole Harmonium*, is a poet himself, and he has written several other biographies of poets. His analysis of some of Stevens’ poems is astute. In *The Whole Harmonium*, one can see the famous Stevens poems “Sunday Morning,” “The Emperor of Ice Cream,” “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” “The Idea of Order at Key West,” “The Snowman,” and others in the context of the times and of the ideas that Stevens wrestled with throughout his life. Many of Stevens’ best-known poems are from the first book he published, at age forty-four: *Harmonium*. This biography of Stevens gives us a fuller picture of the man and his poetry.

Like many artists, Wallace Stevens poured his best, most interesting self into his work. Stevens’ poetry is highly original and unmistakably his own. It is intellectual: wrestling with big ideas and never afraid to use uncommon words. It is sensuous: full of fabulous imagery that shows the power of this introverted gentleman’s fierce imagination. And it is spiritual: always searching for the language of the experience of the sublime.

In *The Whole Harmonium*, the life of the poet is laid out in exhaustive detail; quite a feat, since in many ways Wallace Stevens led a rather ordinary life. There was nothing extraordinary about his childhood in Pennsylvania or his work as a successful lawyer and eventually as a vice president of The Hartford, a major insurance company with headquarters in the city of the same name.

He married a beautiful girl, Elsie Viola Kachel, from “the wrong side of the tracks” against his parents’ wishes, and the marriage was not a fulfilling one for either partner. She had been forced to drop out of school in ninth grade in order to help support her family. She played the piano well and served as the model for the figure of winged liberty on the liberty dime. But she never felt able to fully engage with his poetry, and Wallace Stevens was a distant sort of husband. Once he determined that they could finally afford it, they had a daughter, Holly, who was to be their only child.

In New York City, where Stevens lived for many years, he associated with William Carlos Williams, Walter Arensberg, Marcel Duchamp, and others. Modernism was in the air, but Stevens’ style remained uniquely his own. Stevens’ work was often published in *Poetry*; the magazine’s Harriet Monroe was always a champion of his work.

When he lived in Hartford and West Hartford, Stevens composed many of his poems on his walks to and from work. His route often included a jaunt through Elizabeth Park, and several poems give reference to the park. After dinner at home, he would disappear into his study for the evening to write.

Stevens traveled often for his job, but only within the United States. He discovered a wonderful get-away though: Key West, Florida. In Key West, he relinquished his staid Hartford businessman persona and embraced a hard-drinking, tropical lifestyle that gave him respite from the strictures of his role as an insurance executive.

Stevens, a shy man, got lively and impulsive when he drank. One of the most interesting incidents recalled in the book is the fistfight he got into with Ernest Hemingway in Key West. He was laid up for a while after that one, and invented excuses to his wife regarding his delay in returning home.

Robert Frost also visited Key West with some frequency, and the two poets had a few verbal jousts. Their poetic styles could not have been more different, yet they were both after something similar: to find a language that could speak deeply to their readers.

Stevens was a deeply intellectual poet, always searching for an overriding philosophy. And in poetry, he found his spirit nurtured. Imagination was his god, and Stevens felt that the best poets ought to be recognized as spiritual figures. Some of his philosophy is expressed beautifully in a poem written late in his life, “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour.” The last three stanzas of the poem are as follows:

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.

We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole, A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

Within its vital boundary, in the mind. We say God and the imagination are one... How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind, We make a dwelling in the evening air, In which being there together is enough.

Wallace Stevens appeared distant and cold-hearted to many of his coworkers at the insurance company. But his emotional depths are evident in his poetry, and poetry provided for him great spiritual sustenance. In an inscription in a copy of his *Collected Poems*, he wrote, “When I speak of the poem . . . I mean not merely a literary form, but the brightest and most harmonious concept, or order of life.”

The Whole Harmonium is a must-read for anyone interested in knowing more about the man who wrote some of the most imaginative and brilliant poems in the American canon.

The nihakasesto

By Dave Harvey, Oregon Poetry Association

During my teaching career, I had to attend meetings, all of them important. Still, there were times during many of them when, enervated by someone launching into a yet another speech about something I’d heard too many times before—my attention drifted. One afternoon, we were subjected to yet another lament that not all of us were being consistent enforcers of the chewing-gum rule—and I confess: I drifted. I began creating imaginary poetic forms in which syllable counts figured as a major way of distinguishing one form from another. Later, intrigued with my idle creations, I tried versifying in some of them and found myself enjoying yet another way to express my world in poetry. Following is the description and examples of one of my new forms. I don’t know what suggested its name to me.

The nihakasesto is written in one form, but in two conventions. The form is syllabic: 65 syllables in eleven lines, arranged 5-7-5-7-7-3-7-7-5-7-5. In one convention the nihakasesto is a list of images, all tending to a single effect. An example:

A Moment While Climbing the South Slope of the Unicorn—Sierra Nevada, Above Tuolumne Meadows

Stopped to blow, I see my mountain friend scramble up through the boulders. He stops to catch his breath. With a look at me, he grins, plants his boot on the next step of our trail, but pauses, while his heartbeat slows a little, and his breath comes back. So I wait and admire the view.

A second convention of the nihakasesto uses two contrasting images for a single effect. The “pivot,” also called the “turn,” between them is nearly always the three-syllable line. Here’s an example from the years when we lived hundreds of miles north of San Francisco, but still inside California:

Coming Home from Down Below

Morning lights buildings as streets roar to teeming life. A siren tells of urgent trips through the city, and people hurry to work. Our evening lights shaggy forests and long, wild, canyons; we watch for bears on the four-lane, as sunset sees us closing on our North Country home.

I’ve also composed a few double nihakasestos, like this one:

A U-Joint Makes a Worry Bead

Roadside, a silver gleam; I stop my bike, pick it up: a U-joint for a quarter-inch-drive socket set. Unscarred, perfect, I work it in my hands. A girl in my English class, whose brain squirms like a dying snake. Might this U-joint calm her, be her worry bead? It rides in my pack.

Third period: I hand it to her, teach the class. When I look at her, she’s working that U-joint like a worry bead: turning it, stares at it, fascinated. For today her torment seems quiescent, her battered brain at peace, as she turns it, gazes transfixed at the gleaming piece of technology.

President's Message from page 1

my grandchildren, my readers, for as long as it exists. I once bought an anthology at a used book sale containing poems about birds. As I flipped through it, I came across a poem about bluebirds written by my Great Aunt Marie Barton. She had been an old woman when I was a child, and I only knew her for a short time. She was a poet, and I had both her published books. Here, though, was a serendipitous re-meeting with her from the yellowed pages of a little book I found at a library sale. I treasure that book and its poem about bluebirds.

Where do I get my ideas? I get them at the store, at the city dump, at the park near my house, in the shower, at work, under a stack of firewood, on a lonely highway deep in the night. Ideas are everywhere. Inspiration resides within the poet. It is up to him or her to match the two, and then to let the poetry flow from the soul, to the brain, down the arm, to the fingers and to spill out onto the page, the computer screen or the microphone.

How does poetry enrich my life? It forces me to see the details that so often are overlooked. It pinches me when I am staring into space and unwilling to notice the magic that sits at my feet. It gives me reason to sing and laugh and dance when my weary body wants only to lie down and wallow in self-pity. It helps me taste life in all its glorious flavors while I still can.

A life without poetry is unfathomable. I am a poet. I choose the life poetic because I have only this one beautiful chance to drink in life's wonders and to celebrate.

I am a poet.

I choose Life.

James (Jim) Barton ~ 32nd NFSPS President

ENCORE PRIZE POEMS 2016 NOW AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.COM

This year our *Encore* anthology will be available before the traditional convention attendee's copy is distributed in June, 2017. Order *Encore Prize Poems 2016* at Amazon for the reduced price of \$13. Plus, Amazon offers free-shipping on multiple-book purchases. Go to amazon.com/books to see sample *Encore* pages and to place your order. ~ Kathy Cotton, *Encore* Editor

SPRING FESTIVAL OF LITERARY ARTS IN UTAH

Take an early spring break in Southern Utah and be inspired by "Word Woman" Rosemerry Wahtola-Tromme (Colorado Western Slope Poet Laureate) as she explores "Metaphors Everywhere" in a free Z-Arts lecture in Springdale (March 2, 7 pm), a daylong Poetry-in-the-Park workshop at Zion Park Lodge (March 3) plus optional Redrock Seminar (March 4)

in St. George. Lodging available in Springdale and St. George. Details on poetry-in-the-park.com or redrockwriters.org.

NFSPS SOCIAL MEDIA HASHTAGS

NFSPS has a Facebook page and Twitter is coming soon. Anything you post electronically that has the ability to use #hashtags, please make a habit to add #NFSPS, #nfsps and #nationalfederationofstatepoetrysocieties to your posts. If your state society wants to post directly to the NFSPS Facebook page, contact Julie Cummings, NFSPS Publicity Chair, Electronic Media, at jcumplings3@gmail.com.

THOUGHTS ON STATE REPORTS

State reports are wonderful resources--our marketplace of free poetry ideas. What works well for the WyoPoets should definitely work well for the Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas and all the other state societies. *Strophes* Editor Paul Ford tries four times a year to fit 10 pounds of nuggets into a five pound bag of *Strophes*. I help him in that endeavor. In order to make everything fit, we have to use the blunt scissors of editing. I try to keep the state reports to a maximum of about 200 words. This gives each state plenty of room to report the wonderful things they have done to advance and enhance the world of poetry. As report writers, we strive to use the best words in the best order, eliminate unnecessary words and make our point succinctly. If you are reporting something that contains outstanding information and the report runs way long, it will be best if you write a separate article about that one item. It will even things out in the state report section and convey its importance by being published as an article. One final thing—keep up the good work; our *Strophes* is second to none as a newsletter. Comments? Please send to Jim Lambert, *Strophes* Associate Editor, at: jim@jimlambert.net.

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER 9/11

We recently observed the fifteenth anniversary of that terrible day and I was reminded again of how poetry helped in so many ways to heal that wound. I know someone who died that day. Bob was in his office on one of the floors directly hit by one of the planes. He was a truly nice guy and I had not seen him for a few years. I knew he was working in Manhattan, but didn't know where. About two months after the attack, I noticed an article in our local paper. It was an interview with Bob's mother who lived nearby. This is how I learned Bob was lost that day. She talked extensively about how much Bob liked his job and had told her that he couldn't believe they were paying him for doing something he enjoyed so much. After reading the article, I noticed a candle jar in one of our bathrooms had an Emily Dickinson poem on it. I thought it summed up what our attitude should be about our hope for the future. I have sent this poem to so many people over the last 15 years. ~ Jim Lambert, *Strophes* Associate Editor

To Make a Prairie (#1755)
By Emily Dickson (1830-1886)

To make a prairie it takes a clover and
one bee,
One clover, and a bee.
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.