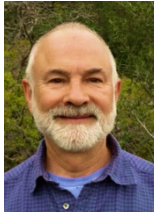




Dear NFSPS Poets,



Paul Ford
35th NFSPS
President

I recently had the pleasure of chatting with my first poetry teacher. She also lives in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area. We met by chance at a neighborhood social event. Many years back she won our Utah State Poetry Society's book of the year contest and had her manuscript published by our society. She admitted that she no longer writes poetry. In fact, she has let her UTSPS membership lapse. Perhaps you know poets who have been active in writing poetry, some even successful as my teacher, as well as involved in their

poetry society's programs but have left their creative love behind? Membership across NFSPS state societies has declined over the last dozen years. Back then I was involved in publishing *Strophes*. We were printing 5,500 copies and mailing them out to all the NFSPS state poetry societies. This *Strophes* print count did include some extras, so membership was somewhat less. And this was years before many of our state societies shifted to electronic delivery as the preferred way to distribute the quarterly *Strophes* to their members. The current NFSPS membership total is now a little over 3,600.

Many traditional social organizations face this same issue of shrinking membership as most of our NFSPS state societies face. Those of us who take on leadership roles within our societies find it harder and harder to engage others willing to pitch in and help with running our organization and/or hosting its programs/activities. Thus, we end up wearing multiple hats, both for our state poetry society and, for a few of us, additional roles on the NFSPS Board. You know how many hats, if any, you wear in service to poets and poetry.

Please allow me to suggest an aspiration: there are four "poetry" muses of Classical Greek mythology (out of the nine in their pantheon). The four Greek muses for poetry are:

- Calliope (epic poetry)
- Thalia (comedy and pastoral poetry)
- Erato (love poetry and lyric poetry)
- Polyhymnia (hymns and sacred poetry)

Each of us could act as an ambassador (akin to Old High German *ambaht*, "service") for one of the above. Perhaps one of these muses calls to you, more than the others, to be in service as an ambassador to either the homelands of poetry (inhabited by our poetry society members and other poets) or to the distant lands occupied by non-poets, who may be receptive to the breath of human experiences shared by the speakers of poems. What say you? Will you receive your calling (i.e., from the Latin verb, *vocare*, "to call", root of our 'vocation') from the muse you resonate with?

From the above, you may not be surprised by the following: currently the NFSPS Board has three open roles. For many months I have reached out to those who I thought could potentially take on one of these roles. The only responses have been "no" with one very recent, tentative "yes". A variety of reasons for not being able to help were offered, but in the end, it was primarily that they had no spare time. Which brings me to the poet's existential question: is your writing poetry, from trigger to a completed poem, a totally solitary process or does it typically involve

other poets providing feedback? Perhaps the reality for most of our poems is that it takes a poets' community to *raise* a fledged-out poem. For myself, I have a debt I can never repay to the UTSPS poets who allowed me to attend their critique sessions. They didn't kick me out, considering what I brought session after session were shadows of poems, not poems-in-the-making like theirs. In fact, they encouraged me time after time to keep writing poetry. I find being in the presence of poets, especially when they talk about the subject of poetry, to be uplifting and expanding. I always come away with new perspectives on what poems can be while appreciating the craft and dedication of these other poets.

Where is this *musings* going? I beg you to think about what you might be able to do for other poets and those who are interested in finding out more about poetry. Yes, your state poetry society has many ways in which you could help. Some roles do require a commitment over time such as a society officer's term (e.g., 2 years). However, there are many one-time tasks such as helping host your society's annual poetry festival. The latter allows you to get your feet wet without making a significant commitment. You can also reach out to me to inquire about the open roles we have for the current Board term (ends June of 2024). These open roles are:

- Contest Sponsors/Brochure Chair
- Contest Chair
- Youth Chair

Note that each of the above roles has "Chair" in the name. This implies that the Chair may form a committee of a few helpers to perform the tasks that the role is responsible for. Dividing a role's tasks among two or more individuals does then require some effort in coordination. It takes thought to figure out how to both perform tasks divided among the committee members and not significantly increase the hours of effort needed to coordinate.

I cannot take on all three of the above open roles, as well as diligently act as NFSPS President. If you are interested in any of these NFSPS annual contest roles or the Youth role, send me an email. My Inbox is hoping to see your message. If you do send me a note, please let me know which state poetry society you are a member of. Thanks for being willing to consider helping your state poetry society and NFSPS. We are all ambassadors in service of poetry, to share that which speaks to the heart, what it means to be human.

Your servant in poetry,
Paul Ford, 35th NFSPS President
president@nfspd.net (note *.net*, not *.com*)

**EDWARD HIRSCH, NOTED POET AND PRESIDENT OF
THE JOHN SIMON GUGGENHEIM MEMORIAL
FOUNDATION, WILL JUDGE
THE 2023 BARBARA STEVENS POETRY BOOK
MANUSCRIPT COMPETITION**

In 2022, the NFSPS was privileged to have Ellen Bass, a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and the author of four books of poetry, judge the 2023 Barbara Stevens Poetry Book Manuscript Competition.

(continued page 3)

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE POETRY SOCIETIES, INC.

Organized October 17, 1959 ~ Mary B. Wall, Founder
Honorary Chancellor: Lance Larsen
EXECUTIVE BOARD ~ 2022-2024
 Elected, NFSPS Convention, June 2022

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STROPHES

Strophes, the newsletter of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc., is published four times a year: August (*June 25th) ~ October (*August 25th) ~ January (*November 25th) ~ April (*February 25th). News items and information on contests may be sent via regular mail or email, which is preferred, by authorized members of NFSPS member state societies to:

Julie Cummings, *Strophes* Editor
 9428 Fallen Rock Road, Conifer, CO. 80433
 stropheseditor@nfspss.net

* Submission Deadlines
Strophes is available without cost to all paid-up members of NFSPS member state societies when mailed/shipped in bulk to the president or other designated person, who is responsible for ordering the number needed by the submission deadline for each issue. Individual subscriptions are \$4.00 a year to cover handling costs. Special orders are mailed separately. To order a single issue: specify the issue ordered, include a #10 SASE and \$1.00 per copy.

NFSPS PAST PRESIDENTS (Presidential Advisors)

- *Cecilia Parsons Miller
- *Clinton Larson
- *Robert D. West
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- *Max Golightly
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- *Doris Stengel
- *Nancy Baass
- *Russell H. Strauss
- *Jeremy M. Downes
- *Eleanor Berry
- *Jim Barton
- *Julie Cummings

* Deceased

(continued from Page 1) When I accepted the position of 1st Vice Chancellor, I came to the NFSPS with a vision of improving the perception of our manuscript competition. In my work producing poetry podcasts and my introduction to many world class poets through my association with Anne McCrady of Texas, I began to develop a network of relationships that helped me share professional insights into the writing of poetry but also helped me improve personally as a poet.



This year the judge of the competition is my good friend and mentor, Edward Hirsch, a MacArthur Fellow, who has published ten books of poems, including *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems* (2010), *Gabriel: A Poem* (2014), and *Stranger by Night* (2020). He has also published six prose books about poetry, most recently *100 Poems to Break Your Heart* (2021) and *The Heart of American Poetry* (2022). He has received many awards and fellowships, including the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pablo Neruda Presidential Medal of Honor. He taught at Wayne State University and the University of Houston and now serves as President of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He is generous with his advice and support of poets. We often joke about our tendency to write elegiac poems. It is delightful to work with one of the world's best poets on the judging of this competition.

Past winners of this competition often become even more successful poets. The list of past winners includes Jennifer Hambrick, who has hundreds of poems published in *The Columbia Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Maryland Literary Review*, *Santa Clara Review* and in dozens of other literary journals and anthologies. Flower Conroy, the 2019 winner, is an LGBTQIA+ writer, a National Endowment for the Arts and a MacDowell Fellow, and a former Key West poet laureate. Her work has been published in *The American Journal of Poetry* and many other prestigious publications. The 2018 winner was Amy Schmitz, whose work is featured in *Quiddity*, *the Louisiana Review* and *Poetry International*.

The Barbara Stevens Poetry Book Manuscript Competition is open to all poets writing in English, except previous Stevens Competition winners. Friends, colleagues, and students of Edward Hirsch are asked to postpone entering until a future year. The 2023 deadline for submission is November 15th. For complete guidelines, see <http://nfsp.com/stevens1.html>. ~ *Terry Jude Miller, 1st Vice Chancellor*

MANNINGHAM TRUST STUDENT POETRY CONTEST RULES: 2024 ANNUAL COMPETITION

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 Student Poetry Award Anthology. Winners will receive complimentary copies. The schools of each winning student will receive a complimentary copy for the school library. **There is no entry fee.**

1. There are two divisions: Grade 6-8 (Junior Division) and Grades 9-12 (Senior Division). Competition is open to all qualified students. Poems may have been previously published and/or have won previous awards.

2. The competition is open to all USA students in grades 6 – 12. Public, private, and homeschooled are eligible for entry by individual submission. **Individual poets may only submit one poem.**

3. All entries must be entered through **Submittable**, and the proper application form must be completed, indicating poet's contact information, school attended, & grade student is currently in. All students can open a Submittable account for no cost and there is no entry fee for the contest. Go to www.nfsp.com/submittable.com and check the appropriate grade level to submit.

4. Each poem must be neatly typed or computer-generated and should appear on a single sheet. In order to fit on the page, line width limit is 60 characters, including punctuation marks and spaces between words. Lines longer than 60 characters will be wrapped with a hanging indent by the editors. Any poem that exceeds the 60-character limit may be disqualified. Because our printed format will be a 6 x 9 book, some winning poems may end up printed on more than one page. The decision of the judge and/or editor is final. **There should be no large or unusual fonts or illustrations.** Times New Roman is the suggested font. **12-point font should be used.**

5. The poem submitted must not have ID information. There should be no indication of prior awards granted or publication information. Winners may be asked for that information to be provided at the time of publication.

6. Each entrant must make a declaration of originality. The statement will be included in the Submittable application "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. Entries must be received on Submittable between September 15, 2024 and November 15th, 2024.

Notice of winners will be sent to each winner's member state society (President and/or Manningham Youth Chair). Awards (certificates, checks, anthologies) will also be mailed to the student. Each member state is responsible for celebrating their state's winners. The top winning poems will be read at the Annual NFSPS Convention held in June 2024.

Literary Standards. While we honor the First Amendment right of free speech, be aware that the winning poems will be published and distributed to school-age children. The use of inappropriate language could disqualify an entry. The decision of the judge is final.

Any questions can be directed to secretary@nfsp.com

BLACKBERRY PEACH NEWS

This year, for the first time the Blackberry Peach National Poetry Slam Competition, the Slam was held in conjunction with the NFSPS annual convention, building on the successful partnership with the Florida State Poetry Association (FSPA) last year, when the first annual Blackberry Peach National Slam Competition was held as part of the annual FSPA Convention in October.



BLACKBERRY PEACH NATIONAL SLAM POETRY COMPETITION

The NFSPS Convention's theme this year was CATCH POETRY: STAGE AND PAGE, blending the usual emphasis on the literary aspect of poetry with the excitement of Performance Poetry at the National Blackberry Peach Poetry Slam Championship. Winners of this year's Slam Competition are Champion, Dove Dupree of Greenville, S.C., \$2,000, second place Terry Odis of Desoto, Texas, \$1,000, third place Jahman Hill, of Birmingham, Alabama, \$500, fourth place, Jonathon Kelly, of Port St Lucie, Florida, \$250. All 12 of the finalists received cash prizes.

This year, the second Blackberry Peach Youth Festival that included poetry workshops with star Performance Poetry presenters Ed Mabrey, Eddy Vega and Sherri Hall, all previous winners of the Blackberry Peach Written and Spoken Word contestants. As part of the Festival, a National Youth Poetry Slam competition with medals and cash prizes was held. Winner was Vincent Ali of Iowa. A cash prize and a medal for the most inspiring poem was awarded to Alix Nath, also from Iowa.

Complete details are available on the NFSPS website at NFSPS.com. If you have any questions, or need any additional information about next year's Blackberry Peach Written and Spoken Word Contest, which will be open for submissions from January 1-March 15, 2024 or the Blackberry Peach National Poetry Slam Competition, or the Youth Festival, both to be held as part of next year's convention scheduled for June, 2024 in Georgia or if you have ideas or input for next year's NFSPS convention, please contact me at jcavanaughh1@gmail.com.

~ Joe Cavanaugh, First Vice President

NFSPS MEMBER SOCIETY NEWS

POET'S ROUNDTABLE OF ARKANSAS: PRA's 2023 Poetry Day Conference is scheduled for October 14 at Parkview United Methodist Church in Benton, AR. Registration will begin at 9:00 am and the conference will begin at 9:30 am. There is no registration fee and lunch will be available at \$8.50 a meal. Dennis Patton will serve as Poetry Day Chair and Christine Henderson will serve as Poetry Day Contest Chair. The featured speaker is Michael Blanchard of University of Central Arkansas. Michael Blanchard joined the Department of English as an adjunct faculty member in the fall semester of 2018. In addition to his teaching duties, he serves as editor of *Slant*, the department's journal of contemporary American poetry at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, and the University of Louisiana.

PRA members will be actively promoting Arkansas student poetry contests in the fall.

Harding Stedler Memorial Student Poetry Contests for
middle and senior students
Pat Laster Collegiate Student Contest

For more news on Poets Roundtable of Arkansas, follow us on Facebook and see our website, poetsroundtableofarkansas.org. ~ Laura Bridges, Vice President

CALIFORNIA POETRY SOCIETY: The *California Quarterly* is edited by a rotating group of editors that currently includes Konrad Tademar Wilk, Bory Thach, Maura Harvey, and Maja Trochimczyk, CSPS President and CQ Managing Editor. Recent guest editors included Deborah P Kolodji and Nicholas Skaldetvind. We mail about 150 printed copies, with deposits at the Library of Congress, California State Library, and various college libraries. The editor's introduction, table of contents, and *Newsbriefs* are posted online. Poems can be submitted via Submittable.com; by email and mail – the latter option is restricted to poets without email access. Our second publication is the *Poetry Letter* edited by Maja Trochimczyk and issued quarterly as PDF and online posts. On about 20 pages, it presents CSPS contest winners and featured poets, plus book reviews. It is emailed to about 480 poets and then posted on the blog, californiastatepoetrysociety.com, and website, californiastatepoetrysociety.org. In the spring of 2023, the *Poetry Letter* received its Online ISSN 2836-9394 and Print ISSN 2836-9408. Submit book reviews (500 to 800 words with cover images) to maja@moonrisepress.com. ~ Maja Trochimczyk, Ph.D., President

COLUMBINE POETS OF COLORADO: will celebrate their 45th anniversary on Sep 23, 2023 at their annual Poets Fest. The day will include the release of the anthology: *Columbine at 45: Keeping Poetry Alive!*, a workshop and reading by Brice Maiurro, editor in Chief of South Broadway Press and co-founder of the Nationwide Howling Movement, announcement of our annual contest winners, an open mic, and long awaited fellowship. ~ Julie Cummings, President

ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY: The Illinois State Poetry Society will have a presence at the Printers Row Lit Fest in Chicago, September 9th and 10th. Our member Kathryn Haydon will be a featured poet at one of the stage events that weekend. She will be reading from her recently published collection of poems, *Blue Unsalted Sunrise*.

Our annual contest is open! Deadline to enter is October 31st. See Illinoispoets.org for more information or contact me at isps.manningham@gmail.com. ~ Mary Beth Bretzlauf, President

KENTUCKY STATE POETRY SOCIETY: The KSPS 2023 Poetry Conference (October 28-29) will be virtual via Zoom, with an in-person workshop option at several locations throughout the Commonwealth for local attendees. The keynote speaker is poet and translator Kristen Renee Miller, Director and Editor-in-Chief at Sarabande Books. Her work in translation, particularly with the Quebecoise and Illnu poet Marie-Andrée Gill, has been widely praised, and she was awarded a 2023 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Translation. The conference program includes generative workshops, readings, panels, and open mics. Details and registration information can be found at <https://kystatepoetrysociety.org/>.

The monthly Zoom reading series is going strong, with nice participation at both the open mic events and the featured readings. Please join us on the third Tuesday of each month at 8:00 p.m. Eastern. Information and participation links can be found at <https://kystatepoetrysociety.org/> ~ Jennifer Barricklow, KSPS secretary

MASSACHUSETTS POETRY SOCIETY: We met Aug 12 for an excellent workshop entitled "Why" given by Pres. Jeannette Maes. Why leads to a search and answers to many questions: Why do

you like or dislike certain things? Why do I like to write, etc. It surprised us to learn we make 3,000 decisions a day! After lunch, attendees read several of their poems. Our next meeting will be Oct 14 with CREW Poets Chapter giving the program. Current Contests: Prizes \$50, \$30, \$20. Annual Poets Choice Contest, deadline Nov 1st and Arthur Potter Memorial Award Contest, deadline Dec 15th. Mail entries to: Contest Chairperson Roberta Hung, 22 Salisbury Rd., Wakefield, MA 01880.
~ *Beverley Barnes, Reporter*

MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY: Our four branches are busy promoting Youth and Open Mic events, holding “Meet the Authors” with “Book Sales,” and planning workshops on writing and marketing. We are happy to report that our newest branch, West Branch, is growing!

Highlights-

*Linda Watson Owen is our 2023 Poet of the Year and was honored at our Spring Festival in beautiful Ocean Springs with a book signing of her chapbook, *A Gift of Dappled Light*.

*Famed artist Walter Anderson’s son, John, was our Spring Festival’s keynote speaker, giving us an intimate look at his father, who was also a gifted poet.

*Bill Hill was chosen to compete in the Blackberry Peach Poetry Slam at the NFSPS convention and placed in the top 10. He was also interviewed for the Daily Memphian newspaper for an interesting article entitled “At 74, dyslexic wordsmith heads to national poetry slam” about his being dyslexic and still becoming a strong poet, artist, and pastor.

MPS is getting ready for its annual contests: one for Mississippi students only; the other, for all poets everywhere. We always offer a wide range of categories, impressive prizes, and publication of winning poems in our annual contest journal. Please check our website, www.misspoetry.net, in November for guidelines. Our Central Branch is hosting the annual Spring Poetry Festival in April. ~ *Dorothy Wiman, Secretary*

NEW MEXICO STATE POETRY SOCIETY: Senses awaken in summer hours, whether they’re spent in stifling cities, sleepy country sides, or on breezy shores. Poetry activities in New Mexico have been on hiatus in some areas, but members are now participating in poetry readings via Zoom and in person. Soundscapes swell to accommodate the rhythms of outdoor gatherings, and scents waft—a tableau vivant of life in all its forms.

We are looking at a fall mini-festival in October— more news still to come. In the meantime Poets and lovers of poetry, it’s a great time to cuddle up with some summer poems in the shade of a tree or the air conditioning of a house. There’s so much to do this time of year. ~ *Bernadette Perez, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF OKLAHOMA: The falling leaves drift past our window and PSO is looking forward to the cooler days of Autumn that will soon arrive (hopefully). My, how quickly this year has flown!

PSO will be celebrating this year’s National Poetry Day at our annual business meeting in October. National Poetry Day is a celebration of poetry that takes place (this year) on the 5th of October 2023.

The theme is *Refuge* and PSO will be discussing and sharing poems on the theme. It is a busy time as we celebrate, present awards, read

winning poems from our National Poetry Day contests and give out door prizes - all celebrating poetry’s power to bring people together.

This is also the time for our PSO election of officers for 2024-2025 and voting on any changes in our PSO Constitution and By-Laws. The board is working on ideas for updating the Constitution and By-Laws, and also looking into other avenues of payment for dues, etc. that have been suggested by several members.

Please remember to check our PSO website and our PSO Facebook page. <http://www.angelfire.com/poetry/ps/> Until next time ~ Keep writing those poems! And... “Come and Grow at PSO! ~ *Patti Koch, President*

PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY: Pennsylvania Poetry Society is looking forward to turning 75 in 2024. Their fall conference will be held October 21, on the society’s actual 74th anniversary! PPS will open its’ annual poetry contest October 15th. More details will be forthcoming. ~ *Steven Concert, Acting President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE (PST): Membership renewals continue, and PST has gained new members.

PST virtual monthly membership meetings featured educational programs, members-only contest announcements and readings, and a poetry share. Lacy Snapp is program chair and Russell Strauss is contest chair. PST critique groups also are active monthly. In June PST celebrated their 70th anniversary. The event featured poetry readings, memory shares, and a time capsule ceremony.

PST’s Regional Connection Committee members attended such events as open mics and a youth poet laureate celebration and discussed potential collaborations with other organizations.

PST’s anthology, *Tennessee Voices, 2022-2023*, is now available: <https://www.poetrytennessee.org/pstpublications.html>. Howard Carman chaired the anthology board.

PST student contests are open for submissions: free verse for High School and Middle School and any form for Elementary. Seth Grindstaff is student contest chair.

PST seeks festival contest sponsors. Online and paper application and payment accepted.

PST now offers various online applications and payment. Paper methods remain available. Howard Carman (Treasurer) pioneered this work.

PST created a member bio page, printed business cards and developed a student contest flyer. A general flyer is in the works. Matthew Gilbert chairs Communications.

Get society information on their website (www.poetrytennessee.org) and blog (<https://poetrytennessee.com>). Follow PST on Facebook and instagram: @poetrysocietyoftennessee. ~ *Lisa Kamolnick, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS: After Beth Ayers located a hotel that met our needs and budget, our PST Summer Conference was held in Fort Worth, Texas at the Radisson Fossil Creek Hotel July 20-22. The Theme was *Blazing Poetry Trails*, and was planned by the PST officers and board members and was headed up by trail bosses, Directors Steve Sanders and Carol Thompson. Barbara Blanks was registrar, and JDarrell Kirkley helped promote the conference with a video and his graphic art. Everyone received a “grab bag” filled with

useful items and treats. Some of our presenters were Christine Boldt, Diane Glancy, Michael Guinn, Cade Huie, JDarrell Kirkley, Robert "Doc" Parkey, Budd Powell Mahan, Fred Manchester, Steve Sanders, Courtney O'Banion Smith, and Janet Tyner. Readers for our You Be The Judge Contest were Barbara Blanks and Michael Guinn. The poem that received the most votes was by Bob Schinzel. Second place was Karl Smith, and third place was won by Catherine L'Herisson, and each received a check for their effort. On Thursday night, after our Mexican buffet, and speaker, Diane Glancy, winner of the 2023 William D. Barney Memorial Chapbook Contest, we were entertained by Kare2Dance a trio of belly dancers. Melody Sanders, Steve Sanders' wife was part of the group, and this was their debut. For a small fee to be donated to the charity or non-profit of your choice, you could enter a poem to be read while they danced. Response was better than expected, and since the ladies said they were not poetry judges, they randomly chose three poems. All proceeds from this contest would go to the organization listed on the last poem drawn. The last one was written by Karl Smith, one of our councilors from Amarillo, and he had listed PST! After a Western buffet Friday night, our speaker was Courtney O'Banion Smith, winner of the Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize. Bill White, a professional and popular singer and guitar player, entertained us with Western songs before our Life Member Raffle conducted by Betty Roberts, who had been selling raffle tickets throughout the conference. There were some great prizes donated by chapters and individuals, especially a number of books donated by Patrick Marshall. We also had open mic poetry readings each night of the convention. Melody Sanders did a wonderful job of managing our book room where poets could display and sell their books. Those who attended the 2023 PST Summer Conference left with new inspiration and fond memories. ~ *Catherine L'Herisson, Vice President*

WYOPOETS hosts a Zoom meeting the second Sunday of each month at 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time. The first 20 poets to sign up get to read. Additional poets may be allowed to read based on available time. Each poet gets 5 minutes to read. You don't need to be a member to participate. Please email Abbie Taylor at abbietaylor945@gmail.com if you would like a Zoom link.

WyoPoets' Eugene V. Shea National Poetry Contest will be open for entries from October 1 to December 31, 2023. You need not be a WyoPoets' member to enter. Go to <https://www.wyopoets.org/sheacontest.html> for more details. ~ *Myra Peak, Strophes Correspondent*

POETRY JUDGING CRITERIA

Although any poet's major aim is to write poetry, writing is not the entire poetic experience. Poets should also read poetry (both their own and the poetry of others), critique poetry and judge poetry. These are all part of the learning experience that makes one a better poet. Critiquing poetry and judging poetry are two different processes. Critiquing involves evaluating a single poem for the purpose of improvement. Judging involves comparing poems to determine which are the best. If a contest contains only a few good poems, this becomes easier, but the judge still must determine a ranking for those poems. There must be some criteria to decide which is the first place poem, which is the second place poem, etc.

In the last few years, NFSPS has had a major thrust toward obtaining new judges who can bring fresh insight into their poetry contests, but many people are still reluctant to volunteer to judge a large contest with 100 to 300 poems. Part of this reluctance is due to the insecurity that some people have toward making decisions in general. When we make decisions for a poetry contest, we should prepare ourselves by studying

the appropriate form and every poem should have a fair reading, but there is a point at which a decision must be made. I have known of judges who determined the ten best poems for their contest and then spent weeks moving them back and forth before submitting their decisions. Always consider judging to be a timed activity that should be completed within a limited number of days to be fair to the contest chairman, who must prepare certificates, and the treasurer who must issue checks. Be firm in your decisions once you have made them.

Since the difficulty with judging often involves those very good poems and how to rank them, I have devised a rating system for evaluating those poems. Your rating system may not be the same as mine, but you should definitely have one to help you make those difficult final decisions. I rate the poems on a scale of one to ten on each of the following criteria:

- Originality. Is there something different and interesting about this poem or is it the same old thing we have seen many times before?
- Cohesiveness. Does the poem hold together as a unit?
- Figurative language. Are similes and metaphors used when appropriate? Are they fresh and not trite?
- Appropriateness to form or topic. Does the poem stick to the rules for the type of poem being written? (Even free verse has rules.)
- Clarity. Can you easily understand what the poem is saying?
- Meaning. Does the poem seem to have a purpose? That purpose does not always have to be a serious one. Humor is a purpose. This does not mean that the poem should be moralistic or "preachy"
- Correctness. Is the grammar, punctuation and spelling in the poem correct? If the poem depends on factual information (i.e. scientific or historical facts, etc.) are those facts correct? Are words used in their correct meaning? Poets who care about their poems check these things carefully.
- Beginning and endings. Is the title interesting and appropriate? Do the opening lines lead us into the poem? Do the final lines bring the poem to an appropriate conclusion?

You can see how having a clear sense of what you are looking for can help you to become a better judge. I hope each of you will consider judging in the future and find it a rewarding experience. ~ *Russell H. Strauss, Board Liaison to State Societies*

INCREASING OUR MEMBERSHIP: GROWTH OF OUR STATE SOCIETIES

The biggest challenge faced by our state societies is how to grow our membership. There seems to be no easy "one-size-fits-all" answer. Focus appears to be how do we attract younger poets so that our organizations don't fade away. Instead of asking ourselves how to attract younger poets, I think we need to find a way to attract ALL poets to our organizations. By only looking at how to bring in youth, we are basically limiting ourselves. Effectively, we are cutting our potential in half based on an arbitrary number of age.

The first step in growing our numbers is to let potential members know that we exist. Our state organizations cannot grow if nobody knows we are here. Contact your state's tourism agency. Their job is to promote what the state has to offer its citizens. We can get ourselves listed

through their website and in printed materials. If there are local tourism agencies, contact them as well. Approach colleges, universities, and high schools to find potential members. Contact teachers and professors so they are aware that we exist. Find the local chapter of teachers' groups like the National Council of Teachers of English.

We are in the digital age and should be utilizing technology to its fullest potential. That being said, all state societies should have a website that is frequently updated, yet there are NFSPS state societies that are still not "online." If you are one of those five state societies, you should be aware that NFSPS can provide you with web space through the NFSPS website. No experience is needed as there are NFSPS members willing to help develop your web pages. At the very least, each state society should have a basic web page that tells "who" we are and "how" to contact our organization.

Social media is a very popular way to keep in touch - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and chat groups - the list goes on. If a state society does not have a presence here, think of all the potential members we are failing to reach - thousands, possibly millions. This media can help us to announce who we are. By design, social media allows us to connect with our friends, and those friends connect with their friends, and the friend's friends connect with their friends - creating an intertwined network of potential members.

We've put our information out there. It's time to sit back and relax. Any day now the poets will be kicking down our doors to join. While we can hope that with our information "out there" others will come in search of us, such a statement couldn't be farther from the reality of the situation each of our state societies faces every day.

The second step in growing our numbers is to seek out any potential members. This will increase our chances of success. We need to identify where these potential members can be found. Chances are if your town has a popular coffee shop/cafe that routinely hosts "open mic" nights, you will find poets there. Do the cafes routinely bring in poets to conduct a reading? Chances are that the audience will be mostly comprised of poets. Who from our state societies are sitting in the audience? Add to your list local colleges and universities as well as local high schools. A few years back, a local university brought Billy Collins to the campus to do a reading. It was standing room only in an auditorium that easily holds 1000 people. And several hundred attended the "meet the poet" reception held following the reading. Among the crowd were many local and regional poets who did not belong to the state society. Think - potential members! Another place where poets are sure to gather are local, regional, and state poetry festivals. Local and college libraries as well as book stores could be additional good sources for potential members. Check the internet to see if there is a local meetup group for poets. Leave no stone unturned when identifying where potential members can be found.

We've put our information out there, and identified where poets are most likely to be found. So, now what do we do? To be continued in a future issue. ~ *Steven Concert, 2nd Vice President*

MET WITH SURPRISE DELIGHT: TWO POEMS TO READ, TWO PROMPTS TO WRITE

Sometimes when we least expect it, we are met with joy. Perhaps it's a bizarre event, like seeing a flash mob sing in the middle of a mall. Perhaps it's an encounter with an animal, another human or even a startling fact that somehow opens our eyes to the wonder of life. Once

we've been met by wonder, there's something powerful about writing into that experience—not only because it memorializes the delight, but because as we explore this kind of moment, often it continues to unfold for us in new ways.

1) TRYING ON NEW PERSPECTIVES

I am often startled into wonder by facts about other living plants and animals. This is the premise of Danusha Laméris' poem "Feeding the Worms," in which the poet begins with a surprising detail about the taste buds of earthworms and how they literally take in the world. It's a poem that teaches us, but it also reveals how when we better understand another creature, it can change the way we interact with them.

There's so much pleasure in this poem—of discovery, of engagement—and then, oh! The last line opens the whole poem into a reflection on our own mortality. What are the moments of delight we might take in before we die? How might we find pleasure in the ways we nourish the world and ourselves?

Invitation to Write

Choose any animal or insect that lives near you—an animal you are likely to encounter at some point in a year. You need not like this animal. Research it. What do you learn about this animal that surprises you? Delights you?

Choose one or more facts and write about them. What does this animal have to teach you about what it is to live, or to die? How might you meet this animal differently, next time you come across it?

2) A SMALL SPASM OF JOY

"Why am I not allowed delight?" asks Ada Limón, the question at the heart of "Give Me This." The poem details a surprise encounter with a groundhog. And though the small animal is pilfering homegrown tomatoes, and though the speaker in the poem has been asked to think on suffering, this scene elicits in the speaker "a small spasm of joy" as the groundhog finds pleasure in devouring the juicy tomatoes.

As a reader, the speaker's joy comes as a bit of a shock. You're not mad? You don't try to shoo the groundhog from the garden? It's thrilling, really, this unexpected turn of events—and the poem incites in *me* an unpredicted, small spasm of joy. *Why not delight?* The poem invites us to find joy in the world as it is—to revel in whatever surprises a day might offer us.

Invitation to Write

What has recently brought you surprise joy? Recall the scene. What were you feeling before that moment? Why did the joy surprise you? How did it inform the rest of the day? What did it teach you about surviving?

*This is an excerpt from *Exploring Poetry of Presence II: Prompts to Deepen Your Writing Practice* by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer (Back Porch Productions, 2023), written as a companion book for *Poetry of Presence II: More Mindfulness Poems* (Grayson Books, 2023). The poems cited are both found in the anthology.

NFSPS DEADLINES AND DATES**Manningham Submission Period:**

September 15, 2023 - November 15, 2023

Stevens Manuscript Submission Period:

September 1, 2023- November 15, 2023

CUP Submission Period:

December 1, 2023 – January 31, 2024

BlackBerry Peach (Spoken Word)**Submission Period:**

January 1, 2024 – March 15, 2024

Annual Contest Submission Period:

January 1, 2024 – March 15, 2024

**State Membership Lists and Annual Dues
Deadline:**

January 15, 2024

Updates due by March 15, 2024**Strophes Reports or Articles:**August Issue Deadline: June 25thOctober Issue Deadline: August 25thJanuary Issue Deadline: November 25thApril Issue Deadline: February 25th**BlackBerry Peach SLAM Entry Period:**

Stay tuned for further information!

Contest Sponsorship Forms and Payment:March 15th for the following year**State Annual Reports:**

One week prior to convention

Board and Committee Annual Reports:

One week prior to convention or when complete in special cases. (Treasurer, Contest Chair)

State President Meetings:

Held Quarterly- Watch for emails!

Learning Central Meetings:

Held Quarterly- Watch for emails!

**CORRECTION: WINNERS LIST
CONTEST 9:
POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS AWARD**

Lynn Farmer, of Decatur, GA, is the 5th Honorable Mention winner. Another member appeared in her place in Strophes. The editors regret this error.

**BARBARA STEVENS POETRY BOOK
MANUSCRIPT COMPETITION**

The Barbara Stevens Poetry Book Manuscript Competition submissions window opens September 1, 2023, and closes at midnight PST November 15, 2023. This year's judge will be Edward Hirsch. The Submittable online system will be accessible only during this time. No early or late submissions will be considered. If you are unable to use Submittable, please email stevenschair@nfsp.com no later than November 8, 2023, to ask about alternative means of submission. Complete details are available at <http://NFSPS.Submittable.com> starting September 1 and also at <http://www.nfsp.com/stevens1.html>.

2024 BLACKBERRY PEACH SLAM

Start planning now to host state slams to determine your state society sponsored Slam competitor! Kevin Campbell, the Performance Poetry Advocate, can give your society ideas for hosting state sponsored slams. Contact Kevin at macdelandslam@gmail.com.

PLEASE BE WARY OF SCAMMERS

Whenever you get an email with my name as the sender, check to see if the message is actually sent from president@nfsp.net. If it isn't, I suggest you report the email as scam/phishing to your email provider. I will never ask you for money or gift cards in an email or text message.

~ Paul Ford, 35th NFSPS President

MONTHLY POETRY CONTEST

Wilda Morris, former president of the Illinois State Poetry Society, posts a contest for other poets each month on her blog. New contests are posted the first of the month; deadline is the 15th of the month. No charge to enter. Previously published poems are okay, but not simultaneous submissions. Winning poems are published. See: wildamorris.blogspot.com.

ENCORE PRIZE POEMS 2023

The 2023 anthology of prize-winning poems awarded at the "Catch Poetry: Stage and Page" NFSPS convention is available on amazon.com. All royalties from *Encore* sales support NFSPS.

~ Kathy Cotton, *Encore* Editor

NFSPS CONTEST BROCHURE

The NFSPS 2024 Contest Brochure will be mailed to state contacts and will also be available at nfsp.com and nfsp.net. You may also request a copy by mailing a SASE with adequate postage for 4 pages to Julie Cummings, 9428 Fallen Rock Road, Conifer, CO 80433.