



# 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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Julie Cummings  
33rd NFSPS  
President

### Dear Poetry Family,

I'd like to begin this New Year message to you by welcoming the North Dakota State Poetry Society to NFSPS! They are a small, yet mighty group working together to further poetry in North Dakota. I am so excited to see what will transpire in their society and what we can do to assist them in their poetic endeavors. WELCOME NORTH DAKOTA!

Now, on to other business. This issue of *Strophes* usually has an outline of the upcoming annual convention and information for registration. I am sad to report it does not. We have a group working to secure a location with a respective venue, and once that is done, I will send emails to State Presidents with all the necessary information. In the meantime, rest assured that there will be a 2020 convention somewhere in the lower 48 during the summer.

I hope 2020, the beginning of a new decade, brings you much joy and many chances to participate in what you love. I know I will be doing as much as I can with my local poetry family and NFSPS.

I recently have been fascinated with the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and the fact that there are only a minimal number of her poems published. Simultaneously I'm reading a book titled *Braving the Wilderness* by Brené Brown. I purposefully started studying Bishop's work and accidentally started reading Brown's work. How was this accidental you wonder? When I purchased Brown's book, I thought I was purchasing a book about hiking—silly me! Who would think that a book with a title about wilderness would be a book about belonging! And regarding Bishop's work, who would think that a major 20th century poet would not have many works in the poetry sphere! Taking these on simultaneously has been an enlightening and serendipitous adventure for me.

As I read about Elizabeth Bishop, I have discovered that she said: "Being a poet is one of the unhealthier jobs—no regular hours, so many temptations!" and I whole heartedly agree. I am not referring to the temptation related to sin. I am talking about the temptation of decisions. Part of the temptation I experience is deciding what is important and what is not. Shall I make my priority what I love to do? Should I read other poets? Should I go to an open mic? Should I sit down here and write? Should I organize my books? Should I volunteer my service even though I feel I don't belong? Trust me, I have discovered the answer to all these questions is usually a resounding *Yes!* The answer is definitely not *No*, but my own insecurities and abundance of obligations seem to get in the way and echo 'no, I cannot' before I realize what happened.

I used to worry what others thought about my poetry career. Is my poetry even a career? Yes. No. Maybe. For some it is all they have. For others it is an escape. For some, perhaps, a way of self-expression that works for them. For me, it is my passion. I write because I must write. I must express. I must let those jumbled thoughts escape and become pencil on paper.

So I write! When I write, I very rarely enter contests and when I read at open mics, I often cut my time short, believing that stopping early was a way of not boring people. Not long ago, I was a featured poet at a large event attended by many friends and amazing poets, with whom I have great respect and admiration. During my reading I was truly grateful the weather came in forcefully and loudly, with a kaboom, strikes of bold lightning, darkened sky, swaying trees, and impending hail I surmised. There were some shrieks, some gasps, the power flickered and fear arose of a potentially severe weather event. Because of mother nature making her presence so known, and causing alarm, I had to stop reading. (*continued on page 8*)

### POETRY DAY AND POETS AT PLAY

By Shirley Blackwell, Poetry Day/Poetry Month  
Liaison Co-Chair

I offer my apologies for omitting the Poetry Society of Texas in my October article on State affiliates who had submitted reports on Poetry Day and Month activities. PST always participates in these events and had sent its report well before the deadline; but, in our new reporting system, it got rerouted. More about the new system later in this column.

Texas chapters and members of PST organized numerous activities and programs for National Poetry Month, April 2019, including a café open mic sponsored by the Mockingbird Poetry Society of McKinney. Three members of the Poets of Tarrant County (PTC) presented a Poetry Day program for seniors at the Mansfield Activity Center. PTC President Barbara Goerdel and PST Past President Jeannette Strother were among the readers.

For the second year, Steve Sanders, President of Fort Worth Poetry Society, hung an envelope on his office door offering a "Free Poem!" to all passers-by. It was well-received, indeed.

Columbine Poets of Colorado gathered on October 19, 2019, to celebrate the first official National Poetry Day as well as the 60th Anniversary of the NFSPS. Everyone brought one poem to read and fielded questions on what inspired it and the process used to write it, which sparked an insightful discussion. Attendees then formed two teams, which competed in finishing the last line of poems taken from the children's book *Animal Limericks A B C* by member Melinda Rice. The celebration concluded with cake and refreshments.

CPC is the only state society that has reported so far on activities for the 2019 National Poetry Day. Reports can still be submitted at [poetry.day.month@gmail.com](mailto:poetry.day.month@gmail.com), although they will not be acknowledged until the 2020 Annual Convention.

Given the special status bestowed on October 15 as National Poetry Day in the USA, the NFSPS will honor it separately from National Poetry Month. I encourage all State Presidents or NPD reporters to send me—by November 15, so I can make the November 25 *Strophes* deadline—reports about your society's NPD observances. From now on, I will share your NPD exploits and creative ideas with all members of the NFSPS (not just Annual Convention attendees) by way of the January *Strophes*.

Likewise, I will ask all reporters to email their NPM reports by May 15, in time for the Annual Convention and the August issue of *Strophes*. As mentioned above, email them to [poetry.day.month@gmail.com](mailto:poetry.day.month@gmail.com). Please do not submit hard copy reports at or just prior to the convention. I will not be able to include latecomers in my annual report.

My purpose with this new system is to disseminate your clever "poetry hacks" to our whole Federation via this newsletter. Remember, I can't publish everything, so start thinking now about ways your society can win a spot in the NFSPS limelight.

## NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE POETRY SOCIETIES, INC.

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 9428 Fallen Rock Rd., Conifer, CO 80433  
 jcummings3@gmail.com

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 10239 Hickory Point Dr., Sandy, UT 84092-3960  
 pmford3@gmail.com

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 P.O. Box 1352, Los Lunas, NM 87031  
 sonneteer@earthlink.net

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2563 Twin Woods Cove, Memphis, TN 38134  
 ladyjoan1946@gmail.com

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2325 61st St., Des Moines, IA 50322  
 lucille\_e\_wilson@hotmail.com

**SECRETARY:** Linda Harris

711 6th St. SE, Altoona, IA 50009-1926  
 harristaxes@aol.com

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22614 N. Santiam Hwy., Lyons, OR 97358  
 eberry@wvi.com

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 18 S. Rembert St., Memphis, TN 38104

RSTRpoet@cs.com

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P.O. Box 2863, Evergreen, CO 80437-2863  
 ContestChair.nfspd@gmail.com

**Contest Sponsors/Brochure Chair: To Be Appointed**

**Encore Editor:** Kathy Cotton

1019 Applewood Lane, Anna, IL 62906  
 kalcotton@gmail.com

**Historian:** Nancy Baass

408 E. Warren Ave., Victoria, TX 77901-4847  
 nancy.baass@gmail.com

**Legal Counselor and Parliamentarian &  
 Manningham Trust Competition Chair:**

Susan Stevens Chambers  
 PO Box 422, Mankato, MN 56002  
 schambersmediator@yahoo.com

**Librarian:** Catherine L'Herisson

518 Grinnell Dr., Garland, TX 75043  
 catherinepoet@juno.com

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1570 Auburn Way, Reno, NV 89502

**Publicity Chair, Traditional Media, and Poetry Day/  
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3520 State Route 56, Mechanicsburg, OH 43044

**Special Events/State Outreach:** Peter Stein  
 5612 23rd Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55417  
 pwilliamstein@yahoo.com

**Stevens Manuscript Competition Chair:**

*To Be Appointed*

**Strophes Associate Editor:** Jim Lambert  
 300 Twin Lakes Rd., Carterville, IL 62918  
 jim@jimlambert.net

**Youth Chair:** Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer  
 P. O. Box 86, Placerville, CO 81430

rosemerryt@gmail.com

**Webmaster:** Billy Pennington, P.O. Box 7842,  
 Moore, OK 73153 ~ nfspsweb.master@gmail.com

### NFSPS MEMBER STATE SOCIETIES AND PRESIDENTS

**ALABAMA: Alabama State Poetry Society**

Alina Stefanescu, President ~ 3842 Glenwood Ave,  
 Birmingham, AL 35222 ~ rainscented@gmail.com

**ARIZONA: Arizona State Poetry Society**

C. Christy White ~ President, 1145 E. Kaler Dr.,  
 Phoenix, AZ 85020 ~ AZPoetryorg@gmail.com

**ARKANSAS: Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas**

Frieda Patton, President ~ 2512 Springhill Cir.,  
 Alexander, AR 72002 ~ patton.frieda@gmail.com

**CALIFORNIA: California State Poetry Society**

Dr. Maja Trochimczyk, President ~ P.O. Box 4288,  
 Sunland, CA 91041 ~ Maja.Trochimczyk@gmail.com

**COLORADO: Columbine Poets of Colorado**

Anita Jepson-Gilbert, President ~ 8989 Yukon St.,  
 Westminster, CO 80021 ~ anitajg@aol.com

**CONNECTICUT: Connecticut Poetry Society**

Tony Fusco, Co-President ~ 311 Shingle Hill Rd.,  
 West Haven, CT 06516 ~ tfusco357@gmail.com

Patricia Mottola, Co-President ~ 390 Maple Ave.,  
 Cheshire, CT 6410 ~ patriciamottola@yahoo.com

**FLORIDA: Florida State Poets Association**

Al Rocheleau, President ~ 3903 Township Square Blvd.  
 #1321, Orlando, FL 32837 ~ ARRO40@aol.com

**GEORGIA: Georgia Poetry Society**

Miriam C. Jacobs, President ~ 1445 Pontiac Place SE,  
 Atlanta, GA 30316 ~ georgiapoetrysociety.president@gmail.com

**ILLINOIS: Illinois State Poetry Society**

Susan T. Moss, President ~ 1209 Michigan Ave.,  
 Evanston, IL 60202 ~ stm48@hotmail.com

**INDIANA: Poetry Society of Indiana**

Deborah Petersen, President ~ 718 S. Bennett St.,  
 Bluffton, IN 46714 ~ djpetersen57@yahoo.com

**IOWA: Iowa Poetry Association**

Jerrold J. Narland, President ~ 122 S. 7th Ave.,  
 Winterset, IA 50273 ~ chiefjer@aol.com

**KENTUCKY: Kentucky State Poetry Society**

Sarah McCartt-Jackson, President  
 sarah.mccartt.jackson@gmail.com

**LOUISIANA: Louisiana State Poetry Society**

Kaylon Allen, President ~ 6660 Cambridge St.,  
 Baton Rouge, LA 70807 ~ kaylonallen@gmail.com

**MAINE: Maine Poets Society**

Jenny Doughty, President ~ 31 Rustic Ln.,  
 Portland, ME 04103 ~ jmdought@maine.rr.com

**MASSACHUSETTS: Massachusetts State Poetry Society**

Jeanette C. Maes, President ~ 64 Harrison Ave.,  
 Lynn, MA 01905 ~ msps.jcmaes@comcast.net

**MICHIGAN: Poetry Society of Michigan**

Elizabeth Kerlikowske, President ~ 2423 Russet Dr.,  
 Kalamazoo, MI 49008 ~ mme642@aol.com

**MINNESOTA: League of Minnesota Poets**

Peter Stein, President ~ 5612 23rd Ave S., Minneapolis,  
 MN 55417 ~ pwilliamstein@gmail.com

**MISSISSIPPI: Mississippi Poetry Society**

Linda Owen, President ~ 310 Cornerstone Dr., Brandon,  
 MS 39042 ~ lowenpoem@yahoo.com

**MISSOURI: Missouri State Poetry Society**

Carla Kirchner, President ~ 439 N. Farm Rd. 193,  
 Springfield, MO 65802 ~ ckirchner@sbniv.edu

**NEVADA: Nevada Poetry Society**

Phyllis Peacock, President ~ 35 E. York Way,  
 Sparks, NV 89431-2424 ~ pbtwo@earthlink.net

**NEW MEXICO: New Mexico State Poetry Society**

Bernadette Perez, President ~ 19645 Hwy. 314,  
 Belen, NM 87002 ~ president@nmpoetry.com

**NEW YORK: New York Poetry Forum**

James DeMartini, President ~ 7941 78th Ave., Glendale,  
 NY 11385 ~ jwvdm123@gmail.com

**NORTH DAKOTA: North Dakota State Poetry Society**

Bonnie Larson Staiger, President ~ 419 East Brandon Dr,  
 Bismarck ND 58503 ~ dakota923@hotmail.com

**OHIO: Ohio Poetry Association**

Chuck Salmons, President ~ 12886 Coventry Ave.,  
 Pickerington, OH 43147 ~ president@ohiopoetryassn.org

**OKLAHOMA: Poetry Society of Oklahoma**

Patti Koch, President ~ 5101 N.W. 20th St.,  
 Oklahoma City, OK 73127-2312 ~ pattikoch0@gmail.com

**OREGON: Oregon Poetry Association**

Bruce Parker, President ~ 2530 N. Argyle St.,  
 Portland, OR 97217-7022 ~ dotcyclyst@yahoo.com

**PENNSYLVANIA: Pennsylvania Poetry Society**

Emiliano Martin, President ~ 2955 Columbia Dr.,  
 Bensalem, PA 19020-2109 ~ poeta48@aol.com

**SOUTH DAKOTA: South Dakota State Poetry Society**

Bruce Roseland, President ~ 16894 SD Hwy. 47,  
 Seneca, SD 57473 ~ bbroseland@venturecomm.net

**TENNESSEE: Poetry Society of Tennessee**

JoAn Howerton, President ~ 2563 Twin Woods Cove,  
 Memphis, TN 38134 ~ ladyjoan1946@gmail.com

**TEXAS: Poetry Society of Texas**

Irene Robertson, President ~ 1625 Gayla Creek Dr.,  
 Little Elm, TX 75068 ~ yranie@att.net

**UTAH: Utah State Poetry Society**

Paul Ford, President ~ 10239 Hickory Pt. Dr., Sandy,  
 UT 84092 ~ pmford3@gmail.com

**WYOMING: WyoPoets**

Thomas Spence, President ~ PO Box 98, Buffalo,  
 WY 82834 ~ tl2940@wbaccess.net

### STROPHES

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Paul Ford, *Strophes* Editor  
 10239 Hickory Pt. Dr., Sandy, UT 84092-3960  
 pmford3@gmail.com

\* Submission Deadlines

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**NFSPS MEMBER SOCIETY NEWS**

**ARIZONA POETRY SOCIETY** participated in the second annual Meet Your Literary Community event in Phoenix on October 5th. We have reserved a table at the Desert Nights, Rising Stars Literary Fair in conjunction with the annual Conference, February 22, at Arizona State University. Plans are to hold a reading from *Sandcutters 2019*. Our space will be big enough for member books to be on display and for sale. Our Fall Conference was held in Tempe on November 23rd with 20 attendees. The morning's presenter, Tanner Menard, talked about their musical and poetry collaborations, their process in the creation of poetry, and their rituals they use to break out of old writing habits. They also spoke about being a Native American/Arcadian from Louisiana and how identifying as a non-binary person has entered into their work. Afterwards, there was a poetry workshop using various forms of music to inspire the participants' writing. The 2019 annual contest winners were announced. Of special note was the new youth category which garnered 54 submissions, 30 from Sunnyside High School in Tucson. Our *Sandcutters 2019* can be purchased on [azpoetry.webs.com](http://azpoetry.webs.com) for \$9.00 each plus shipping. ~ *Christy White, President*

**POETS' ROUNDTABLE OF ARKANSAS' Poetry Day** in Arkansas was celebrated on October 19th in Little Rock at the Butler Center. Cathy Moran won the Sybil Nash Abrams award with Laura Bridges finishing second. Karen Hayes posthumously won the Merit Award for her work introducing poetry to Alzheimer patients and for her Poetry on Demand program. This year's event had the largest attendance in over 10 years. PRA members are reaching out to Arkansas schools this fall promoting collegiate, high school and middle school contests. PRA is already planning its 2020 Spring Celebration. Laura Trigg is the chairman. See PRA's website [poetsroundtableofarkansas.org](http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org) for more information. ~ *Laura Bridges, Reporter*

**COLUMBINE POETS OF COLORADO** held its annual State Poets Fest in September. As usual, we had a sizeable showing from all over the state of poets ready to share, learn, and energize each other in all things poetry. Initial introductions to this august assembly were made by our very own Julie Cummings, NFSPS President. Then followed the presentation of the winners of this year's Columbine members' three contests: free verse, traditional form, and prose poem, which were judged by William Tremblay, Robert Cooperman and Sandra McRae. The

contest was coordinated by Maria Maldonado-Dunn, who did a superb job. Much to our delight, the contest judges offered an in-depth analysis of how they selected each of the poems chosen for each of the categories, resulting in an impromptu workshop all its own on how to respectfully judge poetry. Our fine presenter for our afternoon workshop was William "Bill" Tremblay, who focused on the craft of writing and revising poems. Lunchtime offered attendees time to catch up with each other. The afternoon ended with an open mic for those who wished to share their words. Once again, we left looking forward to next year's Fest. ~ *Karen Betstadt, Reporter*

**FLORIDA STATE POETS ASSOCIATION** members enjoyed the annual fall convention October 25-27, 2019, hosted by the Live Poets Society of Daytona Beach. Poet and college professor, Carol Frost, was installed as a Chancellor during a ceremony following the Saturday night dinner, and keynote speaker, M.B. McLatchey spoke about "Rhyming to Set the Darkness Echoing: Remembering Seamus Heaney." FSPA is currently planning its annual Spring Fling, a one-day event scheduled for Saturday, April 18, 2020, in historic Zephyrhills. Poet Silvia Curbelo will be installed as another of FSPA's new Chancellors at the event. ~ *Leslie C. Halpern, FSPA Secretary*

**GEORGIA POETRY SOCIETY** held its Fall quarterly meeting in Sandy Springs, Georgia. Theresa Davis presented a workshop on working with youth. Davis is an educator, storyteller, poet, author, poetry slam champion and the host of Java Speaks. Her first full collection of poems, *After This We Go Dark*, can be checked out in local and college libraries. Her latest poetry collection, *Drowned: A Mermaid's Manifesto*, was included on the Georgia Center's list of Books All Georgians Should Read 2017. Afternoon speaker Amy Pence authored the poetry collections *Armor*, *Amour*, *The Decadent Lovely*, and the chapbook, *Skin's Dark Night*. Her hybrid book on Emily Dickinson, *[It] Incandescent*, was released in 2018 and won the Eyelands Poetry Award. New poems are forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly* and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. GPS member Steven Shields read from his second full collection, *Creation Story*. Shields is a professor at the University of North Georgia. His work has appeared in publications such as *Angle*, *Deronda Review*, *Lyric*, *Measure*, among many others. He also has edited a collection of his great-grandmother Edna Rice Crane's verse. The GPS anthology, *The Reach of Song 2019*, is available for purchase online

at [georgiapoetrysociety.org](http://georgiapoetrysociety.org). ~ *Duanne Kaiser, Reporting*

**ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY** successfully completed this year's annual poetry contest. 105 poets sent in 805 poems which were passed along to ten judges. This year's deadline was Nov. 1. The monthly Brewed Awakening with featured poet and open mic was on Nov. 24 and included a holiday celebration plus poetry writing with prizes. Our Pontiac chapter held an open mic reading for members and the public at Cup and Scone on November 23. The Archetypes In Contemporary Art ekphrastic poetry and art event took place at the Burning Bush Gallery in Wheaton on October 5. A second presentation is planned for March 1, 2020, at Benedictine University in Lisle. Our fourth Gala with a members' anthology launch has been planned for November 14, 2020. ~ *Susan T. Moss, President*

**LOUISIANA POETRY SOCIETY** held its Fall Festival/Business meeting in October in Baton Rouge, hosted by the Founders' chapter of Baton Rouge. Attendance was good and supportive. Newly elected officers are: President Kaylon Allen, Vice President Carolyn Files, Treasurer Linda McCullough, and Secretary Sandra Nantais. Our newly elected President has been a member since 2014. LSPS has given her encouragement and inspiration for remaining active. Scott Fleming has a couple of poems nominated for the Pushcart Prize. The poems appear in the online *Delta Poetry Review*. A watercolor by Scott graces the 3rd edition of the journal. Sandra Nantais and Carolyn Files attended the Louisiana Book Festival in Baton Rouge in November. They had a brief visit with Peter Cooley, a past poet laureate. Poetry on Demand, held in the state library building, was also enjoyed—complete with smaller-sized travel typewriters that clacked out poetry by the young ladies holding down their fort. The Monroe group has decided to be a sponsor of the Celebration of Literature and Art, which will be held in St. Francisville in February 2020. ~ *Kaylon Allen, President, and Carolyn Files, VP*

**MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY'S** attendees at the South Branch November meeting shared their poetry and listened to an interesting program about the poetry of American Presidents presented by member, Joan Crow. She focused mainly on the poetry of Jimmy Carter. Also discussed was the poetry of Warren G. Harding and Abraham Lincoln. South Branch's December meeting will be a luncheon and a Christmas poetry contest for attending members only. North Branch met in

November to continue planning the Spring Poetry Festival, which will be held at Lake Tiak O'Khata Family Resort in Louisville, Mississippi, the first weekend in April.  
~ *Janice Canerdy, Secretary*

**MISSOURI STATE POETRY SOCIETY's** road to poetry has been interesting this year. It led us to Springfield, Missouri, in mid-September where the Springfield Poets and Friends chapter welcomed us with open mic read-arounds, speakers, and an announcement of the summer contest winners. They hosted our Annual State Convention. We had an electrifying group of 24 who attended. Dr. Jill Pelaez Baumgardner, a poetry editor for *Christian Century*, spoke to us about what she looks for in poetry submissions. If the poem doesn't grab her in the first two lines, it would most likely not be selected. So, work on your openings, make them an attention getter. A good suggestion also for people who enter poetry contests. Pat Durmon spoke on "getting into the arena" and "sharing one's work." We did that when we read our work at the read-arounds. Another way is to enter poetry contests. It tests your ability, your fortitude, and forces you to grow. Plus, share your work with your family. My grandchildren have received several homemade books of poetry from me over the years. So, share with family, friends, fellow poets, even people you don't know. *Terrie Jacks, Reporter*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF OKLAHOMA** wishes everyone a "Happy New Year!" In 2020, PSO will mark 86 years of existence. This past year was good for us. We had some new members come in (which is always great) and former members return—an exciting time! We celebrated National Poetry Day at our October meeting. The theme was Truth and we discussed and shared our poems about both Truth and Change. This was also the month of our annual PSO business meeting, which included the election of officers. We presented awards and read winning poems for our National Poetry Day contests and gave out door prizes. Our PSO National Poetry Day meeting, as always, included a delicious noontime dinner. We will hold our annual Spring Banquet in March of 2020. Winners from the Spring Contest will be announced, prizes awarded, and poems read. Visit our PSO website for information on all our contests. There is quite a variety to choose from! Check our Facebook page and [angelfire.com/poetry/pso/](http://angelfire.com/poetry/pso/) for additional information. Until next time—keep writing those poems! And, we invite you to...Come and Grow at PSO. ~ *Patti Koch, President*

**OREGON POETRY ASSOCIATION's** annual conference was held in September in Salem, Oregon. The conference was a great success, with more people attending, more sales in the book room than last year, and 19 workshops, presentations, and readings. The increase in sales was partly attributable to the use of Square, an application and device for taking credit card payments using a cell phone. Conference evaluations were positive, and our newly elected Executive Board is encouraged and energized to produce an equally beneficial conference in 2020. ~ *Bruce Parker, President*

**PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY** celebrated its 70th Anniversary and held its Fall Conference on Saturday, October 19th, at Bethany Village, Mechanicsburg, PA. Guest speakers Gary Ciocco and Elizabeth Bodien provided a separate poetry workshop before an attendance of 40+ poetry lovers. Besides lunch and a good time together, an open poetry reading was held to the delight of all present. ~ *Emiliano Martín, President*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE's** annual Poetry Festival took place in mid-October. We were pleased to have Budd Mahan of the Poetry Society of Texas as our workshop leader. He did a great job. We sponsored an oral poetry contest, and two winners were young, new members attending for the first time. We also announced the winners of our annual festival contests (26 in total!), which are posted on [nfsp.com](http://nfsp.com)'s State Links / Tennessee. Make a note to think about attending the event or participating in absentia in our Festival competition next year. We meet September through May and on those occasions try to offer beneficial programs. At the upcoming January meeting for example, a panel of three judges will reveal how they evaluated poems submitted anonymously by members who volunteer for this learning experience. In March, we will be having a Haiku Madness contest. We also offer a monthly poetry contest with prizes, and our [poemssamples.blogspot.com](http://poemssamples.blogspot.com) helps members learn poetry forms. Contact us at [poetrytennessee@gmail.com](mailto:poetrytennessee@gmail.com) for details about joining us. ~ *Lori Goetz, Corresponding Secretary*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS' 63rd** Annual Awards Banquet was held at the Doubletree Hotel near the Galleria in Dallas on November 9, 2019. The theme was "Leaving Poetic Footprints." Beth Turner Ayers, Chairman of the event, welcomed attendees and after the meal, President Irene C. Robertson made introductions. Budd Powell Mahan brought greetings from NFSPS and as Chairman of the Hilton Ross

Greer Outstanding Service Award; he announced the 2019 recipient was Catherine L'Herisson. Ann Howells, Chairman of the PST Student Contests, announced the names of the winners, and students who were present read their winning poems. Nancy Baass, Chairman of the PST Annual Contests, was unable to attend, so her Annual Contests Report was given by President Robertson, who along with Vice President Richard Weatherly, announced the names of those awarded third, second and first Places in the PST Annual Contests. First Place winners who were present read their winning poems. Corresponding Secretary Susan Maxwell Campbell, Chairman of the Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize, announced that the winner was Todd Hawkins. Others receiving recognition were Christine H. Boldt, 2nd; Budd Powell Mahan, 3rd; and Robert Schinzel, 4th. ~ *Nancy Baass reporting*

**WYOPOETS** and Writing Ink, Buffalo (a Wyoming writing group) sponsored a National Poetry Day reading on the eve of the celebrated day. The event was held in the lobby of the historic Occidental Hotel—Butch Cassidy's ol' stompin' grounds. Readers were Eugene Gagliano, Wyoming Poet Laureate, Henry Real Bird, former Montana Poet Laureate, David Romtvedt, former Wyoming Poet Laureate, Chris Valentine, and Clara Caufield from Sheridan, Wyoming. Closing the program was "Splint" Memmer, noted local poet of "the cowboy persuasion." Another former Wyoming Poet Laureate, Rose Hill of Sheridan, attended. The room with fireplace ablaze, elk trophies high on the walls, embossed metal ceilings, and a swinging door to the Virginian Saloon, was packed.  
~ *Tom Spence, President*

## POETRY CONTESTS

### NFSPS 2020 COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATE POETRY COMPETITION

Two winners will be chosen for the College Undergraduate Poetry (CUP) Competition, one receiving the Edna Meudt Memorial Award (\$500), the other receiving the Florence Kahn Memorial Award (\$500). Undergraduates working toward a degree in an accredited U.S. college or university during the contest submission period are eligible to enter. The manuscript submission consists of 10 poems in a single Word or .pdf file. Submission via [submittable.com](http://submittable.com) is from December 1, 2019, to January 31, 2020. There is a \$10 fee. Manuscripts must be submitted through [nfsp.submittable.com](http://nfsp.submittable.com) or, with permission of the CUP Chair, entries may be submitted through the Postal

Service (USPS). See contest rules for details. Complete guidelines for the 2020 College Undergraduate Poetry competition are available online at [nfsps.com/CUP.html](http://nfsps.com/CUP.html).

### MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY ANNUAL CONTEST

Contest details are now posted on [misspoetry.net](http://misspoetry.net). The student contest (for Mississippians only) has divisions for first graders through college undergraduates. The adult contest (open to all poets) has 26 categories and good prizes.

### OHIO POETRY DAY CONTEST

In our 83rd year, Ohio Poetry Day offers a contest with 25+ categories. Opens March 1, closes May 15. Prizes awarded in October. If you are not on our current mailing list, send a postcard with name and address, or a #10 SASE, to Amy Jo Zook, 3520 State Route 56, Mechanicsburg, OH 43044.

*Editor's note: this contest is not sponsored by the Ohio Poetry Association. However, OPA does sponsor one of the categories in this contest and has members in common.*

### POETRY ARTICLES & NEWS

#### CONSIDERING THE CREATIVE

By Ron Weber, Poetry Society of Michigan

To me the compelling dynamic of creativity is *the* need to express ourselves through the written word, be it through poetry or prose. And it is the creative element that can be the most elusive and thus the most frustrating aspect of the entire enterprise. Why isn't it always up and running so I can tap it as needed, instead of being, to me at least, the single cause of writer's block? Which brings us to the shadowy kindred spirits of creativity: loneliness and patience.

Of my fellow writing colleagues and versifyin' amigos, I envy most those who experience writer's block due to not being able to come up with a subject or topic to write about; the 'what' of creativity. Once they do, they're off and running and the words just seem to flow. My challenge on the other hand, and perhaps yours, is the 'how' of creativity; what tense, what person, how long, which viewpoint, etc. The loneliness of these considerations and the patience needed to accommodate what I eventually end up with can drive me absolutely crazy! Am I truly saying what I want to say about the chosen subject?

So, whether we realize it or not, it is incumbent upon us as creative souls to embrace the loneliness and accept the challenge of patience in order to fulfill that which is creative. Mary Oliver, one of my favorite poets, is accurate when she refers to some of the people with most personal regret are those who felt the call to creative

work, "who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time." This says to me we must heed patience (time) if we are to overcome the loneliness of focused solitude (power).

Franz Kafka called patience the master key, but it comes only to those "who are there as though eternity lay before them, so unconcernedly still and wide. I learn it daily, learn it with pain to which I am grateful: patience is everything!" The frustration of patience in creativity for me is the necessary slowing of the entire process, which is good but conflicts with my sense of urgency.

Maria Popova puts it well in referring to making art as "a lonely patience." And Rainer Maria Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet* writes of the incubator solitude of creative work. Goethe, too, has offered that "Works of art are of an infinite loneliness." I've never learned to think creatively on schedule, if that's even possible, but in jousting with it I strive to keep in mind Thomas Carlyle's admonition: "The merit of originality is not novelty; it is sincerity."

Whether we embrace patience and loneliness as first cousins to creativity or not, there are, of course, no guarantees, which is the first lesson we all learn when attempting to pursue a writer's life, either through vocation or avocation. The great literary critic Harold Bloom wrote, "Poems are created to last, though relatively few can achieve permanence. Most are fated to become period pieces at best. They prove to be shadows, not substantial things."

In all the years I've been a poet, it never ceases to amaze me that individual words can be arranged on a blank piece of paper and end up touching someone's heart, soul, mind, memory. Or words arranged in a way so as to lay a soothing hand on the pulse of someone's sorrow and grief. Or words arranged in a way to highlight someone's great joy and happiness.

Ezra Pound said, "It really matters that great poems get written, and it doesn't matter a damn who writes them." I would only add that, to me, one of the saddest realizations is that, inside of too many men and women, there is a poet who died young.

#### ALL HIGHER FORMS ARE COMPRISED OF BASIC ELEMENTS

By Tommy Little, Mississippi Poetry Society

A poem is like nature in structure. When we look at beautiful things in nature such as trees, flowers, grass, clouds, rivers, and oceans, we see them in their highest form which God gave us to enjoy. Nature, however, in its basic structure, consists of billions of microscopic cells, molecules, and atoms lying beneath what is visible to the naked eye. We usually don't think of that aspect when we are enjoying the beauty of a

picturesque landscape. We are enjoying the highest form of it all.

It is the same in poetry. When we read or listen to a well-written poem, we mentally visualize the highest form words can represent to us in well-conceived and well-crafted lines. Underlying the aesthetic quality of what we read or hear, though, is a basic structure comprising words that we usually pay little, if any, attention to. Just as cells and molecules, together in perfect harmony, enable us to enjoy nature in pleasing forms, choice and arrangement of words enables us to enjoy the highest form of written or spoken human expression.

Consider computer programming. Computers, in their basic structure are designed to operate in what is called assembler, or machine language. Miniature circuits and chips compose bits and bytes of memory that recognize only binary code (ones and zeros). These ones and zeros tell the machine, in its most basic language, what alpha-numeric information to print on the screen, or monitor, for the user's benefit.

For example: A byte consisting of six bits might look like this: 101110. The arrangement of ones and zeros produce various letters, numbers, or pictorial information on the screen depending on the intention of the programmer. Therefore, the lower machine language of binary code makes possible all the visual images that are transferred to the screen. When using a computer or smart phone, we are not aware of the ones and zeros, just the end result.

Likewise, the highest attainable expression of poetry is founded on a structure of words composed of syllables and sounds that we are mostly unaware of when writing, reading, or listening. We may think a grand thought, but successfully putting that thought to paper in a poem depends on how we manipulate the basic structure of that thought, which in essence is the basis of language.

And lastly, consider music, an art form akin to poetry. All the wonderful songs, hymns, instrumentals, and magnificent symphonies all begin with notes written and composed on sheets of paper. These notes are written on lines called a staff, divided into measures. The composer arranges notes in these measures based on a predetermined number of beats per measure, such as 4/4 time, or four beats per measure. A note can be one beat, more than one beat, or less than one beat, depending on the desired sound to be produced. For example, a waltz generally contains three beats per measure (3/4 time).

Just as the time signature determines the number of beats per measure, the meter of a poem determines the number of feet or syllables per line.

History records that Beethoven was deaf and never heard some of the greatest symphonies he composed, but he heard them in his mind and made it possible for us to hear them by writing the notes on paper that corresponded to the sounds in his mind. He used the basic elements of musical notation to render his marvelous masterpieces audible. What a blessing!

We may not always be consciously aware of what underlies the beauty of creation and creativity, and we may not always understand the workings of it all, but we need to know it is there.

“Verse embalms virtue.” — John Donne

### MEMBER INSPIRATION

By Myra L. Peak, Past President, WyoPoets

Inspiration: sometimes nebulous, sometimes ubiquitous.

I sent the following questions to our WyoPoets’ members and waited for their responses.

1. What encourages you to write poetry?
2. What types of people help your poetry endeavors?
3. Are there locations that put you into the writing spirit?
4. What is your writing routine?
5. What do you read that informs your writing?
6. What poetry strategies don’t work?
7. Have you set poetry goals that have worked (or not worked)?
8. How have your writing goals or processes changed?
9. What events in your life make you want to write?
10. During what time of day or season would you rather write? Why?

I have published four articles in our newsletters and covered 10 people with their photos. Snippets from their replies (with some editing on my part) tell us about their poetry and their processes:

*Balk at rules and burdensome structure.*

*Do something, several somethings to clear the way for the poem to hatch.*

*Pin the shooting star to paper.*

*Harvest visions of emotions.*

*Cross out, sneak words into margins.*

*Strong emotions of funerals, weddings, and truck accidents.*

*Introduce missing thorns.*

*My dishpan and vacuum cleaner are my best friends.*

*From little up, I’ve told stories.*

*The wildness of the way poems come to me.*

*Every morning I read haikus. Every morning I compose and post (on social media) a rhyming couplet*

*Scribble... like your hair is on fire.*

What works for one poet doesn’t for another. One thing that works for all of them is that they immerse themselves in words, phrases, stories, and ideas. Even those who wrote that they had no routine had a routine of finding a way to surround themselves with words.

Their common threads are a natural curiosity about life and about how to connect words and life, an openness to new ideas and new people, their surprise and wonder of ordinary and extraordinary, a tolerance of others, and a mission to find meaning in everything.

### WHY DO I WRITE?

By Terrie Jacks, Missouri State Poetry Society

*Well, because I do.*

I have been asked if I have always liked to write. I’m not sure I’ve always liked to write stories, but I have written hundreds of letters. Living far from family, it was an inexpensive form of communication with Mom, Grandmother, Aunt, Mother-in-law and friends.

When my children came along, I told them stories. I was often asked if I was writing them down. Slowly I began to do that.

An illness gave me time to reflect on the humorous side of being unwell. Maybe it was a side effect of the medication. That was the beginning of my *in-earnest* poetry writing.

### Detours

Detours change things.

Detours go different ways.

Detours sometimes wander around.

Detours sometimes are strange.

Detours mean you can’t go that way.

Detours can be good or bad.

Detours are sometimes hard to follow.

Detours aren’t always on a road.

Detours change things.

Shel Silverstein’s poetry books were a favorite of my children. At times now, I will read his work then I sit down to write. He is great inspiration for me. It’s a trip to where the sidewalk ends, so don’t slip or you may find yourself free-fall-ing.

My poems nags at me. A phrase will catch my attention, then beg to become a verse. It will repeat over and over until pen and paper must be found. I use spiral notebooks to scribble my verses, sometimes rewriting them many times. Next, they are put on the computer for the final finishing touches.

Sometimes, poems come to me without labor; other times the poem takes hours of work. Yet, the mind is wonderful: put an idea in, let it root around, and before one knows it, a verse will pop out.

I have no secret for writing poems; I say give it a try. Have fun with it, get your

emotions out. Writing is a great tool; you will be surprised at what you can do. Another thing, do it often. It doesn’t have to be a masterpiece each time. The punk verses lead to something better.

### poetry

to write a poesy  
free or blank  
rhyme or not  
gotta catch the meter  
scribble a verse  
use that unique magic  
found in words

Recently I have been working with some people at Lafayette Industries\* in Manchester, Missouri, helping them to write poems. There are 6-8 poets who meet with me once a month. For example, we write about holidays, sports, animals, pets, family. Sometimes it is a three-lined verse and other times it rambles on forever. I am always impressed with what they produce.

The following are two examples of poems from workshop sessions.

ghosts are white  
and spooky  
they say boo!

By Casey

Alison Blue  
Her hair is too  
She wears a shoe  
Without a clue  
Alison Blue

By Alison

\*Lafayette Industries is a work center for adults with developmental disabilities.

### WALT WHITMAN: A BICENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

By Ron Weber, Poetry Society of Michigan

May 31, 2019, marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Walt Whitman. As most of us learned in high school English class, he was the originator of, and has been referred to as the father of, American poetry. Although he is most noted for that, he was just as much a deeply passionate believer in this new developing nation of the 1800s and the freedoms and liberties that stood as the guiding values of the Constitution.

He strove to support those democratic values as essential realities to the everyday life of American citizens, even beyond his open and deeply democratic verse. If he would have been with us during the latter half of the 20th century and early 21st century, he would have been on the side of civil rights, racial justice, the feminist movement, and against discrimination on the basis of sexual preferences, each of which I’ll touch on later.

In his iconic collection *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's poetry liberated verse from the tyranny of the literary forms and structure that dominated in Europe. As with the nation itself, he brought a new, bold and audacious voice to American poetry and for the American people. *Passionate democracy* is what he called his poetry. Whitman was a champion for the belief that the abiding value and genius of the United States is regard for the common people. Many today still hold to this belief, despite the cultural fractures of the past 40 years.

Whitman defined what it was to be American. Professor Karen Karbiener, a Whitman scholar, writes, "his influence on his contemporaries and his descendants transcends the boundaries of poetry and becomes, in many ways, the story of young America." He was a working-class man who left public school at age 12. "Whitman is America," Karbiener goes on. "He is the American success story we all hope for." Whitman held dear to honoring and respecting the freedom and liberty of the individual over institutions.

Whitman and slavery: Though he held some conflicted early views during the crucial 1840s and 1850s, Whitman was a highly vocal antislavery advocate. He lost the editorship of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1848 because of his antislavery stand. Whitman said, "The idea of slavery – of the holding of one man by another in personal subjugation – under dictatorial investment – was palpably bad – damnable." During the last few years of his life, he said to Horace Traubel, "I have been antislavery always – was then and am now: and to all other slaveries, too, black or white, mental or physical." In our time, he would definitely support civil rights and racial justice as part of simply being a good and decent human.

Whitman as feminist: In the 2nd edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman embraces the unity of all things, including women. He celebrates the equal treatment of women and recognizes and praises their potential. He wrote that a man and poet "is a great thing upon the earth and through eternity, but every jot of the greatness of man is unfolded of woman...only out of the inimitable poems of woman can come the poems of man, (only thence have my poems come)."

He writes of the positive feminine attributes of "speaks out loud: warns, encourages, persuades, points the way." He criticizes history's partiality toward men and writes, "...because women do not appear in history and philosophy with anything like the same prominence as men – that is no reason for treating them less than men." Modern women poets have responded to

Whitman: Erica Jung, Alicia Ostriker, Adrienne Rich and others.

Whitman and sexual orientation: Whitman would undoubtedly have strong support for tolerance and equality for those of sexual orientations outside of society's mainstream. In his book on Whitman, M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues that he was the "first gay American" and that he invented gayness in literature. That may be problematic, but the first appearance of the word "homosexuality" did not appear before 1897. The distinct patterns of Whitman's life seem to point out quite clearly that he was indeed a homosexual, so he likely would support efforts to accept the LGBT community.

Walt Whitman, a man of his time and, as well, a man of our own time. It has been said more than once that every American poet who wrote verse of distinction has in some way been responding to his legacy. Whitman saw both the Civil War and the maturing of the United States as a commercial power and a political power. He was witness to the apex and the abolition of slavery. It is, therefore, no surprise that his poetry centers on equality, democracy, and brotherhood; a legacy celebrating 200 years.

### POETRY CONTEST TIPS

By Jim Lambert, *Strophes* Associate Editor

I have chaired the Illinois State Poetry Society's annual contest for four years now and several things are now obvious to me, both from the standpoint of entering contests and from producing them. It seems that people think that chairing contests is somehow difficult and challenging. There is a bit of a challenge but chairing one is essentially paper shuffling, sorting and, most importantly, getting judges. When entries arrive, I log them in on an Excel spreadsheet. At that point, the poet becomes a number. I file the "information" copies by number. On the anonymous copies, I write the poet's number and file them by contest. I check each poem for obvious errors— inadvertently putting the poet's name on them happens more often than you would think. It's because each poem they copy has the "by poet's name" line. Any violation of basic rules is dealt with by me but the judges also catch many that I miss. If a poem has typos, some may be sent on to the judges (if it happens to be an excellent poem.) The judges can decide what to do. As a judge, I feel that any typo represents lack of attention and is disqualified. Most judges that I've dealt with will disqualify for typos. The next thing I hear most often from judges is finding bad grammar, forced rhyme, or using a word that has the wrong meaning. One can find almost anything in a large

number of poems. We specify the subject to write about in several of our categories— This is frequently ignored, or the poet doesn't know what the subject means. We have made mistakes on the subject matter which we hope to avoid in the future and those miscues are caused by the subject being too specific. A perfect example is in our current contest, one of the them had as its subject, Shawnee National Forest.

This forest is large and covers a significant part of Southern Illinois—so it's a good topic for those of us in that area, but not for a national contest. We should have made the subject "National Parks". This category got only 23 entries from 105 poets.

Here is what Jon Sebba had to say about the poems he judged in one of our contests.

"I offer the following remarks in the hope that they will help all contestants to rank higher next time. Because I am human, I appreciate poems which: move me, show originality and care in selection and thoughtful use of words. Other judges may have more objective criteria. I am sorry, but I am not an algorithm. If I select a poem as a winner, I feel I bear responsibility for the choice. Thus (in my opinion) good poems, which have typos or unintentional grammatical mistakes, reflect on me. That's why I cannot judge poems with typos or errors to be winners. I urge all poets to re-re-read their work carefully to eliminate all flaws. Find a trusted friend who knows grammar, spelling, capitalization, etc. to review your poems before you submit them. Together with yours, the judge will be reading five dozen or more entries in a category. If the subject is given, there are bound to be several similar in topic or approach to yours. So how will you ensure yours stands out? Strive to be original. Avoid clichés, unintentional repetition of words (if acceptable synonyms are available). Omit any final summarizing line or stanza, which explains or repeats the story, message or theme. Someone said: 'More's conveyed that's left unsaid.' Do use strong nouns and verbs, poetic devices (metaphors, similes, allegories, alliteration, etc.), and employ evocative or emotive situations and language. Remember: brevity. Some of these stories and situations would have been winners had they been pared down to their densest essence. ~ Jon Sebba"

*Jon Sebba, Salt Lake City, Utah, was awarded Utah State Poet of the Year in 2013 for Yossi, Yasser, & Other Soldiers, a collection of his poems about war from the perspective of a soldier in combat. Jon works with ex-soldiers affected by PTSD. He uses his poems to demonstrate how one veteran learned to mitigate his demons by writing.*

**President's Message (continued from page 1)**

Some wanted me to continue; some feared their drive home. It never dawned on me that people who attend poetry readings actually come for the poetry. They came for me. They wanted to hear what I had to say. They were truly interested in the words from within me. Since that invitation I have decided that I will read and share my words and I will do it proudly and not be afraid of boring the audience. They chose to be there for me, and I owe them that mutual respect to give them what they came for- no matter what I think about my own poems or insecurities.

I am not done reading Brown's book but so far it resonates with me. In the first chapter, she states something I know, but don't often follow through on. "You will always belong anywhere you show up as yourself and talk about yourself and your work in a real way." It's so hard for me to do that with my poetry. I use excuses to cover for my insecurities that manifest as my reasoning. I can't send my work out because I don't have time... I can't enter contests because... and my favorite excuse of all: I can't publish because I may enter contests... I'm lying to myself! Maybe I can work on this with you all as my guide. I see you entering the contests. I see you participating in your state societies. I see what you do for different celebrations. Thank you for all you do in your state. Can you help out with the National Society? Maybe you have a skill that will help! Send me your ideas!

In the meantime, I am continuing to work with the board to secure a site for the 2020 convention. We also have no state society that has stepped up for convention 2021. Will your state come through for us? We'd love to visit your state. There are NFSPS resources in place to assist your society in planning a convention. You do not have to go it alone. Please reach out to the NFSPS Convention Coordinator Polly Opsahl (pollyopsahl@gmail.com) or me if you need any questions answered.

*Your sister in words,*

Julie Cummings, 33rd NFSPS President

### **WANT TO WIN A POETRY CONTEST?**

By Jim Lambert, *Strophes* Associate Editor

I do too! Here are some things that will help us do so. **1.** Neatness counts. I receive entries with contact info ball-pointed across the page and words scratched out. **2.** Know/learn the rules (Big Exclamation Point!) and follow them. **3.** Don't wrap your entry as though it will be attacked by hatchet-wielding merciless contest judges. It took me much effort to cut through all the tape on some packs of poems. **4.** Pray.



### **YOUR STATE SOCIETY IS A MEMBER OF NFSPS**

**So – take advantage of one of the perks  
49 entries for \$10.00! WOW!**

By Lucille Morgan Wilson, NFSPS Treasurer

Membership in NFSPS is not an individual matter but is only through a state poetry society that is part of the Federation.

Rule 9 in the 2020 NFSPS contest brochure defines "member" eligibility for our contests: entrant's name must appear on the annual list of a state society's members given to the NFSPS treasurer by January 15th. Names are to be in alpha order, with lists either emailed or sent as hard copy by regular mail. Check for dues at \$3.00 per member, payable to NFSPS should accompany the list or follow very soon, to Lucille Morgan Wilson, Treasurer, 2325 61st Street, Des Moines, IA 50322

To determine a state society's dues amount: regardless of when your state's membership year starts and ends, ALL whose dues are paid at the time the list is prepared should be included, as well as honorary members exempt from paying dues but who are eligible to enter contests at the special rate. Libraries, schools, or students who may be on your mailing list but do not pay dues are not to be in your count.

Additional new members and renewals up to March 15th provided in a supplemental report to the Treasurer (with additional dues payment) will also be honored. This means a considerable savings in contest fees and opens 16 categories designated \* for members only.

It is appreciated if lists contain complete contact info. This speeds up the process when there are questions during the year. Affirmation of membership is used for other NFSPS contests, too. (eg, Stevens and BlackBerry Peach competitions). Member lists are never given out for commercial purposes.

Direct questions about dues or member lists to Lucille at: lucille\_e\_wilson@hotmail.com

### **NFSPS 2020 BLACKBERRYPEACH PRIZES FOR POETRY: SPOKEN & HEARD**

Awards: 1st Prize \$1,000, 2nd Prize \$500, and 3rd Prize \$250. This competition blends "stage" and "page" poetry, equal weight will be given to performance and poetics. A submission consists of four poems, each with a separate audio file, and a transcript of the four poems in a single electronic document. Submissions will be accepted between January 1st and March 15th, 2020, using Submittable.com. For the complete set of guidelines on how to submit, see:

[nfsp.com/BBP3Guidelines.html](https://nfsp.com/BBP3Guidelines.html)

### **ENCORE 2019**



NFSPS' anthology of 2019's top 150 prize-winning poems is on amazon.com for \$13. Buy two copies and get free shipping. All royalties support NFSPS. ~ Kathy Cotton, *Encore* Editor

### **WARNING ON SCAM EMAIL REQUESTS PURPORTED TO BE FROM NFSPS BOARD MEMBERS**

A scammer is sending out requests to purchase gift cards while pretending to be an NFSPS board member such as our current president. NFSPS will never directly email a request for a donation or gift card be sent to an individual, no matter the purported emergency. If you do receive an emailed money request, simply mark it as "Phishing" or "Spam" and delete it. This is not how NFSPS raises funds. ~ Paul Ford, NFSPS 1st VP & *Strophes* Editor