

Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society



WINNERS OF CSPS MONTHLY POETRY CONTESTS IN JANUARY-APRIL, 2022

- **January 2022** - Theme: Nature, Seasons, Landscape.
First Prize: □ Pamela Stone Singer, "Forest Air" □ Second Prize: Jane Stuart, "On the North Side"
- **February 2022** - Theme: Love. □ First: Jerry Smith "Lovers" Second: Jane Stuart, "Crossing the Moon"
- **March 2022** - Theme: Open, Free Subject. □ First Prize: Jeff Graham, "(A Certain Day's Every)"
- **April 2022** - Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes. □ First Prize: Debra Darby "Awaken"

In the Poetry Letter No. 2 of 2022, the California State Poetry Society is pleased to publish the prize-winning poems from Monthly Poetry Contests held so far in 2022 - from January to April. Congratulations to the poets and many thanks to Alice Pero, our Monthly Contests Judge. Our Featured Poet this time is Frederick Livingston and our guest artist is poet and photographer Andrena Zawinski. We also present three book reviews and a reminder about our Annual Contest with poems due by June 30, 2022. Enjoy!

~Maja Trochimczyk, Editor

JANUARY 2022 - FIRST PRIZE

FOREST AIR

You cannot see
but know yourself as light.

Wings hoist you to the top of a tree.
You see meadows' waves
and luminous wildflowers.

Touch tongues of birds.
Swallow night air.
Cleanse your lungs.

Let forests' darkness wrap your body.
Open your mouth to stars.

Geese fly into autumn.
Their flight brings lavender sky
and iridescent feathers.

Soon branches will bend with winter.
Pine and wind-scented air
remind the forest is near.

Pamela Stone Singer, Occidental, California

JANUARY 2022 - SECOND PRIZE

ON THE NORTH SIDE

Walking through darkness
-another sleepless night—
my foot hits a star

But the wind blows shadows
across time...
and in the distance,
the moon sighs
and earth,
a painting,
comes to life—
shells in a bowl
flowers,
still-life fruit
made of wax

The sky quivers.
I reach for
my bow and arrow—
nothing is there,
just the owl
and moss that grows
on the side of trees

Jane Stuart, Flatwoods, Kentucky

LOVERS

She hikes to the waterfall twice a year
once when new-greens leaf the alders
and again as redbuds flame amber-pink

At dusk she lights a candle in the rock
for wind from the falls to flicker
She splits dark pools, gliding

Somehow together again, they
float the lips of the cataract
tumble down torrents

Her breasts engorge at the flood of him
She suspends breath
shallow murmurs

Lying on black basalt beneath stare of stars
she rubs her skin with sage and slumbers
in the sand to rhythms of the roar

At dawn she drops the dying candle
into the dark, murky depths of that
River-of-Might-Have-Been

Jerry Smith, San Luis Obispo, California



Andrena Zawinski, The Nesting Tree



Andrena Zawinski, Love Bench, Half Moon Bay

FEATURED ARTIST, Andrena Zawinski is a poet, fiction writer, and shutterbug whose photos have appeared as covers and on the pages of many print and online literary publications including *Copper Nickel*, *San Francisco Peace & Hope*, *Caesura*, *Levure Litteraire*, and others.

FEBRUARY 2022 – SECOND PRIZE

CROSSING THE MOON

We met on a ship crossing the moon,
a cruise of moments
made of steel and glass
through deep blue seas
and mountains hard as sand
that has been packed
by hands in icy gloves—

Oh love is wild!
and this was our romance,
a foxtrot played and danced to
by the stars.
We moved above earth
in chiffon veils
and vests of champagne corks—

Our glitter crowns
shined in the shadows
of a thousand tears
because this was pretend
and love moved on,
leaving us a world of indigo
and fading light.

We don't know why
but the ship docked at dawn
and we became fireflies
in sudden flight
on tomorrow's wings
that bloomed tonight.

Jane Stuart, Flatwoods, Kentucky



Andrena Zawinski, Monterey Morning at Del Monte Beach



Andrena Zawinski, Sands

MARCH 2022 – FIRST PRIZE

(A CERTAIN DAY'S EVERY)

Neither late May rain, nor memory of,
 nor memory of such scent,
 but scent's cataloging of recollections.
 Rain as timely as late May.
 Late May as sudden as rain at such a time.

*

Everything has led me yet ill-prepared me for this:
 the sound of water taking in itself,
 hybridized with the sound of the taking in of itself
 of water,
 which lands into a backlash of rising,
 to mix in with its mixed within.

*

Rain round and about rain,
 falling as fallen-upon mid-fall.
 Drops just amply to hear,
 scantily such so that impacts dry
 before spaces between connect.
 Not too much, yet just enough
 to linger with and within
 without the want for more,
 for more than enough.

*

Light rain landing on light rain landing.
 Rain between rain's between,
 forming course mid-fall, fall-formed,
 following through its follow-through
 on-to-wards

leaf to leaf to loam to the eversilent
 symphony of the seed, the sweetest
 brutalities of the seed's destitchery.

*

Rain and the scent of rain and the taste of rain
 slides round and down partly parted lips
 to fall to, land amid, and settle with(in)
 what buried's soil of making and taking,
 tilling the grave's cradle of what was –
 existing as is,
 becoming what come.

*

Of the hundred things I wanted to say,
 nothing came out of my mouth.
 After that came after that, and after that
 came the day cradled in soft though ceaseless
 rain.

When the conceptual of what was unutterable
 became such silence said,
 the cosmos collapsed and reconfigured
 into the gloss of a miscellany of intentions.

Jeff Graham, Walnut Creek, California

APRIL 2022 – FIRST PRIZE

AWAKEN

Find the strings
Ride the gleaming scales of the fish
blazing melon, gold, scarlet
nocturnal sapphire
before vanishing into the ocean at dawn.

Mooring the dreamless
dream remembering in tow
listen to the tides of morning.
The fishtail reveals its secret.

Awake to awaken
In waves of shimmering water,
The mystical call of the whale
beckons.

Awaken
Find the strings.

*Debra Darby
New Hope, Minnesota*

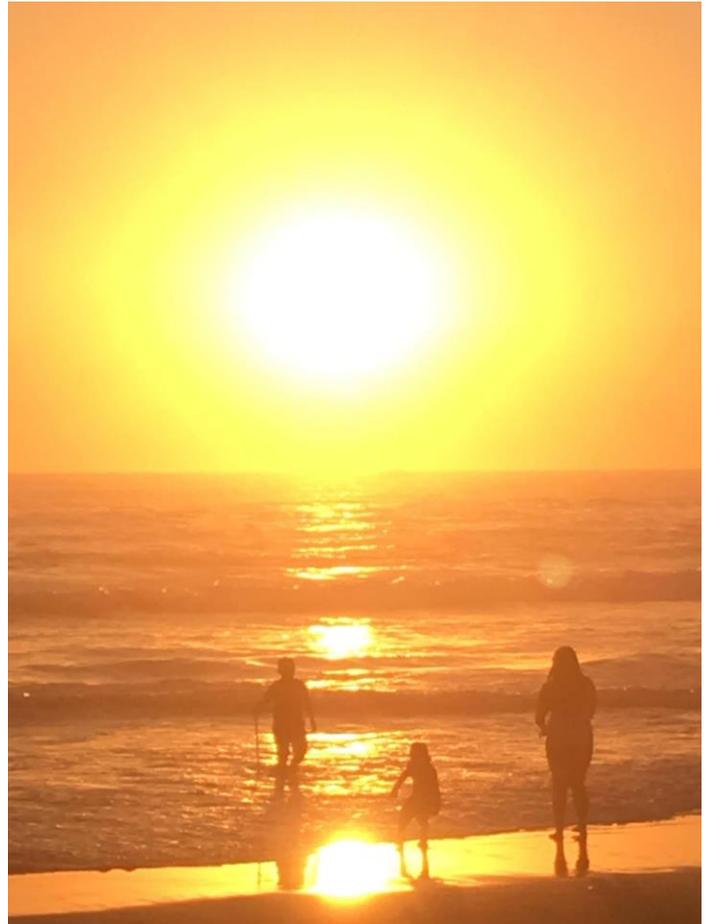


Photo: Maja Trochimczk, Gold Circle

FEATURED POET – FREDERICK LIVINGSTON

CSPS is pleased to present the Featured Poet for Poetry Letter No. 2 of 2022. Frederick Livingston lives in Mendocino, California and often writes about the natural world that surrounds us. The following poems have been previously published in other journals: "Gnat Creek" – *Garfield Lake Review*, Spring 2020; "Pear Blossom" – *Bacopa Literary Review*, October 2021 and "Changing Names" - *Writers Resist*, March 2022.

PRESENT

three blue jays
take flight from limbs
of red alder
just as my eyes
alight on them

let me never say
I made up a poem
but if I listen
I might catch a few
and write them down

before they elope
with the boundless sky

*Frederick Livingston
Mendocino, California*



Maja Trochimczyk, Boundless Sky

CHANGING NAMES / NAMING CHANGE

after how many years
does "drought" erode
into expected weather?

and then what name
when the rains do come
startling the hard earth
the exhausted aquifers?

we'll sing to the deep wells
the quieted fire and clean sky
"winter" brittle in our mouths

holding vigil for rivers elders
insects lovers lost forever
when will grieving season begin?
what one word could walk

between delight of sun
hungry skin and unease
in receiving unseasonable gifts?

what of the breath we held
together as cold certainty melted
whispering "who burns this turn?"
when the broken record

record breaking
dips into new palettes
for our purple summers

cycles tighten
into teeth clenched
against unwavering anxiety.
in which season do we open

our jaws lungs ears hearts
speak our fears
how it feels to be alive

on Earth still
blooming and unraveling
naming petals
as the wind claims them?

*Frederick Livingston
Mendocino, California*

PEAR BLOSSOM

this tree could be dead
or dreaming

dark gnarled bark
ringed in rows
of holes where
long-flown birds
searched for worms

in depths of winter...
until sudden flush
of blooms consume
lichen-crusting branches
with white five-petal
promises of summer
swollen eat-me sweets

well before
glee-green leaves
greet sun
spun into sugar
*proving dreams
precede the means*

where is fear
of late-season frost
shattering this frail unfurling?
where are the rations
siloed inside against
lingering winter?

here instead is
chirping of birds returning
laughter-yellow daffodils erupting
at the tree's feet
and a question
whispered low on cold breeze:

what would the world look like
if all of us had such courage
to offer our most tender selves
not only when spring is certain
but when we can no longer bear
our hunger for a more fruitful Earth?

*Frederick Livingston
Mendocino, California*

GNAT CREEK

This is no
imperceptible wind showing its course
in shifting smoke rising
from our fire

No this is
plunge into river bringing mountains
down to show us
what cold is

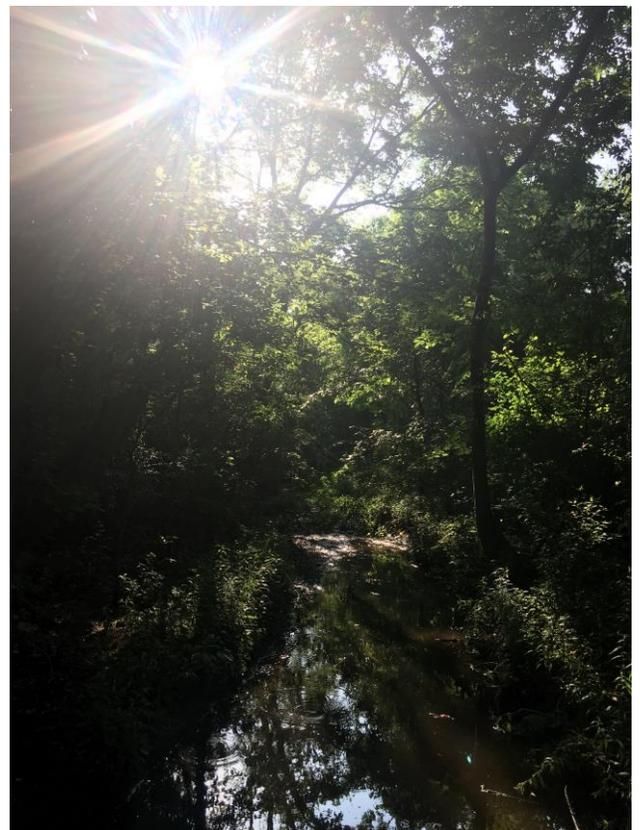
This is no
opalescent dew collecting on
artist conk underbellies

No this is
fistfuls of bright huckleberries
ornamenting the understory

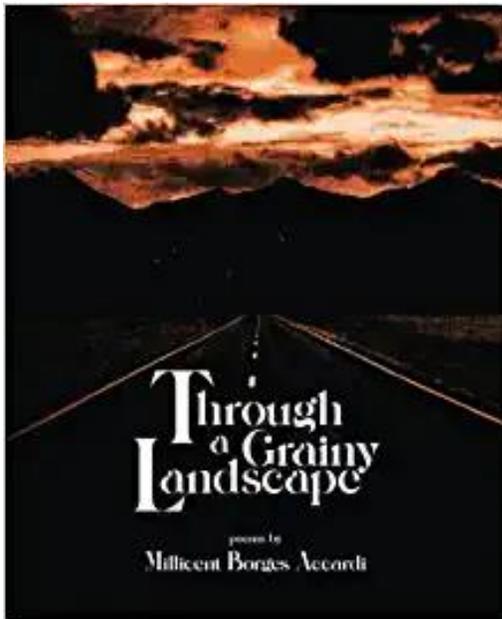
This is no
subtle poem

No this is
waking up in your arms

*Frederick Livingston
Mendocino, California*



Maja Trochimczyk, Sun Stream



Born here, nurtured by immigrants. Two languages *in utero*, one hard and hostile, one sibilant like seawater lapping at the shore. “Longing is the middle ground, when you have/ distant connections...” writes Millicent Borges Accardi, an award-winning poet from southern California. *Through a Grainy Landscape*, her new collection inspired by Portuguese and Portuguese-American writers, affirms multicultural sensibilities that resonate for a wide range of readers.

From blurred photos and memory fragments, Borges Accardi recreates bewildering, intimidating experiences: grandparents and parents laboring on alien turf; children trying to parse adult conversation; girls encountering the same perils as in past centuries. All lost, stifled, betrayed. As Katherine Vaz writes in her Introduction, “everything is uprooted, from history to the rules for marriage.”

By not identifying the speakers of all poems--conflating other lives with hers—this poet makes us feel their perceptions directly. Foreign words from early childhood cue current emotions:

.....oppressive family histories
that shape and shame
and disgrace. Whether it happens
In childhood or later, the sting
of the blur of the bite
of the belt or the tongue,
the trace of it always
swells into an unmanageable

sorrow.....

Saudade, the universe has moved
On and given up its brightness...
 (“The Most Vertical of Words” p5)

Portuguese was one of the seven deadly
jubilations, kept close at hand,
away from, the morcela made in hiding
as meu pai loaded the black blood
Into the transparent casements we kept
inside the house...
 (“The Architecture we were Born in” p28)

Even a single mistake—“casements” (window frames) instead of “casings” (membranes used to make sausages)—can evoke how both children and parents struggle with language. English tenses, so hard to learn, echo painful histories—hers, theirs, ours:

.....to push away
And start over bore, born/borne
As if invisibility could be
Run away from, a new start
in the garage of an uncle...

...away from beat and being beaten
down, the promised land was
to become, became, begin,
a location that pushed away
and helped folks to start over,
pretending you were someone
else to fight, fought, fought.
To flee, fled...

(“It was my Mother who Taught me
to Fear” p9)

Capital letters out of place, as her elders misread them, call attention to significant images:

“Woman in a YelloX Dress”

.....polyester sheath,
trim like the body of a bottle,
a treasure promised to her from soap
and furniture polish commercials... (p8)

Typographical inconsistencies, like the placement of commas, generate physical unease, irregular breathing or motion sickness--a boat on rough seas, railroad cars rattling, running on city streets. Men drowned fishing, exhausted in fields and orchards, bruised in factories. Women assaulted.

Particularly for women, then as now, certain words imply more than they say:

.....a mere child, a poor thing, a lesser
Than to be silenced and chit-chitted away
.....
Is the female of the species only a vision
To want,
To attract, a steadfast of do or don't
A lifetime based on one I do?
A have and a have-not no matter what?
(*"You Swung Round" p42*)

Disappointments, like old habits or clothes, get handed down to the next generation:

.....you swore it would not happen and, yet, it did
any way. You became the great
Aunt you made fun of, who took out her false teeth
at dinner,
who made you cry when you had
leg braces. The woman who was hit
In the head with a hammer by her first
husband, and, yet, before that? Your
grandfather said, no one could laugh
like Anna did.
(*"You'll be Little More than This" p46*)

..... When they
frayed, the elbows were mended,
and torn pockets were reconnected
with thick carpet-makers' thread.
When the sleeves were too worn
to restore, they were scissored off...

The buttons were pulled off by hand,
for storage in an old cookie tin,
the cloth cut into small usable pieces
for mending, for doll clothes, for
whatever was left over. The rest, torn
into jagged rags for cleaning....
(*"The Graphics of Home" p47*)

Hard work, supposedly a ladder to "upward mobility," humiliates and takes us nowhere:

No matter what she wears, customers
find her in the aisle or near the side-work
station and ask for extra ice or "where
is the dry wall?" People yell, Miss or You
or even Over here when they see her turn
their way, as if she were always on duty.
(*"Counting Hammers at Sears" p59*)

"America" is a false promise, not the leisure or luxury dangled before us in movies and magazines. With a parent's death,

the past
slams into the present, in new ways
that the future has yet to consider
or digest. Grief is like that,
it's shrapnel under the skin working
a way out.
(*"Your Native Landscape" p64*)

Even if you can't go home, now you can go back—but, what for? As middle age hits, the poet's perspective shifts again:

There was a border
and a finish line and the path
you were on has been rolled up
like a carpet in storage...
(*"Winter Arrives in Mourning
Unaccompanied" p72*)

The things we used to do willingly, the things
We were talked into as a right of form
Or passage now slip off our fingers like rings
In cold weather, gold rings slipping off
Fingers and disappearing into the frozen
like escaping through an open window.
(*"Still not Ilha Enough" p82*)

At the end, the title poem looks ahead with terrifying clarity: Nothing considered normal may ever be possible again:

And then there are the waiters,
not food service but those who are patient,
for diagnosis, for tests, for death.
The mid-line boundary between someone
saying everything is gonna be
OK and everything is over.
(*"I've Driven all
Night through a Rainy
Landscape" p85*)

Borges Accardi gratefully acknowledges the influences behind these poems and the people who helped them travel. Even writing in isolation, none of us, especially in a commodified and fragmented society, can reach potential readers entirely by ourselves. ♥

Jacqueline Lapidus, Boston

it blows like the fat flat of a palm
shoving you backwards

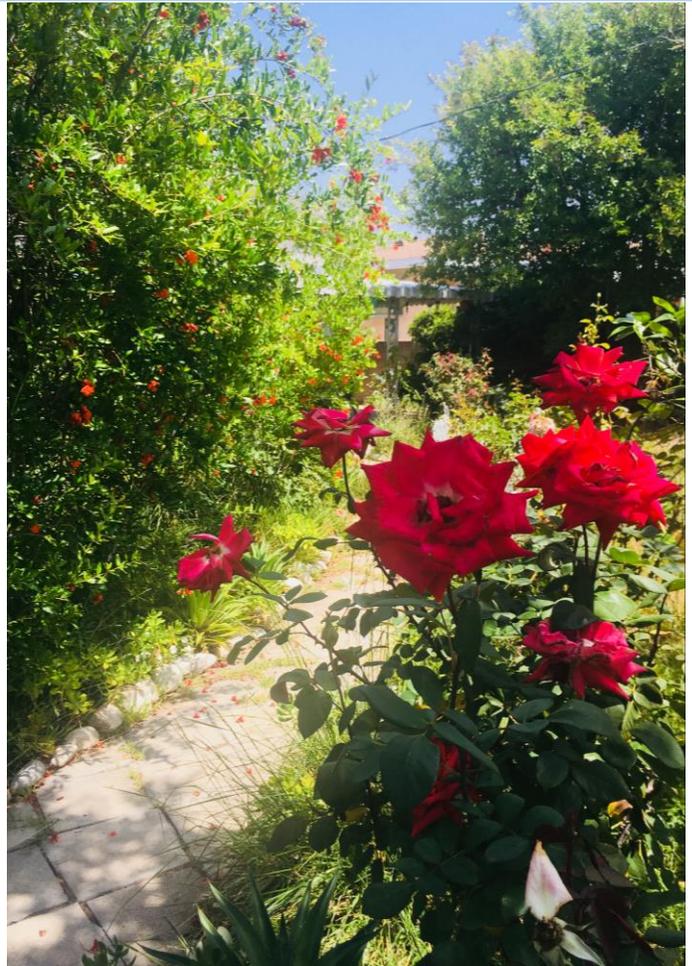
it blows like the stiff straw
of a broom.

The dust of love is swept away.

With an adult daughter of my own, I too, know what it means when someone you love has lost the North Star that she needs.

The first 12 poems set the stage for a subtle shift in the poet's fortunes. The remaining 9 poems gently raise the curtain on light. The venetian blinds are opened with a slight pull of a cord. The *turn* occurs in the poem, "Sometimes Freedom Is a '93 Dodge Shadow:

Boxy, khaki green, low-end model
fully equipped
with rolldown windows,
with one of its keys permanently stuck
in the ignition,
and with two years left on the loan.
I call it my consolation prize
for losing at marriage.
But damn, that Dodge is everything
My ex-husband is not.



I wanted to jump up with a "High Five"! At this point, there is a change in both tone and form. By tone, the feel of winter's unrelenting chill is replaced by hints of lightness, tinges of hope. By form, erratic word and line-spacing is replaced by coherent, steady stanzas and couplets. Form is steady because the poet is steady. Life is different now.

There is one good reason for the changes described above. However, if I reveal it, I wouldn't be doing my job as a reviewer. The best I can do is this quote by Willa Cather (1873-1947), "You must find your own quiet center of life and write from that to the world. In short, you must write to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up."

This is what poets do. This is what Kathleen Gregg does.

*Michael Escoubas, first published in Quill and Parchment
Photo: Maja Trochimczyk, A Garden Path with Roses*

MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS *POEMS TO LIFT YOU UP AND MAKE YOU SMILE*, JAYNE JAUDON FERRER, ED.

100 poems compiled by J.J. Ferrer; published by Parson's Porch Books, ISBN 978-1-955581-09-7

In an age of Covid-19, *Poems to Lift You Up and Make You Smile*, takes on special significance. This anthology is needed now, as never before. However, before sinking too deeply into the pandemic season to justify the worth of poetry, it is important to remember that there has *always* been *something* that, as a people, we want and need to put behind us. The collective calling of poets in any age, is to tell the truth, sometimes with a bit of an edge, but always, in this writer's mind, with a view toward finding the best in people and illuminating the path to hope.

This has been Jayne Jaudon Ferrer's enduring passion for the last 11 years as editor of *Your Daily Poem*. YDP is a valued destination for some of the best-known poets in the country. Yet, Jayne is known for her welcoming spirit to new poets as well. She has a sharp eye for poets on-the-rise and gives many their first significant exposure. Moreover, Jayne's single-minded goal has been "to share the pleasures of poetry with those who may not have had the opportunity to develop an appreciation for that genre."

All of this is reflected in *Poems* and therein lies its appeal. The careful selection of 100 poems, chosen from an archive just shy of 4,000 poems, does exactly what the title says.

As one might expect, the work is comprised of two divisions: Poems to Lift You Up and Poems to Make You Smile.

POEMS TO LIFT YOU UP

Kevin Arnold's "One True Song," reminds me that, in a world that values big achievements, it may be the simple things that count the most:

Our simple acts may be the warp and weft
Of the substance of our lives, what is left

Beyond the gifts and wills, the trusts and estates
After our *belles lettres* or *plein air* landscapes

What if our day-to-day actions, in the long slog
Of life are our lasting legacy, our true song?

Arnold's deft use of couplet rhyme and understated style draws me in, lifts me up.

"Life Lines," by Randy Cadenhead, contains much of the sage advice I grew up hearing, these excerpts draw back the curtain on the kind of person this reviewer is striving to become:

Walk where you have never been
and wonder at the beauty of the world.

.....

Be moderate in all things,
except goodness.

.....

Be moderate in all things,
except goodness.

.....

Listen to the music
you can find in silence.
one does that, who do you pay
after all she may live

What strikes me as important about this anthology is the role poetry can play in our everyday lives. The above noted poem, and so many others, remind us that we are neighbors, that we share common challenges, that we are united in our sufferings and in our joys.

Phyllis Beckman's "I Am, for the Time, Being," illustrates the point:

This morning I was musing when
This feeling came along
Reminding me I'm comfy, that
I feel like I belong.

So glad I'm not so worried
About what's next to be
That I miss the present "now"
That life has offered me

When all these special moments
Are noticed one by one
The richness of just living
Can bubble up in fun

So thank you to the giver
Who urges me to take
My time, though it is fleeing,
A mindful life to make!

I am, for the time, being.

Beckman's judicious use of commas made me slow down, caused me to think carefully about the poem's underlying meaning. It's what good poets do.

POEMS THAT MAKE YOU SMILE

I was already smiling as I reached *Poems'* transitional mid-point! There's just something about being "lifted" that feels good.

Let's lead-off with a poem about America's pastime, Carol Amato's "Baseball in Connecticut." This well-crafted visual poem is about a player at the plate wielding a bat that "was never kid-sized." This is a can't miss delight with an unusual ending.

Michael Estabrook's poem "Laughter," is for anyone who, in their twilight years, doesn't want to be a bother to their children:

My mother called today
wants to pay for her funeral
in advance "so you boys don't have
to worry about it."
But I'm not sure how

another 15 years so I say
just write me a check you can trust me
\$20,000 ought to cover it.
Been a long time
Since I've heard her laugh so hard.

Estabrook's conciseness, clarity, and studied restraint is a good example of a poet picking up on how funny life can be. I'm certain there was a measure of serious-ness that prompted Michael's mother to phone him with her heart's concern; but it is poetry that elevates tender moments to the level of art.

This collection is sheer delight; bringing out the best in people and in life, illuminating the path of love and hope.

As a sidenote, *Poems to Lift You Up and Make You Smile*, is not a money-maker for the editor. A significant portion of sales revenue is earmarked for *Parson's Porch*, a food, ministry program that provides bread and milk on a weekly basis for those in need. Sometimes a lift and a smile is all a person needs to make life worth living. Yes, yes indeed.

*Michael Escoubas,
First Published in Quill and Parchment*



Maja Trochimczyk, Flowering Pomegranate

ANNUAL CONTEST SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES

The 35th Annual Poetry Contest of the CSPS is open to all poets, whether-or-not they are members of the CSPS. Poems must be uploaded to our website or postmarked from March 1st through June 30th. Reading fees for all entries, domestic or international, are \$3.00 per poem for members and \$6.00 per poem for non-members. There is an 80-line (two page) limit for each poem and no limit on the number of submissions, though we have not yet received more than eight poems from one poet. If submitting by mail, send a cover letter with all poet information and a list of submitted poems, one copy of each poem with no poet identification, plus an email or SASE for results, to: CSPS Interim Contest Chair, P.O. Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041-4288. Frank Iosue of Arizona is this year's Contest Judge; he reviews poems without poets' names or any identification, sent to him by the Contest Chair. Winning entries will be announced on our website,

our blog, and in the *Newsbriefs* in the fourth issue of the *California Quarterly* in the contest year. The poems must be previously unpublished; the three prize-winners will first appear in the CQ. Poets honored with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes receive \$100, \$50 and \$25 respectively. As many as five Honorable Mentions may also be awarded.. The submissions may be forwarded to *California Quarterly* Editors for possible inclusion in the CQ.

MONTHLY CONTEST SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES

California State Poetry Society encourages poetic creativity by organizing monthly poetry contests. The contests are open to all poets, whether or not they are members of the CSPA. Reading fees are \$1.50 per poem with a \$3.00 minimum for members of CSPA and/or NFSPA societies and \$3.00 per poem with a \$6.00 minimum for non-members. Entries must be postmarked during the month of the contest in which they are entered. They must consist of a first page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) and the titles of the poems being submitted. At this time there are three ways to submit:

1. by email. Poets may submit their work by email to: SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com (Specify Month) and simultaneously pay their contest fees by PayPal to: CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com.
2. by regular mail, enclosing printed copies of poems and your check, CSPA Monthly Contest – (Specify Month) Post Office Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041
3. online on our website CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org, or

All Monthly Contests are judged by Alice Pero, CSPA Monthly Contest Judge. The 1st place winner receives half of the prize pool for pools less than \$100. For pools of \$100 or more, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners receive \$50, \$10 and \$5, respectively. If there are insufficient fees submitted, the minimum prize is \$10. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. The monthly contest winners are announced as they are awarded and the winners are notified by mail. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first CSPA Newsbriefs of the following year. In addition, the first prize winner poems are published in the CSPA Poetry Letter (PDF, email, posted on website) and posted on our blog. Please note: Do not send SAE's. We do not return poems. If you win, we will let you know. Otherwise there are no notifications.

CSPA Monthly Contest Themes (Revised)

- ① January: Nature, Seasons, Landscape
- ② February: Love
- ③ March: Open, Free Subject
- ④ April: Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes
- ⑤ May: Personification, Characters, Portraits
- ⑥ June: The Supernatural
- ⑦ July: Childhood, Memoirs
- ⑧ August: Places, Poems of Location
- ⑨ September: Colors, Music, Dance
- ⑩ October: Humor, Satire
- ⑪ November: Family, Friendship, Relationships
- ⑫ December: Best of Your Best (Winning or published poems only. Indicate name of contest or publication and the issue/dates of publication/award.)



Maja Trochimczyk, A Pomegranate

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