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# Poetry Society of Michigan



*"Encouraging Poets Since 1935"*

June 2020

## President's Message

Dear Poets,

At first, all I could write about was the pandemic. It truly was a novel virus. But then I got sick of it and myself. As spring got closer, I realized there are things more important than washing my hands, which I do constantly. There is the miracle of plants leafing and blooming. There is the miracle of Zoom, where I meet every Thursday with my writing group (even better than before, because now we meet weekly since no one goes anywhere!).

The virus does not keep us from our desks or from our ideas. Wearing a mask hides my iffy teeth, so in that way, it serves a double purpose! I sometimes look back at how we were legions of huggers. I miss some of that. But what a great gift of time to those, like me, who squander it during regular life. Now there are enforced hours at home. The tools of our trade haven't changed. Write, revise, submit. Even performance can be accomplished on Zoom.

Each morning I post a prompt on the Poetry Society of Michigan Facebook page. I know sometimes we feel empty, but we just haven't found the pin that releases the air. Someday we'll have a reading to recall this time.

Enjoy what Phillip has done with this issue of the newsletter. Please stay safe. We are thinking of you.

Elizabeth Kerlikowske, President

## Signs of Spring by Karin Hoffecker

Three nectarines  
glisten on a shelf  
next to a colorless  
gallon of water,  
dimpled egg carton,  
two cans of Real  
Whipped Cream,  
a jar of Silver  
Floss Sauerkraut.  
The nectarines  
are brilliant, painted  
like the sun.  
Flesh supple, sweet,  
unusual for March.

Asparagus spears  
damp beside  
the kitchen sink,  
crisp, green stalks  
nestled in a bunch,  
their tips delicate  
blossoms. Like the fruit,  
they are unique,  
each spear a reminder  
of spring; baskets  
filled with ivory lilies,  
lavender-colored eggs,  
black licorice jelly beans.  
Easter is early this year.

### Crows by Robert Haight

Every morning a man walked out to the woods to listen. Soon he believed he could translate the language of crows. He took notes on their conversations as they gathered and scattered in the leafy tops of trees. He recorded the crows to later study them as they pecked at roadkill in the ditches along the sides of the lonely county roads as the heaped winter snow melted into the grass of spring. He tried to speak back to the crows, certain they remembered him by the wary gleam in their yellow eyes, but they never acknowledged they understood his caws. He began to love them whether he understood them or not, whether they understood him or not, and so every day he returned to them and watched them and listened. After he had grown very old, one day the man died and was taken to his grave in the township cemetery followed by a flock of very raucous crows.

### A Good Day to Remember by Katherine Edgren

The day John made sourdough waffles with fresh blueberries, and I walked the dog around the neighborhood having to explain to her: “it’s only wind,” as menacing fir trees waggled their branches, garbage cans rolled away, and a kite fluttered from the top of a tree, it was barely 10 a.m., but I was so full that I looked for metaphors for fullness—trees hazed with green, colonies of peepers bleating *I need* from the pond, a bellyful of waffles, summer’s laden blueberry bushes, the way stillness fills a room, and silence fills with music.

### from A Day Is Born! by Larry Rilko

A day is born!  
The sun eases its way into the eastern sky.  
The clouds suddenly pick-up a color tone of pink.  
A day is born!

I grab the day  
and hold it in my hands,  
not allowing any of it to run through my fingers.  
A new day I have for my very own.

I carefully cup the day in my hands.  
I caress it and brush it against my face.  
I smell it and taste it.  
I wish I could hold it forever.

### Editor’s Note

Much thanks for the more than 70 poems sent to me in celebration of Spring in Michigan. I’ve included as many as I could in this issue—some slightly edited, some excerpted. Unfortunately, a good many good poems are not here, for lack of space (or perhaps theme). Still, I am grateful for them all.

While some of the usual news is in this issue of the PSM Newsletter, most of the upcoming readings, events, and activities of the PSM and other literary organizations have of course been suspended for the time being, including the Fall Meeting of PSM, which is/was meant to be hosted by the Lansing Poetry Club, and the Bards of Bird Creek gatherings throughout the summer in Port Austin. Others will be assuming virtual forms of one kind or another. As with the groups listed on the back cover, I recommend that you watch for announcements regarding the reanimation of activities by way of Facebook or organization websites or by contact with organizers.

Me? I’m well, thank you. And, as you can see, following the Governor’s orders by “staying gnome.” —Phillip Sterling



## News from UP North

During May, April and June, the Marquette Poets Circle held monthly poetry workshops and open mics virtually. Our May and June open mics were co-hosted by Peter White Public Library. The Poet Laureate of the Upper Peninsula, Martin Achatz, is holding Zoom poetry workshops on the first Thursday of the month. Email him at [machtz@nmu.edu](mailto:machtz@nmu.edu) for an invitation to the workshop.

Rev. M.E. Kilpatrick, Coordinator, Spiritual Care/Volunteer Services, UP Health System – Marquette, asked the Marquette Poets Circle to create a web page for poems, stories and words of support for the staff of the hospital. **Hearts to Hearts: 2020**

**Pandemic Literary Project** became a place where authors from around the country could share words of support to those who keep us healthy and safe during the pandemic.

Our group is currently participating in the Marquette Memory Box Project, creating literary works and podcasts about this unique time. Our writing will be published at [pwpl.info](http://pwpl.info) and podcasts are available at <https://anchor.fm/mqtmemorybox> and other podcast services.

Speakeasy Poetry Open Mic @Lower Harbor Park! will be held June 11th at 7 p.m. in downtown Marquette. Come watch the sunset and listen to poetry on the lawn! Bring your own chair or blanket & distance accordingly. Sign up for the open mic at [pyrepublishing.com](http://pyrepublishing.com). (Actual microphone will not be used due to risks.)

### June

by Denise Sedman

Remember the sweat of June,  
how my dress clung to my body?  
Damp beads on my breasts,

June, ah June,  
the sun warms me  
like your hands cupping my breast.

I am a goddess,  
a person with steam,  
in the heat of my life.

### Home Office

by Elizabeth Kerlikoske

We refer to our pets as “coworkers” since we are home together all the time. Then we can say, “My coworker keeps licking the draft and then his ass!” “My coworker is asleep on the desk again.” I wish I could sprawl on my work and accomplish what Edgar Cayce could by osmosis, letting the books he slept on seep their information into him.

*Time spent with a cat is never wasted*, said Colette. All of us on the same shift sleep in my bed. My coworkers like to jump from the dresser into the covers. We curl up together. Warm. *Our perfect companions never have fewer than four feet*, Colette said. My oldest coworker has so many toes he can substitute for an abacus if necessary. No one looks as pensive staring at a blank wall. Two of our coworkers are sibs, who haunt the lunchroom and now are Sumo-, I mean, fun-size. When they try to leave early, often, I block the door with my leg and shake a broom in their faces. We enjoy a vigorous romp around the office. One of them ducks outside and comes in to tell the others what it’s like out there. He is their hero. Right now, a coworker pushes my fingers from the keyboard with his entire body. Time to cater dinner. Colette: *There are no ordinary cats.*

## Conversation With Nature by Jane Mayes

I know you love me, little wren;  
you trill your joy,  
    your ecstasy with life,  
to share with me that wonder.

Oh, larkspur,  
    when I admire your beauty  
with a gentle fingering  
of your delicate purple petal,  
you reply with a dainty pollen kiss.

Welcoming mosses,  
you quietly carpet my forest walk,  
offering your velvet cushion  
    to grateful passersby.

Dear broken spiral shell,  
you expose your intricate  
    inner structure  
that we might recognize with awe  
the work of a master architect.

Oh, lowly soil of this rich earth,  
you teach the great lesson,  
taking that which seems lifeless  
and giving nourishment  
    back to creation.

And I,  
what have I to give  
to demonstrate my love?  
    I smile joyfully,  
paint a picture,  
write this poem  
    of praise and gratitude.

## *from Little Morning Miracle* by Sophia Rivkin

... this early spring morning  
the flattened moon  
still caught in high tree branches  
and old oak trees fresh with morning mist  
surrounded by five deer  
who walk and bed  
ghost bodies  
to sweet green grass  
where the broken cement statue  
of an old Indian  
in the yard  
lifts his shattered arm  
to salute them ...

## Nest by Patricia Barnes

Nudged from the edge  
    into air,  
we find we fly or fall.

The precipice pledges  
    to teach a fledgling  
what wings are for—  
first to flutter  
    then to soar.

## Come On Spring by Estelle Davidson

Citrine foreplay of summer  
when the sun splendors the garden  
in celestial saffron  
brilliant yellow flowers forecast  
the greening of forsythia bushes  
daffodils debut in pale lemon  
tulips with butter-bright  
velvet petals  
neighbor a regal stand  
of silky champagne irises  
and those raffish party crashers  
who come early and stay late  
the ubiquitous golden dandelions.

## Literature Matters in a Civil Society

By Ron Weber

There was a time when the concept or definition of a civil society was pretty straight forward. The attributes and benefits of civility were evident in the threads of literature that wove culture and social order together. For generations, literature was a major factor in helping citizens to realize, understand, and internalize the elements of life and its experiences, helping to define “civil” behavior within human interactions. Not so today.

The degree to which we have forsaken literature—novels, short stories, poetry or plays—is the degree to which we have undermined a civil society. Recent studies by the National Endowment for the Arts show that, by 2015, Americans who read literature fell to a three-decade low. Only 43 percent of adults had read at least one work of literature in the previous year. That was the lowest percentage in any year since NEA surveys began tracking reading and arts participation in 1982, when the literature reading rate was 57 percent. By 2017 the percentage of American adults who read novels or short stories fell even further, to 41.8 percent. This research by the NEA also found that reductions in the literary reading rate have happened across the board—all races, all ages, and all educational levels.

The results are disconcerting. Literary readers, the NEA argues, are “markedly more civically engaged than non-readers.” They are two to four times more likely to perform charity work, go to a museum, or even attend a sporting event—interactions that may

very well result from exposure to civic and historical knowledge gained from literary reading. Further erosion of reading skills therefore would have social and cultural consequences. Already, claims the National Conference of State Legislatures, “Young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship... and their appreciation and support of American Democracy is limited.”

We can’t ignore the importance of literature to a country’s health and well-being. I look around, just as most of you do, and no matter the age or political affiliation, it seems that intolerance is the watchword. We don’t just disagree anymore, we must dislike! We are on the verge of becoming a disjointed circus of ideological fascism: self-serving and self-justifying.

I’m afraid that if we don’t seriously step away from this compulsion for self-absorption and self-promotion, we are not going to like or recognize where we will end up. And by then, it will be much too late. A civil society must embrace personal liberty, tolerance, open debate, the freedom to disagree, and the value of trustworthiness. All of which our literature provides.

I’m reminded of a comment by Walt Whitman, which I believe can still be realized if we commit to perpetuating our literary community: “The largest part of our human tragedies are humanly avoidable: they come from greed, from carelessness, from causes not catastrophic, elemental: with more radical good heart our woes would disappear.”

### Sounds of Reconstruction by Joy Gaines-Friedler

They're pounding out the broken sewer line beneath the street  
at the intersection of Main & Cherry Crest, day and night  
men and women move earth, drill new wells to control ground water,  
lay pipe, footings the size of shattered memories to by-pass  
the damaged places.

*We're a country piecing ourselves together.* Still, today, when Nancy made it through surgery, half a lung gone, but breathing, and already wanting to go home, when the phone rang with the good news we jumped up and down for the technology that can restore, for the lights that shine all night at the construction

site, the lights inside the rooms we operate in, for the men and women who choose to learn this stuff, get dirty in it, for the clang and beep of machines, for oxygen tubing, and tank holders, for the chance to breathe deeply again, wade in a symphony of laughter, and there—listen to it—amid the drone of boring, and excavation, a wind chime.

## Home-ing Spring in Michigan

### Blackbird

by Lissa Perrin

See the willows yellowing up.  
The purpling of blackberry canes.

Listen to the river  
singing to sand and stone.

Hear the red-winged blackbird  
calling *oakalee* in the cattails.

Separation is an illusion;  
this is our story, too.

### from Old Masters by Marie Davids

Like brushes on a cymbal,  
The soft and steady rain,  
Its off-beat drip  
Through the downspout  
Where I sit:  
Dave Brubeck must have written  
This music from above.  
He still seems very hip!

### from The Back Forty by Mary Jo Stich

Sitting on this small hillock  
the forest moves around me  
Squirrels bustle in oak leaves  
stuff cheeks with fat acorns  
discard tiny little nut caps

Rabbits hop and nibble  
hop and nibble  
Jays call to the air  
with scattering scolding

I munch wintergreen berries  
within my reach  
stroke their glossy leaves  
wish for more

### from Michigan Spring 2020 by Betty J. Van Ochten

First the dwarf iris opened in purple splendor,  
then the golden forsythia,  
the red, red tulips.  
Oh, can't forget the trees  
that blossomed all pink or white!  
Now the yard awaits the perfume  
of lily of the valley, lilac . . .

### Shelter-at-Home by Jill Marcuse

That spring she lived in the trees.  
Her nest woven strand by strand,  
the weight and warmth of her body  
solidified the hollow she sank down in.

She was content to watch life returning  
to the limbs, like the yellow emerging  
in the wings of the Goldfinches' feathers,  
the leaves breaking green.

First the willows flung their chartreuse  
tresses in the warming breezes.  
The sugar maples' buds flowered next,  
red as the returning Robin's breasts.

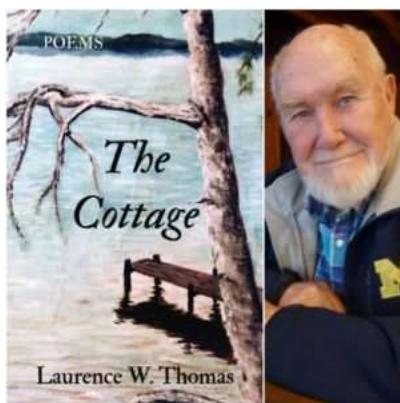
Blackbirds with scarlet epaulets, trilled  
in the cottonwoods, while grey Mourning  
Doves cooed. The doves took her back  
to her mother's graveside.

She was grateful mom had been spared  
this pandemic anyway. Then the orioles arrived  
in numbers she'd never seen. She put out nectar  
and they came to sip beside her window.

The oaks were last to leaf, emerging from the tight  
squirrel's ear sized buds, blushing to be so late.  
That spring she sheltered with birdsong, freshening  
shades of green. She was content there, in the trees.

## The Printed Word

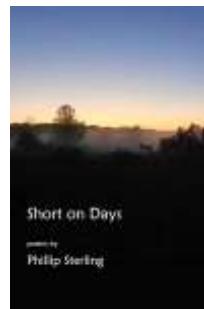
**The Cottage**, a new chapbook by PSM Honorary Chancellor Larry Thomas, is now available for pre-ordering from Finishing Line Press. Larry has been living on a lake of his creation, and this collection shows the friends, human and animal, and pictures of his waterfront life. The book can be reserved for \$14.95 (+ s&h) by going to [finishinglinepress.com/product/the-cottage-by-laurence-w-thomas/](http://finishinglinepress.com/product/the-cottage-by-laurence-w-thomas/)



Patricia Barnes' debut collection *Cup of Home* has been released, though its festive launch party has been postponed until later in the year. "Pat Barnes writes with clarity and wit of the pleasures and pathos at the core of family life," says Mary Jo Firth-Gillett. "Her poems speak with tenderness of her beloveds but also with humor and a sense of whimsy. Barnes gives us the gift of balance—sadness and joy—in these deeply felt and accomplished poems." Beautifully designed—the cover illustration is one of Pat's own artworks—the book is available from Amazon (\$18.50), or order directly from Pat at [barneswriter@wyan.org](mailto:barneswriter@wyan.org).



Phillip Sterling's long-anticipated collection of February aubades, *Short on Days*, has finally been released from its sequestering in North Carolina. The book is available now from Main Street Rag (\$13 + s&h) or a signed copy can be acquired by sending a check for \$13 to Phillip Sterling, 3033 Court Dr. SE, Lowell, MI 49331.



### "quacking back" by David Fitch

a chilly, blustery spring day  
not bright enough to count as almost noon,  
but the forsythia screaming YELLOW!  
the chartreuse green florets—really baby leaves,  
so odd—like a pea soup fog, a fungus veil,  
on all these breaking-out, pubescent trees.

somewhere in here I am, writing this,  
thinking to myself how love  
doesn't seem to mind last year's debris,  
the ducks paddling in our ditch oblivious  
to anything except, "hey—it's WATER!"  
and just because I'll soon be fifty-two

doesn't mean I'm too wise for mental hiccups,  
I'm inured to sticking to my own seed.  
the riot of birds, the stinky hyacinths,  
the too-perfume, gray gnawing in my bed—  
get up! go buy! calm down! sing!  
it's the world's ambiguous—old-and-new command.

**Surprises**  
by Marion Frahn Tincknell

A rumble in the yard—  
our neighbor mowing  
our lawn

On the phone, his wife says,  
“I’m ordering groceries today.  
Do you need anything?”

In the driveway, motor idling, a car waits  
while my friend offers two bags,  
a cooked chicken and a decadent dessert.

With their granddaughter, friends on the doorstep  
bearing a gift—  
their favorite ice cream.

From 90 miles away, our daughter calls,  
“I’ve been to the market  
and will bring your groceries tomorrow.”

The computer screen divides  
and divides again—  
all our children gathered for us!

At my door, eyes lowered, the little boy next door  
holds a ribbon-tied box—  
“I love you” on the lid.

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The editor would like to gratefully acknowledge the poets whose original work appears in this *Newsletter*. Copyright is retained by them. Permission to further reproduce or distribute individual poems in any form, print or online, must be obtained from the authors.

**Wading in Lake Michigan**  
by David Jibson

Each wave you face is the same and each one different.  
The same in how it looks, the whiteness  
of its crest, the deep cerulean of its shadow.

Different in where it breaks on the body,  
one just below the knee, the next just above,  
sending an unexpected joy of cold shock  
through the groin and into the brain,

causing you to lift your weight  
onto the balls of your feet,  
making it feel as if you are lighter.

There is a sudden intake of air to fill lungs  
which have become suddenly larger.

*from A Yooper Takes Shelter at Camp*  
by Lisa Fosmo

At dusk one lone crane flies by  
feathers in close more shadow than bird.  
We watch the fire from the glass door of the woodstove,  
flaming orange and quick as a litter of fox kits.

The radio tuned to 103.3 Elmer Aho bringing us comfort  
with old country and folk music.  
His soft familiar Fozzie Bear voice  
a Saturday evening Yooper Companion.

One last peek at an endless starry sky.  
We nuzzle in bed  
The dark so large so peaceful it eats the world.  
We came here to be small to disappear.  
We drift off belonging now to the ever widening quiet,  
waiting the gift of morning.

# 2020 PSM Poetry Contest

## Category 1

### *Margo LaGattuta Memorial Award*

In 2011 **Margo LaGattuta** was posthumously named the first Honorary Chancellor for PSM. The category is sponsored by Polly Opsahl and Friends of Margo. Any Subject, Any Form Prizes 1<sup>st</sup>: \$100.00; 2<sup>nd</sup>: \$50.00; 3<sup>rd</sup>: \$25.00

## Category 2

### *Chancellor's Prize*

**The Chancellor's Award** is sponsored by Honorary Chancellor, Laurence W. Thomas, for a poem whose ideas extend beyond the frame of the poem; which says one thing when it means something else. Any subject.

Prizes 1<sup>st</sup>: \$75.00; 2<sup>nd</sup>: \$45.00; 3<sup>rd</sup>: \$30.00

## Category 3

### *Founder's Prize*

**The Founder's Prize** is sponsored by Susan Anderson, in honor of her grandfather Clifford Allen, one of the founding members of the Poetry Society of Michigan, for a poem about Michigan, any form.

Prizes 1<sup>st</sup>: \$50.00; 2<sup>nd</sup>: \$35.00; 3<sup>rd</sup>: \$15.00

## Prizes for Categories 4-12:

1<sup>st</sup>: \$35.00; 2<sup>nd</sup>: \$25.00; 3<sup>rd</sup>: \$15.00

## Category 4

### *The Barbara Sykes Memorial Humorous Poem*

**Barbara Sykes** loved to write humorous poems. The award is sponsored by her niece, Patricia Barnes, for a humorous poem, in any form.

## Category 5

### *George Dila Memorial Prize*

**George Dila** is a beloved award-winning writer of fiction and poetry and the founder of Ludington Visiting Writers. The award is sponsored by Phillip Sterling for a prose poem, any subject.

## Category 6: A poem in any style about **Nature**

## Category 7: A poem in any style about **Love**

## Category 8: A poem in any style about **Coronavirus**

(or related topics like **Social Distancing, Stay-at-home, Quarantine . . .**)

**DEADLINE: AUGUST 1, 2020**

## Entry Fees and Submission Guidelines

### **Category 1:**

Members: \$4.00  
Non-Members: \$5.00

### **Categories 2-8:**

Members: \$2.00 per poem  
Non-Members: \$3.00 per poem

\*Poets do not have to be members of the Poetry Society of Michigan or reside in Michigan.

\*Please enter only one poem per category.

\*Entries must not exceed 40 lines, including lines between stanzas.

\* Please do not send poems that have been previously published, including electronically, or that have previously won a prize.

\**Electronic submissions are preferred.* Please send entries as attachments to [psmcontestentry@gmail.com](mailto:psmcontestentry@gmail.com). Entries should include two files—one with your contact info on each poem and one without. Category name should be in the upper left corner of every poem.

\*If you cannot submit by email, please mail your submission to the address below. Send two copies of each poem. On both copies, place the category name in the upper left corner. On one copy only, place your name, address, phone number, and email. No poems will be returned.

\*Entry fees may be paid by check or money order payable to **Poetry Society of Michigan**. Please note on your payment method if you are a member or non-member.

All who submit electronically will receive a list of winners via email. If you mail your entry and wish to receive a list of winners, please include a SASE.

Winning poems and Honorable Mentions will be published in the 2020 Contest Issue of *Peninsula Poets*.

Questions and email entries: [psmcontestentry@gmail.com](mailto:psmcontestentry@gmail.com)  
Mail entries and submission fees to:

2020 PSM Contest  
c/o Melanie Dunbar  
2272 114<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Allegan, MI 49010

## POETRY SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN

Business Address:

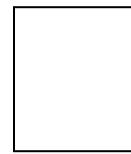
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& FACEBOOK

an affiliate of

The National Federation of  
State Poetry Societies  
[www.nfspa.com](http://www.nfspa.com)



## Literary Locals: Writers Welcome

*Coronavirus Alert! Confirm with Organization before Attending!*

### The Lansing Poetry Club

generally meets at 3 p.m. of the 3rd Sunday of the month at Dublin Square Irish Pub & Restaurant (327 Abbot Rd., **East Lansing, MI 48823**). For more info or to confirm a meeting, visit Facebook or email LPC President Ruelaine Stokes ([ruestokes@gmail.com](mailto:ruestokes@gmail.com)).

### Downriver Poets & Playwrights

meets regularly on the first Tuesday of the month at Bacon Memorial Library in **Wyandotte** from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Contact **Dennis White** at 734-755-5988 or [denniswhite@mail.com](mailto:denniswhite@mail.com) for more information.

### Rochester Poets' Society

meets at the Rochester Hills Public Library, in **Rochester**, from 1-3 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month. For more info Contact **Nancy Stevens** 248-217-4034 or email [writings80@yahoo.com](mailto:writings80@yahoo.com).

### Marquette Poets Circle

meets on first Monday of the month in the Peter White Library Conference Room at 5:30 for workshop, 6:30 for Open Mic. For more info contact **Janeen Rastall** at [janeenrastall@yahoo.com](mailto:janeenrastall@yahoo.com) or 906-451-4473

**River Junction Poets of Saginaw** meet regularly throughout the year. For dates and times and other info, visit their Facebook page or call RJP President **Jim Fobear** at 989-714-5124.

### Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle

meets on second Wednesdays of each month, 7-9 p.m., for workshop and on fourth Wednesdays, 7-9 p.m. with a featured reader and open mic. Crazy Wisdom Book Store & Tea Room, 114 S. Main St., **Ann Arbor, MI**. See blog for details: <http://cwpoetrycircle.tumblr.com/>

### Friends of Poetry – Kalamazoo.

For information about the many activities and gatherings of this group that has served the literary arts of the greater Kalamazoo area for nearly 40 years, contact **Elizabeth Kerlikowske** ([mme642@yahoo.com](mailto:mme642@yahoo.com)) or visit their Facebook page.

**Bards of Bird Creek** *will suspend meetings until further notice.* Typically *May through October* at 7:00 p.m. in the **Port Austin** Welcome Center. Call (989)738-7641 to confirm dates or for more information.

**3rd Thursday Poetry** meets the 3rd Thursday of each month at Horizon Books in **Cadillac** (with breaks in Dec. & June-Aug.). For info contact **Susan Anderson** at (231) 429-2443 ([treasurer.psm@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.psm@gmail.com)) or Horizon Books Cadillac at (231) 775-9979.

**The Southeast Michigan Poetry Meet-up** meets from 7-9 p.m. the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at Panera Bread, 27651 Southfield Road in **Lathrup Village, MI**. For more information, call **Carla Dodd** at 248-861-3636.