The Poetry Society of Michigan

# Peninsula Poets



## Fall 2026
## Contest Issue




# Peninsula Poets

*Fall Contest Edition*

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Cover Photo: Melanie Dunbar, *Bonsai, Japanese Maple*, 2026

## Table of Contents


Editor's Note....6
Category 1: The Margo LaGattuta Memorial Award....8
Foreclosed / *Joy Gaines-Friedler*....9
Walters on Washington / *Sherrin Frances*....10
She Learns / *Joanne Gram*....11
To My Lost Daughter, as She Grieves / *Marianne Peel*....12
Category 2: Chancellor's Prize....14
Another Type of Alpine Divorce / *Lynne Schmidt*....15
California Dreams / *Polly Opsahl*....16
To Be in New Orleans Tonight / *Shawna Braun*....17
Goodness / *Maureen Hart*....18
Category 3: Founder's Prize....20
Train Dispatch – Iowa / *Maureen Hart*....21
A Legacy of Philately / *Marianne Peel*....22
Winter Postcards / *Katherine Edgren*....24
Letter to My Younger Sister / *Linda Nemec Foster*....25
Category 4: The Barbara Sykes Memorial Humorous Poem....26
Cicada Apocalypse by *Ginny Grush*....27
Irish Weather Forecast / *Francis O'Brien*....28
The Best Things I've Learned from Student Papers / *Michelle DeRose*....29
The Impossible Dream / *David James*....30
Category 5: The George Dila Memorial Prose Poem....32
Almost Epiphany / *Jill Doster Marcusse*....33
Cupid with a Musket / *Linda Rosenthal*....34
Morning / *Cynthia Weber Nankee*....35
New Year's Resolutions / *Lynne Fernandez*....36
Category 6: Nature—The Jude P. Dunbar Memorial Prize....38
Ruby Throat at Midsummer / *Michelle DeRose*....39
Park San Miguel, Spain / *Marianne Peel*....40
Fledgling Calls / *Chelsea Szczembara*....41
Earth Elegy / *Dawn Levitt*....42

Category 7: Overcoming Adversity....44
Find a Roost / *Joy Gaines-Friedler*....45
Kintsugi* / *Ann Glumac*....46
Life Lines / *Isabella J. Mansfield*....47
How To Ask / *Joanne Gram*....48
Category 8: The Faruq Z. Bey Award for Poetry Related to Music..50
Für Elise in the Waiting Room / *Colleen Alles*....51
Love Song for Judy Collins / *Marianne Peel*....53
I Kept Your Pillow Next to Me Until It Was Stale / *Sherrin Frances*....54
The Singing Forest / *Lynne Schmidt*....55
Category 9: Loss....56
Two Women / *Lissa Perrin*....57
Fannie Lou Hamer's Note to My Dad / *Nan Jackson*....58
Weekends With Mom / *Terry Jude Miller*....59
They Sell Hazmat Suits at Home Depot / *Joy Gaines-Friedler*…60
Category 10: Women in Science....62
Mary Anning: Rewriting the History of Life on Earth / *Marianne Peel*....63
Proof / *Katherine Edgren*....65
The Slumbering Quiet / *Susan Haifleigh*....66
The Truth in Discovery / *Debra Belcher*....67
Judges' Bios....68

Editor's Note

Happy Fall! Once again I am happy to be compiling the Fall Contest Edition of Peninsula Poets. I love getting a sneak peek at the winners! This year we had more entries than ever. Thank you to everyone who submitted. I'm sure the judges had some tough decisions to make!

A special thank you to past PSM President David James for taking on the monumental task of running the contest this year, and former Contest Chairperson Diana Hart for her years of hard work.

I hope you enjoy this latest offering from poets across the country.

Melanie Dunbar
Editor

## Category 1:
The Margo LaGattuta Memorial Award

**First Place**
Foreclosed
*Joy Gaines-Friedler, Farmington Hills, MI*

**Second Place**
Walters on Washington
*Sherrin Frances, Saginaw, MI*

**Third Place**
She Learns
*Joanne Gram, Lansing, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
To My Lost Daughter, as She Grieves
*Marianne Peel, Lexington, KY*

Foreclosed / *Joy Gaines-Friedler*

My parents things have gone to die
on my brother's wall, shoved together
in his apartment like a hoard of herded
merchandise, stolen by a compulsive thief.

Maybe, because he earned nothing
he craves everything.

Or maybe, it's just a skill
to take from others as much as he can.

Are we trained to be crow-like?
Are lacquered dressers that don't fit the walls,
& crystal glassware that will never be used,
the shiny crow objects we covet?

I know he hoards to fill the empty,
how trauma gets remembered in your bones.

Come May, the smell of gun powder
permeates the air I breathe.

Come August, I become a mother
I've never been, bleeding again.

Each September, I hold the hand of my
best friend as he died from AIDS. Tell him to let go.

I warned my brother about acquiring
what he could not afford;
warned him about the sheriff.
I warned my aging mother
not to let him buy her house...offered him

other choices. A jealous crow
he took what he could. I found fourteen
flashlights in his belongings.

It was never going to be enough.

Walters on Washington / *Sherrin Frances*

I wore sorrow on my feet, slippery with grief,
and nylon anxiety running up my thighs
with crooked back seams and a diamond gusset,
ring finger glittering with sapphire gin.

You wore a mouthful of candied cherries
and a velvet coat woven from
ukulele notes and old man divorce.

Your hand on the empty barstool,
fingers swiveling the seat
drew me through the meaty room.

I wore ghosts on my shoulders and so did you,
and they spoke first, slurring words
through gauzy ectoplasmic veils.

And after they made their introductions,
we unwound from behind the tight shadows
of our lashes and looked at each other, eyes bare.

I took your chair before you offered,
and the bartender said our laughter fit us
as if we had been wearing it for years.

She Learns / *Joanne Gram*

Wisdom is a long time in the making.
To fill a bucket there's a price to pay.
Whenever life is giving there's a taking.
Hearts grow bigger every time they're breaking.
Eyes see deeper in the darkness of the day.
Wisdom is a long time in the making.
The oldest clothes fit softer as they're fading.
Familiar rooms where all your treasures stay,
your memories are a long time in the making.
The wound that healed into a scar is aching.
The words that burned when she was only playing.
Wisdom was a long time in the making.
The walk we took with every footstep shaking
turned us off the pathway into straying.
Living life's a risky undertaking.
To never love is living without waking,
or maybe just not waking all the way.
Wisdom is a lifetime in the making
of pieces we are keeping and forsaking.

To My Lost Daughter, as She Grieves / *Marianne Peel*

I wonder if you have found your angel.
Is she a guardian in Doc Martins
with tattoo sleeves sprawling on her arms,
a red flannel shirt, denim dungarees?

When your father and I divorced,
he had a drawing of Don Quixote
inked to his back. Fancied himself
tilting at windmills. Was he broken
or beaten? And he knew too much sanity
can produce madness.

Did you choose to sit next to the fire,
hold your hand to the machine
that converted your father to dust?
Is the urn on a shelf, next to the ceramic smudge pot
you created in third grade? Your thumbprints
forever embedded.

Or is he in a drawer, buried
beneath your charcoals and acrylics?
Do you sketch his face when sleep doesn't come?
Are his eyes searching or closed?

Do you hear him playing Rachmaninoff
on your grandmother's white grand piano?
Stubby fingers impossible to stretch a full octave.
His hands were made for the valves of a tuba
or the push and pull of a trombone slide.

Did you anoint him with sandalwood and jasmine,
massaging oil into the cracks of his diabetic soles?

Did you take a razor to his hospital beard
one last time?

Do you see his face when you approach a mirror,
see the strands of DNA that mark you
as his daughter?

When life itself becomes lunatic, do you
tilt at windmills with your own saber sword?

Did you touch the tattoo on his back
before this engraving abandoned him
in the heat of the fire?

## Category 2:
Chancellor's Prize

**First Place**
Another Type of Alpine Divorce
*Lynne Schmidt, Norway, ME*

**Second Place**
California Dreams
*Polly Opsahl, Davison, MI*

**Third Place**
To Be in New Orleans Tonight
*Shawna Braun, Flagstaff, AZ*

**Honorable Mention**
Goodness
*Maureen Hart, Saginaw, MI*

Another Type of Alpine Divorce / *Lynne Schmidt*

Poverty means not getting a car on your sixteenth birthday
because you can't afford it.
It means not buying your first car until you're 22,
and when you meet a guy before then who has a car,
who drives you places,
it's not codependency, it's survival.

And it's survival when you follow him to North Carolina in the summer,
until the drive home when he abandons you in Maryland as he drives
back to Maine.

And you stand there with no money, no place to stay, no ride home,
scrambling for what to do next.

California Dreams / *Polly Opsahl*

In my dream, my dead mother comes home,
tells me she's been living in California
for the last three years. She walks
in my front door as if nothing has changed,
tells me she wants back all the things
I gave away: her favorite chair, her purple
sweater, the bag of empty yogurt containers
she was saving in the closet. I can smell
the sweetness of her skin, taste the salt
in my tears. She looks the same
as the day she left, though time
has etched an eternity in my face.

I wish she were in California.
I want to visit her there.
I want to picture her by the ocean,
white hair fluffed by sea air,
sunlight glinting in her smile.

To Be in New Orleans Tonight / *Shawna Braun*

I miss your hand-forged history
the tarnished glow of wrought iron
balconies filigreed like Spanish lace.
Live oaks gathered in Jackson Square,
moss draped silhouettes
against a velvet dusk.
Cascades of hanging ferns
wooden voices of streetcars
the riverboat's mournful horn.
The autumn sun setting
the Mississippi aglow
as if the sky let down her golden hair.
Garlands of trumpet notes
strung through the open air,
I reach up and pluck one from the twilight.
I seek your music, New Orleans,
find me in your streets again,
weathered soul against your stones.

Goodness / *Maureen Hart*

Grandma spoke in sauerkraut,
strong coffee, fresh eggs from the henhouse.

Her thick wrists and spotted hands often held a rosary,
on her lips, the Our Father in German.

What was she thinking? running a farm,
all those potatoes and cabbages,

babies lost, the barn fire that smoked for days,
watching her oldest son die slowly,

filling trucks, sending food to Detroit's Eastern Market,
seeking warmth, driving south on the old Dixie Highway.

Before passing on, she repeated the same story,
a family picnic, a beautiful day, a pie cooling on a tree stump,

her loyal dog eats the pie when no one is looking.
"Oh my goodness," she would say and laugh and laugh.

## Category 3:
Founder's Prize

**First Place**
Train Dispatch – Iowa
*Maureen Hart, Saginaw, MI*

**Second Place**
A Legacy of Philately
*Marianne Peel, Lexington, KY*

**Third Place**
Winter Postcards
*Katherine Edgren, Dexter, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
Letter to My Younger Sister
*Linda Nemec Foster, Grand Rapids, MI*

Train Dispatch – Iowa / *Maureen Hart*

Iowa preens itself in raw dirt
five o'clock stubble of cornstalks
dresses up in white water towers
American flag bow tie
tattoos of Ottumwa or Osceola.

Too much open space
metal silos scattered over the land
bent trees leaning toward an exit
aloneness kicks up dust on an empty road
swallows a car whole.

The Amish on the train discuss the menu options in their Dutch German
In English I hear the words shrimp, chicken, cheese cake
an excited discussion before every meal
women in white caps, men with long marriage whiskers
Iowa doesn't seem to bother them.

I try to walk the aisles stumbling
bumping chairs, walls, people,
"Have another," the staff joke with me
I pause in the viewing car
notice they walk like cowboys.

Train stops let out only Iowans
Squealing their secret code on the old rails
not interested in the rest of us
I look out to see who gets off so far
from skyscrapers and big box stores.

Dreaming, the train cradles and rocks me
small town streetlights, galaxies of the night
shadow spirits of the old prairie Indians
following buffalo through tallgrass prairies
the flat lands continue without witness.

A Legacy of Philately / *Marianne Peel*

S*how me all your stamps*, says the woman
at the Tate's Creek Post Office.
And she tells the clerk she's collected
since she was a seven-year-old girl.

How her mamaw showed her how to steam
a stamp off the onion skin stationery.
How she and her mamaw went to the auction
down in Monkey's Eyebrow,
hunted through antique chests
stuffed with yellowed letters.
She and her mamaw would take turns
deciphering letters from dead people.
They always said a little prayer
for the person who wrote the letter,
for the person who received the letter.
It*'s the respectful thing to do*, her mamaw
always said.

Mamaw was a romantic
and she swooned over every love letter.
Said she always asked Papaw to write
her a love letter, but he was busy tending
to the goats and the sheep.
Said his hands weren't meant
to hold anything so small and flimsy
as a pencil or pen. The hammer
and the screwdriver, both, held
the indentation of his thumb and forefinger,
his mechanic-self forever embedded on his tools.

*I'll take the stamps with the peonies,*
she told the clerk. *They were my mamaw's favorites,*
*ants crawling through the petals, even in a vase,*
*on her roll-top desk.*

Her mamaw loved bringing the outside in,
knowing the peonies were their own love letter
to a woman who wanted nothing more
than a simple declaration of adoration,
that she could fold and unfold
over and over
once he was gone.

Winter Postcards / *Katherine Edgren*

January.
Nails on the deck pop
like kernels of corn.

*

Still life of leather boots lounge by the back door
in disarray, with their closings of zippers and buckles,
Velcro and ties, their rich colors of brown and black,
sculpted by the light over the kitchen table.

*

Remembering summer:
hawks wheeling overhead,
the singular stink of pigs.

Letter to My Younger Sister / *Linda Nemec Foster*

My dear, I know you'll never come here to Krakow,
this city of our grandparents, with its long and winding
river—the Vistula—cutting through my dreams
for the tenth time. But, never yours.
Its colors of burnt amber, verdant green, gold-gilt
of cathedrals you don't believe in anymore. You
stay put near a lake up north and don't want
to imagine the yellow light of the Cloth Hall,
the hum of life in Grodzka Street with its twelve
Apostles half-covered in silent ivy. No sainthood
for you—despite the First Communion veil,
the Confirmation dress, the flicker of red vigil lights.
You say you were never holy. I say you
are the holiest of all. Holier than me:
with your kind eyes, scarred hands,
your dreams deferred because a husband
could not, would not, did not share the dream.
You belong here, in the center of Europe.
This holy place of kings and an ancient
chakra that holds the air in an archway
before the castle's courtyard. You belong
here in the vibrant green of a Krakow park.
Not the muted green of the hospital's
cancer ward. The chemo turning your
auburn hair a shade of absence;
your nails brown; your urine teal.
How much longer will your body's
sense of color be kidnapped
before it remembers the photos I sent you?
Think of the light, my sister. The smudge
of a yellow moon hanging over the river.
And you—holding my hand as I point out
the muted swans, the white arc of roses
near the bridge, the gold edge of a day's end.

## Category 4:
The Barbara Sykes Memorial Humorous Poem

**First Place**
Cicada Apocalypse
*Ginny Grush, Farmington Hills, MI*

**Second Place**
Irish Weather Forecast
*Francis O'Brien, Pacifica, CA*

**Third Place**
The Best Things I Have Learned from Student Papers
*Michelle DeRose, Grand Rapids, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
The Impossible Dream
*David James, Linden, MI*

Cicada Apocalypse by *Ginny Grush*

I am the brood IX Cicada—
Nature-programmed to spend
17 years underground.
Then, to burst forth, molt,
dry my wings, attract a mate,
copulate—and die.
And I'm okay with that.

Bet you've heard my call
loudest in the insect kingdom.
Why, I can reach nearly
90 deafening, love-sick decibels
of vibrating, buzz-sawing
come-hither.

But, hey, what's happening?
My already over-heated sex-drive
is stuck in overdrive
sort of like the guy in Love Potion #9.

And there's something else—
I can't feel my abdomen,
my legs, my genitals.
They've dropped off—
Replaced by a fuzzy white fungus
Which has ZOMBIFIED me.
And now I am its spreader.

Nasty, nasty nature
But what a way to go.

Irish Weather Forecast / *Francis O'Brien*

we may see some frost early on high ground
with fog patches in low lying regions.
it will be wet and breezy on the coasts
but most of the country should encounter
sunny spells with showers throughout the day,
although periods of heavier rain
may be experienced from time to time;
the wind will be blustery from the south
freshening to westerly direction
later, bringing with it a chance of hail.
the change in wind direction might also
cause localized thunder and lightning.
it will be a pretty nice day in most
places—except for those in which it's not.

The Best Things I've Learned from Student Papers /
*Michelle DeRose*

An entire paper on Hester's Calvinist quilt
did not distract from the genealogical problems
cannabis might correct. It was sad to read
how one's aunt fell to a comma, another's mate
failed to welcome warmly the dorm's students
with turbines on their heads. Guess I knew
some states offer organ donation on a first-come,
first-severed basis, but was unaware older women
look sexy in leper-skin suits—or, at least Mrs. Robinson does.
New to a religious school, I learned from "Edgar
as a Jesus Figure" that he seems to have a "Christ-like
appearance and clothing choice, like the kind
of person who shops at The GAP or Land's End."
Glad she clarified: I didn't know where one shops for crowns
of thorns. Apparently, Jesus wore polos and button-downs.

## The Impossible Dream / *David James*

*—"I prefer to think of you as having no excrement."*
*overheard conversation, wife to her husband*

never
a frantic search
for a restroom
the dread
when you realize
after sitting down
there's no toilet paper
in the plastic holder

free
to drink as much coffee
as you desire
eat armfuls of bran muffins
walk the earth
with the cleanest underwear of all

farewell
to those nagging gut cramps
to the hours
sitting on the pot
reading a 2009 *Reader's Digest*
constipated and sweating

yes love
I too prefer to imagine myself
without excrement
but alas
you know better than anyone alive
I am
full of shit

## Category 5:
The George Dila Memorial Prose Poem

**First Place**
Almost Epiphany
*Jill Doster Marcusse, Grand Rapids, MI*

**Second Place**
Cupid with a Musket
*Linda Rosenthal, Fremont, MI*

**Third Place**
Morning
*Cynthia Weber Nankee, Canton, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
New Year's Resolutions
*Lynne Fernandez, Farmington Hills, MI*

Almost Epiphany / *Jill Doster Marcusse*

Driving into the mountains south of Mexico City, east of the rose farms we'd visited that day, Gilberto tells stories of the silver town we are headed for that evening. There is a church in Taxco, Santa Prisca, whose cupola was struck when a terrible storm blew in while it was being built in the sixteenth century. Out of the flashing lightning, a dark silhouette came swooping down. Everyone who saw it fell on their knees in fear, praying for deliverance. Above the church's steeple, as if in answer to their prayers, a beautiful woman appeared catching the lightning bolts in her hands. To this day Taxco remains a town of religious fervor. During Holy Week, three distinct groups of penitents come. The Animas come chained together at the ankles. They shuffle the cobblestone streets bent at a ninety-degree angle. The Encruzados carry bundles of thorned blackberry canes across their bare shoulders, arms outstretched as if on a cross. Flagelantes carry a whip embedded with metal points, a hundred pound wooden cross and a rosary. An attendant with each holds the cross at specific intervals as the Flagelantes kneel and whip themselves. Each day the older wounds are opened once again. These practices, brought by the Spanish, found fertile ground as the Aztec too practiced blood rituals. Gilberto pauses. "But perhaps this is not the best pre-dinner conversation. We should talk of the hectares of beautiful roses we saw instead. Do you not think the rose without thorns, Meilland's Grand Gala will be a Godsend for your florists?" Suddenly a red car in reverse, throwing sparks from its under-carriage, flies by my window. When it has passed, a dark, serious man with a rifle is stepping toward me. He is so close, I can't help but look into his very black eyes. Fear flies out of me, a flock of starlings exploding from a cottonwood. "Get down!" Gilberto yells, floors it. We topple and crouch. He ducks behind the wheel, swerves past the two banditos and the boulders they've dragged into the road. No shots follow us. In the clear, we rise slowly, look at one another, say, "Holy Shit! and "What the fuck was that?" We all light cigarettes. Exhale slowly. I'd fall on my knees if there was room.

Cupid with a Musket / *Linda Rosenthal*

Standing in an airport, waiting to go home. A bored stranger musters a conversation. I tell her where I've been. I tell her about the carving. I found it in Germany, Oberammergau, where the world famous Passion Play is held every ten years. Spared from the Black Plague, they do the Play, carve wood into riots of beautiful things. I laughed when I found him, Cupid or cherub, pink-faced chubby virgin boy, sporting a Tyrolean hat, clutching his musket. She asks to see my prize. I pull him out and her face screws up into a punching fist of dismay. She turns away. I cannot explain myself. Either my humor is twisted or hers is non-existent, probably both. Perhaps she was thinking of Dachau. I visited that horror on this trip. I shivered, felt dark inside the empty cold gas chamber. Perhaps she was a victim of gun violence. I was. I didn't know the wood carver's intention. Did they laugh as they formed this figure? Did they think: philosophical juxtaposition mind games about life and death? Love can be lethal. The wood spoke to her/him. They listened. What else can you do with guilty splinters? Was the artist on the side of angels or demons? I don't know. I do know this: one uncle died in 1944, body washed up onto a French beach. His people, our people, came from Germany to the U.S. by way of Ukraine. He had to go back, fight, die, at the hands of people who may have been cousins. He and his buddies shaved the "V" for victory in their chest hairs before they left for the war front. He had a young man's sense of humor. I suspect he would have laughed at Cupid too. I placed red roses on his headstone at Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, where he is buried, far from home and judgment.

Morning / *Cynthia Weber Nankee*

Waking with coffee and birds, I proceed to pour myself into a fresh outdoors – where I count the buds that will give birth this day. A few tomatoes have rouged their cheeks, and the pregnant melons are now quickening. Near the garden gate, a sizzle of bacon begins to telegraph its aromatic signature from a neighbor's open window. Hunger (that forever guest in my house) rolls over in bed, then rises. I return inside – to bright chrome tossing slabs of toast in the air – to butter seeping into its yeasted soil – to newsprint on my fingertips . . .

Afternoon is inevitable. It will barge in, wearing practical shoes – start washing windows, cleaning toilets, making phone calls. I think I'll ask it to ring up morning for me. You know – just to say hello.

New Year's Resolutions / *Lynne Fernandez*

To lose weight. To stop drinking. To stop smoking. To stop nagging my husband. To stop lying to my wife. To learn how to swim underwater. To learn a foreign language. To learn how to say NO. To write the Great American Novel. To write the Best Poem Ever Written—and then, memorize it. All the guests at the New Year Eve's party in a Detroit bar have resolutions filled with the standard cliches or—even worse—the standard hubris. All of them, except the unemployed jazz musician whose wife died three weeks ago. He cries and cries and says he just wants to start living his life again. Everything around him is silent—even the raucous celebration on the flatscreen TV in the background seems muted. Then, the blue crystal ball drops in Times Square. An hour later, everyone—Pete, Lynn, Mike, Joy, Gene, Rebecca, Paul, Cynthia, Todd, Therese—went back to their lives. Everyone. Except the man with his silent music who was trying to find his.

## Category 6:
Nature—The Jude P. Dunbar Memorial Prize

**First Place**
Ruby Throat at Midsummer
*Michelle DeRose, Grand Rapids, MI*

**Second Place**
Park San Miguel, Spain
*Marianne Peel, Lexington, Ky*

**Third Place**
Fledgling Calls
*Chelsea Szczembara, Brighton, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
Earth Elegy
*Dawn Levitt, Harrison Township, MI*

Ruby Throat at Midsummer / *Michelle DeRose*

She appears like a fleck that floats
in the periphery, fly-bottle green
on her body's sideways fermata.
She curls over her streaked throat
as she needles the feeder, a sphene
hovering. She probes the vibrant deep.
Everything about her small except
the effort but even that's hard to see,
wings so swift they fuzz above her arc.
How it must tire her, the thimbled heart
pumping to sustain these nightly sips
of what in this world remains sweet.

Park San Miguel, Spain / *Marianne Peel*

She gathers the bougainvillea
from the steps where the January winds
have transplanted the petals.

Paper flowers,
lavender and red and fire-orange,
released from their thorns.

Some say the bougainvillea have no scent,
save the fragrance of the air,
just fresh, just clean.

Some say these flowers carry a powdery perfume,
a caress of Mediterranean sea currents,
a touch of breeze on one's pashmina shawl.

And some say the bougainvillea take on
the cologne of a thekla lark whistling
in the branches of the blue jacaranda.

Some say the bougainvillea
adopt the scent of love,
the blush of lovers.

She carries
this aroma of longing
in the pockets of her Kantha robe.

Her robe, made of swatches of saris
women have worn while gathering herbs from the market,
while massaging mango and pomegranate.

She places the petals on her nightstand
in a gold-ribbed porcelain saucer
to absorb the soft fragrance
of sunrise lovers.

Fledgling Calls / *Chelsea Szczembara*

Bent over the laundry, reaching into the back
of the machine for the last sock and yet another
jolly rancher wrapper, the shoes on the rack chirp.
The cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep
steadily beckons to me as I bend down expecting
feathered soles, and winged laces to spread
out of rainbow sparkle tennis shoes.
Pushing aside Cat Kid Comic Club, and last year's sandals,
I see the aluminum cap over the old dryer vent,
tweets seeping through the cracks.

Out on the porch, the old vent hood's barely attached,
hanging off-angle with dried gladiola leaves,
that I never quite got to clearing last fall,
sticking out like scarecrow stuffing from the hole.

Inside, translucent heads with necks too thin
to hold their oversized beaks stretch upward,
silently screaming at the sudden loss of warm feathers
over their bald bodies, and aching bellies.

While perched on the cushion stained with grape jelly,
my children call repeatedly for me to watch their cartwheel,
untangle their kite string, and admire their chalk
composition of a unicorn-mermaid-cat eating a taco.

The mother flits around the perimeter, from porch edge to rooftop,
a bug clamped in her beak, waiting for me to step away
to tie an errant shoe lace or buckle a helmet without pinching skin.
I leave my seat to retrieve the ball, rolling across the road
and she seizes the chance to answer the call of her nest.

Earth Elegy / *Dawn Levitt*

You don’t need to be an eagle
to see the view
from forty thousand feet or a
telescope to savor the curvature of the earth.
You need not smell the smoke of burning forests
or ride a dolphin over the waves to feel
the rising of the sea.
You need only to ask the bees
whose trembling legs, heavy with pollen,
whose whirring wings fan the air in a frenzy
as they carry the payload back to their queen
who readies her eggs to protect the colony
against collapse.
Ask the frogs whose croak in the night used to pale
beside the crickets playing symphonies on their
violin-bow legs under bedroom windows.
Ask the fireflies who used to rise
over the darkened meadow grass
with as many blinking lights toward the horizon as
distant stars fill the night sky.
Now, frogs and crickets fall silent,
stars shine alone,
and the barren queen fills the honeycomb with
unfertilized eggs,
sealing each with wax like
hexagonal caskets.

## **Category 7:**
Overcoming Adversity

**First Place**
Find a Roost
*Joy Gaines-Friedler, Farmington Hills, MI*

**Second Place**
Kintsugi*
*Ann Glumac, Duluth, MN*

**Third Place**
Life Lines
*Isabella J. Mansfield, Howell, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
How To Ask
*Joanne Gram, Lansing, MI*

Find a Roost / *Joy Gaines-Friedler*

When the wrongs of the world feel too big
look toward what is small: the shadow
of a leaf; the pattern of a dragonfly wing;
things that live alongside our disasters. To what end
do wild roses bloom if not to serve the needs of bees?
Go at dusk to the old smokestack preserved as sanctuary—
a roosting site for Swifts, tens of thousands of Swifts—
gather yourself to witness the flight of migration.
Be the chipping calls, the sound and swirl,
the cacophony of community. Join the gathering.
Let the world feel cooperative. Funnel into a safe place.
Aren't we all the epitome of such delicacy
and strength, vulnerability and survival?
When the wrongs of the world feel too big
find the smaller, bigger things.

Kintsugi* / *Ann Glumac*

The shards are scattered
the vessel shattered
from within

a heart heavy with grief
burst open and broken
but still beating.

Thin walls made
of modest clay
smoothed and teased

on the potter's wheel
spinning like
the earth itself.

Broken pieces
still beautiful, still strong
so the artist

gathers them up
fits jagged edges
together with mortar

joins pieces with
precious metal
distilled from tears.

**Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending areas of breakage with lacquer mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum*

Life Lines / *Isabella J. Mansfield*

It wasn't until my hair began to fall out that I
realized how sick I had been

How so much of my body had shut down
in self-preservation

How there's no way to know how close to death
one can be without dying

How I have no way to know what has recovered,
and what I have lost

What I have now are scars, the way my body
holds on to wounds in remembrance

the deepened crease of my brow, as I have tried
to make sense of living

and a single, silver hair. She reflects light in the
mirror, catching my eye as if to say

"look at me. remember your breath. remember
the fight. I was earned, and you are alive."

How To Ask / *Joanne Gram*

How are you feeling about today?
Overwhelmed by feelings.
Overcome by the sunburn
and searching for shadows
Have you been to the meadow?
Once when I was young.
It was littered with thistles and
regrets that left scratches and
welts. I felt them for years.
Have you showered in tears,
held your arms open for hugging?
Once, when the morning came to
my room love was there and
I was warm.
Can you begin again?
No, I search and fear to find
what I may lose.
How do you go on?
The world is a vast sea and
I am buoyant. I survive. But
saltwater stings.

## Category 8:
The Faruq Z. Bey Award for Poetry Related to Music

**First Place**
Für Elise in the Waiting Room
*Colleen Alles, Grand Rapids, MI*

**Second Place**
Love Song for Judy Collins
*Marianne Peel, Lexington, KY*

**Third Place**
I Kept Your Pillow Next to Me Until It Was Stale
*Sherrin Frances, Saginaw, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
The Singing Forest
*Lynne Schmidt, Norway, ME*

Für Elise in the Waiting Room / *Colleen Alles*

In ten minutes, her pediatrician
will hold his yearly stethoscope

between her shoulder blades,
tell her to take a deep breath, let it out

easy. As we wait, she plays
the upright in the corner, impatient

for me to teach her the bass clef:
the broken chords of the left hand

on the keys. My own teacher
called this a rite of passage—

a piece for an intermediate pianist
to master. It's this word

that gets me: intermediate.
In between.

With her right hand, she's got it down:
the effortless lilt of E to D,

then back to E. The receptionist
behind glass smiles at me.

I read once Für Elise wasn't even
published in Beethoven's lifetime.

Decades later, a musicologist
spied the genius on loose sheets.

Such a unique and gorgeous
song, marked with phases

of darkness and complexity.
Now I hear beneath the immediate

sweetness. I hear
the notes cutting sharp and flat.

In between intensities, the song
slows

as though to sort
itself out. As though

letting out a breath.
It’s this word

that gets me: inevitability.
The song recognizing

patterns inside itself. I hear
those notes

remembering.
Now, I hear

arpeggios echoing
in memory.

Love Song for Judy Collins / *Marianne Peel*

This summer you floated in
on a thunder sky at Ravinia.
Purple glitter of a gown, white twine hair
like a waterfall of sixteenth notes
down your back. You have arrived
unbraided, unbridled.

You weave melismas through the lightning.
Your soprano vibrates leaves
off the Linden trees.

I want to make duets with you,
with Leonard Cohen snug at the piano bench.
Take us down to the river
to hold Suzanne as she swoons
at the filigreed edges of the lacy sea.

Holy trinity of sacred banquets,
let us feed on each other,
on the harsh mistress of moonlight,
on tea and oranges that come
all the way from China.

Let us travel blind.
Let us travel unencumbered
by the laws of time signatures,
by the limitations of major or minor keys.
Let us pulse to the symphony
directed in circular time,
spiraling in on itself.

The piano keys slathered
with smoky oolong tea,
the flesh of oranges
squeezed in the cradle of the harbor,
we wear rags and feathers,
we lather ourselves in Moonlight Path lotion,
we weave white blinking lights through our braids –
now, now, let us search
for heroines in the seaweed.

I Kept Your Pillow Next to Me Until It Was Stale / *Sherrin Frances*

and our oldest cat began sleeping there instead,
and did you know, she is the size of a pigeon now, twenty-two and
deaf,

and she can't hear me when I coo at her
so I put my lips on her ribs and hum you are my sunshine

until she wakes and screams, I am here,
and the sound bounces down into the soft crater where your head
used to be,

and beside this cavity filled with the echoes of this animal
who cannot hear the shout of her own voice,
I am here I am here I am here,

I lay down my own head and cover my ears
and dream that I am screaming, too.

*— Buchenwald Camp:*
*October 26, 1944 – April 20, 1945 estimated*

Toward the end,
as memories wore away like breath in a chamber,
my babcia sang Polish love songs,
and still tried to dance
though her legs laid flat like noodles,
her arms waving like bodies hung in trees.

In the camp,
they forced prisoner hands,
and bound them behind backs.
Attached a rope to the shackled wrists,
threw the rope over a tree branch,
pulled.

It was called the Singing Forest,
and my ciocia likely heard the song
and fought like hell to not sing along.
My ciocia lived to nearly one hundred years old,
when my cousin asked what was wrong,
she was able to say, “I don’t know,”
before she took her last breath.

I heard once, that “The good ones didn’t last”
in the camps.
Sometimes, I wonder what she had to do
to survive.

## Category 9:
Loss

**First Place**
Two Women
*Lissa Perrin, Ann Arbor, MI*

**Second Place**
Fannie Lou Hamer's Note to My Dad
*Nan Jackson, East Lansing, MI*

**Third Place**
Weekends With Mom
*Terry Jude Miller, Richmond, TX*

**Honorable Mention**
They Sell Hazmat Suits at Home Depot
*Joy Gaines-Friedler, Farmington Hills, MI*

Two Women / *Lissa Perrin*

Matisse's Antoinette sits alone with her breakfast pushed aside—
thick black coffee, dry brioche, a plum—tasteless.
She's still in her virginal summer nightgown, despite the hour.
Two weeks gone—two years—two eternities. She isn't sure.
A few fading flowers remain, the only life in the room.

She wonders vaguely if she'll get dressed today.

My mother sits alone at the drop leaf table
in her yellow kitchen—head too heavy for her neck.
She lacks the luxury of staying in her dressing gown,
the time to shed tears or the energy to rage.
She pushes wheat toast around on her plate, mindlessly.

She will go to work.

She's dressed in a gray skirt and black twinset,
pearl necklace, low-heeled pumps—
no color—her widow's weeds. Her face is pale
and drawn from the cruelty of sleepless nights
and the abrupt departure of the waking dreams they'd shared.

## Fannie Lou Hamer's Note to My Dad / *Nan Jackson*

*—Re: Donation to the Freedom Farm Cooperative*

Filed away, letters from a lifetime,
a few of the many he received
now three-holed and
numbered. Collected
in plastic sleeves, a binder
ending with a short note of thanks.
Lights sometimes shine from our past
out of the muddle of mourning,
under the weight of remembering.
This note of thanks
once a slip of paper in a type-
writer, possibly written
not by a personal
secretary but by Fannie Lou herself at the
end of a day. Held to the light
now, like a gift from my father, his
death new again, his voice in my ear.
Had I forgotten,
as I sifted through the boxes, what
meant the most to him?
Each fragile piece of evidence one more
receipt of what he held dear.

Weekends With Mom / *Terry Jude Miller*

I wish the crossword puzzles you worked
would have spared you from three letters—ALS.

I broke up a hamburger into birdseed. You pecked
at it on a plate atop a rollaway TV tray. I held

a straw to your mouth so you could wash it down
with Dr. Pepper. Your eyes flashed over

the rim of your glasses to let me know
I could take it away. I wiped your lips

and chin with a paper towel—playfully
you nipped at my index finger to let me

know there was still fight in you. The stone
in my chest heaved when I lifted

you from your chair and brought you
to the toilet. We knew what was necessary,

no time for embarrassment or modesty.
Disease pushed mother and son past that.

I helped you into bed, turned on Jeopardy,
rubbed your arms with morphine crème,

removed your glasses, rolled ointment
on your lips, kissed your cheek. You looked

at me to convey what you could no longer speak.
*I love you too, Mom*. Damn, to do that again,

for you to bite the flesh you gave me
and never let go.

## They Sell Hazmat Suits at Home Depot / *Joy Gaines-Friedler*

*—35 days after the Pacific Palisades fire, Jan. 7, 2025*

My sister will wear a white one today
white against the insult of blue sky
as she visits the site of her incinerated life.

I ask if she will seek to find
something of the before. Hell no.
She says. That life is over.

She'll meet the agent
of her future; measure what was
in cubic inches & square footage,

maybe point out where neighbors
once lived; defer to their disaster
in order not to feel her own.

But that's just me. My sense of her loss
merely imagination.

*The furniture was eating me anyway*
she may as well have said, in order
to help herself move on.

What is fate anyway but the meeting
between circumstance and outcome.
How much wisdom comes from anguish?

Her husband's piano is gone. His shoes & shirts,
every receipt, book case, his car, her mouth guard
& glasses...Even the bird feeders are gone.

She tells me a neighbor has hired a sniffing dog
to find the urn—or her husband's ashes it held.
*She wants to schlep him around with her*

*the rest of her life.* She jokes. And I laugh,
because it's funny.

## Category 10:
Women in Science

**First Place**
Mary Anning: Rewriting the History of Life on Earth
*Marianne Peel, Lexington, KY*

**Second Place**
Proof
*Katherine Edgren, Dexter, MI*

**Third Place**
The Slumbering Quiet
*Susan Haifleigh, Northville, MI*

**Honorable Mention**
Truth in Discovery
*Debra Belcher, Tustin, MI*

Mary Anning: Rewriting the History of Life on Earth /
*Marianne Peel*

Bind me to the precarious cliffs
of England's Lyme Regis. Be mindful
that my wet nurse tried to shelter us
from the storm, shivering beneath an oak tree.
Remember that she lost her life, holding me,
just fifteen months old. Struck by lightning,
she was. Bind me to the women who cradled me home,
soothed me in a washtub of warmth,
singing songs of the sea,
massaging me into a miracle,
with their washerwoman hands.

Bind me to my fossil-hunting father,
who taught me the art of digging.
Who showed me how to extract curiosities
with my own two hands. I became
an entrepreneur, a hawker of these oddities,
to tourists who would look to the cliffs
with amazement eyes, but paralyzed feet.
Their coins for my excavations
put bread and mutton on our family table.

Bind me to the hours I explored,
hours I spent combing the shore.
No safety net. Just the precarious cliffs,
my soles searching for solid footing.
Bind me to the faithfulness of Tray,
my companion on every dig. My loyal
spaniel, guarding all my fossil finds
on the slim shore of the beach.

Bind me to the skeleton, at age twelve,
I spent seven months unearthing:
the bones of Ichthyosaur,
the long-necked sea dragon.
Bind me to my discovery
that ancient creatures could indeed go extinct.
Could disappear from the surface of our planet.

Attribute to me the first complete Plesiosaur skeleton,
the study of coprolites, helping future scientists
map the prehistoric food chain.

Bind me to the memory of my beloved Tray,
my guardian on the cliffs of Lyme Regis.
With me, dear spaniel, until a massive landslide
buried his breathing on those ragged rock mountains.
Bind me to those mysterious cliffs
sheltering secrets I would reveal
with my very own hands,
skeleton by skeleton, bone by bone.

Proof / *Katherine Edgren*

We dressed in long skirts and bonnets one fall Saturday,
gathered bacon fat from our mothers,
and built a fire under a metal pot in Mary's yard.

Challenged by a male science teacher's remark
that women today are soft compared with those of yore,
we bent to candle-making.

We strung would-be wicks over hot fat,
and dipped and cooled all afternoon,
producing skinny, ivory-colored tapers.

The sun set. Growing cold, Mary walked me home.
A stranger shot us a quizzical look, our aroma no doubt
insulting his nose all the way across the street.

Autumn afternoons and the smell of smoke
never fail to ignite the memory of us
presenting seven candles to our teacher.

## The Slumbering Quiet / *Susan Haifleigh*

*—a tribute to Rachel Louise Carson*

The morning arrived without a single note,
a heavy shroud settled over the orchard,
no music poured from any robin red,
no hum of insects on the brittle breeze.

The fields sprayed silver, toxic rain,
called it progress, safety, a cure,
blind to the shadow spreading in the grain,
blind to the poison killing the pure.

A steady voice woke, armed not with thunder,
but truth and light, a dying woman with a pen
spoke, cast a flare into the gathering dark.

Giants roared to silence her decree,
mocked her science, defamed her name,
Yet she stood, as constant as the sea,
unshaken by their anger, their blame.

Forests sing because she dared to speak,
rivers flow unabated to distant shores,
She gave voice to creatures once weak,
woke the world from a dangerous sleep.

Rest well, brave sister, in the earth you saved,
your gentle words still echo each Spring,
across the path of healing you paved,
the wild awakened choirs rise and sing.

The Truth in Discovery / *Debra Belcher*

The ink was still wet on the ledger
when she realized the stars were lying.

They told her the sky was a velvet curtain,
a static map of ancestral ghosts,
but she saw the drift, the shudder,
the way the light bent like a broken reed
under the weight of something unseen.

She spent all those years in the margins,
a ghost in a lab coat,
calculating the curvature of a universe
that refused to acknowledge her name.

She was the hand that polished the lens,
the eye that caught the anomaly,
the voice that whispered the truth
into the ear of a man who took the credit.

They called it discovery when he spoke it;
they called it intuition when she found it.

But the data does not have a gender.
The titration does not care for the shape of the hand
that holds the pipette, nor the
silence of the woman who charted the pulse
of a dying star while the coffee grew cold in her mug.

She learned to speak in the language of shadows—
of radioactive decay and the geometry of cells,
finding the patterns in the noise
that the loud men missed because they were too busy
listening to the sound of their own applause.

Now, the archives are reopening.
The footnotes are beginning to scream.
The erased ink is bleeding back into the page,
and the stars—those ancient, honest liars—
are finally admitting who first saw them move.

## Judges' Bios

Category 1: **Ken Meisel** is a poet and psychotherapist, a 2012 Kresge Arts Literary Fellow, Pushcart Prize nominee, Best of the Net nominee, and the author of eleven poetry collections. His recent collections are, *Chasing Names on Nameless Water* (Kelsay Books, 2025) and *The Light Most Glad of All* (Kelsay Books, 2023). He was the featured poet in the movie: "Detroit: Tough Luck Stories," by Mary Sommers.

Category 2: **Keith Taylor** has published twenty volumes over the years, including chapbooks, edited volumes, and a translation from Modern Greek. He has had fellowships and residencies from, among others, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Detroit YMCA, and Isle Royale National Park. He is the A. L. Becker Collegiate Lecturer, Emeritus, at the University of Michigan.

Category 3: **Cindy Hunter Morgan** is the author of *Far Company* (Wayne State University Press) and *Harborless* (WSU Press), which was a 2018 Michigan Notable Book and the winner of the 2017 Moveen Prize in Poetry. She also is the author of two chapbooks. Her artist's books are held in special collections in libraries throughout the country. She teaches at Michigan State University.

Category 4: **Diane DeCillis** is a poet, writer, playwright, and former gallery owner whose books include *Strings Attached*, a Michigan Notable Book and Next Generation Indie Book Award winner, and *When the Heart Needs a Stunt Double*. Her poetry has appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Columbia Journal*, *The Minnesota Review*, and *Rattle*. Her poem "The Artist and His Volcano," selected for the Lunar Codex, was sent to the moon in 2025.

Category 5: **Marc J. Sheehan** is the author of two full-length poetry collections and two poetry chapbooks. His flash fiction has been featured on NPR's Three-Minute Fiction series and Selected Shorts. Most recently, his hybrid/flash fiction chapbook, *The Civil War War*, was published by Paper Nautilus. He lives in Grand Haven, Michigan.

Category 6: **Robert Haight** has published four poetry collections, *Water Music*, *Emergences and Spinner Falls*, *Feeding Wild Birds*, and *Shimmer.* He has written essays and articles on fly fishing, the environment, education and spirituality for a variety of anthologies, journals and magazines. He divides his time between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas of Michigan.

Category 7: **Jan Worth's** three books are a novel, *Night Blind;* a collection of essays, *That's My Moon Over Court Street: Dispatches from a Life in Flint;* and her newest, a 2026 collection of poetry, *Elegies from the Last Days of the Empire*. Retired from decades as a writing teacher at the University of Michigan Flint, she remains active in the poetry world, with recent work in *Dunes Review, Tulip Tree Press*, and upcoming in *Eunoia Review.*

Category 8: **Dennis Hinrichsen** published his twelfth book of poems, *dementia lyrics*, earlier this year from Green Linden Press. His previous books include *Dominion + Selected Poems, Flesh-plastique* and *schema geometrica*. From 2017-2019, he served as the first Lansing Poet Laureate.

Category 9: **Alan Basting** was born in Detroit and grew up in northwest Ohio. He earned graduate degrees from Colorado State University (MA) and Bowling Green State University (MFA). He taught creative writing, composition and literature at University of Cincinnati and Owens Community College in Toledo. He's published nine books and chapbooks; his most recent is *Weathered Man* from Kelsey Books, 2025. More information regarding Alan and his poetry can be found at: *alanbastingpoetry.com*.

Category 10: **Christine Rhein** is the author of *Wild Flight* (Walt McDonald Prize, Texas Tech University Press) and *Swerve* (forthcoming from Wayne State University Press). Her poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Rattle*, and in anthologies including *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. Christine lives in Brighton, Michigan.

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