

# News 'N' Notes

November 2022

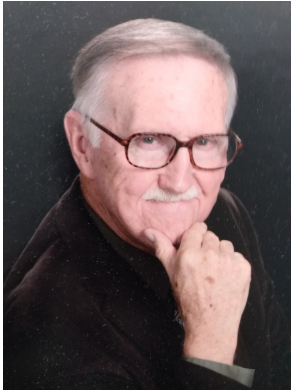
## Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

Founded February 5, 1931

Member of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc.

<http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org>

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### President's Address

PRA Members:

The little library of my high school contained a volume of *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg*. A hefty volume, I've often wondered if anyone but me ever checked it out. Thumbing through a more recent printing recently, I noted a few of my favorite poems: "Chicago"; "Child of the Romans"; "Skyscraper"; "Fog".

A few years ago I stumbled upon one I had not noticed before entitled "Graceland." The first line reads "Tomb of a millionaire." How eerily prophetic, I thought, to have been written years before Elvis was born. I have no idea what "Graceland" Mr. Sandburg was referring to. There is a Graceland Cemetery near Washington D. C. but it's not a final resting place for millionaires.

His long poem "The People, Yes" contains some lines that have stuck with me through the years, especially during election cycles: "The people will live on. The learning and blundering people will live on. They will be tricked and sold and again sold and go back to the nourishing earth for rootholds,..." How many times has that happened through the years? By the way, there's an election soon. Don't forget to vote.

**John McPherson**

President, PRA

### Poetry Day October 15, 2022 Sybil Nash Abrams Award Winners

First Place: **Marilyn Joyner** "The River Called Ouachita"

Second Place: **Donna Smith** "Nature Preserved: The Buffalo"

Third Place: **Elizabeth Dail** "Deeper Than the North Fork's Waters"

First Honorable Mention: **John McPherson** "Big River, Little River"

Second Honorable Mention: **Dennis Patton** "Arkansas River"

Third Honorable Mention: **Fay Guinn** "Arkansas National Treasure"

See full list of winners here:

<https://poetsroundtableofarkansas.files.wordpress.com/2022/10/2022-poetry-day-contest-winners.pdf>

## *Welcome New Members*

**JR Barrow** of Bryant, AR; **Lori Goetz** of Germantown, TN; **Sheri Hayes** of Hot Springs, AR; **Deena Philips Hardin** of Magnolia, AR; **Mary Gray** of Hot Springs, AR.

## *Transition*

**June Pruitt**, a long-time member of the Saline County Branch of PRA, passed away August 2, 2022. Even though in later years June's health prevented her from actively participating in PRA, she continued to support PRA with her membership and never quit writing poetry. June will be greatly missed.

<https://www.smithfamilycares.com/obituaries/wanda-pruitt>

**Birma Castle**, a longtime member of the Poetry Society of Tennessee and friend to many PRA members passed away October 20, 2022. Her obituary can be found here: <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/beaumont-tx/birma-castle-10977116>

\*Just a reminder that the monthly contest entries must now be postmarked by the "first" Saturday of each month that has a contest.

## *August Monthly Contest Winners*

Judge: **John McPherson**; 12 entries

First Place: **Betty Jo Middleton** "The Goose That Laid the Tarnished Egg"

Second Place: **Dennis Patton** "As Easy as Falling Off a Log"

Third Place: **Kerri Hardesty** "Library"

First Honorable Mention: **Terrie Jacks** "Going Down in Flames"

Second Honorable Mention: **John Crawford** "One Can't Go Home Again"

Third Honorable Mention: **Marilyn Joyner** "Who Done It?"

## *September Monthly Contest Winners*

Judge: **Pat Durmon**, 16 entries

First Place: **Dennis Patton** "The Years and Summers of Learning"

Second Place: **Patricia Laster** "Mother's fingers..."

Third Place: **John McPherson** "Going Out On The Ice"

First Honorable Mention: **Cathy Moran** "Learning from age"

Second Honorable Mention: **Dr. Emory D. Jones** "My Father's Hands"

Third Honorable Mention: **Faye Adams** "Biscuits and Gravy"

## *From the Pen of Our Poet Laureate*

The "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" has turned our leaves

to crimson gold and our thoughts bittersweet as darkness clamps down daylight but not the light shining in beloved faces gathered for the holidays. Always there are upturns and downturns, and our necessary work as poets is to catch words to tie to life's changes like tails to a kite.

A wonderful upturn for me was being with the first-place winners and their families of my Yum's the Word poetry contest in the office of Governor Asa Hutchinson at his invitation. Emma Wright (13) of Hot Springs and Elinor Johnson (9) of Arkadelphia were the winners in the upper and lower grade divisions, respectively. Besides receiving cash awards and framed certificates, they each read their poem aloud to the governor, gave him a copy, and had their pictures taken with him. It was an exciting day for all of us. I'm currently thinking about my next project of the year



(and into 2023) which will also be designed to reach Arkansas kids with the power and pleasures of poetry. Sophia Wright and I will collaborate on some ways to achieve this, and I may be asking some of you for ideas as well once I have a draft proposal. Another project I'm pleased to be involved in with several leaders in the state is Literary Landmarks, now under the auspices of the Library of Congress, to encourage the dedication of historic literary sites. Two such sites are being considered. I will report further as plans unfold concretely.

Other upturns: I had a wonderful visit to the University of Central Arkansas where I read to a warm and welcoming audience of students and faculty from three schools. Professor Michael Blanchard is the new editor of *Slant*, UCA's fine poetry journal, and he quickly instituted a Visiting Poets annual event, honoring me by inviting me to be the first. I also was able to attend Poetry Day in Benton and enjoyed the reading given by Tyrone Jaeger whose wonderful strangeness and originality was often electrifying, and whose "Tools, not Rules" talk was encouraging and helpful. As always, it was good to see all my PRA friends. How I appreciate all the hard work done by so many to make the day a success. So many of you won contests—so many won *many* contests! Wow, was I impressed! Congratulations to each of you.

I'm writing new work for a collection in progress and have had opportunities to see many of the poems in print, one being in the current *Medicine and Meaning*, UAMS' creative writing journal, where I got to rub shoulders with John McPherson. His poem "Going Out on the Ice" is remarkable. Check it out:  
<https://medicineandmeaning.uams.edu/>.

Be warmed in spirit and body this holiday season,  
 Suzanne

## *Spring 2023 Annual Poetry Contests for Middle and High School Students*

Information is on the PRA website. Help get the word out to students and teachers you know.

Also, a sponsor who wishes to remain anonymous came forward at Poetry Day to fully fund the Collegiate Poetry Contest. More information about that is forthcoming.

## *Poets and Prose Authors Wanted*

Poets and/or prose authors willing to conduct a free lecture and/or workshop at Scott Settlement, please contact **Sara Gipson** at [saragipson@aol.com](mailto:saragipson@aol.com) or 502-416-0868. Poets and/or authors keep all money for any books sold during their lecture/workshop.

## *Profile: New Member*

**Deena Hardin** I must have fallen in love with poetry before I could talk. My mother read Dr. Seuss books to me nearly every night when I was a baby, and those books still light me up (sorry, I know Dr. Seuss isn't PC these days). I continued to read the books for myself, then to my kids, then to my grandkids. I wrote (or tried) song lyrics when I was a teenager. Even though my poetry writing journey has been a bit spotty, I love it more than any other genre and have two small books of my poems for sale on Amazon. (They're not selling well.) Some of my grandmother's sisters wrote poetry, recited poetry they learned as children (I wish I had recordings!), and encouraged me to write poetry. Beyond the family circle, I was drawn early on to Edgar Allan Poe, Carl Sandburg, Emily Dickinson, e.e. cummings, T.S. Eliot, Dorothy Parker,



Sylvia Plath--too many others to name. As I read and learned more, I found I enjoyed free verse and "confessional" poets and writing like them, but now I've come full circle and love to try writing formal/rhyming poetry at times.

I have, more than once, gone 10 years without writing any poems at all. I do tend to wait for inspiration to strike, which is silly. Everyone who loves writing poetry should try to write something every day, even if it's just a few ideas for new poems or revising old ones. I've tried keeping a daily journal but always fail. Mostly I scribble notes in a notebook or peck them into the Notes app on my phone. If I get to sit still long enough, I type them into a poetry file on my laptop, where I always hope they'll take shape into a poem.

One of the best pieces of advice I've ever received is to go through everything I've written and cut out all the "useless" words, anything that doesn't move it along. I try to do that with poetry *and* prose.

Since I was 10 years old--when I started playing violin--I thought of myself primarily as a musician. I played professionally and made a decent living teaching stringed instruments for decades in Arkansas and then Texas. Circumstances brought me back to Arkansas, where I went to work at a newspaper for a time after a restaurant venture failed. Writing feature articles on interesting folks in the community was a great joy for me. After my husband died in 2018 and Covid hit, I flipped and flopped from one job to another, but I'm in a good position now. My nearly-teenager granddaughter lives with me full time, and I have multiple rescued pets to care for, so free time is nearly nonexistent! I hope to get back to writing more for pleasure soon.

### ***Daddy***

His breath was a minty, smoky breeze  
after millions of drags on his Kools,  
his voice the rugged *basso profundo*  
of several tongues the Army taught him.  
His mind ran to and from wars—foreign,  
domestic—  
some could have been won, some  
couldn't.

His training was mechanical—  
planes, trains, automobiles.  
His job was driving a truck *to see the States*  
since he'd *already seen the world*.  
His step was lively until it wasn't  
from ankylosing spondylitis,  
his legs scarred from burns that were  
crisscrossed by skin grafts.  
His mornings began with the pop  
of the tab of a Coors can;  
his evenings ended that way, a case  
later—  
said it helped dull the pain.  
His words to me twenty pounds ago  
would be  
*fat like your mother. Ach, du.*  
His demons were legion and danced  
in the murky dark of his eyes.



Poetry Day  
Contest Chair  
and Board  
Member at  
Large,  
**Christine  
Henderson**  
reads the long  
list of Poetry  
Day Contest  
winners at  
Poetry Day,  
October 15,  
2022.



## *Congratulations and Newsworthy*

**Pat Laster's** article on chapter three of Michael Bugeja's *The Art and Craft of Poetry*, on nature poems, was published in the Fall issue of *Calliope: A Writer's Workshop by Mail* based in Green Valley, AZ: she received a third place in the ASPS Award contest in Arizona. The poem will be published in this year's AZ anthology, *Sandcutters*.

**Melissa M. Frye's** "A Testimony from the White River Gospel" was published in *Agape Review* online; "Revelation in White Rock National Forest" was published in *Mid/South Anthology* from Belle Point Press.

<https://agapereview.com/2022/07/23/atestimonyfromthewhiterivergospel/>

**Dr. Emory D. Jones'** haiku: "Baby robins chirp..." "The warm spring sunshine..." "Daffodils spout sun..." "Crepe myrtle bursts forth..." were published in the May 29, 2022 issue of *The Weekly Avocet*; "Playful Spring: A Kyreille" was published in the May 29, 2022 issue of *The Weekly Avocet* and in *Whispering Willow: Tree Poems* 2022 edition; "Spring Jewel Bush" and "The Courtyard" were published in the May 29, 2022 issue of *The Weekly Avocet*; "Art Appreciation—A Golden Shovel Poem" was published in *Prize Poems of 2022* a journal of the Pennsylvania Poetry Society: "New Year II: A Golden Shovel Poem" won Second Place in Category #35 (Ohio Award) in the National Federation of State Poetry Societies Contest and was published in *Encore, Prize Poems 2022*, the journal of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies; "Wind castle," "First Horse," and "Painted Desert" were published in the *WyoPoets News* of July 2022; "The Patriot" was published in the

*Tunica Voice* newspaper on July 13, 2022; "Girls at the Piano" and "Lost in Wal-Mart" were published in the August 2022 Edition of *Pennsylvania's Poetic Voices*; "Reverie at Slack Time" was published in the *Pegasus: Spring 2022* issue; "Delta General" was published in *Jerry Jazz Musician: Summer 2022* edition; "Water Lilies" was published in the Spring 2022 issue of *Pasque Petals*; "Winter Haiku" and "The Piano" were published in Fall 2022 issue of *Pasques Petals*; "Tin Roof: An Etheree" was published in *The North Dakota Quarterly*, 2022; "Poetry Defined," "Divine Sculpture," and "The Spirit Moves You" were published in WyoPoets Annual Newsletter 2022; "Poetry Defined" published in *Strophes*; "The Spirit Moves You" published in *Writer's Digest*.

**Debra Dail** won "Best of Show" for her poem "Childhood Reflections" at the Baxter County Fair.

**Gail Denham** has two poems in each month's Poetic Voices (Pennsylvania); a prize in Dancing Poetry and was asked to read a poem on Zoom; sold a poem to Live; has two poems in Quill & Parchment, September issue; a poem in Distilled Lives; two poems in Well Verse; her poem "Barb" in Lone Star; she won First and Second Place prizes in the Massachusetts contest; a poem in the Massachusetts' newsletter; "The Green Monkeys" won Second Place in the Arizona contest; and she won First and Second Place in the Indiana contest.

**Cathy Moran** won Second Place in the Missouri Winter contest; won First Place in the White County contest; won First and Second Place in the Massachusetts's contest; and three First Place prizes, a Third Place; an Honorable Mention in the Indiana contest; and First Place as well as three Honorable Mentions in the Chicagoland Poetry Contest.

**Fay Guinn** won the following prizes at the White County Creative Writers Conference: First Place- article, First Honorable Mention - essay, First Honorable Mention - sonnet, Third Honorable Mention - humor story; Poets Roundtable of Arkansas Contests: Third Place, and two First Honorable Mentions. She will be exhibiting and selling her book, *Don't Wear Red While Sitting Outside With Birds* at the following events: Harvest Festival, Paragould, Saturday November 5, Community Center; November 11-13 Lit'l Bita Christmas, Arkansas State University Convocation Center Arts and Crafts Show; with members of Writers Ink of Northeast Arkansas.



Governor Asa Hutchinson invited Arkansas Poet Laureate **Suzanne Underwood Rhodes** and the first place winners of Suzanne's "Yum's the Word" poetry contest to his office. Winners: Emma Wright and Ellie Johnson. With Rhodes is Sophia Wright, her press secretary. Per Rhodes, "I applaud the devoted efforts of parents and grandparents to provide a quality education for their children."

### ***Poets Recommend...***

From **Sandy Soli**: If members are not acquainted with the poetry of Dr. Benjamin Myers, professor of literature at Oklahoma Baptist University, I strongly recommend any of his books, several of which are available on Amazon. A former poet laureate of Oklahoma, he writes with wit

and wisdom everyone can enjoy. My favorites are *Black Sunday*, about the dust bowl; *Elegy for Trains*, his debut collection; and his newest nonfiction book, *Poetry of Orthodoxy*, that links poetry to Christian principles. Ben's mother is best-selling mid-grade novelist Anna Myers. Ben is a great speaker and a man of faith.

### ***Meet "Naturalist Poet" Kai Coggin***

Kai Coggin (she/her) is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Mining for Stardust* (FlowerSong Press 2021) and *INCANDESCENT* (Sibling Rivalry Press 2019). She is a Certified Master Naturalist, a K-12 Teaching Artist in poetry with the Arkansas Arts Council and Arkansas Learning Through the Arts, an Artist Leadership Fellow with the Mid-America Arts Alliance, and host of the longest running consecutive weekly open mic series in the country—Wednesday Night Poetry.

Recently awarded the 2021 Governor's Arts Award, named "Best Poet in Arkansas" by the Arkansas Times, and nominated for Arkansas State Poet Laureate and Hot Springs Woman of the Year, her fierce and powerful poetry has been nominated four times for The Pushcart Prize, as well as Bettering American Poetry 2015, and Best of the Net 2016, 2018, 2021—awarded in 2022. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *POETRY*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Best of the Net*, *Cultural Weekly*, *SOLSTICE*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *TAB*, *Entropy*, *SWWIM*, *Split This Rock*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Lavender Review*, *Tupelo Press*, and elsewhere. Coggin is Associate Editor at *The Rise Up Review*, and serves on the Board of Directors of the International Women's Writing Guild. She lives with her wife and their two adorable dogs in the valley of a small mountain in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas.

**Kai and I chatted over Zoom about poetry and country life.**

**You were born in Thailand and moved to Houston with your mother. Now you live in Hot Springs. What similarities are there between Hot Springs and Houston? Between Hot Springs and Thailand?** Kai remembers being in the backseat of the car in the heat and traffic, her parents listening to Whitney Houston. (Kai has a poem, “Bangkok” coming out in the spring issue of *Prairie Schooner*, which details her loss of memory after her parents divorced.) Houston, Texas was another big city Kai found herself in at age seven. It wasn’t until she moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 2012 that she experienced a change in the way she lived. Going from city life to country life was difficult at first. She found herself even being afraid of going out into the woods of her home at night, but now having lived in nature for ten years, she’s “good” with it. In fact, the property she and wife, Joann, both Master Naturalists, live on is a federally recognized wildlife sanctuary. “I am completely immersed in the natural world now, and could never going back to the big city. My heart has opened too much here in Hot Springs.”

**You were described by a professor as a “neo-beatnik poet.” At the time, you said you liked that idea. More recently, you described yourself as a “warrior poet.” Do either or both of these fit you now or is there some other title you think captures you and your poetry?** Kai has always been someone who goes against the grain, and though it was hard in her adolescence, she takes pride in being herself, which is often different than others. By living fully as herself, and standing entirely in her multifaceted identity, she gives courage to others, especially youth, to be themselves. She creates safe spaces for others, because she did not have that space growing up.

Starting in 2016, she used her voice and her platform daily against injustice. She describes her poetry then as “steeped in light.” Both *INCANDESCENT* and *Mining for Stardust* were written “in the face of imminent darkness, to create a better world” with her words. She felt that she was a “warrior for good, speaking of atrocities as a poetic scribe of human history.”

She still “carries her sword/words, and will use her poems at any moment to write a better world.” These days, though, she’s “taken off the armor a little bit” and is finding healing and beauty by “zooming in on the tiny infinitesimal beings that continue all around us despite us—the bees, the butterflies, the birds.” She thinks of herself as a “tender naturalist poet” Her fifth collection is leaning toward what Joann calls their “outside family,” nurturing the wildlife that surrounds them.

**You have said that teaching and writing poetry are two of your passions. You are no longer a ninth and tenth grade English teacher, but you are still teaching adult creative writing workshops with many organizations online, and reaching the youth as a Teaching Artist in Poetry on the Arts in Education Roster for the Arkansas Arts Council and Arkansas Learning for the Arts. How do these passions inform each other?** Young students have a rawness, a freshness in their thinking. All of us can tap into that youthfulness and play, that vulnerability and tenderness. Kids create metaphors and comparisons with no inner critic. We adults



need to turn the volume of our inner critics down, and listen to children. Kai says she creates safe spaces especially for those who feel oppressed, not seen, living on the margins. She gives them the agency to be themselves and to express themselves. She tells them “Poetry is a safe place for your feelings.” She builds trust by sharing her own story with them. Students learn the freedom from worry that poetry provides. She’s taught about 20,000 kids in Arkansas in the eight years she’s been part of these programs. About her own education, she says, “It’s always been teachers who gave me something to hold onto, a dream, a word of belief in me, a persistent hope.”

**Who were your early writing influences?**

**Who influences you now? Who are some of your favorite poets? What is on your reading stack that you can’t wait to get to?** Speaking of teachers, she lists her 7th grade teacher Ms. Tonia Sloan, and professor Dr. Chuck Taylor as early influences. Her first access to poetry was Shel Silverstein books checked out from the public library. She lists Andrea Gibson, Rumi, Ada Limón, Sharon Olds, Jane Hirshfield, Jericho Brown, Mary Oliver, Naomi Shihab Nye, Dr. Maya Angelou, Joy Harjo, and Ellen Bass as current influences. On her book stack are *Bonfire Opera* by Danusha Lameris, *Nine Gates* by Jane Hirshfield, and *The Strategic Poet* a craft book by Diane Lockwood.

**In 2019 you became the host of Wednesday Night Poetry, the longest consecutive weekly open-mic series. That is quite a commitment. What effect has that had on you as a poet? As a person? What impact do you think this open-mic series has had and continues to have on the poet community?**

Wednesday Night Poetry is the longest running consecutive weekly open-mic series in the entire country. At the time of our interview, it boasted 1760 weeks in a row,

never missing a single week since February 1, 1989. Taking it over in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, Kai continued the series held at Kollektive Coffee in Hot Springs. Then Covid hit and the series went virtual. Kai scrambled not to miss a week, and asked for local poets to send in videos of themselves reading a poem. She posted them all together that first Wednesday of lockdown, and the streak held. “Poets had a need for community,” Kai says, and she provided a place for them. The next week she opened it up to poets ANYWHERE. “Over the course of the last 97 virtual weeks, people all over the world – about 4,500 poets—have shared poems on our virtual open mic, thousands more have listened and watch.” The series has featured the likes of Joy Harjo, Ada Limón, Juan Felipe Herrera, Pulitzer Prize-winner Diane Seuss, Inaugural Poet Richard Blanco, Jane Hirshfield and dozens of the most prominent poets today. Because the open-mic has been prerecorded videos posted in batches each week, there is a literal archive living online, of poets writing their way out of the darkness of the pandemic. As of July 2021, WNP went back to an in-person format, and Kai still holds the virtual space once a month, holding two communities as one. As far as the impact the series has had on her own poetry, she says, “WNP has allowed me to create and sustain a community of poets that spans the globe. We hold space for each other, and this community has broken down the barriers that are sometimes present in the literary world. We all became equals— the literary giants and the emerging first-timers, we just survived together in this space. It was and still is a beautiful thing to facilitate. Soul work. As a result, my own personal writing, like my latest book *Mining for Stardust*, was endorsed by poets who I never even dreamed would blurb my book. When you hold space for others in love, others hold space for you in love. Good deeds come back. Energy is reciprocal. I write and



hold space. WNP allows me to take a poem from the page in real time, read it, and perform it and have this moment that I just wrote about bloom in another way to a person sitting in my local coffeeshop, or to a listener/reader across the planet.” These experiences inform how she writes poetry.

**I listen to Rattlecast and recently the guest poet said she believed poetry’s power lie in the visual, not the auditory.**

**Do you think that is an individual preference more than a universal one?**

**What are your thoughts about visual vs auditory in poetry?** Kai thinks it is important to “be open to all ways poetry reaches people.” Some “academic” poets are critical of the “Instagram poems” being written. Her view is that “if it is getting to someone’s heart and making them feel something, then it is a poem.” She tries to blend all of the different worlds of how poetry is digested from the reader’s or listener’s point of view. “If I hear a poem first, I want to see what that looks like. I can hear the music and the sonics, the assonance of the poem, it’s beautiful music in my ears, I can feel it that way, but then I want to see what the poet does with enjambment, where are the line breaks, did they italicize this, are there stanzas? There are hundreds of stylistic approaches to poems— many windows and doors, all that matters is that they lead you to something.” She goes on to say, “The aspect of SLAM poetry, spoken word, extra intensity when it’s appropriate is also another way poetry can evolve into something that is completely different than how it looks on the page.”

**I am always fascinated to read about another poet’s writing process. Please describe your process.** “I’ll see something and scribble down the image and I’ll hold onto that image—it might be a phrase or a line or a couple of words—*oh that’s going to be something*. I store them in my head and I let these things kind of marinate for a

couple of days, a week, could be months and it waits, keeps coming to the surface, waits more. I’ll go back to it and I might connect it to something that happens to me emotionally or physically or a life experience and then I marry those two and it comes out into a poem.” She says for her earlier books, poems would just come to her complete. “They would just come through me.” Now that still happens, but there’s more of the marinating process. She’s giving herself more space and time to “inhale life.” She’s been producing, writing, publishing books for ten years, so for the last six months, she’s given herself permission not to write, permission to REST. Now she feels regenerated, especially going into winter. “I love writing in winter because everything is just stripped down and you’re about to start over.” She doesn’t do much revising. Most of her revision happens as she is preparing a manuscript or she might revise a poem when she moves it from paper to computer.

**We are Facebook friends so I see the nature photos you post and I’ve read *Mining for Stardust* so I know how much nature inspires your poetry. From where else do you draw your inspiration?** “I live and I see and I navigate and I experience everything as a poet. I view the world through the lens of a poet. My heart feels with the heart of a poet. I experience life with my heart turned all the way on. Everything is an inspiration to me if i view it and feel it through that lens.” Kai has participated in April’s 30/30 Poetry Challenge and has gotten some “really good work” from it. “When I wake up every day in search of a poem, the whole world opens up in a way and says ‘write about me.’ I’m this flower blooming or I’m this honeybee with golden saddlebags of pollen, notice me, notice me!” Besides current events and the natural world, Kai writes poems of identity, metaphysics, and love for her wife.

**Is there something you've learned recently from students you've worked with?** Kai's answer is *patience*. Students in the classroom now are not the way they were before the pandemic—they have been drastically affected socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Teachers have had so much put on their shoulders. We, as a society, need to be aware of our young people, and care for both our students and our teachers as we come out of all of this. Have you thanked a teacher today?

**You have accomplished so much. What poetry goal or goals have you set for yourself?** Kai is currently developing her fifth manuscript and is giving herself “grace and rest.” She will be a special guest on the Poetry of Resilience Wisdom of the Body webinar in February 2023, alongside Ross Gay, Nikita Gill, and Leila Chatti. She is also speaking on two panels at the AWP conference in Seattle in March. As for other future projects, she is “doing more work that feeds me, nourishes my core values, and inspires me, but also values my time and my energy in a way that’s conducive to me living and creating.”

**How would you describe the state of poetry in Arkansas?** “There’s a lot of amazing stuff that’s going on in poetry in Arkansas.” She says there are organizations bringing in living writers that are nationally and internationally known like the Open Mouth Literary Center led by Molly Beth Rector in Fayetteville, and the University of Arkansas Visiting Writers series who is bringing Jane Hirshfield in the spring. Ms. Hirshfield will also be traveling to Hot Springs to see Kai, and feature for WNP. Hendrix College’s Visiting Writers Series in Conway just hosted U.S. Poet Laureate, Ada Limón. In Little Rock, there is the Argenta Reading Series which just featured Tyrone Jaeger, our Poetry Day speaker. And of course, there’s Wednesday Night Poetry in Hot Springs. Kai has featured for or works

hand in hand with each of these amazing Arkansas literary forces, and she feels like more could be done in a similar vein. “There is a potential for really great things when there is unity and collaboration between organizations. When one organization works with another, we combine our circles and expand our influence. Poetry is alive in Arkansas.” For more on these groups, check out: **Hendrix College Murphy Foundation.**

<https://www.hendrixmurphy.org/>

<https://openmouthliterary.org/>

<https://www.argentareadingseries.com/>

**You have been interviewed multiple times. Is there a question you wish an interviewer would ask you that they haven’t?** Kai wishes there was more focus on a poet’s self-care and renewal and less emphasis on the production aspect of writing. “What’s feeding your heart right now? What’s inspiring you?” She’d like to see questions that “would acknowledge the flux, the periods of rest and fallow periods that we all move through, the inhale and exhale of the writing process.”

**You can read more about Kai and order signed copies of her books at**  
<https://www.kaicoggin.com>

Here is a poem, “Crashing Toward Light” forthcoming in *Cutthroat, A Journal of the Arts*.

### **Crashing Toward Light**

here I write  
in the summer of fire  
in the year of drought  
in the age of unreasoning  
in the epoch of endless suffering

what of this world  
is left for poems—  
not the giant triceratops beetle  
*phileurus truncatus*

ambling in the dark across my kitchen floor,  
his horns glinting some far off light as I flip  
on the switch,  
not his slow steady walking  
toward some unseen extinction  
some critical mass  
not the glass I reach for  
the stiff white paper  
how I slide him into momentary captivity  
coo at his jurassic beauty  
photograph him as he shines his blackness

does it become a poem  
when I see the spiderweb silk tangled  
in his barbed leg and across his face?  
does it become a poem  
when I swirl the cotton candy webs off with  
a toothpick,  
clean him like he is mine  
before releasing him again into the wild  
night?

lately I have been bathing small creatures  
like some residue of being a childless  
mother  
a muddy baby anole lizard the other  
morning  
with the mist of garden hose as he curled in  
my hand  
now this prehistoric present  
beetle stealing my heart

google says the triceratops beetle  
aka the loving scarab  
*crashes toward light*  
flies with a force toward  
all that is bright  
and warm

what a way to live  
or die

crashing toward light

## *Nothing is Wasted by Gail Denham*

For a time, every morning I wrote a few sentences, a story start, a recurring thought, a name – the sentences often became a short story. With poetry, this happens also. A memory of a childhood adventure, a conversation overheard, something you observed in a restaurant. These are all fodder for writing.

My muses are family, faith, humor. Poetry can be fun, enlightening, and I believe it should reveal a truth – or a funny take on real life. I write the real mostly, always hoping editors have a sense of fun. Recently I won a first prize with a poem titled: “The Green Monkeys.”

Odd names, unusual words, incidents, something amusing from home. These are never wasted. Keeping a journal is important for me, since memory isn’t reliable. I keep a file of words such as flummoxed, blithesome, or quixotic. And of course there’s “jabberwocky.” I record made-up words such as “cranky-pated,” or search the dictionary.

Quotes – from writers, thinkers, books, and even TV are great fun. “Why do you sit there looking like an envelope without any address on it?” (Mark Twain).

In poetry, I try various forms (most especially ones I understand). Challenges. Play with words, phrases, ideas, story lines, figures of speech, even idioms and dialect from various parts of our country or world. Most of all, have fun writing poetry.

## *From the Editor*

This year I decided to drive down the day before Poetry Day and spend the night near Benton, so I could skip the skunk-and-deer-dodging-early-morning three-hour trip. It was a smart move. I arrived rested instead of stressed at the Parkview United Methodist Church in Benton. One of its members keeps the place decorated according to the season.

How delightful the tables looked in their fall leaf finery. Many thanks to the church for allowing PRA to hold our celebration there gratis.

This year's speaker arranged by Poetry Day Chair and Vice President, **Laura Bridges**,



was Dr. Tyrone Jaeger, from Hendrix College, pictured here reading from his book, *The Runaway Note*. In addition to reading, Dr. Jaeger shared numerous tools for drafting and

revising. A few that resonated with me were: Embrace the spirit of play; Chose writing practice over poetic inspiration; and Write fast, revise slow.

One of the questions I asked Kai was what is on her reading stack. I have several stacks, one virtual and two actual. What's on your stack? I'd love to share those titles with our members. Send them now to [jkmoultons@yahoo.com](mailto:jkmoultons@yahoo.com) and I'll put them in the February News 'N' Notes. I just purchased *Balladz* by Sharon Olds. I can't wait to dive into it. By the way, Kai told me that Sharon Olds is coming to Arkansas. "An Evening with Murphy Visiting Poet Sharon Olds" Thursday, April 13 at 7:30 p.m at the Staples Auditorium. I plan to be there. How about you?

I just finished a week-long generative workshop with Kim Addonizio, a poet I've learned from in numerous online workshops and during two in-person courses in Italy. It was different from my previous work with her because during the two and a half hour session, we spent a lot of it writing to prompts she provided. We were encouraged to share what we'd written and to develop the work even more after the session was

concluded. This week I started an Ellen Bass series. It is her fifth one. I have taken four of them. (I missed the first one.) These are not interactive but each of the six week sessions is themed and filled with great advice and features a guest poet. The first one was on Epistolary Poetry and featured United States Poetry Laureate, Ada Limón. I find the packet of poems and the analysis inspiring. One of my poetry writing goals has been to share and submit more of my work. I chose a couple of presses and sent my work which was rejected. In one case, I paid extra to have my work critiqued. I am sharing this with all of you because of a conversation started in the November 2021 News 'N' Notes about what constitutes good poetry. According to this poet from Frontier Poetry, "Good poetry brings us observations from the world around us, but great poetry makes us really think. I've always said that great writing makes us realize things that we've always known, but never had the words to articulate." Apparently, my poems were missing this key element. She went on to say they were all "nice" poems, but they were missing "that AHA moment that animates writing and brings it to the next level." While I found this disheartening, it is a message I keep getting from workshops and courses I've taken and continue to take—"No discovery for the writer, no discovery for the reader." I blame my inner critic for my lack of discovery...that and not writing daily. I need to follow Dr. Jaeger's advice and create a writing habit so strong that when I don't do it, it feels wrong. Wish me luck. In the meantime, I'll continue reading poetry, taking courses, and strengthening my writing muscles.

Stay safe.  
Keep poetry alive.

**Karen**