

News 'N' Notes

November 2023

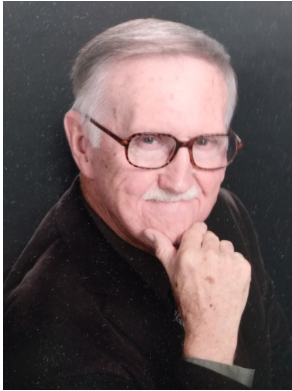
Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

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,

Another Poetry Day gathering is in the books. It was a good meeting and Michael Blanchard did a great job but I wish it had been better attended. I did not get an official count but I guess it was about twenty.

Karen may mention elsewhere that I was recently asked to be the poetry editor of Saddlebag Dispatches which publishes two or three "Cowboy Poems" per semi-annual (for now) issue. Submission guidelines can be found on their website. Cowboy Poetry, which some would call "verse" rather than poetry, has its own characteristics. For instance, I have not found any that do not rhyme. Also, there is little ambiguity or hidden meanings in Cowboy Poetry. It's not Shakespeare, but so what?

Years ago, when I was growing up in rural White County, someone in my family would buy pulp western magazines such as *Ranch Romances*. I did not care much for the stories, but I enjoyed the short pithy poems by someone named S. Omar Barker. The name stayed with me through the years. Recently, I was reading *The Biography of J. N. Armstrong*, one of the founders of Harding College (now Harding University.) For health reasons, he moved for a time to New Mexico and stayed temporarily with a family named Barker who had a son named Omar who was a writer. I went immediately to Wikipedia to see if it was the same S. Omar Barker I remembered from my youth. It was, and turns out, he was a prolific writer: 1500 short stories, 1200 factual articles, and 2000 poems. He was called the "Sage of Sapello" and "Poet Lariat of New Mexico." Jimmy Dean did a recording of his most famous work, "A Cowboy's Christmas Prayer." It's available on YouTube. Check it out to get a feel for "Cowboy Poetry."

John McPherson

President, PRA

Congratulations and Newsworthy

Check here for the list of 2023 Poetry Day Contest Award Winners:

<https://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org/contest-winners/>

Sybil Nash Abrams Contest Winners



L to R

Alyssa Darby - 1st Place

Fay Smalling Guinn - 2nd Place

Elizabeth Dail - 3rd Place (not present)

Dennis Patton - 1st Honorable Mention

Donna Smith - 2nd Honorable Mention (not present)

John McPherson - 3rd Honorable Mention

2023 PRA Merit Winner



Frieda Patton, Treasurer, presenting the Merit Award to John McPherson, President

July Monthly Contest Winners

Judge: **Lydia Cheatham**

First Place: **Dennis Patton** "To Yonder Moon Who Lost Her Love Like Me"

Second Place: **Angela Vanderslice Brown** "Moon Song"

Third Place: **Sara Gipson** "Moonlit Stroll"

First Honorable Mention: **Jerri Hardesty** "Old Friends"

Second Honorable Mention: **Terrie Jacks** "Time To Gaze Upon the Moon"

Third Honorable Mention: **Alyssa Darby** "Earth Best Friend"

August Monthly Contest Winners

Judge: **John McPherson**

First Place: **Dennis Patton** "Off To Bed"

Second Place: **Marilyn Joyner** "Just the Way It Is"

Third Place: **Cathy Moran** "Observing Oaks"

First Honorable Mention: **Ann Carolyn Cates** "Finding Love Again"

Second Honorable Mention: **Donna Nelson** "Gift of Hope"

Third Honorable Mention: **Patricia Laster** "Le Litterateur's Jardin"

September Monthly Contest Winners

Judge: **Marie Allison**

Judge's Comments: *I've truly enjoyed judging these entries. All of them were winners but I had to make a choice as difficult as it was to narrow it down to these. We really have very talented poets in PRA.*

First Place: **Larry Witherspoon** "The Rain"

Second Place: **John McPherson** "I Wonder"

Third Place: **Dr. Emory Jones** "Divine Sculpture"

First Honorable Mention: **Cathy Moran** "The teacher and the lesson plan"

Second Honorable Mention: **Dennis Patton** "The Part I Don't Mind"

Third Honorable Mention: **Patricia Laster** "What A Pleasure"

Kai Coggin has won the inaugural Don Munro Leadership in the Arts Award, a \$10,000 prize for visionary leadership. **Suzanne Underwood Rhodes** was awarded a Practicing Artist Grant of \$8,000 from the Mid-America Arts Alliance's Artist 360 grant awards program.

John Crawford won one first place, one second place, and two third place awards in the Massachusetts State Poetry Society's annual Poetry Day Contests.

Pat Laster was asked by the Illinois State Poetry Society president (and contest chair!) to judge one of their current contests, an Ekphrastic prose poem.

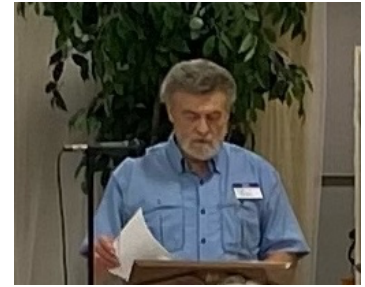
Sue Frizzell has three books of poetry available on Amazon: two of her own poetry and one book of translations from the German of Hermann Hesse's poetry called *Like Resetting Diamonds*. She recently had a signing at Windsor Branch of Fort Smith Public Library. Read more about Sue in one of the two member profiles.

Cathy Moran won four first place, one second place, one third place, and five honorable mentions in PRA Poetry contests; she won one first place and one second in NFSPS contests; she won two first places in Alabama's contest; and she has one poem in UCA's November issue of *Slant*.

Poetry Day 2023

Poetry Day in Arkansas was eclipsed only by the partial eclipse which many members witnessed during the Make-A-Sandwich lunch break. But first, Poetry Day speaker, adjunct faculty member in the English Department at the University of Central Arkansas and editor of *SLANT*, journal of contemporary American poetry, Michael Blanchard, shared a brief history of poetry, submission tips, and a refresher on poetic elements: language, subject, continuity, theme, depth, form, dimension, metaphor, and sound and rhythm. His engaging presentation was followed by a critique of

poems submitted by PRA members. During the afternoon business meeting, Lisa Lindsey was recognized as the new Student Contests Chair. Spring Celebration date and location has not yet been determined. Fay



Poetry Day Chair, Dennis Patton, introducing speaker.

Guinn suggested the Board avoid conflicts with other poetry events such as Lucidity and Ozark Creative Writers Weekend. The Board asks members to send potential conflict dates to them to help in scheduling future PRA Poetry Day and Spring Celebration events. Poetry Day Contest Winners and the PRA Merit Award winner were announced. A full list of Poetry Day Contest Winners can be found on the PRA website. Congratulations to all winners.

Welcome New Members

Claudia Kessel of Williamsburg, VA; **Barbara Mosley** of Alexander, AR; **Larry Smith** of Bigelow, AR; **William Hill** of Southhaven, MS; **Naomi Sechrest** of Searcy, AR; **Amy Taylor** of Little Rock, AR; and **Daniel Moreschi** of West Glamorgan, Wales, United Kingdom.

Transition

Stanley "Stan" Gray died January 11, 2023 in Mountain Home, Arkansas.

He served as treasurer and vice president for the Baxter County Poets' Association. He loved to converse with others and share his poems. Stan played harmonica at parties and at the Bull Shoals Theater of the Arts.

Occasionally, he'd surprise the group with a tune or two. Because he had served in the Navy during World War II, he wished to be buried at sea.

Betty Lou Pittman died March 18, 2023 in Hackett, Arkansas.

Though she was born in Paso Robles, California, she grew up in Salem, Arkansas. As part of her 32 year career as a public school teacher, she taught High School English and K-12 Gifted and Talented Education.

Gordon Samuel Byrd died September 10, 2023 in El Dorado, Arkansas.

He was a charter member of South Arkansas Poets of the Pines. Holding the office of Resident Philosopher, Gordon kept the branch members informed and entertained through the pandemic and beyond with his frequent emails. Known to some as El Dorado's cowboy poet, transplanted from Texas, he kept his poetry short and powerful.

Kitty Yeager, born Dorothy Ann Clingan in Arkadelphia, Arkansas died on October 8, 2023.

As a long-time member of the PRA, Kitty wrote and won numerous awards for her entries. She published one book of poetry *Tracks of a Unicorn*, and was working on her second book, *Southern Cinderella*, when she became ill. She was presented her last poetry award while living at the Plaza in Arkadelphia.

Student and Collegiate Contests

Help Lisa Lindsey and me get the word out about these contests for middle, high, and college-age poets. You can find the updated information on the PRA website:

<https://poetsroundtableofarkansas.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/spring-2024-student-contests.pdf>

<https://poetsroundtableofarkansas.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/pracc2024entryform.pdf>

Haiku Conference November 10-11

The Haiku Society of America 27th Annual Haiku Conference will be Friday and Saturday, November 10-11 at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. There is no registration fee. All are welcome. The Haiku Society of Arkansas will provide lunch at World Buffet. Speakers include: Charlotte Digregorio; Arkansas Poet Laureate Suzanne Underwood Rhodes; Dr. John J. Han, Professor and Chair of the Humanities Division of Missouri Baptist University; Dr. John Zheng, Professor of the English Mississippi Valley State University; Kai Coggin, Hot Springs Poet Laureate and Master of Ceremonies of Wednesday Night Poetry; John McPherson, President of Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas; Pat Laster, "Capt. Billy Bones"; Janine Davis, Award winning haiku poet; June Rose Dowis, Haiku Society of America South Region Coordinator; Dr. Judy Michaels, HSA Haiku Ambassador for Arkansas; Stacy Pendergrast, Haiku Master; Howard Lee Kilby, President of the Arkansas Haiku Society and others. For information email hkilby@hotmail.com use HAIKU CONFERENCE in the subject line to avoid deletion, or call 501-767-6096. www.hsa-haiku.org



PRA Member Profile

Sue Frizzell

I was "born a poet." I started writing at around 11 spontaneously, so have written for over six decades. I approximate this

resulted in around 600 poems,

but 350 or so remain—and most are published in my two books of poetry *The Necessity of Love and Beauty: Selected Poems* and *Walking the Poet's Path: Selected Poetry* now on Amazon. I have lived in Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas and visited other countries as well, and my poetry themes reflect those places. I also am a linguist and independent scholar who loves languages, so sometimes I write in several of these, with German and Latin as my favorites. Ukrainian is the latest language I am exploring to honor those valiant people, who also have a wonderful and long tradition of romantic-style poetry even among their contemporary younger poets!

I have done many things as to career and being a part of communities, such as midwifery, doula, childbirth educator and activist, language tutor, a home school mom, volunteer serving as a member of food co-ops, co-founding three non-profit support and information groups, and helping as companion and caregiver to family and others. I developed private businesses such as organic gardening, collage and calligraphy art with original poetry with wedding poems as a specialty. I've been a children's book seller, an MLS librarian, a teacher in several settings, a vegetarian and vegan cook, and a suicide prevention educator for 20 counties in Missouri. My parents were life-long learners and lovers of reading and films and music. They both loved the Great American Songbook and hymns. My mom loved Edgar A Guest. There was also my grandmama, who was born on the Kansas Prairie and grew up in the late Victorian Era and who was my first Latin teacher. I spent countless hours out in the woods at her house. She introduced me to Robert Frost, Helen Keller, Pearl Buck and Edna Ferber, and to films like "Hawaii" and Book-of-the-Month Club. There were teachers who asked us to read classic

literature and authors like Edna St Vincent Millay, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the English Romantics. In college, I had the chance to read novelists like Willa Cather and see art films like "Citizen Kane." There were language professors over time as well who provided classes that I so valued and have never stopped learning from, even today.

There are dear friends who are family in Germany and the US and UK-- who so graciously supported me over time in my German, French, and poetry efforts. There are students with whom I loved interacting and learning from as we explored languages. Finally, my husband, Bob, son, Chris and his wife, Jenny, who encouraged and supported me over the years and especially so during the publishing of the books—all three of them are people with whom I discuss ideas and value their thoughts and creativity.

Here is my latest poem on the subject of "to be" and the beauty of Nature. The title and all the lines proceeding are first written in Ukrainian in their alphabet, then in German, and then in English.

[The Ukrainian infinitive, "To Be"]

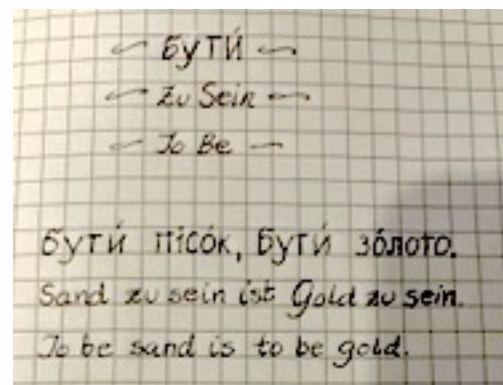
Zu Sein

To Be

[Ukrainian written in their alphabet] To be sand (is)* to be gold

Sand zu sein ist Gold zu sein

To be sand is to be gold...



PRA Member Profile

Larry Witherspoon

Just a couple of years ago, I learned that Dennis Patton was a poet. I have known Dennis for over twenty years and had no idea. So maybe poetry found me. Dennis and I visited about poetry. Sitting in the deer stand, I would text him a poem I wrote. He would text back with pointers and suggestions. Things would just pop in my mind, whether a word or something I heard, and I would just come up with a poem. I just let it flow so to speak. But then there are those days where you sit and sit and the flow does not flow.

My poetry influences are Dennis, of course, Suzanne Rhodes—so fantastic, Paula Marie Martin—who I just found out about and enjoyed her North Star book very much, our Benton Poet group—so awesome, and quite a few of our PRA poets around the state. The poem “IF” by Rudyard Kipling is my all-time favorite poem—genius!

I just started keeping a journal/diary as of August of this year. But I write my poems or stories on a note app on the phone, or pencil and paper, but all are transferred to the computer for obvious reasons.

I was asked, just the other day, “Do you just sit down and think stuff up, and then write this stuff down?” I responded with, “Sometimes, I sit down to write, but only end up sipping on wine. That battle happens more often than not, but the wine wins every time!”

Like I said, I let it flow, but sometimes the flow does not flow. I guess I do not know of or have a so-called revision strategy. I will go back days, or weeks, or even months later, read a poem, and see things I need to change, like a word or sentence. Then read it out loud again. I also found that sometimes



you enter a contest, and you have a perfect poem (so you think) but the rules call for you to change a line or two, maybe make it a rhyming poem, makes you think. And then you hope for a really smart great judge, (which we joke about getting.)

I have dyslexia situations, can't say words correctly, let alone spell, I have learning disabilities, and a short attention span. I was made fun of often. But the good side, I can dance Argentine Tango very well, I do pottery pretty well, and I am creative. I graduated twelfth grade barely. (I think they just wanted me out of their hair.) My one and only A in English was in the eighth grade. I wrote an essay on what the dog, Jip, thought of David Copperfield in the book by Charles Dickens. It went something like this: Bark bark bowwow grrrrrr. Bark bowwow bowwow, bark whimper whimper grrrrr bark bark...for three pages. I cannot remember my teacher's name but she loved it and showed it to the school. An A+. We do not need to go into my regular grades. Here is one of those “the wine wins every time” poems...

Crows

Crows sometimes drive me crazy,
But today they make me feel lazy.
Warm, not too hot, yet cool breeze in the air,
the buzz of a fly trapped in a screen
somewhere.
Drifting clouds expose naked blue sky,
melting ice jingles in glass by my side.
The crows call again with their allies.
Do they not understand, do they not realize,
I want to doze off into dreamland?



*Suzanne
Underwood
Rhodes
Poet Laureate
of Arkansas*

“The Gift of Being Alive”

I doubt I’m alone in recognizing the ludicrous disconnect between the motions of my everyday life—putting on my socks, going to the grocery store, replacing a light bulb, writing this column for News ‘n Notes that Karen so graciously invites me to do—and the horrors of war happening in the Middle East whose shadows we fear may be lengthening even toward our own United States. And yet, awareness of the dearth and fragility of life can make us more grateful for the homely things we do, for being alive and safe, for our families, for writing poetry. For these, I thank God. Poetry Day, from all accounts, was outstanding, and I was sorry I couldn’t be there for Michael’s presentation and to see all of you, and also to share in the joy of those receiving awards for their contest poems. Congratulations to all!

That week, I traveled to Ouachita Baptist University (long trip from Fayetteville!) for a rewarding visit as a guest of the Language and Literature department to co-teach a creative writing class and give a reading. The students, administration, and faculty couldn’t have been more welcoming—in fact, I’ve never met a less stodgy group of academics. For example, the L&L department calls itself the Bugtruck (there’s a story behind that I can share with you sometime).

The week before I was in Hot Springs as featured poet at Kollektive Café’s Wednesday Night Poetry event at the invitation of Kai Coggin, the inaugural poet laureate of the city. What a wonderful

experience that was, with people coming from all over town for the open mic to share their poems and respond so warmly to mine. That’s the beauty of our art: it crosses divisions and brings people together as it also did most recently when I gave a workshop for True Lit, the annual literary festival of the Fayetteville library.

This laureate business keeps me hopping and on the road a lot—so much so that I’m friends with the water towers declaring the names of cities passing by. Upcoming events in early November are to teach a creative writing class at College of the Ozarks and another for high school students at their lab school, the School of the Ozarks, and next, to be on the program of the annual Haiku Conference in Hot Springs. It means so much, not only as the poet laureate but also as a member of PRA, to share my poems and engage with Arkansans of all ages and backgrounds who love to write and grow in their craft.

Something else I’m excited to share and immensely grateful for is being named an Artists 360 Fellow in NWA and grant recipient as a Practicing Artist for 2023-24. I applied unsuccessfully last year, got some good coaching, and was thrilled to be selected this year as one of 25 artists, thanks to Mid-America Arts Alliance and the Walton Foundation. My projects (we’re required to have at least one) is to publish a book of poems written by the women residents of Magdalene Serenity House in Fayetteville that I was privileged to bring poetry to as a volunteer, and to create new work for my third full-length poetry collection. I’m well on the way, having completed a chapbook about loss called *Milk from the Moon* that I hope to publish.

Because of this grant I will be able to give up a few freelance gigs and devote more time to writing, reading, and developing my craft.

As a reminder of the gift of being alive, I close with words from the eminent poet, Stanley Kunitz: “I can hardly wait for tomorrow, it means a new life for me each and every day.” May we hold fast to this hope no matter how the earth is quaking.

Feature Interview:

Alyssa Darby

As a poet, I would describe myself as unique. Yes, everyone could say that, but I often do things my own way. Sometimes



this works in my favor, and other times it does not. I have a quirky personality and interesting brain, so I have been told. This often comes out in my poems and writing in general.

I appreciate set forms and rhyme schemes, but I try a little bit of everything, including experimenting with my own ideas. I enjoy both Old English (which I now keep more for myself than for submissions) and modern writing. Almost all of my poetry, however, incorporates imagery and word play.

I have written ever since I can remember. Because I often think in rhyme and figures of speech, noting patterns and deeper meanings, poetry has always come naturally to me.

While I have never thought of myself as having mentors, the following poets had some influence on my poetry during my youth: Shel Silverstein, Robert Frost, Edgar Allan Poe, Lewis Carroll (specifically “Jabberwocky”), and Edward Lear. I love poets that use artistic imagery and a touch of quirkiness, because those are characteristics of my own writing and personality.

I find inspiration in just about everything. No one genre or style describes my poetry or interests. Most often, it will be based on my faith, my love of language and word play, the world around me (both the good and the things that need to be worked on), or my unique personality as an Autistic adult. My writing process really depends on the type of piece I am writing. When I write faith pieces, I often need to be moved first and will simply write out what comes to me. If I am writing for a contest, I study the poetry form and various sample poems, then create a brainstorm list to figure out what concepts interest me and what words or imagery stand out to me.

Often, I will write intricate pieces that require more prep work—mostly for my own enjoyment. An example would be the poem I wrote as a doxology, which perhaps does not feel as poetic on the first read, but it has patterns of deeper meaning. In addition to the meaning, the first letters of each word, when played on piano, will actually perform the “Doxology,” the word syllables hinting at how long to hold each note. For this, I began by writing lists of words that started with the notes in the song, then broke them down into syllable counts and worked through it until I had stanzas that also gave a picture of praise to God. After my initial brainstorming process and a rough draft, I sift through for words that could be improved, are unnecessary, or are in need of clarification. Before finalizing each poem, I check for grammatical or spelling errors, read it aloud for flow and rhythm, and have a group of readers from various walks of life read it as well to work out any kinks I may have missed in my read-through. Most of the time, the title is the final bit I complete. I like to choose something meaningful that encompasses or hints at the poem’s contents.

Brian Bilston has been sharing some poems that I absolutely love. They are quirky,

thought-provoking, playful, and inventive, much like many of the poems I like to write and have written since I was a kid.

For the past couple of months, I have been in a writing slump, discouraged. While I know that I am a capable writer and poet, I started believing I was simply not good enough. Placing first in the Sybil Nash Abrams Award was an incredible surprise and has helped me have a better perspective on my God-given talents. I am capable. I should not give up. I am sure we all, as writers and poets, go through times like this. Winning any award has the ability to boost our spirits when we lose belief in our abilities, but winning a prestigious award like this has really made a difference in my confidence.

Winning this has also reminded me that trying, learning, and experiencing new things is always a good idea. Prior to this contest, I had never quite written a historical poem or submitted anything that required a bibliography. For this contest, I researched extensively and poured my heart into it. Usually I comb through over and over, making a lot of changes and second-guessing myself—I am a perfectionist, after all. This time, however, I did not have a chance to nit-pick this poem as much as usual before submitting, besides checking for glaring mistakes, inconsistencies, and formatting. I simply had to do my best, find my passion, and believe that I was capable enough to place somewhere on the list of winners.

I know a lot of us are perfectionists, doubters, and imposter syndrome sufferers. I hope, from this recount of my experience, others will be challenged to take chances and attempt new things, encouraged to choose confidence, and reminded to stay true to yourself.

In the past, most of my poetry has been written simply for myself or as posts to Facebook to challenge and motivate my

friends. Recently, I have been shifting to include poetry written for contest entries, with intentions to build my confidence, build my portfolio, learn and grow, stretch my skill sets, and diversify the genres and styles I write. My goal is to begin submitting my work for publishing, while continuing to build my portfolio.

I love that this process, and the successes, have inspired my children to try their hand at poetry and other art forms as well. They are very talented. I believe that watching their mom push through confidence struggles and a busy schedule, making time for something she enjoys, then seeing her take a step of faith to share it with others, has made a positive impact on their own writing journeys.

As you may have noticed mentioned above, I am Autistic. This often comes as a surprise to people, especially when they have only gotten to know me a little bit. It is not always obvious, but it affects everything I do and think, which means it plays a key role in my poetry.

While I may seem to blend in on the surface, many things are more difficult for me—like understanding the unspoken/unwritten social norms, expectations, and simple tasks. I tend to ask a lot of questions that other people would not need to ask.

At the same time, though, this unique part of my personality has some superpowers.

Autism is not an icky word or something to pity. Yes, it has challenges, but those challenges also tend to come paired with benefits that set the individual apart from the “neurotypical” crowd.

For me, I have an obsession with language and its playfulness. I love homophones, metaphors, rhythm, and rhyme. Not all Autistic individuals will understand idioms, metaphors, and sarcasm, at least not right off the bat, but some of us have brains that work in these figures of speech, especially once we know the etymology of the words and

phrases. I use these regularly in my writing and poetry. I have to note, however, that I also appreciate poetry that is not too difficult to figure out. I try to keep my poetry free from overly-obscured pictures and symbolism, flowery speech, or anything that might make comprehension of the poem difficult for the reader. My goal is to keep my writing accessible to a diverse audience. I also notice patterns and deeper meanings and can offer a new and interesting perspective. Much of what I write has multiple hidden meanings and connections to dig into beyond the surface. Many of my poems can be picked apart for days. I live life intentionally, so just about every word that goes into each poem has meaning, purpose, and connections within the piece. If you have ever read my poetry, I hope this has been apparent to you and you have enjoyed finding the hidden nuggets throughout my work.

FACE TO FACE
a palindrome poem

Made wonderfully, am I?
Believing Mirror's view,
I do now only see weight and
scars. . . . My! I am wrinkly too!
Not fair! Are these reflections
my truth?
Behold me with escaping
youth's
memories—old. Dear, have I
come to age!
Another chapter, another page
turned. This was but written and
through;
Life assumed I'd finished. Not
new.
Yet, here, I'm viewing myself
through looking glass . . . as
face to face.

As glass, looking through myself
. . . viewing I'm here, yet.
New, not finished! I'd assumed
life
through and written, but was this
turned
page another chapter? Another
age to come? I have dear, old
memories.
Youth's escaping *with* me.
Behold
truth: my reflections—these are
fair! Not
too wrinkly! Am I my scars and
weight? . . . See, only now do I
view mirrors believing I am
wonderfully made.

Cowboy Poetry

Congratulations to PRA President, John McPherson, for his recent editorship of *Saddlebag Dispatches*. If you are interested in submitting some "cowboy poetry" to this journal, check out the link:
<https://saddlebagdispatches.com/wanted/>

From the Editor

This issue is full of wonderful news and inspiring words. I hope you enjoy it. I couldn't do my job without you, the readers. Please send your winnings and news to me, so we can be sure to share it with the PRA. Maybe keep a running document that you can zip off via email to jkmoultons@yahoo.com.

Happy Fall!
Karen Moulton
PRA News 'N' Notes Editor