

# News 'N' Notes

May 2026

## 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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Greetings from my corner of Arkansas.



Well, maybe not a whole corner, but just a tiny spot on the map. It has been a year since I took the post of President of PRA and much has happened. I sometimes feel like the person at the end of the line in a game of crack-the-whip, but I'm learning what it takes to keep PRA going and have been taking stock of what's been done and what needs to be done. It's amazing how much work is being done by people who volunteer their time and talents. While it's out of season, I'm calling this my message of thanks-giving. Spring Celebration 2026 was fantastic. Karen will issue a full report, but these things don't just come together without participation and assistance, and I thank you for making it such an enjoyable day. You know their names, but many of you do not know what they do, so we need to recognize a few people. **Karen Moulton** is the glue that keeps us informed with news of members, guest interviews, other opportunities, and it exhausts me to consider that she keeps up with all that and still gardens, writes, travels and so many other things. **Rick Houston** and **Larry Witherspoon** have taken on assignments then found other occasions to spread the word about PRA. **Marie Allison** manages to make sense of the chaos around us and keep the record of it all. **Renee Ramsey** pursues the Monthly Contest administration with great fervor. Poet Laureate **Suzanne Rhodes**

represents PRA and the State of Arkansas with talent, grace, and her winning smile. **John McPherson** and **Lisa Lindsey** are managing contests with great finesse. **Frieda** and **Dennis Patton** are great advisors and take on various tasks as needed, and our webmaster, Steve May, is so quick to respond with any request it takes my breath away. If any of these people are in your poetry or writing groups, social circle or other contacts, take note of their contributions and give them the thanks that they deserve.

We sometimes fail to acknowledge the supporters we have year after year in sponsorships for both Spring Celebration and Poetry Day. Give these people and organizations a shout-out. They deserve it, for they keep us going. We also gained a few new Poetry Day sponsors this year - **Charles Templeton of eMerge Literary Magazine**; **Hall of Writers of Excelsior Springs (MO)** who joined us at the encouragement of member **Alyssa Darby**; and **White County Creative Writers** entered the mix. Give all of them your appreciation. May and June are a time of rest for our administrators, with just a few small things going on. There will be time to write, join friends and family, and gather our thoughts before the hurricane of late summer and fall events. So, breathe a bit, know that I admire all of you, and I hope you will have a great summer.

**Christine Henderson**  
President, PRA

## *Welcome New Members*

**Brian Larsen** of Maumelle  
**Samantha Wilson** of Batesville

## *Condolences*

to **Rick Houston** on the death of his mother, Shirley Eileen Houston, who passed away Thursday, April 23. She was 89 years old.

## *Congratulations and Newsworthy*

### **February Monthly Contest Winners**

Judge: **Cathy Moran**

First Place: **Larry Witherspoon** "The Beauty of Dirty Dishes"

Second Place: **Marilyn Joyner** "Dance of Time"

Third Place: **Mike Wahl** "Po' Po' Pitiful Me"

### **March Monthly Contest Winners**

Judge: **Janet Ryan**

First Place: **Marie Allison** "Love, Kindness and Happiness"

Second Place: **Karen Moulton** "Dreams Quit of Dust"

Third Place: **Janice Canerdy** "Girl with Black Eye"

First Honorable Mention: **Christine Henderson** "Hesitation"

Second Honorable Mention: **John**

**McPherson** "The Grin"

Third Honorable Mention: **Lydia Cheatham** "Dear Diary"

## *Congratulations and Newsworthy*

**Samantha Wilson** will be competing in the Blackberry Peach Poetry Slam in July, representing the PRA in varying parts of the competition, and will be attending the NFSPS conference events. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, she hosted Slam Jam, a Slam Poetry Competition at the Polk and Paddle in Batesville.

**Gail Denham** won third and first in a Pennsylvania contest; Ethos awarded a "best

in topic" for her short (100 word) story, subject: Chickens; Highland Park chose two poems "Carousel Horse Music" and "Geezer Band" for an anthology re:

Carnivals/Music/Sijo. They also selected "Midnight Ride" in an anthology of persona historical poems; "To Dream" was selected for PST anthology.

**Fay Guinn** recently attended the 33rd annual Lucidity Poetry Retreat (April 7-9) Her poem "Reba" won the Critic's Choice Award (voted on by all attendees). The Retreat was held in Branson, Missouri at Stone Castle Inn and Conference Center after 32 years in Eureka Springs. See her FB page (Fay Smalling Guinn) for pictures and info on speaker.

**Laura Bridges** has had poems published in the Hot Springs Sentinel Record regularly.

**John Crawford** won first place in California State Poetry Society Winter Contest for "Do Not Go Gentle;" the Sentinel-Record "Poetry Corner" has published the following: Feb. 7, "Challenges of Life," Feb. 21, "Nature's Way," March 7, "Live for Today," March 28, "An Ode to Battle Heroes," April 11, "The Power of Women."

**Emory D. Jones** won second place in the Confluence Category of the Poetry Society of Indiana 2025 Summer Contest for "Eagle Snow;" *The Avocet: A Journal of Nature Poetry Summer—2025* published "Painted Desert;" "Upon Putting an Anthology of Poetry in the Community College Bookstore" won fourth place in the Anything Goes Category of the 2025 Spring Award of the Alabama State Poetry Society; "Rain Regiment" was published in the July 2025 edition of Pennsylvania's Poetic Voices; "Dogwood" was published in the July 2025 edition of *Pennsylvania's Poetic Voices*; "Summer Humm" was published in the July edition of *The Avocet*; "Dust devils whirling..." haiku was published in the July edition of *The Avocet*; "Summer sun beats

down...” haiku was published in the July edition of *The Avocet*; “Summer Sunshine: A Cinquain” was published in the July edition of *The Avocet*; “Campfire” was published in the Fall 2025 edition of *The Avocet*; “The Sanctuary” won first place in Category 18 (Nature’s Wonders) of the 2025 Poets ‘Poets’ Roundtable of Arkansas 2025 Contest; “Poetic Feast” won second place in Category 23 (Betty Heidelberger Memorial Award) of the Poets’ Roundtable of Arkansas 2025 Contest; “Swirling leaves flutter...” won third place in Category 32 (Haiku Classical and Modern) of the Poets’ Roundtable of Arkansas 2025 Contest; “Mississippi Memories” was published in the October 21, 2025 issue of *Deep South Magazine*; “A View from Mississippi” was published in the October 21, 2025 issue of *Deep South Magazine*; “Crow Haiku” won second place in the Traditional Haiku Category of the 2025 Illinois State Poetry Society Contest; “Winter Sunshine” was published in the winter 2025-2026 edition of *The Avocet*; “Dancing Autumn—An Etheree was published in *Sagebrush and Silver*, Nevada Poetry Society Anthology 2026; “Playful Spring—A Kyrielle” was published in *Sagebrush and Silver*, Nevada Poetry Society Anthology 2026; “Verse Virus” was published in *Sagebrush and Silver*, Nevada Poetry Society Anthology 2026; “Light and Dark Haiku” was published in the Connecticut Poetry Society’s Haiku Group for January 2026.



A photo of a recent meeting of the newly formed Apple Blossom chapter.

## 2026 Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration Contest Winners

**Dr. Lily Peter Memorial Award** – 18 entries - judged by Dr. Robert Lamm and Dr. Kerri Bennett – ASU, Jonesboro AR – sponsored by Roxie Wilson  
 First Place: **Dennis Patton** “An Important Difference”  
 Second Place: **Janice Canerdy** “Autumn Majesty”  
 Third Place: **John McPherson** “Vernon”  
 First Honorable Mention: **Mike Wahl** “Continental Drift”  
 Second Honorable Mention: **Sara Gipson** “Dripping Dreams”  
 Third Honorable Mention: **Donna K. Smith** “The Hero”

**Verna Lee Hinegardner Memorial Award** – 18 entries - judged by Dr. Robert Lamm and Dr. Kerri Bennett – ASU, Jonesboro AR – sponsored by **John Crawford**  
 First Place: **Karen Moulton** “Sometimes at Night”  
 Second Place: **Teresa H. Klepac** “Cut the Too-Tight String”  
 Third Place: **Marilyn Joyner** “Up a Tree in Fall”  
 First Honorable Mention: **Sara Gipson** “Saxophone Blues”  
 Second Honorable Mention: **Jerri Hardesty** “Infinite Potential”  
 Third Honorable Mention: **Pat Laster** “Yes Virginia, There Was a Verna Lee Hinegardner”

**Freda Baker Nichols Memorial Award** – 18 entries - judged by Jan Hamlett – sponsored by **Pat Laster**  
 First Place: **Lorraine Jeffery** “The Other Book”  
 Second Place: **Karen Moulton** “With You”  
 Third Place: **Teresa H. Klepac** “Generational Conversation”  
 First Honorable Mention: **Dennis Patton** “January”

Second Honorable Mention: **Cathy Moran**  
“All the Common Steps”

Third Honorable Mention: **John McPherson** “Darkness and Light”

**Spring Celebration Serious Verse** – five entries - judged by conference attendees

First Place: **Fay Guinn** “The Power of Love”

**Spring Celebration Light Verse** – five entries - judged by conference attendees

First Place: **Dennis Patton** “I’ve Been Mugged”

**2026 Pat Laster Collegiate Poetry Contest** – 24 entries – judged by **Joan Barrett**

**Roberts** – sponsored by Lydia Cheatham  
First Place: Kyler Like “I’m a Foxtail.”

Second Place: Skylar Nelsen “morning tidings”

Third Place: Genna Crafton “A Graveyard, a Front Door”

First Honorable Mention: Rachel Miller  
“Tarrying on Beaver Lake”

Second Honorable Mention: Zachary Walter  
“Icarus’ Last Letter”

Third Honorable Mention: Caleb Givens  
“Loves Greatest Cost”

**PRA Student Contest – Senior Division** – 22 entries – judged by **Denise England**

First Place: Tristen Caudell “I wake like something borrowed...”

Second Place: Austin Headley “The Table, Unnamed”

Third Place: Palmer Hopkins “A Lily’s Sacrifice”

First Honorable Mention: Josiah Boone  
“The Box”

Second Honorable Mention: Karsen Sledge  
“It Is Always There”

Third Honorable Mention: Mia Warren  
“Peekaboo”

**PRA Student Contest – Junior Division** – 22 entries – judged by Rhonda Roberts

First Place: Benjamin Trip “Dish of you”

Second Place: Olivia Strawn “Life Recycles”

Third Place: Da’Layah Sawyer “I Miss Who I Was Before You”

First Honorable Mention: Isabella Clark-Yarbrough “When I yell, you ask me why I am yelling...”

Second Honorable Mention: Braydee Hammons “The Shimmer”

Third Honorable Mention: AirieAnna G. Criswell “The Pounding of a Heart”

### *Dues Reminder*

Membership dues are \$20 per year for regular members, or \$15 per year for students (under 18) and seniors (65 and over). New first-time members joining between Jan. 1 and June 30 will pay ½ price membership dues for those few months, then full price for the new year. If a former member pays late anytime during the year, it is full price. The fiscal year runs July 1 through June 30. In order to have your name listed on the membership roster in the annual Yearbook, dues must be paid by **July 1**. You do not have to be an Arkansas resident to join PRA. Out-of-state poets are welcome. PRA only accepts US currency, checks or money orders. Payments should be made out to PRA and sent to:

#### **Rick Houston**

1559 HWY 213

Hattiesville, AR 72063

Please include your name, address, phone number, and email address (if you have one).

### *Opportunities*

Check out these contests from the Massachusetts State Poetry Society.

<https://ns-poets-forum.blog/poetry-contests/>

The Siloam Springs Writers Guild invites you to their 8<sup>th</sup> Summers Writers Conference on July 18, 2026. One of the speakers is **Suzanne Underwood Rhodes**.  
<https://www.sswritersguild.org/summer-writers-conference/>

## *Book Recommendations*

**Laura Bridges** finished two poetry books: Rowan Stuart Lay from Hot Springs (*inner work)ing* and Naomi Shihab Nye *Everything Comes Next*. She finds it both relaxing and inspiring to read poetry. It fevers her own writing.

From **Pat Laster**: In every Sunday's Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, I glance at Phillip Martin's column on books. One day, I saw Jack Butler's "firefish: poetry collection. Bingo! I ordered it. I hadn't read Martin's complete article, but I'd clipped it to enter into the book when it came. Lawsy me! when it arrived I was shocked. It was the size and shape of a half-ream of copy paper! Woe! But on January 25, I began reading the tome of collected poetry he'd written from the places he'd lived. I finished it February 21. But on Feb. 15, I wrote this sequence:

Sitting  
in my reading  
spot at the east window  
with a bulbous lamp lighting my  
journal.

I think  
"What's making me  
read this 1/2-ream-thick  
book of poetry that's over  
my head?"

Yet I  
keep the schedule:  
Read for an hour before  
working on the jigsaw until  
bedtime.

## *The Power of Outreach*

Membership Chair, **Rick Houston**, was distributing student contest information to various schools when he stopped into the Atkins Centennial Library. He spoke to

librarian Kim Lunningham-Tice about this opportunity for students. She not only said she'd share the information with her patrons, but she would distribute the forms to local schools. As the conversation continued, it developed into much more. Three PRA members, **Rick Houston**, **Larry Witherspoon**, and **Michael Blanchard** manned a table set up by the library in the Atkins High School auditorium right after school. About 69 students came by the table and asked questions and learned about poetry and the opportunity to enter our junior and senior division poetry contests. And if you are wondering if meeting with PRA members made an impact on the students, one Atkins student received third honorable mention and one won first place. But there is more. Now the Atkins Centennial Library hosts a monthly poetry club. Because April is Poetry Month, **Rick Houston** sponsored an April poetry contest complete with monetary prizes open to members of the newly formed club. He will serve as judge, too.



Pictured here at the Atkins High School Auditorium are Rick Houston, Kim Lunningham-Tice, Michael Blanchard, and Larry Witherspoon.

## *SoNA Beyond: Transcending Words*

SoNA and the Fayetteville Public Library are proud to present a special concert celebrating literary influences across the arts on May 3 from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Event Center (first floor) of the Fayetteville Public Library. The SoNA Singers will perform choral works inspired by great poetry, paired with Arkansas Poet Laureate **Suzanne Underwood Rhodes** sharing some of those great poems. Rhodes will also debut

newly commissioned works as part of the performance. This event is free and open to the public.

<https://www.faylib.org/event/1624721>

### Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration



Members enjoyed a program provided by Hendrix Visiting Associate Professor, Ellie Black, who discussed with the crowd ways to end a poem. Reading over the poem

critiques completed the morning. After a pot luck lunch, contest winners were announced.



L to R – **Frieda Patton** presenting certificates/awards to those not in attendance at Spring Celebration.

Isabella Clark-Yarbrough, **Frieda Patton**, Braydee Hammons Mt. View Middle School, Benton, AR



Student Junior and Senior Division and Collegiate winners pose with Arkansas Poet Laureate,

**Suzanne Underwood Rhodes.**

L to R-- Da'Layah Sawyer, Kyler Like, Skylar Nelsen,

Rachel Miller, Palmer Hopkins, Benjamin Trip, Oliva Strawn, **Suzanne Underwood Rhodes**

### Meet the 2026 Pat Laster Collegiate Poetry Contest Winners



Kyler Like from the University of Central Arkansas took first place for his poem "I'm a Foxtail." He graduated from

Quitman High School, and is currently working towards a bachelor's degree in Mathematics Education, with hopes to return to teach at Quitman. What inspired him to write poetry were the things and people around him. Sometimes he would see a streetlight and then think of an idea and get it down in his notes app, or he would be in the middle of a service and realize he wanted to capture everything in detail. Most of the time when he writes poetry, it's not for others to read, but for him to be able to express himself in a way that he feels uniquely encapsulates his experience.

Skylar Nelsen from the University of Central Arkansas placed second for her poem "morning tidings." She is graduating this May as a dual major in Creative Writing and Film with a minor in Marketing. Skylar is a storyteller at heart, once being told that she can turn the story of a normal trip to the mall into an enthralling adventure that you never want to end. She has written in a variety of genres, from poetry to fiction to scripts and has made a few short films, one of which played in five different Arkansas film festivals. She has been featured in *The Vortex* literary magazine and looks forward to continuing to publish. With graduation looming ahead, she is excited to enter the world and improve her storytelling skills even further.

Third place went to Genna Crafton for their poem “A Graveyard, a Front Door.” (They/them) is a poet, playwright, and stage manager at the University of Arkansas - Fayetteville. They are currently working toward a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Theatre Design and Technology and a minor in history. Their career pursuits are tied up in stage management, but that does not mean that poetry gets thrown to the wayside. It simply gets scribbled in new margins. This has been the case since they began writing poetry ten years ago. They hated the form right up until they were assigned to write one in middle school, at which point they promptly fell in love. To read more samples of their work, you can refer to their Instagram account @genna.writes (poetry) or the New Play Exchange profile under their name (short plays).



First honorable mention was awarded to Harding student, Rachel Miller, for her poem “Tarrying on Beaver Lake.” She is majoring in English and Theological Studies at Harding University and hopes to pursue writing and ministry after college. She began writing poetry in high school and her passion for poetry was especially sparked at Missouri Scholars Academy where she took a class in nature poetry. Second honorable mention was awarded to Zachary Walter for his poem “Icarus’ Last Letter.” He is a junior at University of Central Arkansas pursuing Creative Writing, Technical Writing, and Philosophy. As of right now his plans post-graduation are to



either go into law school, pursue an MFA in Creative Writing, or both. He got started writing poetry because he wanted to try and find a way to express himself and how he was

feeling, and poetry lets him do that in fun and creative ways.

Third honorable mention was awarded to Caleb Givens for his poem “Loves Greatest Cost”. He is part of the University of Central Arkansas’ class of 2028. He is majoring in creative writing and plans to be a published author and poet. He started writing poetry in the ninth grade as a past time and has developed a deeper passion for it since coming to UCA.



Many thanks to **Lydia Cheatham** for her continuing sponsorship of our collegiate poetry contest. I would also like to thank **Joan Barrett Roberts** for judging.

### *Meet Ellie Black*

Ellie Black, our Spring Celebration speaker, while a junior at Hendrix won first place in the 2017 Jeanie Dolan Carter Memorial Collegiate Contest (previous name of the Pat Laster Collegiate Poetry Contest) and now she is back at Hendrix as a Visiting Associate Professor. She was kind enough to take the time to answer some of my questions.



While I can’t identify everyone in this photo, I will point out Collegiate Chair at the time, **Donna Smith**, standing beside Ellie Black. You probably recognize the gentleman on the end, **Dennis Patton**.

*You graduated from Hendrix in 2018. Eight years later, you are an assistant professor in English there. Do you see any differences in the students now compared to the kind of student you were when you attended?*

College in general is undergoing a big shift in this cultural moment—it's not just Hendrix. I do find myself surprised by some changes in the Hendrix student body specifically: Hendrix is well-known for its social culture, for instance, and when I was a student, I hardly went a day without attending some sort of event, but now I find it's difficult to get students to attend events even when I mandate literary event attendance as a class requirement. I walk across campus during the day and nobody's outside except to get from one building to another. They just don't want to leave their rooms. I never thought I'd wish so much to lay eyes on the Ultimate Frisbee team. It's also true that many current students are woefully underprepared for college. Covid did a number on our education system in almost every way imaginable—decimated attendance, grade inflation, overreliance on tech—and we're seeing those effects hit college full-force through students who were teens (fourteen, fifteen, sixteen) when Covid began.

There are, of course, plenty of students who are still bright and curious and engaged and enthusiastic and weird and funny, and I'm lucky enough to have many of them in my Creative Writing classes. I just wish I could make every single student understand how valuable the opportunities that Hendrix provides are and how limited the time is—four short years!—to take advantage of those opportunities.

*What's it like coming back to Hendrix to teach?*  
Pretty strange. There are many incredible things about it—I'm getting to teach some really cool classes, like Poetry & Horror, and through the Hendrix-Murphy Foundation I have opportunities to take students to conferences like AWP (the major

national writers' conference) and on archival research trips. I'm doing my best to make the most of the plentiful resources Hendrix affords me. But it's also true that I feel a little haunted by the ghosts of my past all the time. Being colleagues with some of the same professors who taught me in undergrad can be wonderful and it can also be sort of surreal. So can teaching in the same classrooms in which I once had classes. Imagine your college or high school. Imagine all the weird stuff that happened to you there, good and bad. Now imagine that you have to be in that place every day as an adult, and you have to watch your students go through some of the same experiences you went through, and you have to experience some of the things you experienced as a student now from a faculty perspective. Feelings get dredged up. I suppose the most optimistic way of looking at it is that I'm being given an opportunity to resolve a lot of stuff within myself that I'm currently discovering to be unresolved. To summarize: I'm grateful to Hendrix for giving me my first academic job after the PhD. I'm also looking forward to finding out what's next.

*In 2017, you won what was then called the Jeanie Dolan Carter Memorial Collegiate Contest sponsored by the PRA for your poem "reading the virgin suicides out loud." Do you remember that poem? Did winning this contest propel you and/or your writing in any way?*

I absolutely do remember "reading *the virgin suicides* out loud"! I wrote that poem after my first semester of college about an experience I had in a film class at Hendrix taught by Dr. Kristi McKim, who now teaches at the Georgia Institute of Technology (I'm actually now in what used to be her office, which is wild). The Jeanie Dolan Carter was my first poetry award, and winning that contest definitely made me more confident about my writing. It was such an honor to be able to return to the very same room to deliver the keynote for this

year's PRA Spring Celebration almost a decade later.

*You've had a number of writing experiences since graduating from Hendrix: DISQUIET: the International Literary Program, the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop, the Bucknell Seminar, and NYU's Writers in New York program. Which one stands out the most in terms of its impact on your writing?*

The Bucknell Seminar for Undergraduate Poets was huge for me. At the time, the Bucknell Seminar was a three-week-long, fully-funded residency for undergraduate and recently graduated writers on the Bucknell campus in Pennsylvania. I attended the summer after I graduated from college (2018).

I was one of twelve students all living in a Bucknell dorm for those three weeks, and I found the experience absolutely life-changing. We worked with visiting writers Kaveh Akbar, Ada Limón (who since then had a stint as the US Poet Laureate!), and Phillip B. Williams. We talked nonstop amongst ourselves about poetry. I felt taken seriously, really seriously, as a poet for the first time there. That experience prepared me for the MFA, which I started the next fall. I feel in many ways that I transitioned from young poet to adult poet that summer. After Covid arose, the Seminar went virtual, then went on hiatus for a few years, then returned as a week-long in-person program—I'm a bit sad to see the change, but I'm glad it still exists in some form. I hope that at some point it can return in full swing and a new generation of young poets can have the same kind of transformative experience that I had.

*Are there poets who have influenced your writing?*

Of course! You can't be a good writer without being a good reader. If you want to write poetry, you should be reading as much poetry as possible; that's the only real way to learn what you do and don't like and what tools are available to you.

Some of my biggest influences are Richard Siken (whose collection *Crush* changed my whole life and made me love poetry in the

tenth grade); Sylvia Plath; Wanda Coleman; Frank O'Hara; Louise Glück; Alice Notley; my graduate school mentor Melissa Ginsburg; Patricia Lockwood; Natalie Shapero; esteemed Arkansas poet C.D. Wright; and Dorothea Lasky, who—perhaps you can imagine how thrilled I was to discover this—was the judge who selected my book for the 2026 APR/Honickman First Book Prize.

*Which poet or poets are you reading now?*

I'm not reading as much as I'd like to right now; I'm mostly reading my students' work, ha. I'm hoping to get some good reading for pleasure done this summer (though I may need to dedicate most of my time to reading in preparation for my classes this fall).

Currently in my poetry to-read stack: *The Hungering Years* by Summer Farah; *Opera Fever* by Chelsey Minnis; *What Good is Heaven* by Raye Hendrix. I'm also really looking forward to fellow Arkansas poet Acie Clark's *Small Talk*, which will come out in September just a couple weeks after my own book.

*Your debut poetry collection, Revelator, is coming out in the fall of 2026. How important is it to you to have a collection published? Will there be a promotional tour? Are you currently working on another collection?*

It's very important to me to have a collection published. For one thing, if you're working in academia, it's really hard to get a good job without a book. So hopefully the book sets me up well as I go back on the job market this fall. For another thing: This book is the culmination of years of hard work. There's at least one poem in the book that I wrote in college. I started sending it out to contests after defending it as my MFA thesis in 2022 (the first few drafts were called *Visitation*). It got rejected from contest after contest for four years until I landed the APR/Honickman First Book Prize in 2026. And to be honest, four years of submitting for a debut poetry collection is not that long—I know many wonderful

poets who sent their books out (or are still sending their books out) for longer than that. But I needed those four years. The book changed a lot during that time. The title changed; the organization changed; I wrote new poems; I took old ones out. That's just how long it took to become the book it needed to be, and I see this publication as the result of that labor.

I am going on a bit of a tour. I'm hoping to do plenty of Arkansas events: I'll be having a launch event at Paper Hearts Bookstore in Little Rock on September 8 and another at Hendrix on October 1, and I'll also be reading at Wednesday Night Poetry in Hot Springs on October 21. But I'm also hoping to travel a bit and to use it as an excuse to see friends and family: I'm planning a reading at Off-Square Books in Oxford, MS, where I went to grad school, in September; I'm trying to get an event together in New York City, where my sister lives; I want to do events in Boston, Providence, DC, and Chicago, where I have friends I can stay with. And those are just my plans for this fall—I want to do more in the spring.

I'm not working on another collection right now. To be honest, I'm sort of letting myself take a break from poetry—I actually haven't written a totally new poem since December 2024. For the past couple of years, I've mostly been focused on a memoir project that also served as my PhD dissertation. I finished the first draft of that book last spring and have been slowly but surely revising since then. It took a lot out of me. But hopefully I'll feel ready to write some new poems soon. In the meantime, I'm trying to enjoy celebrating the first book.

*Will you share one of your poetry goals with us?*

I have a lot of poetry goals. I think the big one at the root of all the more specific ones is that I want people to read my work. I want to get my work in as many people's hands as possible. Most people don't read poetry, and I have no illusions that that's going to change any time soon—but I would be

honored if I discovered at any point during my life that I did for anyone what Richard Siken did for me when I was fifteen, making some young person in some small town somewhere say, *wait, what is this? How can I use words to do this? I want to do this too.* And like most artists, I think, I hope for a legacy. May I be lucky enough for my work to survive me after I'm gone.

*What advice would you give to PRA members about submitting their work?*

Wait until it's ready. When you've written a draft of a poem, put it in a drawer for a week, a month, a year—as long as it takes for you to feel like you can look at the poem objectively so that you can revise it without ego.

When you're ready to revise, have others read your work and listen to their feedback. You can't please everyone, so when you get contradictory feedback from different people, don't panic. Learn to filter feedback in a way that serves your own vision for the poem; take what's useful and leave the rest. If multiple readers give you feedback about a specific part of a poem but all have different advice on how to revise, what you're getting is the information that *something* is off—and it's up to you to figure out how to revise it.

When you're certain that you're done revising a poem or a small group of poems, you may be ready to submit to literary journals and magazines. There are plenty of resources online for finding places to submit, but my favorite method is fairly analog: Read full-length poetry collections. When you come across a book by a poet you particularly admire, or one who you think writes similarly to you in terms of aesthetics or content, go to the book's

Acknowledgements section (usually in the back, sometimes in the front) to see where poems from the book have been published. Then go read some issues of those journals to see if you think your work would be a

good fit. Once you've come up with a list of places, start submitting.

Once you've started submitting, you will get a lot of rejections. This rejection has basically no relationship to the quality of your work; it's just part of the process. Journals get a lot of submissions and acceptance rates are generally pretty low, especially for high-ranking publications. You can minimize rejection a little by making sure you're curating the list of places to which you submit well—only submit to places that you can actually envision your work appearing, and don't submit to the *New Yorker* first then get frustrated when they won't publish you—but you'll never get rid of it entirely. My best advice here is to submit so frequently that you get used to rejections.

Remember that when you publish your work, it goes out into the world and operates outside of your control. The novelist John Green often says that “books belong to their readers,” and that's true for individual poems as well. People may have interpretations of your work that you find puzzling or affronting. But after the poem is published, your work is done. It belongs now to the reader. That's why it's so important to make sure that you've given the reader all the information they need *within the actual poem* as you're writing and revising. Once that poem is in the world, all you can really do is write more.



Thanks to **Christine Henderson** for this photo of the crowd at Spring Celebration.

## *From the Editor*

I've been taking online classes offered by River Heron Review. I have especially enjoyed my ekphrastic and prompt classes taught by Barbara Krasner. In Artful Writing Barbara does what she calls speed dating, only with images. We have one minute to write impressions from an image. She presents ten images. At the end of that time, the participants select one and write on it for 15 minutes. Then participants select another image and write for 15 minutes. We spend the last part of the two-hour class sharing what we've written. The instructor writes and shares, too.

In the prompt class which is called Writing to Save Your Life, participants are given a prompt, sent off to write, given another prompt, sent off to write, and if there is time, a third prompt is given. Writing is shared.

Both classes use the Amherst Writers & Artists Method. You can read about it here: <https://amherstwriters.org/what-to-expect/philosophy-practices/>

You can see what they have on offer here: <https://www.riverheronreview.com/writing-workshops>

I have generated a number of successful poems from these classes.

I signed up to have River Heron Review send me an image and a prompt each day in April to celebrate Poetry Month. What did you do to celebrate?

If you don't want to share your answer with everyone, then just email me at [jkmoultons@yahoo.com](mailto:jkmoultons@yahoo.com)

By the way, if you have a book coming out or a reading happening, send me the details and I can post about it on the PRA Facebook page.

Sincerely,  
**Karen Moulton**