

News 'N' Notes

August 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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Just when you think you can take it easy, life throws a few things at you and says, "Here, handle this!" That's kind of how my summer has gone. Among other things, I set my retirement date of August 1 three months ago. I'm scrambling to prepare for it and it's the end of this week! My plans for training a replacement got reduced from six weeks to about 20 hours, so ouch! I still don't know how that's going to go. But I kept a promise to myself and attended the Siloam Springs Writers' Guild workshop the weekend of July 18 and was not disappointed. "Our" own **Suzanne Underwood** was one of the speakers, along with writer/editor Robyn Hook and writer/professor/traveler Becky Marietta. There were breakout sessions, and I'm sorry I did not get the name of the person who presented publishing. Somebody drop me the info and I'll spread it around. The conference was well planned and executed. My kudos to the Siloam Springs Group. Combining sessions of prose and poetry filled a lot of gaps, and after Suzanne's presentation, Robyn commented about how even though our genres are different, many of the tips and tricks about engaging readers, approaching our subjects, and deciding on the best word choices are universal. You all



missed a great gathering...and I hope to be there again next year.

So, back to retirement plans. I'm trying to hold steadfast to things I'd like to accomplish the rest of this year. I have worked so hard for PRA in the past few years that my writing has suffered. I've written few poems during that time, have dropped all contest entering, and just have not had my head into the art. But I'm already changing that - giving myself a challenge every night. Instead of mindless television, I'm doing more reading and branching out into themes I've not ever explored before. I've kept prompts in the notes on my phone, and I'm starting to work through those, deciding what I meant (ha!) and what I could do with them.

Of course, writing is not the only thing I've got on the list. There are other old activities I always thought I'd get back into and new things I want to investigate further. It's almost like starting over, and it excites me. So I guess that's my message this time. Find something that excites you - something new, or something old that you have neglected - and think of the fresh, new world that lies ahead. After all, *tomorrow is the first day of* (yup - another cliché). See ya later!

Christine Henderson
President, PRA

Welcome New Members

David Boltz of Mountain Home, AR
Sheila Wyatt of Lakeview, AR
Ali Mattese of Mountain Pine, AR
Michelle Stoll of North Little Rock, AR
Vicky Pool of Siloam Springs, AR
Lisa Mullin of Hot Springs, AR
Judy Muselman of Gentry, AR
James McNeal of Little Rock, AR
Paula S. Kowszik of Millbury, MA
Wendy Derks of Higginson, AR
Stacey Bowers of N. Little Rock, AR
Sarah R. Barker of Greenbriar, AR
Charles Parks of Mountain Pine, AR

Congratulations and Newsworthy

May Monthly Contest Winners

Judge: **Marie Allison**

First Place: **Laura Bridges** “The Beginning and the End of the Arkansas River”

Second Place: **Cathy Moran** “Huck and Jim on the River”

Third Place: **Janice Canerdy** “Mississippi River Cruise-a Bucket-list Item”

First Honorable Mention: **Betty Jo Middleton** – “The Potomac”

Second Honorable Mention: **John Crawford** – “Red River Memories”

Third Honorable Mention: **Barbara Mosley** – “Our River of Dreams”

June Monthly Contest Winners

Judge: Amanda Garrison

First Place: **Cathy Moran** “the touch of my friend”

Second Place: **Jerri Hardesty** “At Lake Nokomis”

Third Place: **Mark Hudson** “The Texas Lake”

First Honorable Mention: **Karen Moulton** “Sunrise on Bull Shoals Lake”

Second Honorable Mention: **Larry Witherspoon** “Decompression”

Third Honorable Mention: **Sara Gipson** “Snowy Egret Photographs”

July Monthly Contest Winners

Judge: **Pat Durmon**

First Place: **John McPherson** “I Made a Kite That Would Not Fly”

Second Place: **Larry Witherspoon** “Call of the Sirens”

Third Place: **Cathy Moran** “Recognizing failure”

First Honorable Mention: **Marie Allison** “Failing”

Second Honorable Mention: **Patricia Laster** “Would Our Founders Feel They’d Failed?”

To see the complete **NFSPS Annual Contests Winners’ List**, click here:

<https://nfsp.net/2026-contest-results>

Once on that page, click on the link that says files and Winners List.

You will find many PRA members’ names.

At my count, there are three first place winners; five second place winners; eleven third place winners; and 31 honorable mentions. Also in the student contest grades 9-12, students from Arkansas took first and third place and first and third honorable mention. Congratulations!

Teresa H. Klepac was published in the Well-Versed 2026: A Collection of Poetry and Prose published by the Columbia Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild. Her three poems “Forever Starlight,” “Sunset Humming Bird,” and “Mundane Magic” were included. Her prose *Ouroboros Tangle* and *The Mage and the Night Witch* also were published in the anthology. She also read her work, *Ouroboros Tangle* at the launch for Well-Versed. *The Coffee Cup in Cedar City* non-fiction flash fiction will be published on the site picturajournal.com/intervals on August 3rd. Teresa will be scheduled as a featured author at **Spoken: Poetry and Prose** at Café Berlin, in Columbia, MO on August 27. Spoken is hosted by the Columbia Chapter

of the Missouri Writers Guild, Café Berlin, and Nightjar Arts Collective in Columbia, MO <https://www.nightjarartscollective.com/>. On June 2, 2026, she participated in Open Mic at Gumbo Bottoms Alehaus hosted by Gumbo Bottoms Single Pot Still Poets Society and also open mic at Spoken: Poetry and Prose on May 28. She is currently working on a poetry book for publication later this year.

John W. (Doc) Crawford entertained at Hot Springs Wednesday Night Poetry on July 1 reading his recent love poem titled "You Are My Adam, You Are My Eve"; "My Philosophy of Life" was published on June 8 in the Hot Springs Sentinel Record; he received a win from the NFSPS Convention Contest Chair for his prayer poem titled "Unity of Our Dreams," to be read at the July 23 dinner in Overland Park during the NFSPS Convention; he won an honorable mention at the White County Creative Writers Conference in June for his poem "My Annabelle."

John McPherson had two winning poems in The Great American Poetry Competition sponsored by The Society of Classical Poets. Under the Henry Longfellow Ode & Ballad category, "The Melody That Lingers On" placed in the Finalists Tier I and an "Old Man at the Wall" received an honorable mention in the same category. You can read his winning poems here:

<https://www.classicalpoets.org/winners-and-rankings-of-the-great-american-poetry-competition/>

Karen Moulton's poem, "Refrain" was published on July 29 in *The Ekphrastic Review*; "Kaleidoscope" and "Lines Written While Throwing Out Old Photos" will be in the August issue of *The Marbled Sigh*; "They Say Age Is Just a Number" will appear in the Fall/Winter issue of *Rats' Ass Review*.

Gail Denham's poem "Celebration of Peace" was chosen for the Sunflower Rising

Peace Anthology; "Finally" took third place in a Massachusetts contest; "Boys And Their Critters" received an honorable mention and will be in the Mississippi anthology; in the Oklahoma PSO, she won first place with "Cynthia" and second place with "Gospel Music"; Ethos first in theme - 100 word story "Chicken Feud"; "Carouse Horse" and several photos in Highland Park theme anthology; in a Pennsylvania contest, she had a third place showing and her poem "His Poetry and My Eclair" won first place; and "Midnight Ride" was in a Highland Park anthology.

Pat Durmon's my fifth book of poems is available for \$10 plus postage (patdurmon@gmail.com or via Amazon.) It is called *OFFERING: Poems on Grief*. In this book, she shares life examples of grief and loss, sometimes with resolution and hope, sometimes simply expressing the grief as it stands alone in all its rawness--the loneliness, anger, sadness, acceptance. She says, "Grief has a way of poking us, prodding us, and until we face it, we will carry it inside. Sometimes life hurts."

Paula Kowszik received seventh honorable mention in the NFSPS contest, category 48, The Poets Northwest Award where there were 126 entries. She received a small award from the Poetry Society of Texas for being the first to respond to their newsletter using certain words in a poem.

From **Fay Guinn**: "I attended the Hemingway Pfeiffer Writers Retreat June 22-26. One of the best I've been to. And I've been to a lot. Almost every one in the last 14 years. The mentor (writer-in-residence), Greg Brownderville, is a poet and has been teaching at SMU since 2012. Also a singer-songwriter. He actually taught poetry that week. First mentor I can remember who taught poetry even though there have been mentors who wrote poetry as well as prose. Thought I knew everything there was to know about writing verse.

Turns out I was wrong. So wrong. I learned a lot. Wrote copious notes. Penned five poems with ideas for many more. Yay! Hemingway Pfeiffer Writers Retreat!"

Elizabeth Dail, President of the Baxter County Poets' Association states that members have been taking turns writing to a particular form. The group started with limericks and have recently moved to haiku. Below is the limerick sequence featuring a hat of some sort called "There Once Was Minus One."

Elizabeth Dail

Once there was a man without a hat.
His hairline was quickly marching back.
Then he entered a store,
when exiting he wore
on his head, a Yankee's baseball cap.

David Boltz

There once was a Sheik from Nantucket
Whose Keffiyeh covered a bucket
When the jihad began
Quick to Harvard he ran
Threw a bomb and said "best you duck it."

Karen Moulton

There once was a gal from Chicago
who was always seen in her chapeau
She'd run jump and play
In snow ev'ry day
But never did cover her torso

Debra Dail

There once was an 'ole man from South
Maine
Most folks thought was insane
He quickly chose his booze
When he boarded the cruise
Then jumped ship yelling "Where is my
cane?"

Sheila Wyatt

There once was a girl who found a burl
Upon placing her hand she did hurl
She lived on foreign land
Konechiwa, Japan
She was elated as an oyster pearl

Pat Durmon shares: "Our Mountain Home Free Verse Poetry Group, which is not a member of PRA, meets monthly and donated eight poetry books this April to third grade students in three elementary schools: Hackler Elementary (Mountain Home), Viola Elementary and Norfolk Elementary. The teacher I worked with at Norfolk was receptive and grateful. We left it up to the three teachers and a librarian to discern the best way to put the books in the hands of 24 children. Colorful bookmarks created by Barbara Robinette were part of the gift package. This was an effort to encourage reading poetry. Those members who ordered and distributed the books to the teachers were blessed.

I am a PRA member, but I may be the only one in my group. We do study poems and critique each other's poetry on the 2nd Saturday of each month at the Donald W. Reynolds Library in Mountain Home at 1:00 p.m."

Board Meeting Highlights

The PRA Board met on June 27 in Searcy. Merit Award nominations were made and voted on by secret ballot. The winner will be announced at Poetry Day on October 17, 2026.

Nominating committee chair for the 2027-28 election is **John McPherson**. He will choose a team of five members to fill board positions.

Steve May has agreed to continue serving as webmaster for the PRA website at the same fee as last year.

A Poetry Day speaker was suggested as well as a venue for Poetry Day. (Both have now been confirmed. See article on Poetry Day in this newsletter for details.) Suggestions were made for the Sybil Nash Abrams contest judge and forwarded to **Marilyn Joyner** who is the chair of the committee.

Various roles were filled for Poetry Day:

Poetry Day Chair: **Larry Witherspoon**; Critiques: **Frieda Patton**; Programs: **Suzanne Rhodes**; Door prizes: **Fay Guinn** and **Larry Witherspoon**; **Frieda Patton** will bring plates, cups, utensils, and napkins; **Dennis Patton** will provide water, drinks, and coffee; **Suzanne Rhodes**, **Larry Witherspoon**, and **Dennis Patton** volunteered to judge some Poetry Day Contests.

Because of some confusion when chairs changed, a change was suggested and approved to have page 7 in the yearbook read: *3. Entries must be mailed to: refer to website for contact name/address or contact the President.*

A change was suggested and approved to have page 10 for the Spring Celebration contests contacts be replaced with: *6. Mail no earlier than January 1 and no later than February 28 (postmark) to: refer to website for contact name/address or contact the President.*

The treasurer position remains vacant. President **Christine Henderson** is filling in for now. **Renee Ramsey** has resigned her historian position. **Larry Witherspoon** volunteered and was approved by the board to be historian. Two members-at-large positions are vacant. Suggestions were made. (Those positions were filled after the board meeting. You can read about the new members-at-large in this newsletter.)

Larry Witherspoon volunteered to be Membership Chair. **Ali Mattese** volunteered to be the Monthly Contest Chair beginning in September. (Look under Contests on the PRA webpage after August 1st for contact information.)

The Collegiate Contest Chair and the Student Contest Chair positions are vacant. **Suzanne Rhodes** volunteered to check with someone to possibly fill the Collegiate Contest position and to report back to **Christine Henderson**. There are two individuals expressing interest in the Student

Contest Chair position. **Christine Henderson** will make a determination to fill this position.

A motion passed to change the appointed position of Youth Chair listed on page 2 of the Yearbook to Student Contest Chair.

A motion passed to make changes to a sentence under Membership Information on page 5 of the Yearbook to read: *First-time members joining between January 1 and March 31 will pay a reduced fee...*

Poetry Day Plans in Place

Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas will host Poetry Day on October 17, 2026 at the Parkview Methodist Church in Benton, Arkansas. Registration will begin at 9:00 a.m. followed at 9:30 a.m. by the program presented by **Tori Sharpe**, Associate Professor of English at Arkansas Tech University. There is no registration fee. **Larry Witherspoon** will serve as Poetry Day Chair. There will be a pot luck lunch and door prizes. Poetry Day Contest winners will be announced. If you wish to have a poem critiqued by **Tori**, please mail or email it to **Frieda Patton** by September 1st. (You can find **Frieda's** contact information in the PRA Yearbook.) There is no line limit for these drafts. The first ten submitted will be critiqued.



Tori Sharpe received her master's degree in Creative Writing from The University of Texas and her PhD in Creative Writing from

The University of North Texas. Her writing has appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Blackbird*, *The Southwest Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Humanities Review*,

Pleiades, and other journals. She has received awards from institutions such as The Academy of American Poets, The Robert Frost Foundation, and The Association of Writers and Writing Programs, and she was recently awarded a 2026 Individual Artist Fellowship from the Arkansas Arts Council. She is currently an Associate Professor of English at Arkansas Tech University.

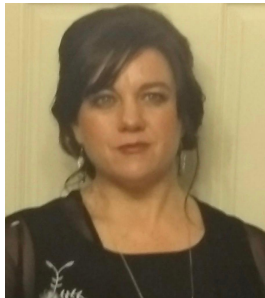
Important Changes in PRA Roles

Larry Witherspoon is the membership chair. Check the membership page on the PRA website for his contact information.

Ali Mattese will be taking over as monthly contest chair starting with the September contest. You will find her contact information as well as the 2026-2027 monthly contest descriptions on the Contest/Monthly Contests page very soon.

Meet New Board Members-At-Large

Ali Mattese and **Michelle Stoll** have agreed to serve on the PRA Board. As you will find out by reading their profiles, they have a lot to offer the PRA.



At the age of 14-years-young, **Ali Mattese** began studying poetry with her 9th-grade English class in public school. She entered a PRA contest, won, and was so

encouraged that she wrote over two hundred poems in less than two years—writing which, she admits, saved her life.

Over the four years of high school, while enduring tremendous hardships which would have crippled most young students—Ali went on to enter other poetry contests, was published in two anthologies, and her poem “And Then There Was Love”, won

two awards—a trophy and a medal—at the District- and Regional-levels of The Teen Talent Extravaganza with the Church of the Nazarene and Southern Nazarene University. Ali went on to graduate high school homeless, crediting her survival to writing poetry as her outlet and therapy.

In 2017, Ali met PRA’s Mrs. **Marie Allison**.

Marie quickly invited her to join the Hot Springs chapter of PRA. As Marie continued encouraging her in her writing, Ali was again published in an anthology at National Park College in 2018. Ali remained a member of PRA until moving out of state in 2022. Now back in Arkansas, she has rejoined the Hot Springs chapter of PRA.

Writings include innumerable poems, songs—on children and faith, as well as jingles—sermons (occasionally), nonfiction works, speeches, essays, and curriculum—school, homeschool, and parochial lessons.

Speaking engagements have ranged from fundraisers, homelessness and poverty, life skills workshops, leadership and stewardship, recruiting events for nonprofits, et al. Teaching engagements have included all ages from birth to adult, children’s studies in

faith—Bible, prayer, missions—preschool computer classes, public schools, homeschool, preschools (all ages), art classes and camps, Success Classes—children using art to paint future success stories, working with nonprofits, ESL classes (English Second Language) through the Garland County Literacy Council, et al. Enjoying hobbies of thinking, researching, gardening, and exploring nature, Ali invests herself as a literacy advocate, bridge builder, and lover of books, plants, and dark chocolate, “as medicine of course!”

Passionate about mentoring and opening opportunities for youth to experience the arts, especially writing, Ali envisions a Junior League of Writers—providing a space for youth to express themselves

through writing, while developing language skills, building confidence, and growing as future leaders.

“In Shadow and Shade”

By Ali Mattese

Darkness descends,
In shadow and shade,
Life wanes
As light begins to fade.

The light crumbles,
Life stumbles,
Darkness shatters the light
As day gives way to night.

In shade and shade,
Wakefulness perishes,
Relinquishing power over life and living
Succumbing to all that is waning...

Sleeping...
Mysterious...
Fleeting...
Into shadow and shade.

What'er be lifted
And lighted,
Now becomes all that is withered
And blighted.

What more can be said
For darkened descendants?
What more can be had
'Cept slight and rescindance?

We'll shutter our resistance
At holding back our fierce brigade,
Muddling their defenses...
In shadow and shade!

Michelle Stoll is a native of North Little Rock, AR. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) and completed a

Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from Mississippi University for Women. Her poetry and fiction have been widely



published in well-established journals such as *Slant*, *West Trade Review* and the *Galway Review*. Her essays have also appeared in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. Michelle was a finalist for the Tennessee Williams and River Heron Review poetry prizes and was shortlisted for the Wigtown Poetry Prize. Michelle has served on the editorial staff of *Poetry South* and *Slant* and has been a judge for the UCA student poetry competition. Michelle's writing is deeply influenced by place and sensory experience. Her poetry often explores questions of mortality, transcendence, family, self-identity, and occasionally the mystery of cats.

Before returning to Arkansas in 2022, Michelle lived in Virginia for 25 years where she managed communications for several state agencies, primarily the departments of Health and Forestry. She was a certified wildlife rehabilitator with the Virginia Wildlife Center where she specialized in capturing and restraining raptors and snapping turtles. She began her life in Virginia as a volunteer with the U.S. Forest Service, living in a one-room cabin in the Appalachian Mountains. She now feeds her love of nature through her role as lead writer for an Arkansas-based environmental business, as a Master Naturalist, and by

serving as assistant scout leader for Troop 427G.

You can read "Instructions for My Death" a runner-up for the River Heron Review Poetry Prize along with judge's comments here:

<https://www.riverheronreview.com/river-heron-poetry-prize-2023-1#/michelle-stoll>

From the Editor

This has been a mixed summer for me. I have had a record number of journal acceptances, I have enjoyed my gardens and the critters who visit them—butterflies, caterpillars, birds, and moths—but I have also been recovering from trigger finger surgeries—one finger on each hand—a lack of air conditioning in our certified pre-owned car we just bought, and my older sister has spent most of the month of July in and out of ER, hospitals, and skilled nursing facilities with little improvement to show for it. She lives in Los Angeles. The distance apart adds to the frustration. I'll be flying there sometime in August.

But back to the journal acceptances. I have received this advice for years: read poems in journals you are considering submitting to. This is simple to implement. Simpler now than ever before perhaps because so many journals are online and make their issues available at no cost. I finally used this advice and guess what? Those journals that I felt published work similar to my style and taste said yes to my work.

I am a life-long learner and as such, I participate in a lot of online (mostly) classes and webinars. I try out various poets' offerings. For example, last summer about this time, I decided to be part of the Litfield Community led by poet Danushi Lameris and her partner, Armando Alcaraz. For my rather hefty membership cost, there are five main monthly events: a close study of a published poet's work, an interview with that poet who answers questions and reads

their work, an open mic event, a fishbowl session where four members of the Litfield Community have their work critiqued, and a generative session with two writing prompts. There is space to share work and receive cursory feedback as well.

By far the best money I've spent is for my ekphrastic classes with teacher and poet, Barbara Krasner. She offers classes through her website in addition to classes through River Heron Review. These are generative classes. Some of my best poetry has been written under her instruction. If you need a spark of inspiration, seek her out. Lastly, I am looking forward to a poetry retreat at Boyd's Mills in Pennsylvania in November.

It is exciting to see how many new members we have in the PRA and how so many of them have jumped in to take on roles and tasks. If you have been wanting to contribute to the PRA in some way, be sure to reach out to **Christine Henderson**. She'll be happy to put you to work—maybe as treasurer? We still need one. Or perhaps you'd like to be the Collegiate Poetry Contest Chair. I will show you the ropes.

Don't forget to submit your Poetry Day Contest poems by August 15 and remember the USPS may not postmark your envelope if you just drop it in the box. Take it inside and ask for the postmark to guarantee you meet the deadline. All of the details can be found here:

<https://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/2026-poetry-day-contests-brochure-final.pdf>

Happy writing and maybe I'll see you in Benton on October 17th.

Sincerely,
Karen Moulton
Editor