



California State Poetry Society

Post Office Box 7126, Orange, California 92863

2019 No. 1 *Poetry Letter*, a publication of the California State Poetry Society

CSPS Poetry Letter

Dear Poets and Readers of Poetry:

This April Month of World-Wide Poetry marks the first issue of the *Poetry Letter* published on our website, californiastatepoetrysociety.org. From now on, it will be vastly easier to print all our flyers inside the issue, or, in the case of the *Poetry Letter*, have it appear on the website. I remember stuffing those envelopes at John Forrest Harrell's house that were always so tight, especially fitting in the publication of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, *Strophes*, which will now appear electronically on their website, nfsp.org.

Remember, the *Poetry Letter* is for publishing already-published poems. So if you wish to contribute an acclaimed, published poem of yours to the *Poetry Letter* from now on, please do not hesitate to send it directly to my email below. That way I will see it on the day you mail it. ☺

We thank John Forrest Harrell for years of hard work on the *CQ* and in the CSPS and welcome the dynamic, competent and delightful Maja Trochimczyk as our new President, elected by the Board. (Disclosure: Maja has published two of my books, *Lit Angels* and *Gardens of the World*)

By the way, we are still trying to compose a complete run of early *CQ* issues for our archives, which are housed at the California State Library in Sacramento—but they are hard to find. If you have, or have inherited, a set of *CQ*s and can part with them, *please* let us know!

Wishing you a happy summer and *lots* of good reading *and* writing,

Margaret Saine
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We start with a reminiscence from last year about the *Valley Poets*, a group founded during the early days of the *CQ*. Our recently retired Board member, Keith Van Vliet, a long-standing *CQ* editor and one of its editors for upwards of two decades, wrote it and we thank him very much. The Valley, to be sure, is the San Gabriel Valley, east of Los Angeles.

The Valley Poets

There are more ways than one to profit from writing poetry. Besides the personal satisfaction from turning an original phrase, there are the associations one can gain, being part of a poetry group. The *Valley Poets* group was founded in 1983 by Keith Van Vliet from a want ad in the local paper, which brought a few interested local poets together who consented to once-a-week meetings on Tuesday evenings in an office building Van Vliet had recently built. From that beginning, the group has continued for 35 years, meeting 17 years in the office and, after Van Vliet retired, 18 years in the Van Vliet living room.

The poets who have come and gone over those years have provided Van Vliet with a wealth of good poetry and also a wealth of entertainment. Keith is Vice President of CSPS, and besides a stint as *CQ* editor, is chair of the Monthly Contest [until April 2019]. Last year, 2017, Van Vliet, reflecting on all the interesting poets the 34 years of the group had brought him, decided to write them up as a story. From copies saved of every poem that had been read over those years, he was able to provide a sample of the best work of each of the members. The recent functions of the group provided the aging Van Vliet with inspiration for the written account. As the story grew, the appreciation for the poets grew, and the inspiration for telling the tale became a six-part serial during the 2018 production of *The Glendora Magazine*, a local publication.

Van Vliet proclaims the 18,000-word account to be a major joy in his 92nd year—as poetry has been for all the decades it has been a part of his life. Back copies of the magazine can be obtained from Liberty Enterprises, PO Box 1174, Glendora, CA 91740-1174.

Keith Van Vliet, 2018

To honor our past President, John Forrest Harrell, I would like to print two of his poems, both from the book, *The Hand of the Midnight Moon* (Brendan Printing House 2017):

Wisdom in the Sky

Lounging on my back in the garden's soft grass,
The landscape silvered by the full moon's light,
Tiny points of stars tickle my consciousness.
I pick at them, pulling each one from the heavens
And popping it into my mind, mulling it over,
Chewing, feeling the laughter it twinkles at me.
When I've used them all up, I go down into the earth
And savor the deep sleep of one who is secure.



The Fountain of Youth

Her emotions huff, rise and fall
Over lines of love and hate; her eyes fill with cold fury
For multitudes, for possible failures of plutonium fires,
And for animals maybe mistreated by insensitive handlers.
She flashes brightly and then fades to sneers for old lovers
Who misunderstood their roles and failed her expectations.
She is pretty, slender, and moves boldly with sure gestures,
But they are punctuated somehow with moments of uncertainty,
So that I want to touch her, to protect her and support her.
Even as I think such thoughts, I am much too shy to move.
I cannot give the reassurance I conjure as a gift for her.
She would misspell my honest concern as sneaking sexuality.
Surely, she would; so I listen to the language of her poems
And offer my own quiet praise for her growing, glowing gift.
I love her strong commitments, but I don't truck with them.
In my middle age and particular experience I have no energy
For millions beyond my ken, nor for animals I've never seen.
And I prefer to put the heat of my heart into the tragedies
I have hope in some small way of changing for the better.
There is also another aspect to our different times of life.
Watching her reject old lovers with a cold, righteous scorn,
I think of my first wife, not of the betrayal and the pain,
But of the sweet hot love I held in my young heart for her
And how it lingers in me still.

Here are two poems by Diane Lee Moomey of Half Moon Bay, California. They are charming sonnets, indeed, in the English format of 12 verses + 2. (You will remember the European Continental version is the Petrarchan sonnet, 2 quatrains of 4 verses and 2 tercets of 3 verses):

Seven a.m.

Raku's the name I give these pots of tender
clay, fired and coated in a wash
of powdered glass and flamed again. With tongs,
I've pulled them out at orange heat and dropped
them into vats of grasses, sawdust, straw,
perhaps to shatter into glitter or
to crack with blackened webs like highway maps
across a glossy surface. Plates, and cups



that now hold tea and coffee—crackle lines
that trace their crazy route a little farther
'round the curve with every morning's pour
the way our faces crease and fold themselves
around our forks and spoons, the bagel crumbs
and butter, kisses, our bits of daily news.

**1st Prize, 99th Ina Coolbrith Circle Poetry Contest (Fall
2018)**

**Honorable Mention, 2017 Soul-Making Keats Literary
Contest, Sonnet Category**

Wearing Snakes

I let them wrap around my wrists, the sleek
green scales so like the gold link
bracelet Mother wears to parties. So like—
I close my eyes while wearing one and feel
the other. In summer's green beside the fence,
by long stems my father's mower doesn't
reach, I wait, place my wrist on mullein,
grasses, dock. They part. I intercept
and lift, feel it wrap. Snake will twine
around an arm, always: body taut
and steadying itself against a fall.
(Ruby tongue flicks in and out). In my
own world I am, (ruby tongue tastes),
the only little girl who wears snakes.

**Honorable Mention, 2018 Soul-Making Keats Literary
Contest, Sonnet Category**

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Until next time, I remain
Your *Poetry Letter* editor,

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Orange, April 2019

