California State Poetry Society is pleased to publish the prize-winning poems for the year 2021 in its blog and the Poetry Letter No. 1 of 2022. Below is the list of winners with links to the blog posts where the poems are published. January through March winners appeared on the blog twice, April through June once and July through December also once in the blog posts linked below. The award winning poems are included in this issue of the Poetry Letter. Since there are so many, we will publish book reviews in the next issue in May 2022. Congratulations to the poets and many thanks to Alice Pero, our Monthly Contests Judge.

As illustrations on this blog, we are presenting the artwork of Pam Coulter Blehert, still life paintings and landscapes. The artist who died in 2021 was born in Evanston, Illinois and lived in Northern Virginia, the subject of many of her landscapes. She completed various postgraduate courses in art: American University, Corcoran School, Odeon Art School (LA), Paris and holds a B.A. degree from Antioch College in Humanities/Studio Arts (1965). She participated in 17 solo exhibitions and in 34 group exhibitions. You can find more information on her website at pamcoulterart.com.

~Maja Trochimczyk, Editor

### List of Monthly Contest Winners

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**September 2021** - Theme: Colors, Music, Dance. □ 1st prize: Catherine McCraw, "Blue Plate Special" □ 2nd prize: Carla Schick, "Other Miracles I Failed to Notice.(Remembering Coltrane’s Dear Lord)" □ 3rd prize: Jonathan Ansley Ward, "Are Islands Alive"

**October 2021** - Theme: Humor, Satire. □ First Prize: Joan Gerstein, "A Day of Races"


**December 2021** - Theme: Best of Your Best (award-winning or published poems). □ First prize: Lynn M. Hansen, "Storm Spiders" □ Second prize Elizabeth Kuelbs, "Flower Moon" □ Third prize: Louise Kantro, "By the Campfire, Borrego Desert"

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**JANUARY 2021 – FIRST PRIZE**

**Sanctuary**  
*by Emory D. Jones*

Bent grasses hint  
at the passing of unseen winds  
and spirits.

Spires of black spruce,  
rise out of moss  
and point skyward,  
their broken branches draped  
with a haunting thin gauze  
of lichens.

Poisonous red capped mushrooms stand  
like miniature tables and chairs—  
fungus furniture  
that some secret night  
might have hosted  
the "little people"  
so important in the folklore  
of the native Ojibwa.

Something spiritual lives here,  
something dark  
something old.

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**JANUARY 2021 – SECOND PRIZE**

**The Summer of Fire**  
*by Marlene Hitt*

... only a few clear days to see mountains  
that summer of smoke.  
It blew north to south, west to east,  
then due westward with a thick canopy  
veiling the sky.  
That one morning, dawn sun  
rose red as a bloody yolk  
fiery as those flames  
that devour ridges and ranges  
licking them clear of chaparral.  
That sun spread orange on the sheets  
where we lay while orange flames  
covered thickets and nests.  
Fire!  
You have such a terrible craving  
reducing cedar and pine to  
blackened stumps, sumac to ash.  
We pray for rain to bear you downhill  
to melt the rage of you.  
This morning in the orange light  
air is pungent;  
the smell of black brush,  
the fear of live creatures.  
After the night of fire  
I do not fret over the smell of  
last night’s onions  
nor do I light a bathroom candle  
but gaze out to yellow-grey,  
watch the mountains disappear.

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LEFT: Pam Coulter, “Shack in the Foothills”
JANUARY 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

The Coming Snow
by David Anderson

The lone buffalo grazes
ninety feet away
from a single giant pine.

This landscape hangs
unbalanced
by the haze of a coming storm.

Coated with ice
the buffalo
continues to bite

the short grass
we cannot see
under the shifting layer of slush.

Spare winter feed belies
the flourishing tree
which, like the buffalo,

stands alone
and catches the diamonds
of the oncoming snow.

FEBRUARY 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Speculation
by Claire J. Baker

I learn by going where I have to go.
~ Theodore Roethke

My love & I are a blink
in time’s polished mirror
a tinkling of bells
a sprinkling of savvy
filled with drama, trauma & triumph.

In the center of our story
we gather anise
& rosemary for soup.
After reading The Waking
we realize we read each other easily.

Speculating
we will love forever,
clinking glasses
surely makes it so,
& so for now
we gloriously come and go.
MARCH 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

**Just One Thing—**
*by Julia Park Tracey*

Between two trees, a pretty
atch of light like sun on water, firelight on walls—
like rain against the window, where every gleam’sa jewel—

Mica in concrete. Ice crystals. My wedding band with a diamond for each child.
William Carlos Williams’ broken glass and Lucy in the sky, all shining with that unbearable beauty, the only thing that keeps my two feet moving when I should otherwise collapse. A sparkle so bright it waters my eyes. A light so delicate and sharp like the first breath on a January morning. Strange that’s all it takes some days to endure. So little. So much.’

Pam Coulter, “Lemons in a White Bowl”

**APRIL 2021 - FIRST PRIZE**

**Aboriginal Americans**
*by Colorado Smith*

A windblown iris-blue sky,
flint chips and black-on-white shards are peppered among red-rock spires where, centuries of centuries ago,
yucca-fiber sandals pressed braided tracks into this barren barranca leading down to a sulfur spring.
Summer monsoon mud and smoldering sun seared their trace into castellated Cañyon del Muerto in the Dragoon Mountains.

A fevered history and sacred legends from the People’s Chantways speak of spiritual geography:
ancestral burial cists, shamantic blessings;
of salt-pilgrimages to the Sea of Cortez, of crossing windswept sands and silver playas;
of parched, desert dreams: mesquite-bean mortars, palo verde, and Sages.

**APRIL 2021 – SECOND PRIZE**

**Plein Air, Oxford**
*by Teresa Bullock*

There. Near the pinking apples stands a giant chestnut shading the yard.
On the ancient wall crusty with lichen, a resting cat sits sentry. Plush gray, a boat cat by trade, he stops by for a lap of milk and tummy rub before padding home to his long boat on the Isis.
Downy cygnets paddle around his boat, bobbing and weaving for slick grasses. Sculls swoosh by like needlefish.
Look again. Up river a cow herd cools under long lashes of willow. Port Meadow glows golden in the late sun. The palette: Mud Brown, Tree-Canopy Green, Sky Water Blue, Shadow Black. For the cows - quick strokes in white and rust.
**Praxilla's Folly**  
*by Ruth Berman*

Sicya — a fruit like the cucumber  
Or the gourd  
Eaten ripe.  

In Cucumber Town  
In Sicyon near Corinth  
Praxilla mourned Adonis in the spring.  

Her Adonis, sprouting in the garden,  
Spoke of what he missed,  
Being dead:  

Sunlight  
Starlight  
Moonlight  

Ripe cucumbers  
Apples  
Pears.  

Silly as Praxilla's Adonis!"  
Men in other  
Cities hooted  

Shocked that an idiot woman dared  
Put cucumbers on a par  
With the celestial glories  
In Cucumber Town  
Praxilla  
Ate fresh salad  

Her bite of immortality  
Succulent  
With earth-born flavors.  

In the land of death, Adonis  
Waiting for the spring  
Remembers sunlight on the garden.

**Mending its Own Business**  
*Elaine Westheimer*

Slick, midnight black, big as Poe's imagination, bird claws wood  
where leafy tears flutter like green crystals under a jay-blue sky.  

Seems nothing like a writing desk*  
as I spy its folded span amid tree sway and sprawl, a warrior hunter alert for prey and insurrection.

---

*Why is a raven like a writing desk?" is a riddle proposed by the Mad Hatter during a tea party in Lewis Carroll's classic 1865 novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
May 2021 – Third Prize

The House Knows
by Elizabeth Kuelbs

The house knows this baby’s zipping her bags bound for some wild place riddled with termites or leaks or views of cracked bricks. All the babies are the house’s favorite so she sings remember like a circus at the end of the world tumbling lavender Easter eggs from under the sofa, sunshining the floor with golden nap patches, percussing the stairs with ghosts of first steps and high heels, breathing fresh sourdough and butter from the kitchen, cajoling flocks of orioles to trill in the backyard poplars, and plinking scraped knees and triumph on the worn piano. But this baby, bound for some wild place, just kisses the front door, then rolls her bags down the walk where the weeping cherries froth blossoms at her nonstop and the grass greens so hard, stretching pluckily skyward—you hear me, baby? the house calls, you stretch skyward always lawnmowers or no damn lawnmowers

June 2021 – First Prize

The Ghost in the Restaurant
by Gail White

If I’m not fit for heaven, let me haunt Venice, I prayed. And now I have a front Row seat at Florian’s, facing St. Mark’s square, To start again my oldest love affair. It’s true the waiter never comes to take My order - understandable mistake Since I’m not visible - so what’s the use Of showering the servants with abuse? People sit down around me. I don’t care- Catching the pageant from my vacant chair, I see the paving stones grow bright with rain, The pigeons cluck and stutter, twilights wane To starry nights. I watch, while thanking God, God, the changing lights that turn St. Mark’s facade from gray-green stone into a sheet of gold. Don’t sit down suddenly. You’ll feel the cold.

July 2021 – First Prize

Mezzrow’s Mistake
by Corey Weinstein

What was I thinking, what was thinking anyway? In high school I thought a lot about who was doing what to whom, And how did I fit in or out. A jock, yes that barn door right tackle, The pride of Little Warsaw, Polsky Tech, Lumbered dumbly right up to us stoners, Da ya know where I ken get sum, y a k now, sum. A doobie lookin’ for a doob, yes, Dope, dank, bud, boo, giggle stick, weed, Joy by many names, Herb, cabbage, reefer, shake, In so many ways, Ganja, da kine, Cheech and Chong, skunk. His Jay Tokenstein to my Mezz Mezzrow, My 420 every day to his can’t name the day. Dare I on a dare, I did dare, I swear. In the hall, swivel eyes, arms at sides, palms fast and smooth, cash and goods, A dime bag, he’d never know it was Oregano. Let’s just say, He Knew. What was I thinking!
On Butterflies
By Keala Rusher

One day, I woke up
Just like every other
But this day, I was no longer
Sixteen or seventeen or eighteen.

Instead, the lettuce in the planterbox
had bittered and bolted
Shooting up flowering stalks,

While the air smelled of soil
And warm tomatoes
Fresh off their vines in mid July.
If I spoke to my past self
And she asked me if true love exists
I would tell her yes,
Because I know it myself.

Though, it doesn’t feel like
harrowing and insects,
however beautiful,
The way people say it does.

More so a letter with good news
You were not expecting,
Sweet tea, and a fleeting breeze
That carries scents you can't begin to place,
But recall all the same.

ABOVE: “Sunflowers and Pears”
RIGHT: “Great Falls Autumn” by Pam Coulter

Canid
By Chryss Yost

This story begins with low sun and low tide.
The shadows pulled across on the sand,
rolled out like butchers’ paper.

The blue-grey brush strokes evening.

The story my dog tells himself,
of shadow wolf in the wilderness,
running with his fierce jaws and arch
of feathered tail projected onto sand.

And the shadow of me, long-limbed
giant wobbling south, with the tide
and the darkness snarling over
who will get us first.
Montreal from a Departing Plane’s Window
By Ahmand Amir Malik

The buildings and bridges that were so bright and so towering yesterday
with a thousand lambent flickers receding like an irreversible lament.

City lights that often spoke of home, of her, of tears hidden no longer
breathing in fragile shimmers the way teardrops do.

Somehow, I know the wistful agonies that vacillate in the city air
after an hour of rain; somehow, I know the petrichor of moist yellow leaves
rising from the street sides around St. Denis tomorrow morning.

In a few hours,
I’ll be a line of burning frost in the sky,
a contrail of wonder for a child lying in the dying November grass.

And now I can see all the streets I never saw,
all the people I never knew,
all the lives I never lived.

Caribbean Dreams 1 & 2
By Eileen Carole

I have felt no tropical breezes
Blowing through my sister locks
Have sipped no Caribbean concoction
With coconut and tiny umbrella
Have eaten no plantain, much less rice and curried goat
I have walked no sandy white beaches
Whether by day or moonlight eve
I have shopped no marketplace for baskets and shells and such
No tall, dark and handsome island man
Has whispered sweet nothings in my ear
I’ve not the money to have the travel agent book the fare
I sit landlocked and stateside I fear
So, my Caribbean fantasy is just that, a dream
St. Lucia, Antigua, Jamaica… all too far away it seems

This is my equinox, my season of content
A Spring, eternal on my horizon
The onset of sunshine, warm days and Caribbean nights
My season of glory and community with earth and sea
Barefoot in the sand and skipping along the shore
Basking in Spring and longing for Summer
Spring is my opportunity to reinvent myself
To evolve into my higher destiny
In this place is my time to come alive again
Leaving Winter’s discontent
And the cold, synonymous with closure
I have come to the island to retire, yet live again
I’ve come into my equinox, my Spring, if only in my dream!
Blue Plate Special
By Catherine McCraw

Flying home to Hot Springs
for Christmas
I closed my eyes and recalled
the old Bluebell Cafe, long closed,
which was a few blocks
from my parent’s home.
and served "blue plate specials". I tried to remember the distinct color
of the sturdy china dinnerware ...
at first I thought cornflower
but my memory twisted
to a darker tint, more a deep royal blue,
like a winter evening in Paris,
the time of day the French call l'heure bleue.
Then my mind segued to the Club Cafe downtown
that served homemade custard or fruit pies
and the waitress who was always there
with the blueblack beehive hair,
wearig the mustard gold uniform
with the cream ruffled apron.
What was her name -
Edith, Evelyn, Esther, Estelle?
I refuse to believe she retired or died,
She was too essential.
I prefer to imagine she slipped through
a lattice-work square in time
and now resides in a black-and-white
Twilight Zone-esque diner
where she doles out slices of blueberry pie
and thick mugs of hot coffee
while she daydreams of sneaking out
back for a Marlboro break.
Then I revert to trying to conjure
the shade of those plates -
cheerful afternoon blue,
or a deep twilight hue?
It's not really true you can't go home again,
but it is true you can't get home again.

Anacapa, Island of Mirage
By Lynn E. Hansen

Emerging from coastal fog
Anacapa, known by the Chumash
as Anypakh, Island of Mirage,
appears as one island
but is actually three
separated by water.
Wind-swept and volcanic,
Anacapa grows golden
with a unique floral display
each Spring - giant coreopsis.
At the East end of the island chain,
Arch Rock bends over the sea,
forms a frame for reflection
of our solar flame as it slides into the next day -
its last beams glittering
on the writhing water that slaps
steep cliffs along island sides.
Without fresh water or trees,
western gulls form pairs,
join the largest breeding colony
of their species in the world.
Safe from predators, surrounded
by abundance of food, they build nests
in sheltered depressions of vegetation,
forage in the rich waters off shore,
feed and defend their spotted chicks,
circle overhead keening,
dive bomb human visitors,
appear out of the fog
like ghosts.
Other Miracles I Failed to Notice. (Remembering Coltrane's Dear Lord)

by Carla Schick

Coltrane's sax breaks sound
Each note yearns for the next
prayer

Walk these hot humid days
Walk although your body just drifts
nowhere-

Who watches?

Strange to view everyone turn in
tears centered in their eyes
clouds drift in and out
no direct path of light

Each note ascends to the next
unpredictable sequence of chords
a key no one heard before shudders

I move looking out a window
catch my reflection
yet cannot see

Each note turns
Each note trails above

Unbroken clouds desert lupine
blossoms as though resting
in opened palms-

Alone and not I listen again
did I hear him crying or just
myself shedding skin
I thought I knew'

SEPTEMBER 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

Are Islands Alive?

By Jonathan Ward

Sunrise over Kauai
Blue/Green + Golden sand
The night loses its magic
The day begins to dance

Are islands alive?
Do they breathe in
The warm tropical breezes
Do they exhale turquoise surf?

Is Love like an island—
A warm embrace of wonder
A surrender of the heart
Into a peaceful sea of Light?

Sunset over Kauai
Golden Fire into Green/Blue
The day enfolds into twilight
The stars begin to dance
OCTOBER 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Day of Races
By Joan Gerstein

With briefcase in hand and sharpened pencils, I traverse streets of this coastal town. In evenings, mornings and afternoons, I wear sturdy shoes, walk up and down.

I enumerate for the US Census, going to non-response follow-up homes. I record the answers they give me, though I’d rather be penning a poem.

The questions of name, sex, age are easy. "Are you of Hispanic origin?” is OK, but I know when I voice the next question, perplexed people will stare with dismay.

We’re almost done, it’s the fifth question, I smile sweetly as I gaze at their faces. Please look at list D, I say, with dread, Choose one or more of the following races.

There's Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, African American, Negro, Black, American or Asian Indian, maybe White if a name starts with Mac.

There's Filipino or Other Asian, Native Hawaiians or perhaps Samoan. You could be Other Pacific Islander. Tell me which ones you have chosen.

I don’t really understand, they reply, I think of myself as Canadian. With a weary smile and patience of Job, I say Look and show them List D again.

Where is Estonia, they inquire. I'm sorry but I fail to understand. Using examples I learned in training, I cite some groups, give a helping hand.

Pacific Island groups include Tongans. Other Asian groups are Laotian or Thai. I say, Aha, there’s another category: Some Other Race, in desperation I cry.

Tell me what you want to call yourself. I’ll write whatever you want me to. You can be French, Nubian or Russian. I just want this interview to be through.

Finally they decide what race to pick. At this address, the Census I complete. But I bet you dollars to donuts, at the next home, this farce, I repeat.

NOVEMBER 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Cannery Row Mural, 1946
By Marilyn Robertson

Before the factory whistle blows at noon, a blue lunch wagon pulls into a parking spot beside the tracks.

A passing engine trails its banner of black smoke, but cannot put a damper on the scene—all greens and yellows drifting toward a peach-colored horizon.

Nobody looks anxious here, wondering what might come next.

The woman in the back of the wagon slices bologna as usual.

The man on the bicycle steers his loaves of sourdough to their destinations.

The blonde on the porch railing leans forward as a soldier lights her cigarette—his strong arm holding up a weathered post, his sturdy boots just waiting for instructions.

Pam Coulter, "Path (Riverbend)"
NOVEMBER 2021 – SECOND PRIZE

**Insatiable**
*By Kathy Porter*

ten too many, and the night just started as if there are better options and if you cross me, don't let the door... tried to quit - but daylight kicks that idea back with a shot I won't hold your coat if you want to dance the couple in the corner look ready to fight they remind me of us when faces were young every party a jet ready for take-off those good days line my face and I swallow what's left of the years

NOVEMBER 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

**Ode: The 2020's**
*By Jeff Graham*

Sometimes, people enter your life - what I thought of what I thought there was, of what I thought there was to say. Strand of hay in a needle stack, broken by the camel. Hat pulled out from the rabbit. White mask hoisted atop the mizzenmast - sometimes, people.

DECEMBER 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

**Storm Spiders**
*By Lynn E. Hansen*

Prickly like puncture vine seeds speckled brown, spiny-backed, storm spiders undulate as they ride harmonics of tropical breezes. Throwing, running, cutting, throwing running cutting, they craft geometry of delicate threads, communities of silk made visible in back lighting, or soft mist Tethered to grass, leaf, balcony, crouching centrally in their silvery plane, imitating dead leaves, directing yellow mammary-like bumps toward the light, Gasteracantha await prey. Suddenly, dashed like Hawaii during hurricane winds of Hele ulu ulu, a mower slashes gossamer webs, casts spiders adrift clinging to silken balloons riding pulses of wild warm air. Fortunate filaments snag on a shrub, anchor arachnids who begin again, throwing, running, cutting, throwing, running, cutting, a delicate geometry of thread.

~ 1st Prize in Nature, Ina Coolbrith Annual Poetry Contest, Oct 15, 2004

LEFT: Pam Coulter, "Hanover Avenue, Richmond, Virginia"
DECEMBER 2021 - SECOND PRIZE

Flower Moon
By Elizabeth Kuelbs

Before dawn breaks, catch the palms:
those dutiful guards, who shade
their little daytime queendoms,
feeding bees and woodpeckers,
in the windy dark, when the jacarandas
lavish blossoms at their feet, and
the roses exhale honey and clove,
and the jasmine trembles like a bride.
Their lush plumes, sequined with stars,
ravage the flower moon.

~published in Black Bough Poetry:

DECEMBER 2021 - THIRD PRIZE

By the Campfire, Borrego Desert'
By Louise Kantro

Tonight she writes in lantern light
apart from the circle of others, in small, tight,
cursive, of how this desert day began
sunrise-cold and windy, with the smell
of bacon scrambled into a swirl of
eggs, potatoes, and onions.
Clean-up of skillets took a while
with only sand to scrub and
a pot of rinse water boiled
on the Coleman stove.
She has learned that there is poetry
in such tasks. In the zero hour
of the night, well before midnight
since little brightens the blackness
she remembers how, when she was young,
sun, clouds, and black-tailed jack rabbits
made her giggle and her heart
puffed up with the dough
of childhood's promise
soft with joy.

~ Third Prize for Northern California
Women's Music Festival Contest

CSPS 34th ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST WINNERS, 2021

The 34th Annual Poetry Contest of the California State Poetry Society was managed by Joyce Snyder and adjudicated by Georgia Jones Davis. The contest results are as follows and the prize-winning poems are posted below. Congratulations to all winners! And thank you for the gift of your words.

PRIZE-WINNING POEMS
1st Prize: “Three Men in a Boat” by Robert S. Spich, Los Angeles
2nd Prize: “Snow” by Bruce Gallie, Rancho Cucamonga, California
3rd Prize: “Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Three Men in a Tub” by David Anderson, Lincoln, California

HONORABLE MENTIONS
- “Winged Sandals” by Claire Scott, Oakland, CA
- “A Snake in Pajamas” by Louise Moises, Richmond, CA
- “I Don't Know Why” by Livingston Rossmoor, Modesto, CA
- “Wish” by Susanne Wiley, Hot Springs, AR
**ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - FIRST PRIZE**

**Three Men In a Boat**  
*By Robert S. Spich*

Three men in a boat on a hot Saturday  
In an open field in Kansas, near Freeway 117.  
Their presence suggests a strange hope floats in their grassy harbor,  
Hope that perhaps some new anxious sea will rise to save them,  
Help them to escape from the immensity of this endless dry land!  
Maybe a return of the Great Flood to this cloudless, blue sky place,  
And they, rescued in that strange old boat, chosen to reseed lost humanity!

But probably not...see all those shiny beer cans scattered about?  
Hear the whistles and yells at the passing cars,  
Listen to the shouting laughter and hugely bad singing!  
And those flaunted flags waving of no nations anyone knows!  
This is not an Armageddon Moment to fear!  
Not that Final Judgment to fear!  
Not that Final Judgment that seeks to separate, condemn and punish!

No, just three men in a boat in a field on a hot Saturday afternoon,  
In the middle of endless Kansas, drinking beer and raising no particular hell!  
Why should we expect anything else? After all this is Dorothy’s country!

**ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - SECOND PRIZE**

**Snow**  
*(a tanka)*  
*By Bruce Gallie*

Recall my cold feet  
in a foot of snow, walking  
by her that time, not  
saying "Hi", heart skipped a beat  
then my sadness, my cold feet.

**ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 – HONORARY MENTION**

**A Snake in Pyjamas**  
*A cento for D.H. Lawrence, The Snake*  
*By Louise Moises*

A snake in pyjamas came down the steps  
down from the earth-wall  
trailed soft-bellied over stone  
his straight mouth  
mused a moment, gold venomous voice,  
I like him  
drunken god, length curving round  
the broken bank  
snake easing, withdrawing  
into a clumsy log  
lke lightning, gone into a fissure  
At noon, I stared,  
regretted human education  
wished he would come back  
king of the underworld in diamond-back pyjamas.

**ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - THIRD PRIZE**

**Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Three Men In a Tub**  
*A cyrch a chwta (pronounced kirch a chootah)*  
*By David Anderson*

Every tenth wave swells and lifts  
them high, drops them deeper, sifts  
their guts, dizzyes their brains, shifts  
speed, empties the guts of the biffed,  
rocks sightlines, horizons, gifts  
those emptied stomachs with sniffs  
of food for the crew, and drifts  
the skiff toward shore, to tumble  
the seasick off, humbled, stiffed.

Pam Coulter, “Yellow Reflections”
I Don't Know Why
By Livingston Rossmoor

I don't know why it came in search of me.
I don't know when or how it came.
It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

Dust in the wind, breezes rustle in the tree.
A speck in the universe, it has no name.
I don't know why it came in search of me.

It sails in a canoe on the wild sea,
in and out of waves, don't know where to aim.
It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

I know it is there, still coming, it seems.
Nothing to latch on, nothing to claim.
I don't know why it came in search of me.

A small bird, a nest, it's real, not a dream.
It's neither words nor voices, it is calm.
It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

It is not a summons, it carries no theme.
It was cold, I can feel it now, it is warm.
I don't know why it came in search of me.
It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

Winged Sandals
By Claire Scott

He played tennis, soccer, softball
sailing on the back of an easy wind
a Hermes in winged sandals

until that Sunday when he was seventeen
and the sharp edge of luck tossed him
twenty feet, and he hard hit on
the asphalt of Fuller Street

his dreams defaced by a distracted driver
running late or texting her boss
or putting on pale pink lipstick
future plans wobbling on spindly legs

hobbling, listing, stumbling, lurching
dystonia said the doctor no cure
and she looked away

now only in hope's distorting light
do I see him running down the field
scoring goal after goal, a great grin on his face

I want to fly back on winged sandals
touch him on the shoulder and say
leave home a little later today

I know there is a wider world
where some slow shuffle, some curl over
walkers or canes, some settle in wheel chairs
pushed by attendants from the Philippines
Diwa, Althea, Mahalia

sometimes I get a glimpse of this world where
not everyone needs winged sandals to soar
then my son scuffs into the room, wincing,
his left foot dragging
The Wish
By Susan Wiley

I zip up my favorite jacket - the one with the frayed cuffs
grab a scarf and Hannah’s leash, and we slip into the dark night -
like voyeurs in someone’s deepest dream
Her white tail dances before me as we navigate
thru night sprinklers and fallen branches to our favorite hill
Constellations scribbled on a backboard sky sparkle like
tiny flashlights held by travelers on their way
to the other side of midnight
I worship Orion and his god-like stance
as if his stars were my own private cluster of magic
He grows weary of my constant adoration
We sit in our own velvet silence and watch for falling stars
Hannah and I - shoulder to shoulder - keeping each other warm
She lays her nose against my cheek, and I weave my fingers thru her fur
like fat worms burrowing themselves in the warm dirt

I lean in and whisper in her ear
“Lets pick the brightest star and make a wish”
My wish is always that she will be with me
for as long as I live

The nights grow shorter and the path harder to navigate
and when the sun has scorched our grassy hill
we take our last walk

I look to Orion to reach out his sword
and stay this moment with his magic
But he slips away beyond the horizon
to a greener hill - and Hannah follows

I think back to that night of falling stars
and I believe Hannah’s last wish was
that I would be with her for as long as she lived.

Lucky girl
She got her wish

Annual Contest Submissions Guidelines

This contest is open to all poets, whether-or-not they are members of the CSPS. Poems must be uploaded to our website or postmarked from March 1st through June 30th. Reading fees for all entries, domestic or international, are $3.00 per poem for members and $6.00 per poem for non-members. There is an 80-line (two page) limit for each poem. Winning entries are announced on our website, blog, and in the Newsbriefs in the four issue of the CQ in the contest year. Poets winning 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes receive $100, $50 and $25, respectively. As many as five Honorable Mentions may also be Award-winning poets are published in the fourth issue of the CQ in the contest year. The Honorable Mention poems and other submissions are forwarded to the CQ Editors for possible inclusion in the subsequent issue. Contest results are posted on our website. If submitting by mail, send a cover letter with all poet information and a list of submitted poems, one copy of each poem with no poet identification, plus an email or SASE for results, to: CSPS Interim Contest Chair, P.O. Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041-4288.
Monthly Contest Submissions Guidelines

California State Poetry Society encourages poetic creativity by organizing monthly poetry contests. The contests are open to all poets, whether or not they are members of the CSPS. Reading fees are $1.50 per poem with a $3.00 minimum for members of CSPS and/or NFSPS societies and $3.00 per poem with a $6.00 minimum for non-members. Entries must be postmarked during the month of the contest in which they are entered. They must consist of a first page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) and the titles of the poems being submitted. At this time there are three ways to submit:

1. by email. Poets may submit their work by email to: SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com (Specify Month) and simultaneously pay their contest fees by PayPal to: CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com.

2. by regular mail, enclosing printed copies of poems and your check, CSPS Monthly Contest – (Specify Month) Post Office Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041

3. online on our website CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org, or

All Monthly Contests are judged by Alice Pero, CSPS Monthly Contest Judge. The 1st place winner receives half of the prize pool for pools less than $100. For pools of $100 or more, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners receive $50, $10 and $5, respectively. If there are insufficient fees submitted, the minimum prize is $10. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. The monthly contest winners are announced as they are awarded and the winners are notified by mail. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first CSPS Newsbriefs of the following year. In addition, the first prize winner poems are published in the CSPS Poetry Letter (PDF, email, posted on website) and posted on our blog. Please note: Do not send SAE’s. We do not return poems. If you win, we will let you know. Otherwise there are no notifications.

CSPS Monthly Contest Themes (Revised)

2. February: Love
3. March: Open, Free Subject
4. April: Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes
5. May: Personification, Characters, Portraits
6. June: The Supernatural
7. July: Childhood, Memoirs
8. August: Places, Poems of Location
9. September: Colors, Music, Dance
10. October: Humor, Satire
11. November: Family, Friendship, Relationships
12. December: Best of Your Best (Winning or published poems only. Indicate name of contest or publication and the issue/dates of publication/award.)

Pam Coulter, “Gypsy”