

# Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society



## PUSHCART PRIZE NOMINATIONS FROM CQ VOL. 48, 2022

California State Poetry Society is pleased to announce the following nominations to Pushcart Prize for 2022 from the *California Quarterly*, vol. 48, issues no. 1 (edited by Maja Trochimczyk), 2 (guest-edited by Margaret Saine), 3 (edited by Bory Thach) and 4 (guest-edited by Deborah P Kolodji), published by the California State Poetry Society in 2022. Congratulations to all poets! Copies of honored poems are posted below.

1. Vol. 48 No. 1. "Waterfall Symphony" by Dana Stamps II
2. Vol. 48 No. 1. "Light" by Frederick Livingston
3. Vol. 48 No. 2. "The Land I Long For" by Michael Fraley
4. Vol. 48 No. 3. "The Calling" by Ella Czajkowska
5. Vol. 48 No. 3. "Tule Elk Preserve in March" by Vivian Underhill
6. Vol. 48. No. 4. "Morning at Moore's Lake, Again" by Kimberly Nunes

### LIGHT

*Mendocino, California*

sunbeam alone  
is a poem  
but on this fallen log  
with you

everything is  
tongue tip  
fingertip  
heartbeat

who was I?  
sweating brick  
by brick  
in gilded cities

as if  
to impress  
the heavens  
with my cleverness

as if  
to invent  
anything  
as alive

### WATERFALL SYMPHONY

Droplets drum against  
rocks, a blue dragonfly's  
enchantment dances,

lilies perfume the amphitheater sky,  
coconut sun —  
screen slathered on,

and nude sunbathers splash  
as they surface,  
then dive

underneath. Echoes  
from a chorus of jumpers,  
the jagged cliff's ledge a stage

as summer mist—an ovation  
as happening wetness hits—  
croons its steamy scores.

*Dana Stamps II  
Riverside, California*

### *LIGHT, continued*

as this urgent  
syrup  
melting into  
our veins

warming  
pine-steeped air  
Earth was made  
for breathing

suddenly  
I become  
blue  
and cloudless

*Frederick Livingston  
Mendocino, California*

### THE LAND I LONG FOR

The world I want lies under the waves,  
Under many chilling leagues of water,  
Beyond the reach of common daylight.

Pale stars illuminate its deep blue sky  
And trees of giant girth cover the ground  
They've occupied for countless years.

The land I long for is wakened at dawn  
By the clear notes of flowing birdsong  
From the leafy crowns of the trees.

The story was never told to me in school,  
I only know it to be true because...  
My blood and bones have taught me so.

*Somehow I will find a way  
To reach the forest floor  
Through a door I cannot say  
Is made of gravestone or of wood,  
But which is no less real to me  
Than any ordinary day.*

*Michael Fraley  
San Francisco, California*

### TULE ELK PRESERVE IN MARCH

Here it is midmorning and the valley is singing to itself.  
Listen to the bees  
thrumming to the trees in bloom like a hum in the chest  
for comfort. The hawk unfolds from the cottonwood  
a mosaic of pottery shards and the ravens  
croak like stones dropped in water, down the back  
of the throat. Feel the earth pulling you close.

It is not nostalgia, to cling to the marshy ghosts  
of a parched lake, the water snakes who swarmed  
through the rattling reeds.

The breeze picks up and the hawk returns.  
The heat rises and the plains begin to wave.  
One shell-white egret sits in the shush  
of leaves still translating wind into sound.

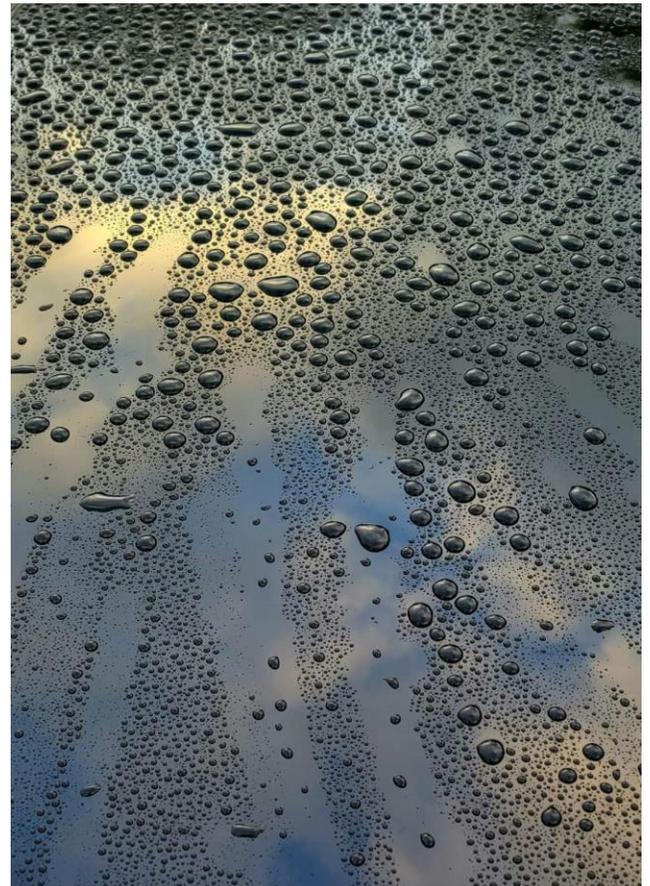
Someday all this will have silted away, the halo of song  
arcng above this small pond, the calf chasing the birds.  
The birds translucent below the sun.

Once this was underwater

*And is*

*And will be again.*

*Viivian Underhill, Allston, Massachusetts*



*Raindrops and Reflections* by Susan Rogers

## THE CALLING

Take my hand, we shall drink golden starlight  
from the brass chalice of curiosity,  
adorn our hair with stars' glittering light.  
We shall clothe ourselves in silver moonlight  
and blush our faces with sunlight's kiss,  
and dance through the dust of time unmeasured,  
whirl till we are dizzy with awe  
and drunk on the songs of the universe.

I have not truly known freedom until  
I have shaken off the chains of attachments  
to this world, this low-land  
—of biological, mechanical, electric—  
of static, of moving,  
till I felt the seductive  
beckoning of the ephemeral,  
the limitless melody of cosmos.

I measure myself in dawns and twilights,  
in inhales and exhales, breathless moments,  
in dreams and daydreams and nightmares  
as I unravel into blooming.

I am a flower eternal, floating,  
drifting soundless in space on the waves  
of the darkly enchanting oceans  
of nebulae in purples and pinks.

And I dare you to not heed my calling,  
and I dare you to resist the pulling,  
the fire, the resonance in the bones  
which leaves the traitorous flesh a-trembling.  
And I hail to you: Come! We shall walk down,  
down to the center, down to the core,  
down to the end of all, down till it's up,  
until it becomes the beginning.

*Ella Czakowska  
Beverly Hills, California*

## MORNING AT MOORE'S LAKE, AGAIN

By eight a.m., the mist, like ghosts exiting, bustles and fades  
in every direction, spheres barely there,  
until they aren't.

Quickly, slowly, the sun casts in.

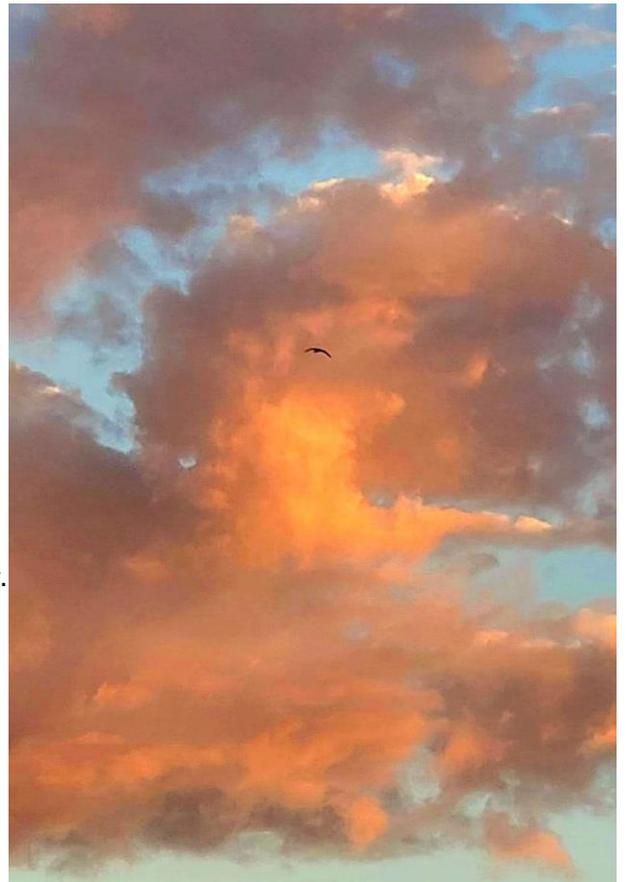
The lake turns dark mirror, speckled with night dust  
and featherings—the occasional dragonfly  
stringing along morning's heat. Reflections of trees—  
and clumps of trees, borders  
onto other realms, all the same as this one.

Sudden sounds—a cormorant propels  
the surface like an engine. At the floating dock, hops  
to join another, then settles, observes the air, the sky,  
all the nothingness of the world before them.

Black from beak to tail, to webbed toe, yellowish dob  
on the other one's head, he has not moved, but to nibble a wing.  
The wet one holds her wings aloft, waggles tight,  
steady beats in eastern sun, diaphanous, melting to brown,  
she continues, thus—I know so little—

have gendered them to my own pleasure.  
With pen and notebook, sun hat, and poncho  
over my pajamas, shoes  
I slide on and off in cool sand.

The birds contemplate—an avian thought matrix, untouched.  
One steps a quarter turn, intent, drying her body.  
So much patience here. And time.



*Paradise Sky* by Susan Rogers

And yet—I can see the watermark on the shore reeds, the lake  
is lower than last year, that much dangerously  
lower. There's a flash of red

on one cormorant's bill, somewhere, the same bullfrog sounds  
at a depth that matters, somewhere out of sight.

*Kimberly Nunes  
Ross, California*

## FEATURED POET – KATHI STAFFORD

### EARTH

March 1st Rabbit rabbit  
Rabbit doesn't help this time In a hospital  
Room I'm on the floor Day of my disaster  
Cancer in gut Foundations of earth and my  
Life laid bare Bible on the nightstand  
Cords of death pull tight at 2 am I am so  
Alone the disease my powerful enemy  
I am on a fine line in the dirt I'm only mud  
In this moment on an edge between being  
and  
Nonbeing  
Nothing left and yet  
Supreme love reaches down rescues me  
Cords loosened I still breathe air mixes  
with  
Dust He brings me into a spacious place of  
Beauty Ferns orchids lantana spring up  
under  
These feet the day of rescue and  
Clean hands lifted in praise for eternity

### THE SPACE BETWEEN

On the edge of sleep, here sits the yes  
In the magic space between now and maybe  
Between the star and its implosion I find  
Joy too much Music the bridge between  
Galaxy's edge and this mild heart of mind  
Opposite sides of the glass  
I wish for a tiny denouement  
I kiss the raccoon and he turns into a  
Fish Or a ruddy prince  
He sniffs the air On his hind legs  
He wants in He thinks he wants to be  
tamed  
If he only knew

### BLANK CHECK

One year ago today: My first go  
At radiation. The tech with his arms  
Flu of blue tattoos and scars eases me  
Into place. The quiet clicking

Machine drones on as I hold still  
In its shadow. A thin red light razors  
Below my skin, down to an ocean of  
Cells and fear. In a few weeks, my skin will

Scale off—each strip delicate  
And lacy. So individual, each layer  
With its sheer story of my past. Some women  
Much stronger than I am

Thirty-three times I go home after and burrow  
Into sleep, so hard and final.

I win the lottery. One year come  
And gone  
With no new lumps. This is a gift  
And a wonder yo me. Will there always be  
A blank check  
Made out  
To future scars?

May I never ask the right questions.  
There's a tale for every traveler.

The tech guy talks about his newborn,  
Jimmy, three months old, while shines  
With joy. Jimmy almost in the room with us  
Talcum powdered and fresh  
The man is trying to distract me.

I laugh and  
Take it all in.

My pain held up on all four corners  
By the prayers lifted by my saints, my friends, toward  
Gentle sky, oh Metta, oh peace of my Lord.

## BANYAN

I drive toward the airport 3 am in a hot  
Bengaluru night I drive past a park  
Full of banyan trees where one man  
Sits beneath the Strangler fig  
Shared with a swarm of wasps

No fruit without the sting He is wrapped in  
White robes His sweat precious as he achieves  
Nirvana The columns of the trunk ricketed and  
Etched with Many rivers of joy in this  
National tree of India  
Elliptical leaves with seeds spread  
By birds frugivores soaring through  
Branches and with mutual bliss  
Move the fruit Far from the parent  
The man leaves behind his robes  
For his next ascension

## PSALM 30 DIVIDED AND CUT

Thou has lifted me  
Thou has lifted me  
And my foes have not rejoiced over me  
Thou has lifted

I cried unto you  
Cried unto you  
Thou hast healed me  
Pulled out the cancer cells  
By surgeon hands  
Thou hast healed me

You brought my soul out  
You brought this soul  
Out from the grave kept me from the pit  
At 2 am on the March morning when my soul  
Almost slid away I felt it going

Sing Give thanks at the remembrance  
Of His holiness  
His gift of life  
Weeping lasts a night  
But with morning comes joy

I cried to Thee Lord  
And in the morning you gave  
Joy. Peace. My soul.

You turned my mourning into dancing and  
gladness  
Thank you forever for this extra day to see  
The precious granddaughter faces you gave me.

## BORDERLAND

I am on the edge of old and older  
My land pushes up to his land  
In the field three horses sisters  
And one pony. In the land next door they  
Wait next to the gathered trees In sacred shade  
One kneels to me Do they remember apples  
I brought them last spring? I forget their names  
Except for Bear The little one black and  
Impetuous. One suffers from the pain that  
Will not end while Three witches stir their  
Cauldron in the borderland Six geese float at pond's edge  
Under Oaks and slash pines and two crows  
Fly to them for no known purpose.  
Jasmine on the gate Still blooms  
Its scent and whiteness Bring me home  
Help me find level ground  
I'm dizzy these days  
Ground beside the blue red roses a cliché of beauty

## GLAD HIVE

A tablespoon of honey and Aunt Ruth makes me  
Swallow the comb my throat  
Tickles. Tiny wings scratch me close  
Spit out the wax when she's not looking  
My little bee might miss his sisters Or not  
Let's call him Fred for now From Glad Hive  
Next day Auntie steers the station wagon  
Halfway across Oklahoma encased in teak  
Over to Glass Mountains. Though they are barely a  
Mesa but we don't argue Free buzzes around  
And my toe hurts  
But I keep still  
Auntie glows on the crest transformed  
We scoot down the hill on our butts all the way  
My cousins and I build an altar One stone for each  
Tribe Near Rattlesnake Lake  
Plains Spread out every which way in a  
Season of tall grass  
And barley rustling in the vicious  
Wind where I am simply myself.  
A very small girl in a big prairie.

**Kathi Stafford** is the author of *Blank Check*, a poetry collection, and co-editor and contributing author of *Grateful Conversations*, an anthology of Los Angeles poets. She previously served as Poetry Editor and Senior Editor for *Southern California Review* for many years. Her poetry, reviews and interviews have been published in many journals, such as *Rattle*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Southern California Review*. Her poetry has been anthologized in *Chopin and Cherries* and *Sea of Alone: Poems for Hitchcock*. Stafford is a corporate attorney who is also a violinist with Brookwood Strings and a banjo player and alto for the Staffords, a bluegrass band.

## FEATURED POET AND PHOTOGRAPHER – SUSAN ROGERS

### GRATEFUL CONVERSATIONS

Everything we have we're given  
in love to use in love, in grace.  
There is nothing we alone have written.

We are but a conversation  
of light, through this exchange we trace  
everything we have. We're given

sour and sweet, lemon, raisin  
and grain to bind them into place—  
there is nothing we alone have written.

We eat cakes but have forgotten  
their origin. We have erased  
everything. We have, we're given

we look, we laugh, we love, we listen.  
We welcome gifts we embrace.  
Yet there is nothing we alone have written.

Watch sunset turn to a ribbon.  
Remember honey and its taste.  
Everything we have we're given.  
There is nothing we alone have written.

### A FIELD OF WINTER GRASS

~ after a photograph by Peter Sheffler  
"Winter Field Grasses, Far Away Point, Maryland"

To be still in the middle of chaos  
to be singular in the midst of multiplicity  
to be a line in a series of lines  
a note in a chorus, a voice in the marsh  
a reed in a tangle of stalks  
to be woven in a field of complexity  
yet still a thread, an arrow, a direction  
an intention, a clear heart, a hidden blade  
a crisscross of here and there, a slender  
reaching strand of light, an intersection  
of possibility a dance of detail, a piece of  
the weave, a pattern of everything,  
a field of winter grass.

### THE ORIGIN IS ONE

*for Kotama Okada*

The dove knows the way  
follow her.

Your heart knows the way  
listen well.

Within your deepest self  
are wings of light.

They cover the earth  
with waves of love.

Do you remember?  
You once knew.

Stand in the warmth  
of sunlight and recall.

The origin of the world  
is one.

The origin of religions  
is one.

The origin of all  
humankind is one.

Circle back.  
Imagine the great will

of all things  
stirring in your fingers.

Reach out your arms  
and open your palms

to the sky.  
It is time.

## NUMBERS

When she thinks of her husband,  
she thinks of a half-moon carrying a shadow half behind.  
The moon never loses fullness,  
even if it is draped by night.  
Once she could see the moon's unsevered disc,  
no matter what portion lit the sky, and in its one, cool light  
complete herself. Now she finds only broken shapes,  
sees semi-circles separated. She does not know how  
to live in two places at a time. For three or four months  
she thought she could be the sky  
suspended in space above their cities.  
But it has been five or six years; he has not appeared.  
She feels hollowed like air inside a weightless cloud.  
Seven days a week, she composes letters in her head,  
but cannot find eight lines to explain emptiness.  
Her nine koi fish swim in bright scaled circles in the pond  
They cannot distract her. She thinks again about walking  
ten miles to the pavilion, but has walked this road  
a hundred times before, envisioned him returning  
a thousand times and more. Today, it seems  
ten thousand miles separate them.

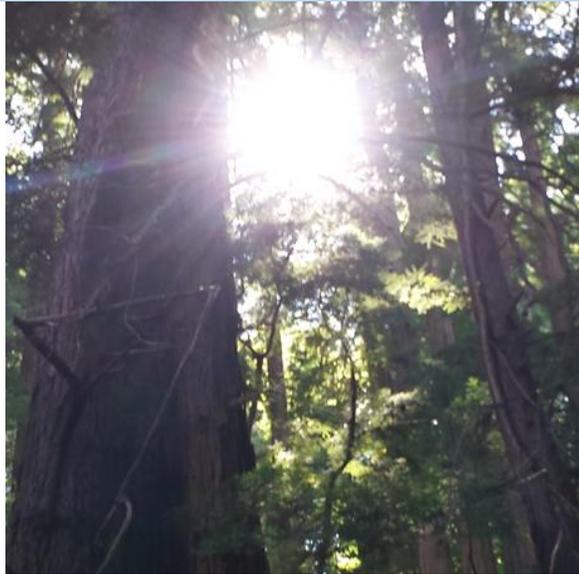
If she knew the words, the numbers, she would write a poem.  
She thinks of ancient China, of Zou Wenjun  
who waited for her husband at a pavilion  
when he was sent to the capitol for months which spun  
into years. Zou Wenjun waited spinning words and tears  
into a numbered verse and when her husband sought divorce  
showed him the poem. Greatly moved, he changed his mind.

Where in this ordered universe can she find  
the words to fill a heart? She will have to start again,  
relearn the edges of a circle, reclaim the white light  
of her first moon.

## GRASS

Yesterday, someone I know  
Looked through me  
like I wasn't there,  
as if I were a field of air,  
insubstantial and invisible.  
Today, I think of my great teacher  
who said,  
"Become a practitioner of genuine humility,"  
and a modern saint who said,  
"A cyclone can destroy the mightiest of trees,  
but even a cyclone cannot touch the grass.  
This is the greatness of humility."  
So today I have decided to become like grass,  
which needs no encouragement  
but water, sun and sky,  
which is invisible, often, as we walk by,  
a genuine practitioner of humility.  
It is true the grass is sometimes mowed;  
but that just keeps it safe from storms,  
close to the ground, close to you.  
Oh God of all things great and small,  
cyclone, trees, dirt,  
let me strive to always be like grass,  
cool comfort for the earth.  
So that children may run through me,  
barefoot on a summer day  
and I may greet them, or catch them if they fall,  
soft and green and sweet, with no resistance  
to their play,  
almost invisible, pure reason for their joy





### RETURN TO MUIR WOODS

In the cathedral of trees  
sunlight christens moss-grown branches—  
a sacrament.

I breathe in  
air of clear intention  
purified, re-written.

In the cathedral of trees  
I smile at each person I pass  
sharing the wisdom of woods.

So many voices mingle:  
English, French, Italian, Farsi.  
Each harmonized in hope.

I caress a broken trunk on its side  
a moment of camaraderie  
thanking it for pointing me to sky.

In the cathedral of trees  
I walk with you  
each tree

a testament I read now  
and save for later.  
I do not know

if the path through  
is straight or a loop  
that circles back to myself.

Either way I return.

### SUNFLOWERS IN YOUR HAND

I wonder if I will recognize you  
when you return  
in a different form.  
I like to think your breath  
so intimately part of mine  
that when you are reborn  
even if you wear  
white organza as a bride,  
or the black habit of a nun,  
if you appear much younger  
than you were  
in a sweater striped in cyan blue  
with wild sunflowers in your hand  
I will remember you,  
just as I remember the shine  
of a sun dazzled stream  
after it's gone dry, the rhythm  
of staccato rain when I swing  
my hammock under cloudless skies,  
or the sound of laughter  
in a dream of exquisite joy.  
Even if you choose to be my cat,  
a hummingbird, a bright scaled koi.  
And if you are born in another country,  
don't speak words I understand  
if you are not female this time  
but instead a boy, I hope there will be  
some note of you that sings,  
your music indisputably  
through the differences of then and now,  
so I will know you are the one  
that it's you come back  
in whatever form you come.

**Susan Rogers** considers poetry vehicles for light. She's a practitioner of Sukyo Mahikari—a spiritual practice promoting positivity. In 2013, 2017 she received nominations for Pushcart Prizes. She's co editor of *A Sonic Boom of Stars* and was one of four international judges for the 8th Rabindranath Tagore Award.

<https://www.loispjones.com/susan-rogers>. **Publication Credits:** "Numbers," *Kyoto Journal*, Issue 92; "Longing for October," *Kyoto Journal*, Issue 81; "A Field of Winter Grass," *Interlitq: California Poets Part 2*; "The Origin is One," *Saint Julian Press*, 2012; "Grass" and "Grateful Conversations," *Grateful Conversations*, 2018; "Return to Muir Woods," *Altadena Poetry Review*, 2019; "Sunflowers in Your Hand," *Quill & Parchment*, May 2019.

## 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 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 cover page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) as well as the month and THEME on cover page, and the titles of the poems being submitted.

Starting in January 2023, we are accepting previously published poems for our Monthly Contest. Please note the publication where it first appeared on any such poem. There are two ways to submit, by regular mail (enclosing check) or email (using Paypal): 1) by mail to CSPS Monthly Contest – (specify month), Post Office Box 4288 Sunland, California 91041, with a check made to CSPS; and 2) by email to: [SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com](mailto:SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com) (specify month), with fees paid by Paypal to the following account – [CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com](mailto:CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com).

The monthly contest winners are announced as they are awarded. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first *CSPS Newsbriefs* and published in the first *Poetry Letter* of the following year. Prize-winning poems are also posted on the blog, [CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com](http://CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com). The 1<sup>st</sup> prize winner receives half of the prize pool for pools less than \$100. For pools of \$100 or more, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners receive \$50, \$10 and \$5, respectively. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. Please note: Do not send SAEs. We do not return poems. If you win, we will let you know. Otherwise, there are no notifications.

### CSPS Monthly Contest Themes (Revised)

- ① January: Nature, Landscape
- 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: Back Down to Earth (Time, Seasons)



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Photos by Susan Rogers: *Ladybug Luminous*, p. 7, *Muir Woods*, p. 8, *Fuji Suddenly*, p. 9.

## MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS *LEAVE IT RAW* BY SHAKIRA CROCE

24 poems, 30 pages, published by Finishing Line Press. ISBN 978-1-64662-265-8

<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/leave-it-raw-poems-by-shakira-croce/>

As a reviewer the first thing I consider about a collection is the title. *Leave it Raw*. Who would use those words for a poetry collection and why? I don't want my food served "raw." I want it cooked according to the recipe. I don't want my body rubbed "raw" by the clothes I wear. I want garments whose textures and styles are kind to my body. In conversation, I dislike "raw" language that irritates my sensibilities. Give me well-heeled vocabulary and good verbal manners. *Leave it Raw*. What is this?

Poet Shakira Croce invites her readers to join her on a journey. It is a pilgrimage of sorts. Croce visits familiar places and experiences. These include making sense out of life after losing everything in a fire ("The Remains"). "Homecoming" returns readers to those long ago days when:

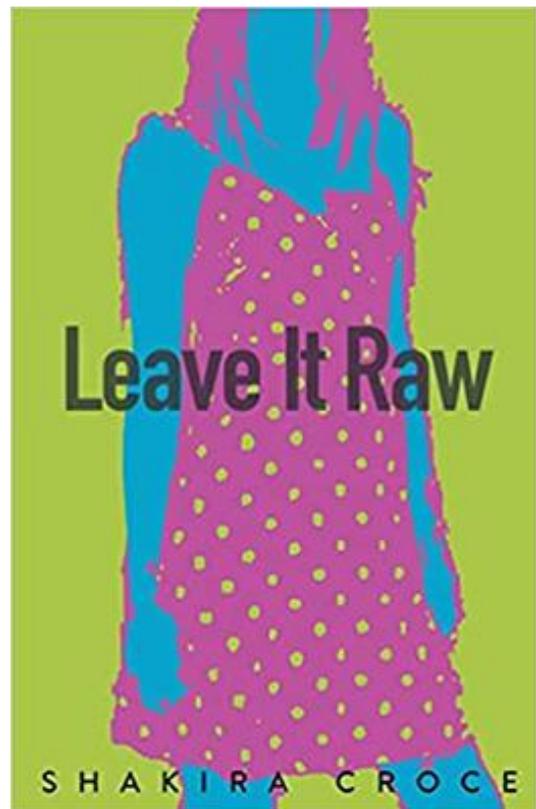
King and Queen  
walk down the 50-yard line,  
but she feels the arena of eyes  
still on her.

"Commuter's Pastoral" studies a once robust man in the dim light of old age. I give these examples merely to point out that Shakira Croce is a gifted poet. Her poetry paints compelling pictures of *reality*. Hence, her title, *Leave it Raw*. When poets tell the truth, the results get our attention. I interpret "raw" in the sense that Croce takes a "fresh" perspective on her subjects.

Croce's writing style is *verse libre*. She uses it well. Line break decisions result in pleasant reading cadences. Her poems look good on the page. She varies presentation between couplets, tercets, quatrains and poems without stanza breaks. Croce does not employ end-rhyme. I'm impressed by her craftsmanship. Interlinear rhyme, assonance and alliteration are hallmarks of her work.

Earlier I used the term *Pilgrimage*. Croce includes a poem by that title. I reproduce it here as Exhibit A in my thesis that *raw* means "*freshening of life*":

We can make up time in the air,  
the captain explained,  
or at least that's what I understood  
between the fuzzy intercom and  
broken English,  
not mentioning we'd lose  
six hours crossing the Atlantic.  
They say animals have a different  
internal clock, without feeling  
passing weeks and years.  
Yet the butterfly with a tear  
across her right wing  
returns at noon each day  
to that same turn in the road,  
darting between rosemary and dandelions drying  
in the honeyed weeds.  
The sense of smell is the strongest  
for us all to find food, a partner.  
Flowers waiting to procreate on a cliff above the sea  
bring me back to where I was born.  
After spending a lifetime thousands of miles away  
that simple power lets me know my home  
is not where I live  
but a long climb up from Roman rocks and ruins



to the stuff springing from  
the uncut earth.

In “Pilgrimage” the poet considers the meaning of place. During a tedious flight across the Atlantic she muses that even a wounded butterfly has a strong sense of belonging. The butterfly returns again and again to those environs which propagate life. The “raw” truth is that occasionally, if we’re looking, we gain a fresh perspective—and life can never be the same again.

This is precisely why *Leave it Raw* should be in everyone hands. The best poets take the commonplace and infuse it with freshness not thought of before.

Best of all, Shakira Croce’s poetry reflects a good mind. Hers is a mind which takes a deep dive into her subjects. “A Second Honeymoon” demonstrates that Croce knows where her readers live. Two quatrains follow:

Last night I don’t know why  
we were fighting.  
I think you felt like  
everything was on your shoulders.

.....

It’s time to plan  
a break from working our way  
up, shift scenery, and  
rest our limbs from the climb.

We have come full circle. *Leave it Raw*, is a pilgrimage down the road of life. Reserve your seat on the plane and buckle up.

*Michael Escoubas*  
first published in  
*Quill & Parchment*



*Beach Sunset 1 & Beach Sunset 2* by Maja Trochimczyk

## Judith R. Robinson Reviews *BORN UNDER THE INFLUENCE* by Andrena Zawinski

ISBN 978-1625494160, 130 pages, \$20.00 <https://www.wordpoetrybooks.com/zawinski.html>

Andrena Zawinski, author of *Born Under the Influence*, is a poet of time and place but that is clearly not all: This is a voice of great experience. Equally notable for this reader is Zawinski’s extraordinary skill with the many forms of poetry; this collection contains villanelles, pantoums, rondel. and sonnets, all brightly rendered. One of her specialties is the haibun: A haibun is a Japanese genre of writing that mixes chiefly autobiographical prose with haiku. Here is a beautiful example:

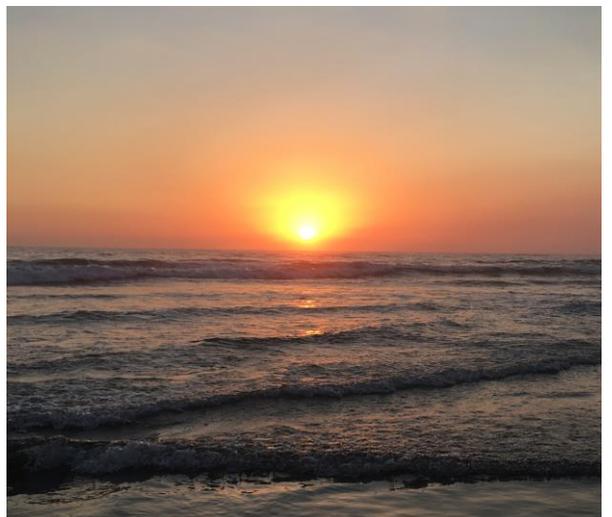
### SUMMER HAIBUN

Summer’s long light swells with bright lemons, melons, corn,  
the silken thoughts, facets of sunlight cascading along waves,  
run of shorebirds sweeping the horizon.

It is for young mothers jostling babies in low tide or for dozing  
on the soft lull of water lapping the shore beneath an untamed  
sky feathered in oncoming sunset.

This time of day curtains billow at windows in soft light, sun  
squints in above a rippling bay as summer knocks at the door  
and we answer

a wail of seagulls  
winging wild above a catch  
eyes fixed past us



In addition to her range with form, Zawinski's work can be quite lyrical, even when referring to gritty beginnings—

From "Anchorless in the Light"

I cannot resist lingering here  
in this veil of white light blinding with beauty,  
reminding to hold onto this, hold it close and dear  
as I was once stuck inside glass and brick, sight set  
on neighboring city decks, their hubbub, drunken songs  
brouhaha, all of it weedy with ivy, bats circling chimneys,  
unlike these distant hills yet to be peopled.

—and as we travel with her from a girlhood in western Pennsylvania, with its rivers, mills & furnaces where she reveals—

The milkman's daughter  
is what I longed to be.  
I loved when the sun rose and buttermilk came,  
pulled off the seal and foiled cap, ringed my finger  
around chunks of yellow fat at the bottle's lip, shook  
and spilled it into a glass, salted and gulped it down.

(Interestingly, she reminds us in an endnote that a milkman's daughter referred to a child of adultery, at a time when women were housebound.) --through an American, mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century childhood::

From those ----  
drawn-out summers  
sticky with sweat, bare feet stung  
by pavement, racing inside to box fans  
for a wash of syncopated cool, waiting  
for something bigger to arrive...

—to young adulthood when:

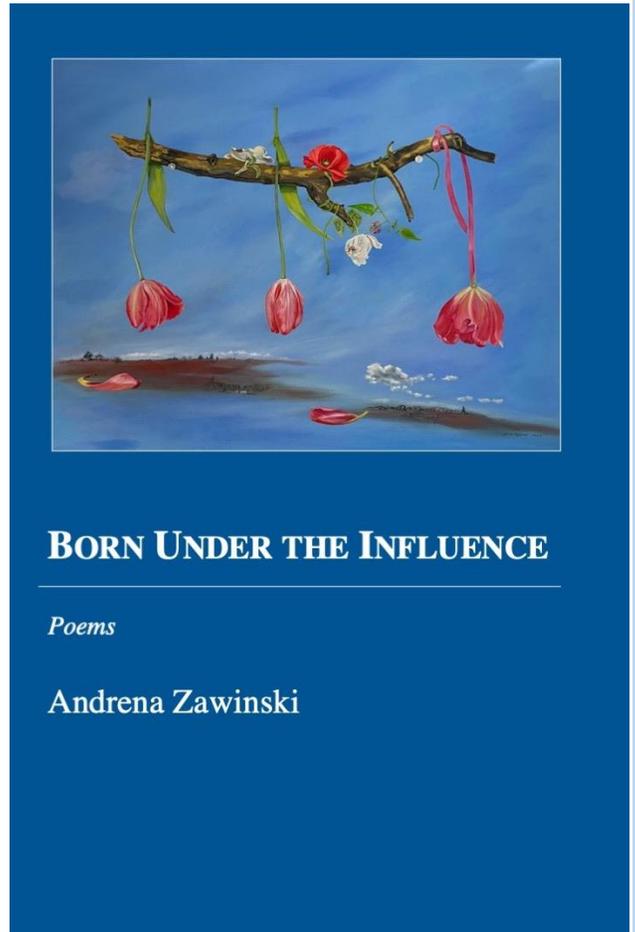
Getting stiffed on tips waiting corporate parties, sweating out  
mid-summer short orders of cheesy omelettes and fluffy pancakes  
washed down with pitchers of Bloody Marys and Mimosas.  
Grabbed by the throat by a drunken pill-popping veteran  
for shutting him off from another Long Island Iced Tea."

It is also worth noting that Zawinski has enormous knowledge of other people's work, which she acknowledges as influencers throughout this collection. She generously tips her poet's hat to Adrienne Rich, Maggie Anderson, Wislawa Zymborska, Gerald Stern, and many others.

Also impressive is the volume of solid work in this collection, much of it finding a place here after publication and awards from many fine literary journals. Finally, perhaps the greatest pleasure in reading *Born Under The Influence*, is the opportunity to participate in the fully realized life of an intelligent, engaging woman. In over 100 vivid poems, we live it right with her. There are even forms called cherita and landay, both new to this reader.

~ Judith R. Robinson

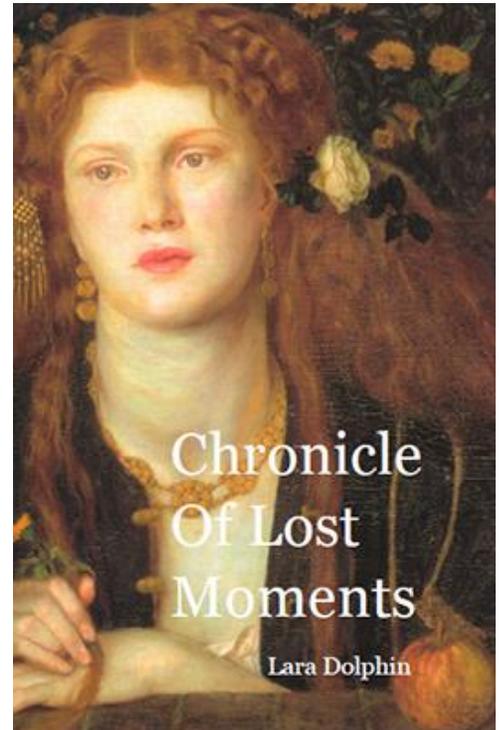
**Judith R. Robinson** is a visual artist, editor, teacher, fiction writer and poet.



Among the many aphorisms uttered by Wallace Stevens is this gem: *Poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right.* I have always treasured that quote because it gets to the heart of poetry and why people write poetry. As I immersed myself in Lara Dolphin's latest chapbook, *Chronicle of Lost Moments*, I was impressed by Dolphin's eye for detail and heart for the ironies of life. Her poetry demonstrates an affinity akin to Stevens. More on this later.

I lead with the poem which opens the collection: "As The Earth Regards the Anthropocene":

All our stuff (the concrete the asphalt  
the gravel the plastic) outweighs every  
living thing on the planet from the Pando  
aspens to the pygmy possum—  
creation waits for us and while it's easy  
for gestures long-delayed like a greeting card  
lost in the mail or a flight stuck on the tarmac—  
it's almost lunch and I'm at the donation center  
chatting with Dave as he helps unload a trunk  
full of gently-used clothes books and toys—  
he's told me that he's five months sober  
he won't get the kids for the holiday  
I tell him about my job the long hours  
the low pay my car that won't stay fixed  
so there we stand among the stuffed animals  
and kitchen appliances feeling  
the weight of the world on our shoulders.



The title segues into Dolphin's themes: "Anthropocene" refers to human activity as it relates to climate and environment. I researched Pando aspens and the pygmy possum. A large Pando aspen grove in Utah is in grave danger from several outside influences. I did not know that this tree grove, with its lovely yellow foliage, is the single largest organism in the world and has been around for thousands of years.

There are fewer than 2,000 pygmy possums left in the world. This cute creature is prey to several predators and suffers from a reduction in food supply. These potential losses may seem trivial to some but not to Dolphin. Moving into the heart of the poem, the poet chronicles a series of "ordinary" things common to daily life. These "lost moments" pile on and weigh us down . . . while "creation waits" for meaningful human responses to challenges that could have irreversible impact on life as we know it.

Stylistically, Dolphin writes in free verse. When she uses rhyme, she uses it well. "Lost In L.A." illustrates:

There is no worry of wind or snow  
or time or place in Godot's Hyperloop below  
  
sidewalks where children run and play  
near streets where out-of-towners lose their way.  
  
No trains, parades or fire trucks  
no snapping turtles, so safe of ducks  
  
will slow the traffic as it flows  
to listen, for what, no one knows.  
  
Where cars sail by on electric skates  
and no one sees and nothing waits.

While a variety of environmental themes permeate Dolphin's *Chronicle*, poetry as fun and entertaining is

important to her. "Pace of Play" pokes fun at baseball. It's slow pace is about as boring as *waiting for the oven to heat*. Don't miss this one!

Dolphin's heart for her husband showcases one of many tender moments included in *Chronicle*. Her innate pathos shines in "The Best Time To Plant A Tree":

we were classmates in seventh grade  
hanging out at band practice  
riding the same bus home  
we made out in high school  
then went our separate ways  
four years of collect passed  
before we met again  
and another five years would pass  
before you got serious and I got smart  
and you asked me to marry you  
the fifth anniversary is wood  
so let's plant a tree to celebrate  
we make a hole two times larger  
than the nursery container is deep  
for our hearty Appalachian Redbud  
as we dig I try to remember  
the last time I told you I love you  
that you are my lifesource, my breath  
I should have told you twenty years ago  
the second best time is now.

I thought the author should have used the title, *Chronicle of Lost Moments Recovered*. The tenderness and maturity enshrined in the above poem is precisely why. In it Lara Dolphin understands that *poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right*.

~ Michael Escoubas, first published  
in *Quill & Parchment*



*Waiting for Us and Hill Clouds* by Maja Trochimczyk

