

# Utah State Poetry Society 2015 Poetry Contest

Kati McClurg, Contest Chair

## Category 1 - *Shoot for the Loot* Judge: Budd Powell Mahan, TX

The six poems I selected were flawless. As always, I must tell the poets that another judge would have ranked them differently, but every line of *Next Door in Room 5504* resonated in me. This poem spoke its story clearly, but with a skillful manipulation of our beautiful language. These six poems seemed the most crafted and they were so diverse it made it difficult to choose. Two of the poems were intricate and woven and laden with meaning, yet the third place poem is simple, direct, honest, and real. Second place stresses the ever important lesson of letting go, and does so charmingly. It was an honor to judge for Utah State Poetry Society. The poems were brilliant and the process of selection was challenging.

## Category 2 - *Wild Card* Judge: Julia L. George, MI

First Prize: *Yellow Stars* A poem consisting of surreal images. I searched for a Dali painting. A young girl finds a strange way to deal with the horror of Life magazine's story and images of the holocaust that invade her every waking thought. She expertly plays the piano far beyond her years while seated upon the floor! After many readings, I stood and read this poem aloud. I found the rhythmic music of the words carrying me forward. I began to speak more quickly, louder and louder, feeling desperation, the intense desire of the child to understand the horror. The many musical references spur the poem along; they become musical accompaniments that augment the tone of the various evil images as seen by the young girl. Her teacher, a kind of "every man," ignores the plaintive cry for explanation. No matter our age, young or old, we cannot grasp the "why" of the holocaust. For me, and I may be totally incorrect in my understanding, but I view this poem as a metaphor for the poet's belief that many today, who have lived with these images all these years, choose to deny its reality though they still haunt. Others of us long for confession of its sin. Yet, acceptance of guilt is rejected by many perpetrators all over the world who chose those long years ago to ignore its reality. Something we have yearned to understand all these years, but know in our hearts was the epitome of evil, a dead end; it cannot be "confessed" away . . . and may be impossible to forgive.

Second Prize: *Miracle of Sagacity* Lyrical poetry, images I will not soon forget. The poet summons an old grandma, who invites us to consider nature from a unique point of view. Who worries the hay is mowed to "give it the perfect taste to please the tongue of a cow?" Or who has pondered the hen's "mysterious inner place that slips out a warm egg wrapped safe in its covering like gift?" The grandma sees her life nearing its end, and warns the "*fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*," defines "fear" as a kind of *reverence*. I am left to worry why the poet tells us of the "impulse for in-your-face disrespect" and, thankfully, decides to forego the impulse. Moves on, back to the mundane. This poem gave me miraculously new insight, but showed a poem can also end too soon, can leave us in limbo looking for answers to questions we cannot ask.

Third Prize: *In the Dark, an Echo* This poet's use of the pantoum is outstanding. The poem form requires the use of repeated lines from one stanza to another and back again, and, they certainly do "echo" each other. In less skillful hands, this repetition can become irritating, phrases seem redundant when used without imagination. This poet did not have that problem. It covers a span of 100 years, 1863, the time of Lincoln and the struggle to abolish slavery to 1963, and Dr. King's time of struggle for the civil rights of black Americans. The lines are cleverly written so that even though they are the same phrases, they take on entirely new meanings in the different stanzas depicting two distinct eras of history. I love the line "black will be the new color or hope." I hope that while we are not free of it yet, we can strive for an "end to this living nightmare," and live to see as a nation, how "loudly our footsteps will echo into history."

1st HM: *Tango por la Tarde* So romantic and beautiful, made me wish this were my memory: someone to dance with me “lest we disappoint what’s left of the day.”

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: *I Weep for Sodom* So Lot’s wife was not longing for the debauchery, but for her home created by a devoted wife and mother? Sadly profound and revealing take on this Bible story. Wonderful.

3<sup>rd</sup> HM: *The Rice Trade* This poet writes: “When you opened the box, did you feel the breath from a previous life brush across the back of your hand?” Filled with rich images, like a strong cup of tea, the leaves left at the bottom telling the story. Heart-rending ending.

Special Recognitions *H2O NO!* ~ Now we know the other side of the story! Could there have been a good reason why the wicked witch was wicked? Who knew? This perfectly rhymed poem was funny and appealing. Surely deserves publication.

*Dark Swallows* Touching poem about loss of a father. Simple, honest writing that could portray our own experience. Truly wonderful.

*Submerged* This poem gives us hope Alzheimer’s might be beautiful after all.

*Grasshopper’s Penance* Enjoyed this gay take on the old fable. I too prefer an “abundance of melodious moments fiddled away” so I will carry away “the songs of summer earth.”

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit with the Utah State Poetry Society poets. So many worthy poems only made choosing more difficult and left me wishing for more opportunities to share them with everyone. You can be justifiably proud of your organization. I hope my vision of your poems is not too far off. I tend to look behind the words, trying to find the truth of the poem. So many poems to treasure, you are indeed rich with poetic talent.

**Category 3 – Rosamond Socwell Memorial Judge: Jared Copeland, UT** Congratulations to the winners! The entries were all strong and it was a difficult task to judge. I found the strongest poems in the category worked within the parameters set by the contest, but they used carefully chosen language to evoke a sense of wonder in the human experience, making the common uncommon. The strongest pieces, while in one sense narrative, were in another sense connecting to a long tradition of commentary on a specific moment that says more than one would expect. Another vein of strong entries contained interesting reflections on history, personal experience and religious themes. The weakest pieces seemed to be trying too hard to emulate Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess.” While Browning’s poem is a great example of what can be done within the form, it is better to make the form one’s own. Again, the great majority of the entries were well done and it was difficult to decide the winners. Thanks for the opportunity.

**Category 6 – Betty Fowler Memorial Judge: Stacie Weatbrook, MA**

Thank you for the opportunity to judge this year’s poetry. Please tell all the entrants that I was so impressed--and touched--by the stories they had to tell. The details, the sense of time, the sense of place were all so evocative of the theme. I feel very honored to have had the chance to glimpse into the imagery and experience of these fine poets. The decision was not an easy one as there were many fine entries.

**Category 7 – Elaine Ipson Memorial Judge: Joyce Shiver, FL** There were a lot of good poems and a several good ones that only missed by an unrhymed word. Several used words like “cite” and “sight,” which are **not rhyme** sounds, but the **same sound**. This is very easy to do and I’m sure most of us have done it

**Category 8 - Word Weavers Judge: Laurence Thomas, MI**

First Place, *Searching for the Spirit of the Antelope* A solid piece of writing that overlays the image one kind of life with the coming of one that would destroy it: antelopes vs. wolves. Historical and biographical at once, it graphically depicts how the change affected the feelings of a family and a way of life.

Second Place, *Immortal Me* Aging shown by contrasting the youthful feelings that this can last forever with a mature view that, no, it can't. The pictures drawn skillfully move from super-human powers and invincibility through getting older and finally stoically accepting reality. Third Place, *Their Mark* Creating rhyme without making it sound contrived is not easy. This poet does it well. Showing (not telling) examples of how artisans leave their mark leaves memorable pictures. The moral tag in the last two lines weaken the effect but don't ruin it. They could be omitted.

**Category 9 – Daniel Seth Morrise Award      Judge: Ruth Harrison, OR**

*Lilacs for Lily*: Translucent language and a sure, light touch make this poem stand out. The images are clear and memorable.

*Little Sis*: Conveys the nature of its subject in light, bright imagery. Excellent use of figurative language.

*Riding Bareback*: Again, fine use of figurative language. Good, live imagery and action.

1<sup>st</sup> HM: Good energy and sensory appeal.

2<sup>nd</sup> HM: Good characterization of subject and situation. An appealing portrait.

3<sup>rd</sup> HM: Surprises us with unobtrusive meter and rhyme, yet is clear and coherent in portraying its subject

**Category 10 – ScanCelts Award      Judge: Matt Halaczkiwicz, UT**

This category provided the contest with many inventive, eloquent and touching poems. The poetry showed immense potential. I would suggest all of these wonderful poets, including those that placed or finished with an honorable mention, continue to revise their work so that the words they write may move closer toward their poetic intent. I think each of us, as a poet, should always revisit our poetry with the hope that every next encounter brings us closer to capturing those moments we so value. Always pay particular attention to your endings, the uniqueness of your language/imagery and the focus/direction of your poems. Most importantly never allow yourself to get complacent. Be careful not to trap yourself in the sounds and rhythms of your poetry at the cost of distracting your readers from the moments you have shared. After all, as much as poetry is a very personal endeavor, it is also meant to be not only heard but also understood. Always keep your audience in mind.

**Category 11 – Kathryn Kay Memorial      Judge: David Hedges, OR**

I was disappointed by the low number of entries in this category. I've judged a number of Utah contests, and I've come to expect a much thicker bundle in the mail. But I didn't let a little thing like that spoil my enjoyment of the poems! The variety of distinct voices was matched by the disparate takes on the theme.

First Place, *Sexy Selfie* – This poem bobbed to the top in the initial read-through, though I was concerned it didn't belong in this category. Then I realized that I was guilty of drawing too narrow an interpretation of the theme. The environment certainly includes nature and the human footprint, but it also includes our immediate surroundings, and the environments and situations we create. The poem teases us with its contemporary social media title, draws us into the story with its vivid descriptions, then knocks us for a loop with its surprise ending. If you're old enough to remember *The Twilight Zone*, visualize Rod Serling delivering a mini-sermon tinged with irony at the close.

Second Place, *New Song for El Condor* – This poem segues from the fate of one Condor caged in a backwater town in Ecuador to the fate of the native people whose name, Los Colorados, was applied to the town by interlopers. Both bird and natives are presented as symbols of mankind's

unthinking, unfeeling destruction of the planet. Like the bird, the natives are reduced to roadside attractions. The words of the old song, *El Condor Pasa*, reverberate.

Third Place, *Calf* – In this descriptive but matter-of-fact narrative of tourists aboard a cruise ship, we witness the birth of a “calf,” the house-sized spawn of a glacier. The poem unfolds gracefully, at a measured pace, unloading its powerful, thought-provoking message in the last line: When will we wake up to the environmental freight train bearing down on us?

First HM, *My Country Home* -- This villanelle is a pure and simple love song for the land. What gives it high standing is its dispassionate approach to the gut-wrenching reality of a dying way of life, one we can never replace. Yet a ray of hope is expressed in the passing mention of a miracle.

Second HM, *Dollars and Sense*-- What would an environmental poetry contest be without a rant among the winners -- and this one is a dandy, all muscle, no fat. It sticks a stiletto in the neck of a society seen as corrupt, decadent and remorseless, and pins down the perpetrators with a vengeance.

Third HM, *Oregon Forests* -- The poet dons his caulk boots in this raw-boned tale of death and rebirth of the logging culture of the Pacific Northwest. It is a potential top winner if the poet will revisit the second page and carry over the same authoritative tone.

### **Category 12 - Zara Sabin Memorial      Judge: Inge Logenburg-Kyler, MI**

There were other poems that were outstanding, but they, for one reason or another, did not quite fit into the category or display the craftsmanship as did the winning ones. They surely will be winners in other contests! All of the poets did a good job in stirring emotions as I tried reading them out loud and had a hard time with some of them!

The First Prize winning poem rose to the top immediately. One could feel the hope and disappointment and imagery of it all. The Second Prize took me virtually to the War Memorial in Washington, D.C. The Third Prize poem was also well crafted and displayed an excellent choice of words. The honorable mention poems were also well crafted and were all "winners" in their own right. That also goes for those selected for special recognition. I would urge those poets to enter them in other contests. Regarding the "non-winners" I just might add that poets need to be careful with how they end a poem. There were a few that were outstanding in their use of words, but the ending left a disappointment. They just need a little tweaking to be winners. Again, thank you for letting me read this wonderful work.

### **CATEGORY 13 - Tomas Memorial      Judge: Morgan Ray, CA**

First place, *Mouse Guest* It was difficult to choose 1st, 2nd and 3rd place because they were all so wonderful but, *Mouse Guest* stood out for its well-constructed story, the consistent rhythm and the fact that the poet never had to stretch to the point of absurdity to sustain the rhyme scheme. Each stanza was strong and, unlike many of the other poems that fell apart in the last stanza, this one excelled with its ending. I can imagine children memorizing and reciting this poem with glee.

Second place, *Grandpa's Old Barn* This poem is wonderful for its exploration of how to slow down, pay attention and use your imagination to have a good time. The descriptive detail is wonderful, evoking textures, smells, sounds and colors.

Third place, *Turtle Facts* This poem was very clever in how it delivered informative facts about turtles in a fun rhyme scheme.

Honorable Mentions:

*Baby Food* Loved this poem too. Very fun rhymes and easy to memorize for kids. I would have liked a different title that contributed more to the poem and felt that the interludes “My breakfast, etc.” were not necessary. The poem is lovely without those lines and stands strong.

*Nursery Rhyme Montage* This was a very sophisticated and fun poem drawing on the

presumption of familiarity of several classic nursery rhymes.

*Not Afraid* A fun journey with Madilynn McMurphy any child would enjoy going on.

**Category 14 – Words Judge: Jeremy Downes, AL**

This was a challenging set of words for our poets to work with--postprandial the most difficult, with winsome and derelict not too far behind. But some good poems managed to emerge from the obstacle course.

I always enjoy reading poems in a Utah contest--there is a depth to the language and images.

The top three places did a particularly good job of creating poems that flowed with strong words used in a new and creative way and formed a cohesive whole celebration of the subject matter.

Thank you for the privilege of reading them!

**Category 15 - LeRoy Meagher Humor Judge: Caroline Walton, FL**

I enjoyed judging this category very much. Humor is meant to give every reader a chuckle or smile and that is what the winners did. There were many good poems that I did not consider real humor, just really good poems with a little story. Thank you for the opportunity to read all these great poems.

**Category 16 - Leroy Meagher Sonnet Judge: Linda Banks, TX**

Sonnets are, in my opinion, one of the hardest form poems to write. Specific rules for rhyme, meter, etc.—which must be strictly followed IF entered into a sonnet contest--often force poets into writing awkward lines, and clarity is sometimes lost along the way. When read, a successful sonnet must flow with natural rhythms of speech, while making its meaning clear, but without calling attention to its “perfect” rhyme scheme and meter.

I love sonnets, and enjoy writing them, despite their challenges. I applaud the many poets who entered this contest. I include here a special note of appreciation to those who indicated the type of sonnet on their poems.

It would be a great help to future judges to make it a requirement of this contest category.

**Category 17 – Time Piece Judge: Naomi Stroud Simmons, TX**

I was particularly drawn to these poems by strong imagery in all lines, good use of poetic forms and/or unique technique. Each poem was easy to connect with, a real sense of being there. Vocabulary brought back so many memories of words and scenes that had been buried and now revisited. The poems showed a real quality of holding the reader’s attention and moving forward at a steady pace. Congratulations.

**Category 20 - Ann W. Hafen Memorial Judge: Valerie M Baily, TX**

First Place, *Cynthia Ann Parker, 1863* (note: before publishing this poem, make a tiny correction. At the end of line 6, please place the period INSIDE the quote marks. This is a frequent error that lots of people make. I did not consider it serious enough to keep this poem from winning first.)

I enjoyed reading these poems. Many would have been in the winners' circle with a little extra care. Two of the poems that were excellent otherwise had misspelled words, even one of the special recognition poems had a word that was misused, but not misspelled, but it was such an excellent poem that I recognized it anyway. The poets covered the subject of the old west with a nice variety of topics that covered landscape, people, animals, plant life, folklore and history.

It was like taking a course in all things "old west." There was also a nice variety of styles and forms that made reading and judging a very pleasant experience. Utah poets are always outstanding and I thank you for the opportunity to judge their work.

**Category 21 – Lloyd Murray Light Verse     Judge: Ann Gasser, PA**

Thanks. It was fun to judge these. BALLROOM BLUES would have rated higher if not for a glitch in the second line of the second stanza. Most of the winning poets understood the importance of making the last line a delightful surprise when writing humor, and they accomplished that goal. Other aspiring humorists would do well to remember that premise.

**Category 22 - Dale Cutting Memorial     Judge: Rob Carney, UT**

First, let me say that I think this is an important category, and I'm glad it exists. Too often poems seem written for some reason other than urgency, but that's not true with a category such as this one. Also, I have at least one student asking me about the ideal way to integrate her interest in poetry with her interest in journalism, and many poems here seem like good demonstrations of an answer, if that makes sense.

All three of the top poems, for what it's worth, are quite a bit better than the other entries, and these poets are deserving of recognition.

My congratulations to the winners, and to the honorable mentions, and to every poet who entered this category since writing about social issues isn't most poets' first inclination but maybe ought to be. It's hard, especially since current events change and specific catalysts and referents can be become forgotten or dated so quickly. But poets can, should, be ethicists. William Carlos Williams wrote, "Hear me out, for I too am concerned," and he wasn't kidding around.

How to be authentic, empathetic, and not sensational? How to never come across as some kind of vampire of other people's lives/sufferings/struggles/griefs for mere subject matter? Those are serious questions, and they can reasonably lead poets to duck the whole thing. What I mean is there are lots of reasons not to address social change in poetry, so I'm glad to see several people in USPS trying to anyway.

**Category 23 - Jay & Freda Snell Memorial     Judge: Michael Johnson, NM**

While any one of these poems, even those with the top awards, might profit from some stylistic tinkering, there were splendid touches, here and there, in all of them--startling sensory detail, rich sound-bonding, engaging voices, crisp phrasing, heartfelt emotion, thematically-crafted line-breaks, and more. My job may have been difficult, but it was also a pleasure. Thank you for letting me play the role of judge again this year.

**Category 24 - Kyrielle Sonnet     Judge: Ken Zeeman, UT**

What a delight to read these fine Kyrielle sonnets. The competition was fierce and final decisions very difficult. With a sonnet, content and form must be carefully intertwined. The well-crafted poem must not let either content or form take supremacy, but the two should work together in a wonderful *pas de deux*. These winning poems dance with grace, beauty, and even humor.

**Category 29 – Wood Memorial     Judge: Chloe Hanson, UT**

I was impressed with how many different directions the entrants in this category took the prompt “Dill Pickles and Cheetos.” From literal to far-reaching connections, each poet did an excellent job with the admittedly wacky topic. Each poet should be very proud of the work he or she has done.

The winning poem, *Unfaithful Moon*, displayed creative use of the topic. Instead of writing a poem about dill pickles and Cheetos, the author wrote a poem that utilized imagery related to the topic. I particularly liked the integration of dill pickles in the form of the vinegar taste, and the way the author came back to the idea of a fermented pickle in the fourth stanza with the line

“steeled, she ferments in the silent parlor.” Overall, *Unfaithful Moon* was a well-crafted piece of writing and a pleasure to read.

I was also impressed with the author of *Cheeto and Dill Pickle*, 2nd place. The author flawlessly utilized the villanelle form. I loved the personification of Cheeto and Dill Pickle as a wild couple. The tone of the poem reminded me of a 1920’s jazz club. *Cheeto and Dill Pickle* was both a fun, lighthearted take on the topic, as well as an example of a high level of craft.

*Affinities* took me by surprise. This poem is quite short, but the ending packed a powerful punch. While this author took the theme of Cheetos and dill pickles more literally, the author managed to incorporate a twist, turning Cheetos and dill pickles into symbols for something else.

Again, I would like to congratulate all the contestants who participated in this category. Your poems were funny, heartwarming, sad, and silly, and I feel lucky to have read them.

**Category 30 – Love Poem            Judge: Debbi Brody, MN**

Many good poems were eliminated because of the writers'

1. inability to keep track of verb tenses,
2. over-use of the verb "to be" when excellent alternative verb choices were available in the very same line as adverbs,
3. over-use of conjunctives when the poet has the use of commas, line and stanza breaks, and white space to fill this function,
4. over-use of adjectives stealing the power (softening the value of) of strong nouns.
5. lack in trust of in the reader by providing a non-imagist summary of the intent of the poem, typically in the final stanza.

**Category 31 – Poetry Conspiracy            Judge: Lila LeBaron, UT**

Thank you so much for the opportunity of judging this division. It was a rich experience. I was amazed at the level of talent shown in these submissions. And I want to pay a complement to all of the writers. While the decisions were not easy, I focused on the actual writing as well as how the poems would likely work read out loud by the two voices, or of course performed in a reading on stage. I hope I was able to do the contest justice.

**Category 34 – Haiku            Judge: Susan Kirkland, UT**

In general, the poems were lovely. Those who were picked as winners made me think more than once about them, a double tension in the poem or a play on words as well as an image.