

The 30th Annual Jo-Anne Hirshfield Memorial Poetry Awards

Sunday, April 13, 2008
2 p.m.
Evanston Public Library
Community Meeting Room

Program

Welcome: Mary Johns, Library Director

Introductory Remarks: Christopher Stewart, Library Board President

Remarks by 2008 Poetry Judge Janice N. Harrington

Presentation of the 2008 Awards and Prize Money

Elementary School Students
Middle School Students
High School Students
Adults

Poetry Reading Janice N. Harrington

Meet the Award Winners
Refreshments Immediately Following the Program

Past Judges

1979 Eloise Fink
Lisel Mueller
1980 Mark Perlberg
1981 Mark Perlberg
1982 Daryl Hine
1983 Eleanor Gordon

1984 Mark Perlberg
1985 Dennis Brutus
1986 Lisel Mueller
1987 John Dickson
1988 Eloise Fink
1989 Gertrude Rubin

1990 Reginald Gibbons
1991 Angela Jackson
1992 Richard W. Calish
1993 Beatriz Badikian
1994 Maxine Chernoff
1995 Martha Modena Vertreace
1996 Effie Mihopoulos
1997 Mark Turcotte
1998 Mark Turcotte
1999 Allison Joseph

2000 Sterling Plumpp
2001 Richard Jones
2002 Susan Hahn
2003 Julie Parson-Nesbitt
2004 Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti
2005 Paulette Roeske
2006 Jared Smith
2007 Averill Curdy

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WINNERS

1st Place

Shireen Husami
Walker Elementary
Grade 5

Falling – A Haiku

Snow silently falls.
Cascading down to the ground.
Padding our hard falls.

2nd Place

Joe Bricker
Kingsley School
Grade 5

Two

My favorite number is two,
One more than one,
One less than three,
Not too much, not too little,
Two parents,
Two pets,
Two siblings,
I'm never alone with two.

3rd Place

Caroline McCance
Walker Elementary
Grade 5

The Story of a Pen

Alone
in a small room
on a wooden desk
sat the writing tools
of Kenneth Oppel.

In front of the computer
next to the notebook
and far from the desk lamp

lay a pen.

It was worn smooth by the hands
of an author.
It lost track years ago of the times
it was refilled with ink.

The computer and the
notebook talked to each other
but they never talked to the pen.
The desk lamp talked to no one.

The pen looked out the window.
He watched
as the snow melted
as the flowers bloomed
as the streets filled with children
as the snow fell again.

Sometimes, the author left
the desk lamp
on
and the pen would bask
in the warm light
until the author
ducked back in
and turned the desk lamp
off.

One day
a woman came.

she talked in a higher voice
than the man
then she took the pen away.

She put him in a small room,
on a wooden desk,
next to a notebook,
in front of a computer,
and far from a desk lamp.

But the notebook and
the computer would chat,
and the desk lamp
even said a little.

And his new author wrote
with him every day.

He no longer felt sad
and alone. He felt an
entirely new emotion.

He felt happy.

MIDDLE SCHOOL WINNERS

1st Place

Miriam Wolf
Bessie Rhodes Magnet School
Grade 8

[He looks out] Untitled

He looks out
At the thousands of faces
Listening intently
To his moving words
All different colors
Different shapes and sizes
But all with the same expression
Of serenity
Of peace
Of love

And his words
Have a clear message

That all of those people listening to them
Must unite in harmony
No matter their colors
No matter their shapes and sizes
And be peaceful
And loving
And put violence
In its rightful place

And the people listen
Really listen
And seem to understand
That the man standing before them
The man so gentle, yet so strong
The man who rises above discrimination
And who speaks out for love
That that man
Has a point

Then suddenly
With a collective intake of breath from the crowd
All falls silent
And all is still
As the man's eyes grow wide
Staring into the depths
Of nothingness
And the curtain drops
On his life
The play is over
But the audience
Doesn't applaud

Instead, as one
It reacts angrily
For one single act
Of one single man
Has taken the life
Of another one
A great one
And it isn't fair
It isn't right
And something must
Be done

Riots
Fires
Screaming
Crying

"No!"
"Why King?"
"This just can't be true!"

One little boy
Stands outside the group
Eyes watching
Ears listening
Heart exploding with pain
For he's upset too
But he knows something
The others are ignoring

Something important
A reason
To stop the fighting
Put out the fires
Dry the tears
Silence the sobs
Restore calm
Restore peace
Restore love

Because all this
Is for Martin
But it's exactly what
Martin wanted stopped
These ignorant people
Making everything he said
Be in vain
Acting just the way
He didn't want them to
And doing the things
He died trying to stop

And the little boy
Watching from the outskirts
Of the rioting crowd
Knows
That Martin wouldn't take this
He'd try to end these actions
With love
For in his own words
"Darkness cannot drive out darkness
Only light can do that
Hate cannot drive out hate..."

Only love can do that

Only love can do that
The little boy
Repeats to himself
Over and over

And the boy hears a voice
Inside his very head
A voice he's heard many times before
Issuing from the small black radio
On his mama's kitchen counter
That strong, yet gentle voice
Telling him that he must be the one to stop the violence
Put out the fires with love
Stop the furious gunshots with love
Drive out the hate
With love

Just like great Martin before him
He must make peace
And carry on the legacy
Of a true
King

The little boy
So young
Yet so brave
Makes his way purposefully
Across the terrible town
Trying to show people
That hate and violence cannot bring Martin back
Cannot solve their problems
Cannot unite them in harmony
As was Martin's greatest hope
That the only way to do that
Is to continue what Martin started
But the little boy doesn't know
That he'll never get the chance to

For he becomes the victim
Of bad luck
Of being in the wrong place
At the wrong time
Because while striding
Through that miserable town
A shot
Was fired
And the little boy
The last person who could truly carry on the legacy

So caring
So passionate
So loving
Falls
To the cold, hard ground

Now he'll never be able
To make peace
And to end the hate
With love
Because his body
Simply lies there on the street
Sad
Pathetic
With no use at all

And

Nobody

Notices

2nd Place

Blaire Frett
Bessie Rhodes Magnet School
Grade 8

All We Need Is Love

I am sitting in my chair
with fire burning in my eyes.
why should I have to suffer through
his bitter twisted lies?

All my life he's made me feel,
that I am just another mouth to feed,
when he sips his intoxicated nectar,
and beats me 'til I plead.

I stand up when he's almost finished,
telling me his sorry excuse,
but when I'm about to walk away,
he lifts up his hand, more abuse.

My cheek is dripping with ruby-red blood,
and I peer into his dark, dark eyes.

I know what is coming next, times up,
more of his painful lies.

All I'm really thinking about
is how stupid it was to walk away.
I knew the beating would occur again,
but I also knew that soon he'd pay.

He enveloped me in sorrow
and destroyed me with his beating,
he pierced me with his words,
and he killed me with his cheating.

One day I couldn't take it any longer.
I felt I was about to explode.
For so many years I had taken his abuse,
no longer a daddy I could hold.

I longed for someone to love me,
to make me feel that I was great,
but all I got for 13 years
was a father filled with hate.

I picked up the phone as fast as I could,
and I dialed 9-1-1.
I heard my dad's footsteps,
and I was getting ready to run.

I hung up the phone,
and sat on my chair.
He didn't even look at me,
I knew he never cared,

about the way I felt inside
about the way he made me feel
about the way I cried myself to sleep
about the way I never had a meal.

He might now be behind rusty bars,
but the memories will never be erased.
I will always feel that at any time he could hurt me again.
The terror, the fear, the horror that I faced.

3rd Place

Perry Nelson
Bessie Rhodes Magnet School
Grade 8

The Room Between the Worlds

Through the doors
Quick as a whisper
Take a deep breath
Then
Through the gates
And up! - up!
Racing
Legs pumping, aching
One more step, one more

Run, Perry, Run

Reach the top
But there's no pause
Gasping, out of breath
Heart pounding
Hand on the doorknob
Grab it, opening
And –
Peace, calm, quiet
Bliss
Careful to close the door
Noiselessly
Reach the stacks of doorways
To other worlds
And finally
Stop to catch breath

Breathe, Perry, Breathe

Stand resting a moment
Run fingers over gateways
Take quick peeks through tiny windows
To get a feel for what might be there
Remove the most promising
And revisit favorites
to explore at home

Look, Perry, Look

Stay there

Surrounded by peace
Lose track of time
'Til –
Time to go.
Maybe...
Five more minutes?
No.
Leave then
Come back another time
At home
Journey at your leisure
Through the lands contained
In the very small doorways
Taken out
At the library

Read, Perry, Read

HIGH SCHOOL WINNERS

1st Place

Ashley Gordon
Buffalo Grove High School

Tire Swing

Soft breeze circles with the sunlight,
dancing leaves bob along the ground.
Velcro shoes stomp through the wood chips,
crunching them into tiny pieces,
scattered in all directions.
Tire swing rocks back and forth,
head resting at the edge,
hands and feet weaved through metal chains.
Faster, faster Michael!
Spinning trees twist above,
into a blur of green and brown.
Sun pokes through every crack,
playing peek-a-boo with the clouds.
My arms are tired Ashley.
Giggles spreading through the air,
now lay soft,
resting on the winding breeze,
floating away with fallen leaves.

2nd Place

Denise Parmar
Buffalo Grove High School

String

Nothing again will ever be my grandmother's vegetable garden.
Each breath I take is filled with the sweet smell of mint.
Her soft, gentle hands offer me a piece of string to tie to the wilting plant.
My seven-year-old hands fumble to tie the knot,
as my grandmother's warm hands wrap my tiny fingers to tie it with me.

3rd Place

Sasha Wolff
Deerfield High School

[In the hush of the night] Untitled

In the hush of the night,
two sisters lay nestled against each other
tracing the bright spirals of the ceiling with their toes
and whispering with juice-stained lips
about their latest crushes.

Elsewhere a shaggy-maned grandpa sits in bed,
his head propped up on three pillows
as he sails past the words on his page
into the moonlit waters of Venezuela.
Far away a freckled Senator lies snug warm in his bed,
memorizing his favorite Shakespeare sonnet.
and somewhere a boy with round blue eyes
practices multiplying his nines table
while on the bunk below him
his little brother twists and distorts his hands
to make shadow puppets on the wall.

The night draws on.
Lights switch off, eyes yield shut.
Somewhere a principal sleeps, humming softly to himself.
A musician tosses about, worrying about the day ahead,
And a hand falls across his chest
Belonging to a woman who is not his wife.
In the empty mansion the old woman
Thinks of the man she saw today in the park,
Of his azure eyes flecked with silver.

A soldier stays awake,
trying to remember the way hot water used to feel
cascading down his back in the shower.
And a mother of six stays up late into the night,
half-frustrated, half content
watching old re-runs from the eighties.
Eventually they too will sleep.

At one point or another, everyone must sleep.
For hours, lives are put on halt,
yet no will is strong enough to resist.
Everyone must succumb to these tigris waters.
Every person must eventually close their eyes and drift off.
For some it is a nightmarish hell
for others it is soft and delicious,
but rest we all must.

Millions of little girls sleep at night.
And lawyers and waitresses and criminals too.
They all sleep at night or try to.
In this country, in countries on the opposite ends of the earth.
All across the world Thai farmers and Italian jewel thieves
snore too loudly for their lovers.
Little children across the oceans kick in their sleep.
Liars and dreamers doze off for hours in the deserts of Namibia
and in the shimmering cities of Japan.
The whole world sleeps when time or their bodies tell them to.
So do you.

And murderers too, sleep with their chins tucked under the covers,
their heads slightly cocked to one side.
Their eyelids smooth as rose petals, they look like angels.
Little girls and thieves and serial killers
All sleep in the still of the night.

Honorable Mention

Timna Axel
Buffalo Grove High School

Riding the Loop

The smudged plastic windows shudder.
Mud tracks slap down the center aisle
And flank rows of double seats,
Graffiti carved through the padded skin
Retching white cotton.
You watch a heavy man clench the strap of his briefcase,

Brown leather twisted like a knotted gut.
A broken light switch and the halting spasms of light
Across an automated door which calmly slices open.
This is Adams.
An older black woman slowly peels a flailing orange;
She squeezes out the fluid and smacks her lips of its tangy marrow.
You bore out through the bludgeoning darkness of the tunnel,
Wring your hands free of those contorted muscles
And the raw knuckle pink that won't wash away.
Above you march the city multitudes tap-tap on the concrete
And the rhythmmed blows of a street drummer stinging coffee-shop walls.
Fathers and sons ride the Loop together
And you look for the next station but the belt around your waist
Constricts thought.
An exploding metal shriek writhing like a child
At the very last station.

Honorable Mention

Vickie Rich
Buffalo Grove High School

A Dinner Party

I can't help but notice how
This music seems to go with
The people at the party.
Janet leans against the bar
With a drink in one hand
Showing off her new dress that exaggerates
Her pear shaped body
Daniel pats Robert firmly on the back
And leans a little closer to him
As he whispers about a
Business negotiation,
And Donna's little boy,
Who uses the bar stools
As a drum set
Because she couldn't
Find a babysitter for tonight.

Honorable Mention

Rebecca Morris
Buffalo Grove High School

Alcohol

Her favorite antique lantern

She got for their fifth anniversary
Lies in the hallway,
Glass shattered, carefully handcrafted brass sides
Bashed in, the heat of the argument
Burning the wick.
A stench of cardboard and chloroform
Fills the house,
But lingers
Mainly around the old leather recliner
In the living room with two year old
Pork rinds stuck
Under the cushion and stained from 113
Touchdown passes, 97 field goals,
And the smell of yesterday's lunch
That abused his stomach.
The sun pierces through the window and shines
On the day old, half empty
Glass giving it a richer, golden color;
That is, until a cloud passes over.
Enough bottle caps lie
On the floor that he could tell his wife he never
Lost his.
His grandfather's walnut wine chest opened
For every birthday, every Christmas, every Hanukkah,
Every Black Friday.
A key hidden under all the unread brochures,
The self-help books still wrapped in cellophane,
And a single pink slip;
All of these attempting to cover the sweat stains.
A path is worn from the chair to the bathroom
And in the bathroom he sits as cold as
The ice from his last burning sip of Scotch.

ADULT WINNERS

1st Place

Jean Keleher
Evanston

Night Watch

The man in 214 has blowfish lips—
swollen, bruised. Translucent as blue
mussel shells. His wife left him
with me when she went out

to get some air last Tuesday.

I've always been good at staying up
all night. As a child I sidestepped
camouflaged crabs sidling
underfoot on my Islamorada sand;
they postured and clawed at me
in the pre-dawn light.

I'm on guard,
now, awake – cantankerous
orderlies sledding patients
through waxed corridors,
nurses' metronomic chit-chat,
electric snores of new machines
can't impersonate the soar
and descent of that child's night
tide.

One April, 4:00 a.m. –
in a vein-blue sky a new moon
fueled a world of distended
nighttime breathing;
I'd troll the shore before
palms awoke and wilted,
humid fronds limp
as horse tails displacing flies.
All the sea slept in caves: rays,
parrotfish and sergeant majors,
stripes bleached by night, and pale
eels ribboning the floor.

Underwater
this sandstone frieze empty
but for willowing weeds
and sand cyclones spawned
by silent currents. At dawn
I'd hitchhike to the fish plant,
bargain with the fisherman
for mussels, his blue-eyed daughter
after a wet puppy down the pier.
The only cool thing those days
was a coffin in the sea, or the tickle
of the highway eddying north
up the Keys toward Miami
in Uncle Joe's indigo Lincoln,
careful not to rest against

the suicide doors. Nightfall,
and the sky was just the ocean
in a mirror. Uncle Joe crooned
"Starlight." I envisioned silver-
tinted starfish, affixed
to the dry sea above us.

Everything's white
in a hospital, but even here I see
a blue tint, the shards of night sky
braceletting this sleeping patient's wrist,
the blue of tranquilizers, or those Drano pellets
he swallowed to get in here, dry
as aquarium rocks.

When he wakes,
his aquamarine eyes dilated and dry as scarabs,
his tongue a balloonfish, he will fix
on the silver needles twinkling above my dark lap,
the clicking of my all-night knitting.

2nd Place

Maureen Tolman Flannery
Evanston

Influences

I

The Moon Weaves in Mayan Women

Ximena, weaver of the Guatemalan highlands,
is a student of the moon.
The women of the old stone cities received their art
from the moon goddess, Ixchel,
who taught how light penetrates darkness,
how what goes away comes back changed,
looking for its old place
and needing to be worked in.
The moon implied that spinning binds,
showed them, too, through inconstant rays,
the way many small angles inscribe a curve
and taught them again and again how to use the reds
and beauty's inexplicable desire to feed and be fed.

Each weaving pupil of the moon,
axis of upper and underworlds, keeps track

of everything that matters to the Mayans,
keeps the color in the children's cheeks
and the stories in the *huipiles* she wears
keeps evil out and life-warmth in
keeps the confluence of number and time
keeps the calendars in cotton
and mysteries in wool
keeps nurture cloud-soft on their skin.

The *cordon umbilical* around her waist ties Ximena
to the mother-god tree that pillars the universe.
The head of her loom sings back
as she weaves, sings her the old chants
of coming and going
sings of how holy stones in the life-heat of sun
learn to undulate as the snake that makes its
sidelong way
down the equinox stairs of Chichen Itza.
Her companion-loom opens and closes
with its heartbeat sound, *latir del corazon*
as she labors the birthing
of a new garment to clothe the holy,
the raiment of the gods which Ximena weaves
with devotion equal to that with which
she wove the everyday *huipiles* of her children.

II

Mayan Weaver Dozes at the Loom

Ximena has been frayed, off balance lately,
her equilibrium listing wayward
like a small fruit-bird in heavy winds.
Long into the night she kneels
and weaves as one possessed,
leaning intently into the loom
and straining her eyes in lantern light,
then falls back exhausted against the strap
and speaks to the fibers in her fretful sleep.

Santa Veronica of the Cloth
came to her in one such fever-dream
naked with the face of Jesus tattooed up and down her body.
The saint asked Ximena to make her a *huipil*
fine as the garments of Mayan gods,
one more in keeping with the lines
the gods weave into world designs
where blood-red swirls among blade greens.

So she works with devotional fervor on the saint-sized garment,
every thrust of shuttle a prayer,
thread-bare emotion in each next comb of weft
back against what is there.

Sometimes the pattern of a great grandmother from another village
asserts itself into her work –
the diamond design of space and time
shows up in a row of geometric corn
as if silenced ancestors need her hands to make visible
the things they can no longer say.

III

The Village of a Single Gender

The women of San Jose Poaquil
are grateful for the teachings of the moon.
They have, at least, their work
and the colors that sustain them.
They have the expressive looms that commune
in heartbeat rhythms as they weave,
and they have one another, skilled and humble each
and eager to do what they can
to reduce the communal pain.

And they have, of course,
the ambiguous blessings of memory.
They do not have husbands or grown sons
nor any new children
since the night when all the men of the village
were taken away.

IV

Ximena Works to Finish the *Huipil* of her Saint

Ximena cannot stop. The Lady waits.
She weaves now night and day and even she
cannot say where this sky-inspired garment originates.

The feast day of Saint Veronica
comes flying over her waking hours
like a seagull aiming to land at her feet.
By the twelfth of July she must complete this
most magnificent of all Veronica's ceremonial garments.
Already the women in the church have begun
to remove the layers of *huipiles*
that hundreds of years of veneration have placed
over her wooden head.

The saint will be bathed
and each of her *huipiles* washed with ritual motion
in basins of prayed-over rosewater.
Ximena will be with the women
when they polish the collar of silver coins
their ancestors gave to adorn the *patrona*.

She must not faint or waver
when they lay the saint's *huipiles*
to dry in the cleansing heat-light of midday sun.
She, too, will pray down the causeway of weavings,
the aisle between the saint's displayed garments
where each worshiper can kiss the hems
and drink from rosewater in which they were washed.
Ximena weaves by night as the thread-moon has taught her.
Each swipe brings it longer and grander and more full of light.

3rd Place

Maureen Tolman Flannery
Evanston

Another Day on the Brooklyn Subway

I am riding the A-Train to Forty-Second Street
when four men stand up and begin a rhythmic clapping.
We try not to notice the guy moon-walking by us,
smooth in the jerky aisle of the train.
A young man joins him in a dive to the floor
where he caterpillars between upright poles.
Now three keep up fancy footwork,
body angles sharp, geometric, then fluid
waves of appendages breaking against each other's shores.
They pass arm undulations back and forth through each other
while the annoyed awareness of subway passengers
congeals to one will-force of begrudging support.

An older boy breaks in, drops to flares and spins,
inverts himself into splits and pops up again
to flip the small one up to the overhead poles
just as the train lurches beneath the East River
and two more guys emerge from the sides,
grip each other's ankles, and steam-roll body-over-body
the length of the car where all the passengers
have moved aside to give over the floor.

More beat-boxers percussion the show.
A brother breaks into a spin, does a G-kick

and freezes while the train continues its prescribed path
beneath the surface world.
Windmills spin in the wind of our gasps
as the little one stays suspended in air
and a power-head catches him again between drops and floats –
all before we get off at Port Authority.

2008 Judge – Janice N. Harrington

Janice N. Harrington's book of poems, *Even the Hollow My Body Made Is Gone*, appeared in 2007 from BOA Editions, where it won the A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize. Harrington is the 2008 winner of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, which will be awarded at Claremont Graduate University in Claremont, California, on April 15, 2008. The recipient of a 2007 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for Poetry, she is also the author of two children's books, *Going North* (2004) and *The Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County* (2007) from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. She teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Dedication

This year's poetry awards are in memory of:

**Sara Busch
Robert C. Busch
Brian Garrick**

The prizes in poetry are awarded in remembrance of:

**Stephen Feinstein
Edith Mall
Shirley Tatar
Diana Weinstein**

Beginning this year, prizes are being awarded in a new category,
The Sara and Robert C. Busch Middle School Awards.

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to contributors to this year's awards.

Hope Arthur
Shirley Asnis
Jean Baron
Elaine and Bernard Bell
Robert Belly and Family
Van Bobrow
Harold and Evelyn Brown
Rose Busch
Sam Lederman and Jill Cogan
Maria Lily Diaz
Victoria Eckstein
Marg and Herm Eisenberg
Mitchell and Yetta Frank
Sylvia Friedman
Dorothy Gans
Paul Gottschalk and Becky Crump
Teri Hartman and Family
Jerome Hausman
Carol and Kenan Heise
Ilse and Milt Herst
Bernice Hirsch
Marlene and Rose Huttner

Suki Kandell
Dan Kletnick and Family
Melvin and Irene Landau Family
Maury Levy and Family
Gertrude Hirsch Lewis
Ethel Liten
Marvin Lustgarten
Steffi Masur
Sylvia Nissenson and Family
Rosita and Bob Pildes
Mr. and Mrs. Ed Reinfranck
Louis and Jackie River
Julie and Felipe Rivera
Billie Rosman and Family
Gertrude Rubin
Mrs. Erwin Salk
Shirley Evans Tabachnik
Tina and Peter Weil
Eila A. Weisman
Bernice Weissbourd
Amy and Josh Yulish

Contributions to the Jo-Anne Hirshfield Memorial Poetry Fund are welcomed, and will enable this program to continue.

Gifts may be forwarded to:
Library Director
Evanston Public Library
1703 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201

Award Program and Design by Rivera Design & Communications
847-869-7708

Photography by Rich Foreman
Copies of the photographs can be purchased from:
Rich Foreman Photography
936 Sherman Avenue, Evanston, IL 60202
847-864-4549

In loving memory of
Jo-Anne Hirshfield
who found pleasure and delight in poetry

Her family has dedicated funds entrusted to the Evanston Public Library
to award prizes for outstanding new poetry writing.

It is our hope that poets of all ages
will be inspired and encouraged,
and that the funds will serve
to reward excellence in poetry writing
as a memorial to Jo-Anne.

Dr. and Mrs. Hyman Hirshfield
daughters, Laura, Leslie, and Deborah, and grandson Justin Garrick