

*The  
Thirty-First Annual  
Jo-Anne Hirshfield  
Memorial Poetry  
Awards*



EVANSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM  
SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2009, 2:00 PM

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

This year's poetry awards are in memory of:

*Joseph Cohen*

*Paula Dillard*

*Herman Eisenberg*

*Jerry Roy*



The Middle School Awards are endowed by:

*Sara and Robert C. Busch*

## Program

Welcome Mary Johns, Library Director

Introductory Remarks Christopher Stewart,  
Library Board President

Remarks by 2009 Poetry Judge Janet S. Wong

Presentation of the 2009 Awards and Prize Money

Elementary School Students  
Middle School Students  
High School Students  
Unpublished Adults

Poetry Readings Janet S. Wong

*Meet the Award Winners*  
*Refreshments Immediately Following the Program*

## PAST JUDGES

1979 Eloise Fink Lisel Mueller	1994 Maxine Chernoff
1980 Mark Perlberg	1995 Martha Modena Vertreace
1981 Mark Perlberg	1996 Effie Mihopoulos
1982 Daryl Hine	1997 Mark Turcotte
1983 Eleanor Gordon	1998 Mark Turcotte
1984 Mark Perlberg	1999 Allison Joseph
1985 Dennis Brutus	2000 Sterling Plumpp
1986 Lisel Mueller	2001 Richard Jones
1987 John Dickson	2002 Susan Hahn
1988 Eloise Fink	2003 Julie Parson-Nesbitt
1989 Gertrude Rubin	2004 Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti
1990 Reginald Gibbons	2005 Paulette Roeske
1991 Angela Jackson	2006 Jared Smith
1992 Richard W. Calish	2007 Averill Curdy
1993 Beatriz Badikian	2008 Janice N. Harrington

*We regret any errors that may have occurred in this publication.*

# Elementary School Students

FIRST PLACE

Ellie Rogers  
King Lab School, Grade 3

## *A Flower*

In the wind, a flower blows  
And gets ripped off its stem.

Then floats away to a different place  
Where all flowers begin.

On its way it meets a friend,  
A flower much like itself.

And day after day, they play and play,  
For them there is no end.

SECOND PLACE

Sophie Reeves  
Orrington School, Grade 5

## Cookies

The flower butter cookies  
taste so good  
they have a little hole  
in the middle  
where I stick my finger  
and then,  
I chomp around  
my cookie  
It shrinks quite a lot  
until  
there is a small ring  
around my finger  
so, I pull it off with my  
teeth  
and gobble that down  
too

THIRD PLACE

Will Chehab  
Willard School, Grade 1

## *When You Join Rock and Roll*

When a guy needs help  
He calls one friend  
To a disco party.  
Disco Rocks the party but  
When you join Rock and Roll listen too  
Rock and Roll is taking over time  
Yeah Rock and Roll is taking over time  
When you join Rock and Roll  
It can change your life anytime  
Rock and Roll can change your life anytime.

HONORABLE MENTION

Anu Raife  
Orrington School, Grade 5

## *Wind*

Wind is like a fierce, black shadow hovering over you.  
Wind makes an ugly shiver go down your spine.  
Wind sounds like a howling wolf in the distance.  
Wind whips around your body and stains it with bruises.  
Wind is an unseen monster of cold.

HONORABLE MENTION

Daniel Reyes-Mendoza  
Washington School, Grade 2

## *Los pies asombrosos*

Mis pies son grande como un caballo.  
Cuando yo brinco meve rapido como un conejo  
Estoy orgulloso de mis pies.  
La manera en que mis pies son feliz y grandes.  
Un día, voi a suenar de mis pies.

HONORABLE MENTION

Hannah Campbell  
Kingsley School, Grade 4

## *F*riendships

friendships  
they're hard

I  
have good friends  
but we have problems

all good friends have problems

I would know

I  
Have problems with my friends  
just like you

## *M*iddle School Students

FIRST PLACE

Caroline McCance  
Chute School, Grade 6

## *U*nder the *S*ilver *M*oon

The hawk shoots  
through the moonlit sky  
a flash of silver.  
She slows  
as she soars  
through the open air.  
It is her kingdom  
she rules supreme.  
Her eyes gleam  
as she glides  
ever so slowly  
in a perfect ring

spiraling  
gently  
toward the ground.  
She alights  
on a branch  
of a towering oak  
glowing  
in the pale light.  
No one  
ever  
messes with her.

SECOND PLACE

Kelly Russo  
Bessie Rhodes School, Grade 8

## Untitled

The grace and power fill me with familiar ease  
As I begin my descent

Among the open sky, open peaks

I'm bent slightly over, concentrating  
On where I put the extensions of my arms and legs

Among the covered pines, bare trees

Breathe in the crisp, cool air  
Breathe out, a haze to match the powder

Among the sharp angles, rocky cliffs

Eyes widen as I take in my next challenge  
But fear soon turns to adrenaline, excitement

Among the lifts, dizzying heights

I move closer, cautiously, extensions of my feet dangling over the edge  
Scooting further and further over inch by inch

Among the blazing sun, gusting winds

I hurl myself over the precipice  
Edging one way and then another

Among shooshing ice crystals, sometimes downy, sometimes icy

*I fly*

THIRD PLACE

Tessa Dalton  
Nichols School, Grade 6

## Untitled

That ant  
walking away with the cookie crumb  
across the counter  
Not much worry  
I still have a cookie  
all except for the crumb  
Twenty minutes later I come back

Where's my cookie?  
I see a trail of ants  
Some carrying crumbs  
a few with chocolate chips  
How did that problem start?  
From that little ant  
with a little crumb of a lie

HONORABLE MENTION

Hannah Arata  
Bessie Rhodes School, Grade 8

## *Untitled*

She was taller than most girls  
Hovering over her family and friends  
Her feet size 13 and her hands bigger than  
A gorilla's.

Most were scared  
But no one knew what she had been put through  
There was one friend who she spilled all her secrets to  
Those days, those nights, those secrets  
Spilling out of her, without regretting anything

Everything was locked up inside of her  
With nowhere to turn to  
The friend listened to her secrets and promised  
Not to tell

For months, then years, those two were friends  
Promising until the very end  
Till one day the friend died  
Leaving the girl behind with no pride

Mean words were being thrown at her  
Being too tall, not fitting in  
The girl was upset, of course  
From all the trauma

At school, things were worse  
Alone and afraid like a dog on a highway

Nobody really knows where she went  
Disappeared one day without telling a soul

People will always remember her  
Because she's hard to forget  
Her big feet and hands  
Uncombed hair and her height  
Her quietness and her ability to stay strong  
Who could forget that?

HONORABLE MENTION

Maleka Green  
Haven School, Grade 8

## *Forward*

I move forward  
No looking back  
If you can't move with me  
You disappear in my tracks  
I dance to my own beat  
Never playing the same beat twice  
Once it's been done

Oh trust me, I move on  
As I move along I sing my hip-hop song  
People try to stop me, put tape on my mouth  
They're going backwards  
I move north, they move south  
I fight them off and keep going on  
I continue to sing my hip-hop song

HONORABLE MENTION

Emma Maxwell  
Nichols School, Grade 6

## *Rapid River*

Always scurrying  
in one direction,  
rushing but never late,  
avoiding rocks and reeds,  
never noticing the  
Kingfisher in the sky,  
or the cattails on its bank,  
or the trout in its belly

## *H*igh School Students

FIRST PLACE

Amelia Levchenko  
Buffalo Grove High School

## *H*ome Cooking

my mother stopped cooking  
three and one-half years ago  
she said that the sound of rice and pasta  
as it hits the side of the pot  
reminds her of my father's fingers  
tapping on the windowpane  
and also it cannot be denied  
that there is something existentially dishonest  
about the aroma and sauce and spices

so Thursday through Wednesday  
we drive through Portillo's  
hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken salad  
there is enough variety  
not to have to repeat a meal in a seven-day cycle  
and enough constancy  
to weave a tradition and concomitant memories  
around plastic lids and styrofoam containers

but just yesterday  
at the Buffalo Grove High School Choral Guild Rummage Sale  
i saw my mother buy two muffin tins  
not to mention a set of stainless steel mixing bowls  
so i have to question  
if it is now possible  
for her to look into the abyss  
and see cranberry-walnut batter

SECOND PLACE

Jordan Weiner  
Buffalo Grove High School

## Colon

In the classroom:  
Test day. Standing near the desk  
Beneath the clock, the teacher is glaring  
At him, a pointed and puncturing glare-

But he looks instead at her buttons,  
Fastened to the collar,  
Two stiff buttons so much like  
A colon,  
So much like  
The letter A,  
Darkened twice, one above the other,  
On his neighbor's Scantron exam.

Now she's tapping her foot,  
Clutching *his* test,  
Her mouth in that round, expectant oh  
Just like his  
And above her head the colon on the clock  
Is flashing, flashing  
Between the numbers,  
Between the hour and the minutes,  
Between the deed and the  
Details  
Or as she says:  
Excuses  
Staring at the buttons,  
He utters two sharp breaths that hang  
In the air between them  
Before she splits apart his test  
And the two halves fall, one above the other,  
Into the garbage can.

THIRD PLACE

Claire Anderson  
Evanston Township High School

## The Elephant Water Slide

The Sun pierces through my underwear  
and otherwise bare skin  
against the terry soft of a beach towel  
above the prickles of dying grass and teasingly perfect sunflowers.  
Neighborhood bike wars,  
Lee St. beach pilgrims,  
late afternoon garbage trucks, rumble past.

In a far off, long-unvisited corner,  
amidst the Backyard Communion  
of the perfectly unfettered day and I,  
sits a small decrepit plastic elephant water slide.  
It was made for days like this-  
August heat thickly settled about the day  
like maple syrup.  
A plastic pool and a hose  
once made him king  
of his backyard suburban kingdom-  
he can almost hear our delighted shrieks  
echoing through the yard

## *The Elephant Water Slide continued*

Today he sits not  
in the prominent central real estate,  
but trunk facing a rusty fence  
surrounded by dirty beach toys and forgotten wiffle bats,  
discarded relics  
of summers' past.  
He catches my eye, the  
solitary wizened blue plastic elephant slide.  
I nod to him in respect of the long ago days that  
he steadfastly cooled and amused,  
because after all,  
an elephant never forgets.

HONORABLE MENTION

Jordan Weiner  
Buffalo Grove High School

## *Ingredients*

Baking oatmeal-raisin cookies with my mother,  
I often wondered  
Why she chose to tap and sprinkle and shake  
From various cartons until they sat empty,  
A film of nutmeg hugging their curves  
While a stack of teaspoons  
Lay unused in the sink.  
I often wondered  
Where she learned that villages  
Can be concocted from  
Those same cartons;  
Entire afternoons devoted to bouncing plastic animals  
Through baking soda buildings  
And applesauce-cup apartments.  
I often wondered  
Who told her that oven mitts  
Make a delectable pair of slippers  
Or that a tub of Quaker Oats  
Yields more noise than a drum.  
I often wondered  
How she heard that the only ingredients you need  
For a day at the beach are  
Rainy forecasts,  
Bright bath towels,  
And an empty vial of vanilla extract  
To hold your "sunscreen."  
But I knew  
That the best kind of oatmeal-raisin cookies  
Are made with  
Chocolate chips.

HONORABLE MENTION

Rachel Sanni  
Evanston Township High School

## *Jazz Man*

He was born Cornelius Isaiah Johnson Jr.  
The Jr he dropped from his name.  
Birthed October 15th  
on the then dusty, now damp, roads of Chalmette, Louisiana  
Just outside of New Orleans.  
Lived in a two room burnt red brick house  
With his ma, pop and seven brothers and sisters he was smack dab in the middle of  
Number four  
His pop's favorite number  
The number of drinks his pop always had before coming home  
The number of mistresses his pop had children with  
The number of times he said I am sorry more than I love you after a swift hit across his  
mother's face  
The number of days he ever saw his pop sober  
So lucky Cornelius was to have the name of his pop  
But he made an agreement with his mother and himself to never harm a woman so sweet  
An agreement he soon broke after the passing of his mother by his father's hand  
And the passing of his father by his fifth drink  
He had his daddy's skin- the pigment of coal that looked as if it was covered with a thin  
sheet of sweat  
He had his daddy's chest- full, like a peacock. arms strictly bound together like sugar  
cane  
He had his daddy's smile-as bright as a full moon's reflection on the Mississippi  
And he had his daddy's way of charming dames  
But like his father, jazz came to be his only love  
  
He would betray all others for the notes that ran across the front of his eyes like a freight  
train that only he could hop aboard  
Until he met her  
She had skin like the red brick clay of his childhood home  
And full lips the color of tamarind  
She never spoke-Just smiled so sweet  
But she left as quickly as she came  
Off to find another  
Left not only him but his music distort  
  
His jazz  
So he dusted off his pop's flask  
Walked crooked lines home to only sleep on the left side of his bed  
Because the right side was for her  
She was always on his right side  
He knew she would come back so every time he played, he played for her.  
He played through a series of d flats and f sharps willing her to come back.  
She did.  
And he loved her five times as much as his father ever loved his mother.  
So much, that he played her.  
He played her ribs with his fists  
He blew her face with his open palms  
He strummed her teeth as he pushed her against the wall  
He drummed her warm skin with the soles of his feet  
She lost her grace as she fell to the floor  
Lost her rhythm  
He knelt down to kiss her tamarind lips  
Brush her red brick cheek  
Put his cane bound arms around her throat  
And he played his last note.

HONORABLE MENTION

Alex Garel-Frantzen  
Buffalo Grove High School

## Sunday on Western

Chains cling on to the dark green panels above the bar,  
Painted with crème stars.  
Each link is rusty,  
One star has only three points.  
In the palms of the last link,  
A planet is held.  
A Styrofoam fireball,  
Oozing out an orange aura to set the mood.

Across the wooden bar counter top,  
A brown cat with specks of gray creeps.  
Her eyes pierce the plate of a half-eaten cheese quesadilla,  
Crinkled napkin adorning the top.  
The flat screen television plays re-runs of Saturday Night Live,  
And static waves ripple through Will Ferrell as they move towards  
The top of the screen.

A Chicago Police car door is bolted  
Next to the bloodshot exit sign.  
And a lone cowboy hat hangs off of a nail  
Amidst the brick wall filled with cracks and crevices,  
Craters and valleys.  
Rushing water from the faucet behind the bar  
Adds to the conversation of a Sunday night in the city.  
“And if the filter looks really fuzzy,  
It’s probably time to change it.”

Streams of headlights drift past the security block windows  
Next to the exit sign and the car door.  
“His shows always start so late now,  
I kind of regret coming,” she says.  
The changing tide of impersonations above  
Is calmed by the bartender.  
The fan above creates a draft,  
Sifting up the loose sleeves of my plaid shirt.  
The bar lights dim  
And the green and blue stage lights grow stronger.  
The warm tone of a Tube Fender Amplifier fills the air,  
As the foam plugs expand into my ears.

# Adults

FIRST PLACE

Margie Skelly  
Chicago

## Encomium for a Sestina

I looked hard for you today  
in the “all new” fourth edition  
of The American Heritage Dictionary,  
a twenty-first century reference  
with over seventy thousand entries  
and one thousand new words and meanings.

I held my breath between “sestet” and set,”  
but you were not to be found.  
I checked again, knowing the frailty  
of the middle-aged eye,  
but you were gone to some quiet place  
where the wordless live anonymously.

Sestet and sonnet, they both made the grade,  
but what oversight or intention  
led you to an early grave?

I will always remember you.  
How can I forget you  
when I wrote several of you,  
taught you to freshmen  
struggling to learn your rhyme scheme?

Where have you gone, my 39-line poem with six verses,  
each with six lines, closing with a triplet?  
Where have you gone with your reliable patterns:  
six different ending words for each line in the first verse:  
A, B, C, D, E, F appearing in each successive verse  
with the new pattern becoming F, A, E, B, D, C,  
until words like water, city, sorrow, season, lovers, passage  
evolve into city, season, passage, lovers, sorrow, and water  
by the sixth verse until the poem fulfills its mission,  
and each last word of each line  
finds its rightful place as the last word  
in another line in a different verse.

You were complex but an ego-less poem  
with no word being first or last  
and all six words appearing in a triplet  
to linger in the reader’s mind,  
sublime, after a six-course dinner:

There is no passage to the jeweled city,  
no right of way for lovers shedding sorrow,  
I am always out of season, without water.

## *Encomium for a Sestina continued*

Now, with the passage of time,  
the light of your jewels dims  
in the twilight celestial city,  
and while I don't mind my free verse,  
I loved your season, its watering of my mind,  
the garden of what is now my sorrow.

SECOND PLACE

Bob Perlongo  
Evanston

## *Elvis is Alive and Slim Just Outside St. Louis*

You can't quite see the thin-smoking chimney  
of the little cabin from any known road,  
but it's him, all right, there on the porch,  
in a rocking chair, the hair, the dark eyes, the cape,  
the gilded garment wound round him like a scroll,  
creamy-center chocolates on a table nearby  
as he rocks to and fro, now and then peering  
into a case full of pills on the porch floor, careful -  
finally - not to take too many of any one item.

Most sunsets, the squirrels and bluejays  
gather like a choir, semicircled before him,  
clattering and chirping, carrying on.

Only they know how he got away.

THIRD PLACE

Diane dos Santos  
Evanston

## *King Pin*

New at the game,  
he's on fire.  
Slap of ball to  
dull maple,  
then swirrl-sound,  
the coefficient of friction,  
plants a mantra in his ego:

*I want the strike, want the strike, want it, want it.*

He's no stroker, but a cranker,  
graceful in rented slip shoes.  
He whoops for the messenger,  
studies the bed posts,  
barks advice to his mate  
at the approach.

## King Pin *continued*

*She puts it down so smoothly,  
It's like how she swims, so efficient.*

He admires his wife,  
then returns to mantra:  
*strike, strike, strike.*

He has made adjustments,  
since he arrived,  
dropped his speed,  
shifted his angle,  
flicked the ball's creamy side  
on the release.

Blue urethane and mica  
bound and cool  
gleams on the skid, hook and roll  
headed for the 1-2.

*It's a Brooklyn strike, he thinks, leaping.*

Smug smile grows  
as he turns his back  
on fallen white.

Yet the five pin,  
a testy tap,  
stands resolute.

Ball 2:  
Spins hard,  
but one millimeter  
to the left  
ruins his trajectory.

*This is a dangerous sport, he thinks.*

As the acrylic passes  
to bang the back drop,  
the five pin  
is a silent mouse  
in the open sun.

Finally, he hits a  
ten in the pit,  
then two,  
eluding the ditch.

Frame ten,  
he falters;  
five pin taunts twice now,  
*you're no three-bagger.*

He sets his rented shoes  
on the counter,  
walks away.

He will return.

He likes  
the despair  
of physics.

HONORABLE MENTION

Elaine Wagner  
Evanston

## Strangling Fig

Living, it creates  
death: this leafy  
twisted troll standing  
in Kenya's bittersweet  
forest soil. Fig drops  
Medusa tendrils from its host's  
upper branches, wraps  
trunk and roots,  
squeezing against  
the upward flow  
of earth's nourishment,  
re-routes life  
to its own fledgling rootlets.  
With its topmost leaves,  
troll steals host's last light.

Samburu tribal legend  
says: if you walk  
seven times around  
this tree your gender  
changes; stand motionless  
beneath too long and  
misfortune snares you.

Perhaps androgyny arises  
at six and three quarters  
turns and paradise while making  
love in its dense shade.

HONORABLE MENTION

Wilda Morris  
Bolingbrook

## *Details*

I don't want to memorize  
dates and places.  
I want to remember  
the details that made them unique -  
that Uncle Norman  
called coffee "dishwater,"  
liked to fish on a small pond,  
named his goats like children  
and let me milk them;  
that he let me climb  
high in the locust tree,  
walked with me across fields  
of weeds and wildflowers  
whose names he knew,  
let me balance  
on the train tracks,  
played games with us  
by lantern glow,

showed us the lushness  
of the country sky at night,  
the stars that twinkled  
like his teasing eyes;  
that Aunt Irene loved  
wintergreen candy,  
Harvard beets, goat cheese,  
and bright red Jello without fruit,  
wore aprons  
over brightly patterned dresses,  
that she cared  
as much as Uncle Norman  
for the goats,  
let me sit on her bed  
to dress her porcelain dolls,  
and when I brought her  
a sparkling rock, her eyes  
reflected its shine.

## *For My Father*

He chose  
the Chinese New Year, the dragon's year –  
zodiac's most auspicious animal,  
symbol of sheer energy. He left  
on the purest of days, a winter's new moon,  
on the cusp of beginnings.

He was an unlikely dragon, coming  
home from work each evening  
all in gray,  
in heavy wool overcoat, suit  
and hat. His hair and skin  
repeated grayness.  
Bent, he climbed  
the concrete steps to our house.

All day he sat in fluorescent  
smoke-hazed rooms, poring  
over numbers, graphs,  
and often brought work home,  
piling papers  
on the dinner table at night –  
a wall between  
the family and  
himself.  
So he moved away from  
feeling, from learning  
who he was.

My mother, sister and I all  
knew long into night  
he would be working. Later,  
he could not turn off  
his mind, took pills  
to sleep.

I sought his deeper  
self through childhood photographs:  
there his face glowed  
sepia and ivory; his eyes  
held galaxies. Once found,  
each time I looked into his fading eyes  
I recognized  
the light.

Even after retirement, during his  
long illness that light  
peeked out – a smile,  
vacation plans, watercolors  
he'd begun to paint –  
all these must have reflected  
the instincts toward  
openness and hope  
which led him out of this  
world on that new moon,  
somehow knowing the last  
morning, as music knows  
perfect octaves, string answering  
string, that this  
was the right February moment  
to follow the dragon  
home.

# Poetry Judge



**Janet S. Wong** and her books have received numerous awards and honors, such as the International Reading Association's "Celebrate Literacy Award" for exemplary service in the promotion of literacy, and the prestigious Stone Center Recognition of Merit, given by the Claremont Graduate School. Janet also has been appointed to two terms on the Commission on Literature of the National Council of Teachers of English. In April 2003, Janet was one of five children's authors invited to read at The White House Easter Egg Roll. [www.janetwong.com](http://www.janetwong.com)

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the generous contributors to this year's awards.

Hope Arthur  
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Victoria Eckstein

Suki Kandell  
Billie Rosman and Family  
Gertrude Rubin

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, IL 60201

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on Evanston Community Television.  
Please visit <http://www.ectv.com/schedule.shtml>  
for the ECTV schedule of show times.

**AWARD PROGRAM BY BETH M<sup>c</sup>GUIRE**