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Unpublished Adults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
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
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

**Friendships**

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

**Middle School Students**

**FIRST PLACE**

Caroline McCance
Chute School, Grade 6

**Under the Silver Moon**

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
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?

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,  
ever noticing the  
Kingfisher in the sky,  
or the cattails on its bank,  
or the trout in its belly

*High School Students*

**FIRST PLACE**  
Amelia Levchenko  
Buffalo Grove High School

*Home 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
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.

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
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 steadfastedly 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.
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.
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.
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  
Evaston

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,  
them swwirrl-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,  
wakes 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.
**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

Acknowledgements

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

Hope Arthur              Suki Kandell
Elaine and Bernard Bell   Billie Rosman and Family
Victoria Eckstein         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
SPECIAL THANKS TO THE HOTEL ORRINGTON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICH FOREMAN

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

FILMING BY
EVANSTON COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTER

The award ceremony will be aired
on Evanston Community Television.
Please visit http://www.ectv.com/schedule.shtml
for the ECTV schedule of show times.

AWARD PROGRAM BY BETH MCGUIRE