

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



EVANSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM
SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2016, 2:00PM

In loving memory of
Dr. Hyman Hirshfield
1921-2010

The prizes in poetry are awarded
in memory of:

Rufus Baehr

Elsie Bernice Covich

Dr. Ben Schuman

Dr. Quentin Young



The Middle School Awards are endowed by:

Sara and Robert C. Busch

P rogram

Welcome	Karen Danczak Lyons, Library Director
Introductory Remarks	Lesley Williams, Head of Adult Services
Remarks by 2016 Poetry Judge	John Rybicki
Presentation of 2016 Awards and Readings of the Winning Poetry	
	Elementary School Students
	Middle School Students
	High School Students
	Unpublished Adults
Poetry Reading	John Rybicki

*Refreshments Immediately Following the Program
Meet the Award Winners*

PAST JUDGES

1979 - Eloise Fink	1997 - Mark Turcotte
Lisel Mueller	1998 - Mark Turcotte
1980 - Mark Perlberg	1999 - Allison Joseph
1981 - Mark Perlberg	2000 - Sterling Plump
1982 - Daryl Hine	2001 - Richard Jones
1983 - Eleanor Gordon	2002 - Susan Hahn
1984 - Mark Perlberg	2003 - Julie Parson-Nesbitt
1985 - Dennis Brutus	2004 - Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti
1986 - Lisel Mueller	2005 - Paulette Roeske
1987 - John Dickson	2006 - Jared Smith
1988 - Eloise Fink	2007 - Averill Curdy
1989 - Gertrude Rubin	2008 - Janice N. Harrington
1990 - Reginald Gibbons	2009 - Janet S. Wong
1991 - Angela Jackson	2010 - Bobbi Katz
1992 - Richard W. Calish	2011 - Janet S. Wong
1993 - Beatriz Badikian	2012 - Laura Purdie Salas
1994 - Maxine Chernoff	2013 - Bruce Guernsey
1995 - Martha Modena Vertreace	2014 - Kevin Stein
1996 - Effie Mihopoulos	2015 - Allison Funk

Elementary School Students

First Place:

Lila Portis
Dewey Elementary School

Sophina, My Mother

my mother loved
the stars.
she knew every
constellation.
one day
she told me
“Sagra,
When I have shed the cancer,
we will live
in Boston,
the place I was born.
we will
be happy
and joyful
and content.
I will show you the garden
I spent my youth in.
I will show you the library
I studied in.
I will show you
my dreams.
But Sagra,
there will be a day,
a long time from now,
where you will not have me.
do you see these stars?
when you are
lonely
look at the stars.
that star... that star is yours. and you see the one
by it's side?

that is you. that is me,
and it will always be me.
so
always know
I will be with you. You hear me?
I will be here.

In your heart.
You can feel me,
Sagra.
feel me
whispering

“I love you.”
And do you know what,
Sagra?
when you feel me
i will feel you.

I will feel you.
Do you understand, Sagra?”

“Yes.”
“Good. You always remember
you are my Sagra,

my

sacred one.
you remember, alright?”
I nodded.
and then

three weeks after that
she was gone.



Sophina, My Mother continued

like your shoe
floating away from you in the water.
i always remembered
her words
about
Boston.
so when dad
and timmy
said
it's time to move
I said Boston...
Boston...
Boston.
But then I saw
a terror
in the night
my brother.
gone too.
i lost my voice.
i could not move.
until
a girl
helped me find the light.
but the light
can be blinding
after you've been in the dark
so long.

Elementary School Students

Second Place:

Jane Watson
Saint Athanasius School

Frozen in Time

Lakes, frozen in time
Whirling snowflakes tumble down
Muffled frosty air

Elementary School Students

Third Place:

Ahania Soni
Dewey Elementary School

Waiting

every time I hear the door creak
I scamper down to peek
hoping it's you
that you've come home to me
one day it was men
wearing all black
with sorrow on their faces
they tipped off their hats
he's gone they say
he'll never return
they left us to mourn
and my heart started to burn
so I'm asking you why
why did you go
with every rain
and every snow
I wish that you never
left me alone
I wish you were here
sitting with me
under the arms
of the great elm tree
I wish you could sit
and hold me close
and whisper in my ear
about fairies and ghosts
without you my heart
seems to be failing
so when you come back
I'll be sitting here
waiting

Middle School Students

First Place:

Esther Orlov-Mayer
Haven Middle School

Finding My Voice

The filthy stench and press of exuberant bodies—
there's no way you'll ever find me lost in that labyrinth.

Flushed faces and skirts so short you wonder why bother?
The music so loud it crackles in my ears,
thrusting its demanding presence through cringing eardrums.

Sweaty shouting crowds, pushing teenage angst and thoughts
away through pores, vocal chords straining to keep up with the music.
I can't stand it.

So many people cramped in this tiny basement, I'm glad I'm alone in
this corner.

Because it isn't just bodies, it's voices filling the room and taking the
very air I am trying to breathe.

My own voice is timid and quiet, as if I'm afraid of the words
I have the power to speak.
As if.

So maybe I am quiet, shy, afraid to speak my thoughts—
but unafraid to write them.

My fingers spit poetry like phlegm, words flowing, mind growing—
but mouth is left untouched.

Lips unmoving when in truth they should be crowing with the
pleasure of setting pen on paper.

They should be tracing delicate words
like a foodie at a delicatessen,
unaware that what I once thought was a blessing
is a curse.



Finding My Voice *continued*

My mind is like a purse, ready to empty its contents
if only the owner will take the time to undo the clasp.
But in this madhouse, you won't even hear a gasp.

Disco lights revolving, all thoughts dissolving into the noise.

How am I supposed to think?
Why did I even bother to accept the invitation?
Just so I swallow a whole nation's worth of punch?
Just so I could hover in a corner, silent as always?
Just so I could go home, knowing
I'll never have the strength to push eloquent words through my mouth,
never know the length my words can take me to?

This barrier seemed impassable, these words seemed unmassable.
Like I could never get the pacing just right,
whispering the forbidden words like poison on my walk home,
dreading that anyone might hear me.
Because if they did, everyone would fear me.

But I realized that one day, I no longer cared.

I no longer cared if anyone feared me,
because my words would save me,
grasping my hands which in turn
grasped my life.

And I no longer care if the ragged edge of my voice
scratches the air like a knife because
my heart is beating like a fife—
drum, thrumming my life blood through inky veins,
hands covered in the stains of the life I left behind.

So I push through the crowds,
and step through the door,
forgoing a jacket, despite
the wind that tussles my hair.

And the cinders of my life fly with me,
as I am reborn, whole and true,
knowing you, my words, will never forsake me.
I have every choice I could ever have wanted.
Because I've finally found my voice.

Middle School Students

Second Place:

Anna Witcoff
Haven Middle School

Darkness to Sunshine

Rejuvenation of the mind. A speck of life at the end of a dark tunnel. Warmth after a winter's hibernation. What sunshine feels like to someone escaping from darkness overhead. A warm hug. A leap into a jacuzzi after an afternoon skating in the ice cold air. The moment when a batch of fresh chocolate chip cookies are taken out of the oven. A drop of liquid gold, glittering in the afternoon sun. A bead of sweat after a long day of work, proof of success and excellence. Says darkness to sunshine, "What does darkness feel like to you?" The sun thinks a minute before responding. "A blindfold over a glistening rainbow, after a day-long thunderstorm. A scrape on a knee tanned by the invincible summer sun, after an hour of pure happiness, playing on a playground during the heat of the day. A melted ice cream an instant after purchasing it. But at the same time relief from a day of hard work." The darkness was offended. "How can I feel like all of these terrible things to you?" Sunshine looked at the blue sky below, beginning to lighten with the anticipation of daylight. "Don't you understand?" said Sunshine. "These things are not terrible at all! In the end, you will not remember what it was like to have a blindfold covering your eyes while everyone around you was taking in a beautiful sight, you will remember the moment when the blindfold was ripped off of your eyes, exposing you to the same beauty. When you think of a scrape on a knee, you will not remember the pain that you felt when the skin was removed by the unforgiving ground, you will remember what it felt like to be carefree, running in the daylight for hours, even with a scraped knee. When you think of a melted ice cream cone, you will not remember the disappointment, you will remember the chill of relief when you had your first lick of ice cream of the summer. And with that, the darkness disappeared and the sun rose, shining light on a brand new day.

Middle School Students

Third Place:

Connor Mitchell
Nichols Middle School

The Cable Car

The San Francisco Cable Car

Stops not too near and not too far.

When it starts, hang on to the bar

And you feel like you could ride it to the farthest star.

You will ride past Chinatown,

Past stop signs red and cable cars brown.

Riding the hills up and down,

Costs 7 dollars for a trip around.

The great bell swings to and fro,

One to stop and two to go.

Even though the car goes a little bit slow,

“Do you want to get off?” We say, “NO!”

Middle School Students

Honorable Mention: Rachel Gelhausen
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Literary & Fine Arts School

I am Earth

I am soil,
Who provides life
And gives crop
But is washed away
and labeled as dirt
Only moments later.
I am unappreciated,
But important.

I am a sparrow,
So common
And unnoticed
But up close,
You see the searching eyes of a hawk
And the silent wings of an owl.
I am delicate,
But fierce.

I am sea glass,
That once had furious edges,
Mercilessly cutting and causing pain
But was worn smooth to a foggy green
By rolling waves drowning in heavy salt and rough sands.
I am unkind,
But gentle.

I am a cloud,
Who is soft, sleepy, and pure
Or stormy, cruel, and unforgiving.
I am different
Every day.

High School Students

First Place:

JJ Shankar
Evanston Township High School

The Death of Stonewall Jackson

I. *Charles Swarenger, Louisiana plantation owner*

I always wonder
whether blood would still be flowing
through the shattered veins of Dixie

if the paper had not
been delivered to the manor house door
that early Thursday morning.

A sweltering sweet summer day,
brown pelicans panning
across the bayou,

Elizabeth wailing
on the cypress front porch
the negroes staring in wonder

on the exposition of June
and the denouement of hope
because the Carolina regiment opened fire.

II. *Davis Winfield, soldier in the Army of the Shenandoah Valley*

The Yankees
had factories, rail lines
and cities too,

but God gave us
three things so we
could have a chance:

pride, cotton
and the great
General Jackson.

Solitary and reflective,
hair curly like strands of cigarette smoke,
and eyes which seemed

to be staring directly at everyone
as he barked out the day's commands.
The May day when the train

went the other way, back
to the valley,
we all let out a cheer

wild as the Gulf winds
and whipped on the Yankees
at Cross Keys.

But then, one summer evening in '63
in the canvas tents on a grassy meadow,
surrounded by the dense Virginia thicket,

southern men were yelling, cursing,
crying, pointing
at the white farmhouse.

His body quit six days later,
I lost my respected commander
and the South lost its mind.



The Death of Stonewall Jackson *continued*

III. *Robert E. Lee, Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia*

I thought I saw him
on the day before the Fourth
living up to his name,

pushing the men in navy blue
off of the Cemetery Ridge,
evading bursting black balls

of artillery fire, pushing them back
into the crisp piney woods
of the Allegheny Mountains.

But then I remembered
the loss we had suffered
the month before, after

we'd made it out of the meatgrinder
of battle, victors over an army
twice the size of ours.

I'd examined the motionless bodies
on the reddened grassy field, and that evening
toasted to health with fine Tennessee whiskey,

which set fire to my throat, hoarse
from yelling orders, but hours later filled
with the taste of bitter blood, because I saw

my best commander, wiping his burning forehead,
praising the lord as his final days approached;
Sawed-off arm on the table,

talking about Ambrose Hill,
and crossing the river
to rest under the shade of the trees

High School Students

Second Place:

Anna Harvey
Evanston Township High School

Cosmic Wanderer

She was going to be an astronaut
When she was seven
And the light that shone through her curtains
Cracked comets on her pillowcase

When she collected stars
Bathed in the Big Dipper
And ate asteroids for breakfast

When swaddled in a puffer coat
Against December's chill
She stuck out her tongue
And let the darkness drip down her throat
To spasm in her stomach

And blanketed
In July's poolside sweat
She ate ice cream
Swirled with peanut butter galaxies
And let Orion paint her toenails blue

She wanted to be an astronaut
A cosmic wanderer
Bowling with planets
And dancing on Saturn's rings

And so
At seventeen
She peeled back the curtains
Pitched forward
And let the universe swallow her whole

High School Students

Third Place:

Danielle Montella
John Hersey High School

Tomorrow

A continuous roll, six sided dice.
A familiar fluorescent light humming
with power sways above.

Mom's next, her mass of chips,
metastasizing with each turn,
each gamble.

Round, green carpet covered tables span the room
surrounded by bar stools and dangling feet
and the snapping of cards on the table top
as each person is dealt their game.

Grandma's faded floral shirt lays flat
on her chest.
She flips a chip in her hand,
the gold writing glistening in the light.

Slot machines spin,
awaiting the odds,
and the clink of red glasses
spreads throughout the room.

I wait for my time.

Grasping dice in perspiring hands,
shaking the odds.
The dice roll,
toppling over and over,
letting genes decide.

There isn't a thing I do
that keeps cancer
from crossing my mind.

Feels like something strange:
like diving head first from a cliff
into the crashing waves,
not knowing what grows just below the surface.

Or maybe,
maybe like gasping
for air
when diseased lungs collapse.

High School Students

Honorable Mention: Molly Hart
Rochelle Zell Jewish High School

A Synesthete's Aesthetic

Once, you asked me what my aesthetic was
under the stars, I squeezed your hand and words
tinkled like falling glass, blue and bubbly

my aesthetic is not
a specific style, or person
it's the way your name tastes on my tongue
(bittersweet, lilac)
and the sound of typewriters clacking
(warm black squiggles)
or the word
"like"
which tastes like sunny-side up eggs
(home)
or maybe
the number five, dark and mysterious
eggplant purple and splattered with stars,
like a magician's cape
that owns the midnight sky

High School Students

Honorable Mention: Aela Morris
 Evanston Township High School

Broken Glass

It's probably just shard from a broken beer bottle -but,
when held up in just the right light,
it transforms into a jeweled kaleidoscope,
every shade of beautiful
You press the small piece of blue glass into my hand as we walk down
the beach,
picking up shiny things the water has rejected.

The sun is setting over Lake Michigan, with colors only summer can
bring.
We stumble across the sand
(Me more than you of course).
You take my hand.

You say I'm beautiful
and I am suddenly aware
of my faded sundress, one size too small,
and my hair, all matted from swimming.
I say nothing, dipping my feet in the water
A silent change of subject

We walk,
faster and faster,
until we are running through the waves like we're in a movie,
though my life is more reminiscent of that broken piece of glass.
You are the hidden brilliance,
seen in a different light.

In between day and night is a whole new universe.
Where I am free to love you.

High School Students

Honorable Mention: Hyohee Kim
 Evanston Township High School

Seeing You Stare

Seeing you stare
Watching your eyes whine
Your smile stoned

The creases underneath your eyes
pulling heavily towards the earth
dripping with weary.

Barren and washy.

He saw me as magic
untameable, invincible

He stared in admiration
smirking silently
eyes twinkling with intrigue

He looked at the beauty in the quiet wilderness of the mind
and denied its faults

He outshined the rest,
I dare say these words.

Close your eyes, love.
Look away!
Don't bring such misery onto yourself

Not seeing you, ached
A burning numb sort of sensation

I felt punched
A hand wrenching and twisting my intestines
pouring with butterflies,
unclipping their wings,
Snip by Snip.
And I watched them sway
down down,
bundling up,
shriveling and rotting.

Remember?
We played like bright infants
in Petty fights and whimsical sparrings
We played in circles,
and triangles, and squares
then back around.
It was young and it was simple and it was kind.

They say that stars are meant to be adored from the skies,
Because it'll kill you otherwise

I will always adore you,
I hope you get back safely.

High School Students

Honorable Mention: Zinnia Hera Schwartz
Evanston Township High School

Someday

After the leaves have fallen for the last time
And the sound of birds is just echo
down empty streets
And the green grass is no more

When pages and pages fall from her window
Burnt, unread
Shadows and memories are the only things left

Buildings sag under the invisible
disappointment hung above them,
Abandoned

What remains is only
the soft breeze
Carrying what was
On curved shoulders

No one is left to hear or tell
but the mystical moon
No one is left to feel
the soft breeze

First Place:

Anita Koester
Chicago

Peering inside the Mouth of the Chicago River

Chicago, my love, my sinew, my muscle and cartilage,
dusted over in January, in wedding dress white, or arsenic,
my dear, my darling, my gate of clouds,
forgive me, but I saw that dollar bill tucked
between your breasts, that fist heavy against your thigh,
I saw that aluminum graveyard you tried to hide,
I saw Hell burn along the river by the Armitage bridge
the whole night over, smelled your sewer nitrous,
your cancer gas, saw the shadowy mass on your x-ray.

They say buried beneath your park's tree trunks
are the bones of a hundred thousand skunks,
and this is why you're called *Chicago*, but honey,
let's dig a little deeper with our spades, our pick-axes, our shovels,
hear the song of the Ojibwa and Odawa, the Potawatomie,
they say the first man who settled here was Haitian,
that he made love to his Indian wife at the mouth of the river
and a boy was born in the onion grass, and his name was *Chicago*.

O, son, I saw your teachers marching, your schools boarded up,
I made constellations out of the bullet holes on your porch steps,
I read your father's children's future in them,
I checked your watermark, confirmed your mansions in Lincoln Park
with rows and rows of windows facing Lake Michigan
like a parish facing a depiction of the crucifixion,
as if the glacier would melt, fresh water overflow
into your streets, clearing out the cholesterol clogging your arteries. —————>

Second Place:

Pat Price
Evanston

FAREWELL DINNER AT LUGENDA CAMP
NIASSA RESERVE, MOZAMBIQUE

We sat under a full moon
 toasted our hosts
 out on the dry river bed.

Origami Master Sean,
 head of the kitchen staff,
 had folded napkins into swans.

He knew how I liked
 my coffee
 after morning game drives.

I miss that: family.
 Like family.
 Filled the emptiness I carry.

Shells and dry river bits
 in old mason jars
 lit by LED lights

glowed down the tables,
 cobble but connected
 by tablecloths.

Underneath, my ankles swelled
 from a steep climb
 up an inselberg,



a knee badly injured
 from falling on slippery rocks
 crossing a riverbed,
hoping for close-ups
 of hippos.
 That didn't happen.

I sat out there
 legs aching.
 Happy.

Halfway through, four shadows
 risked the dangerous
 full moon

crossing the river bed
 toward us.
 The elephants

who hung out behind the camp
 coming home
 to the only place

on three million acres
 they sensed
 safe.

Were they the same ones
 who rustled behind my tent
 every night?

The matriarch lowing and growling,
 talking to her sisters,
 a baby?

Were they bidding us goodbye?
 This family.
 Did they know

we were leaving? Yes.
 No. In all honesty, no.
 They were headed

to a nearby fig tree, where they
 pulled fruit for a while
 before lumbering,

in steep s's, up the embankment
 to our camp.
 A worn path. Worn.

We sat quietly, the night throbbing,
 me throbbing,
 watching

as they passed by us,
 in the glow,
 as if we weren't there.

I had a sparerib
 in my mouth
 or I would have wept again.

Third Place:

Sharon Lieberman
Evanston

Old World Fish Memory

Ambling down the narrow path
her high black rubber boots
hiss against dewed morning grass

On the bank of the slow river
where festival fish run
she stops, standing silent in the spring mud

She casts a line of twine
tipped with a plump worm pierced by a rusty hook
to tempt the celebration carp

Scraping her wrangled fish in the shining silver sink,
under the window,
bright in a spear of sun

Fish scales, iridescent fans,
fly like iron to a magnet, stick to her arms
her cheeks, to me

To my forehead, because I am young
and small, leaning low against her hip
swaying with her rhythm

She moves in my memory, from that across-the-sea world,
in the glistening armor, the sound slippery slap
of a fish caught from scratch

Honorable Mention:

Gay Guard-Chamberlin
Chicago

Pernoctation

If I hear
the great *thwap* of wings
as Death swoops down, claws extended,
will I run like a little mouse,
frantic from spot to spot,
vainly seek escape?

Or will I
pause, pull in one more sweet breath,
stretch myself up to watch the fireflies
in their binary dance
become the stars
at last?

Honorable Mention: Kelly Schiff
Evanston

Red Line

What is that strange compulsion, when standing
on the subway platform that hypnotic light bears down,
screaching whistling sweet rush of death, and
just for a moment I wonder, what would it be like?
If I took the leap, feet propelling into the metal crush
and bones obliterating while I spread smears of
organs like red jelly, and the crowd would gasp
at the spectacle, but not look away.
I don't imagine there would be pain, only
a last transformative moment of pure tingling
momentous life, a second filled with more living
than a lifetime. A rapture of joy and fear,
penultimate to darkness.

Honorable Mention: Emily Feng
Evanston

Remembrance

I didn't remember what use you had for crystalline
fingers until you breathed life into
ebony and ivory
and something cold like starlight
but softer, stole through the air –
it's not peace I feel
because I sense something
turbulent inside me, awaken –
my soul, sorely shaken –
shattering
as cold glass falls
and across the hills,
the sound of forgotten songs
comes drifting into consciousness.

The truth is,
I'd forgotten about the taste of music
like cold spring-water
welling up from the deep earth;
how it could heal and mend
by tearing open old wounds
afresh. There are many things I've forgotten, it seems.

Before scorching rays draw black beetles
back onto tiptoe,
tiny unseen feet of gecko cross
a smeared side-winding S left by a viper.
Tracks of Macedonian mice
and the imprint of two splayed forms—
head-ovals nearly tangent
against designs of fine cinnamon sand—
leave, for dawn light to find with its shadows,
a transient map of nocturnal meanderings.

Poetry Judge



John Rybicki's latest book of poems, *When All the World is Old*, is available on Lookout Books. He is also the author of two other collections, *We Bed Down Into Water*, and *Traveling at High Speeds*. His prose and poetry have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *FIELD*, *Triquarterly*, *Ecotone*, and in *The Best American Poetry* and *Pushcart Prize* anthologies.

He teaches poetry writing in Detroit schools through the InsideOut Literary Arts Project.

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of this year's awards

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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

with special remembrance of

Brian Garrick