



# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE POETRY SOCIETIES, INC.

An educational and literary organization dedicated to the writing  
and appreciation of poetry in America.

## Strophes

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Julie Cummings  
33rd NFSPS  
President

### Dear NFSPS Poets:

Sitting here this morning, in the solitude of my home I am sipping hot black coffee from my favorite mug, in my favorite chair. As I continue to make my plans to attend the 2019 convention in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I begin to think about the many members who do not attend the convention and some of those don't even attend meetings in their home state. This makes me ponder and wonder—why? I know there are many ways to learn and sharpen poetry skills these days: one can read blogs, listen to podcasts,

watch how-to videos on YouTube, and attend webinars, just to name a few. I suppose you could say, then, why bother with the time and expense of an in-person convention or workshop if I can gain the same insight by any of these options? If this is your perception or reasoning, then I believe you may be missing out on one of the best opportunities to take your poetry to the next level.

Live events—conventions, workshops, lunch & learns—all provide unique learning opportunities that you just can't find anywhere else. I have tried to list several reasons to attend National Convention beginning with the reason why I attended my first convention in Duluth, Minnesota, all those years ago. It is simple. Someone from my state society asked me to go. Thank you, Anita, for piquing my interest and asking me to attend! I made many lifelong friends at that first convention and I still love what I learned and wrote on the shore of Lake Superior.

I always return from a convention rejuvenated with new ideas and approaches that make me a better poet. I also have great stories to share with others and notes to organize and reflect upon.

Good conventions have opportunities for attendees to mix and mingle, form new relationships, and strengthen existing ones. While waiting for a workshop, over coffee, lunch, or dinner, you may make a connection. At a breakout session, you may find yourself sitting next to your favorite poet or one who will become your new favorite. Or, if you don't go, maybe the poet with the best idea you never heard will be sitting in your seat!

Remember that scene in *Dead Poet's Society* when Robin Williams made his students stand on a desk to get a fresh perspective? It's easy to find ourselves in a rut. Sitting in the same chair, in the same office, or in the same coffee house, can keep us from fresh thinking and new ideas.

It's easy to read a blog post from the privacy of your living room. You won't break a sweat listening to a podcast. You don't have to make small talk while your YouTube video loads up. You can stay snugly within your comfort zone.

If you're terrified of the idea of going to a convention, bring someone with you so you won't feel completely on your own. Had Anita not been there with me at convention, I probably would never have attended, and I would not be writing this.

A well-run convention will offer new ideas to help us improve our approach to becoming the poet we know we have nestled inside. At convention, your creativity is tapped into in ways that will amaze even the most stoic, introverted poet!

Nothing compares to being in a room filled with amazingly talented like-minded people: other people who are *[continued on page 8]*

### NFSPS 2019 CONVENTION

#### DIAMONDS CROWN THE POET IN THE CITY DIFFERENT

New Mexico's capital, Santa Fe (aka, The City Different), is a special jewel in our Land of Enchantment. She holds tight to her heritage—Spanish, Indian, Cowboy, transplant. Cultures mix as time goes by, creating our own melting pot.

The New Mexico State Poetry Society invites you to be part of the diversity of poets the 2019 Annual Convention will bring to our land.

Santa Fe will be a "Convention Different" in that it will occur during the week (Monday, June 23, to Thursday, June 26) and it will take place in two hotels. You can choose between the luxurious Hotel Santa Fe and the affordable Sage Inn, both coordinating with each other to provide all the space and amenities required, as well as free transportation between hotels if you cannot manage the easy 2-block walk.

You can book either hotel now. Check the NMSPS website [nmpoetry.com/convention-nfspd-2019.shtml](http://nmpoetry.com/convention-nfspd-2019.shtml) for information on hotel accommodations. When booking, be sure to mention "NFSPS" to get special rates. These rates extend three days before and after the convention at both hotels.

Former Santa Fe poet laureate, Valerie Martinez, will be our keynote speaker. She is currently Director of History and Literacy Arts at the National Hispanic Cultural Center. More detail on Ms. Martinez is available at: [artful-life.org/valerie-martinez](http://artful-life.org/valerie-martinez).

We will have some workshops inside the hotels, and some outside on the hotel grounds or at other sites in the city, including the rotunda of the state capital building, which we have reserved for a full afternoon. It has phenomenal acoustics and will be the setting for some not-to-be-missed presentations (more info to come). We even plan to spend an evening cyphering (doing street corner poetry).

We of NMSPS want to share our state with you. Immerse yourself in our culture, enjoy our special foods, and wander this unique high desert city where daytime heat can shimmer, but evening breezes caress the skin and carry the fragrance of ponderosa pine, pinon and juniper. Come, write, and explore Santa Fe; see the art and architecture. We are excited to host NFSPS 2019 and hope to see old friends and make new ones. ~ *Ginny Gaskill, Convention Coordinator*

### NMSPS ANNOUNCES CONVENTION AND INVOCATION POEMS CONTESTS

Let the fun begin! This year's NFSPS Convention Poems contest theme is "Diamonds Surround the Poet in the City Different." Any play on any of these words will be acceptable. Limit 40 lines, any form except prose poem. Up to three poems per \$10 submission. No limit on number of submissions. 1st prize: One night's free lodging at The Sage Inn (or equal deduction from bill at Hotel Santa Fe). 2nd: Free registration for the Convention. 3rd: Free gala banquet.

**Invocation Poems.** Nondenominational poem of thanks, appreciation, or inspiration. Limit 10 lines. Up to three poems per \$5 submission. No limit on number of submissions. Six awards of \$25 each. Winners read their poems as a "grace" before designated meals.

Check the convention website or April issue of *Strophes* for submission period and directions on how to enter via [Submittable.com](http://Submittable.com) or by US Mail. You must be present to win, and you can win only one prize in each contest.

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### STROPHES

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\* Submission Deadlines

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**NFSPS MEMBER SOCIETY NEWS**

**POETS' ROUNDTABLE OF ARKANSAS** celebrated its 71st Annual Poetry Day on October 13th at the Butler Center of Arkansas Studies in Little Rock. Accomplished poet and author Pat Durmon of Norfolk, Arkansas, was the speaker. She spoke on how poets are storytellers who write about what they know from everyday life. She encouraged poets to have others critique their work. The annual Merit Award was presented to Frieda Patton for her long-time support and promotion of poetry and poets through the efforts of PRA. Poetry Day Contest Chair Marie Allison announced all the winners of the contests. The \$1,000 Sybil Nash Abrams winner this year was Pat Durmon. If you would like to be a part of PRA's online group, contact Kate Lacy at [voicedancer2002@yahoo.com](mailto:voicedancer2002@yahoo.com). Check out [poetsroundtableofarkansas.org](http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org) for more about PRA, as well as our Facebook page. ~ *Laura Bridges, Reporter*

**COLUMBINE POETS OF COLORADO** held our Annual Columbine Poets Fest on Sept. 8th at the Community College of Aurora. This year's Poets Fest was bigger and better than ever, as we launched our 40th anniversary members anthology, *Poems from the Back Forty*, featuring the work of 97 of our members. Our featured poet for the day was Judyth Hill, a local celebrity who comes to us by way of Santa Fe, NM, and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Her "PoemMoir" workshop was both inspiring and invigorating as she invited us to enter, body and soul, into our trove of memories and write from "what we have known, have survived, have loved." She is a performer, writing coach and author of nine books of poetry. Her most famous poem, "Wage Peace," which she taught us, has won international acclaim as a call to action after 9-11. Members from all four chapters attended the Fest, participating in readings from the new anthology as well as Ms. Hill's workshop. The Fest also provided the opportunity to get acquainted with new faces and to share news about the work we do to support poets and their events among our varied communities. ~ *Anita Jepson-Gilbert, President*

**GEORGIA POETRY SOCIETY** held its quarterly meeting in October 2018 at the Hightower Regional Library in Rome, Georgia. Alice Teeter, an Associate Editor for *Calamario* in Atlanta and author of five books of poetry, read a selection of her poems. She then led a workshop on using imagery found in photographs to craft poems of love, tragedy, loss, milestones or memories. Sandra Meeks, professor of English, Rhetoric, and Writing at Berry

College, led a workshop on writing a univocal poem, a poem that uses only a single vowel. After reading several of her own univocal poems, she guided an exercise on how to write one. A recipient of several awards for her poetry, she has been published in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. Ed Hall, a GPS member, discussed concrete poetry. Two GPS members, Duanne Kaiser and Lynn Farmer, read their poems that won awards in this year's NFSPS Contests. ~ *Ann Kuykendall Gillespie, Reporter*

**FLORIDA STATE POETS ASSOCIATION's** newly elected President is Al Rocheleau, Mary Marcelle is Vice President, Robyn Weinbaum is Treasurer, and Leslie Halpern is Secretary. The group was installed by National Vice President and former State President, Joe Cavanaugh. In October, Florida Poets explored Daytona Beach and learned about the vibrant life that we normally step all over when enjoying sun and surf. Highlights included an in-house spoken word contest with emcee Peter Gordon; "Beach Poetry" with Lisa Mickey and Mary-Ann Westbrook; a panel discussion on "Does Poetry Matter?" with Lola Hoskins, M.B. McLatchey, Michele Lee, Kyra Brokoph, and Joe Cavanaugh; "Limerick Writing" by Marc Davidson; and a film and discussion led by Leslie Halpern. The annual Spring Fling has been moved to May when a one-day Fling will fill the Comfort Suites in Orlando. ~ *Alice R. Friedman, Past Secretary*

**ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY** had a successful day-long Gala held at the Park Ridge Country Club on November 3, 2018. The event included a continental breakfast, hot buffet lunch and three presentations including writing haibun, poetry as memoir, and a visit with Robert Frost who shared his poetry and life story. We hosted our monthly featured poets and open mic at Brewed Awakening coffee shop on November 25th. Susan T. Moss and Charlotte Digregorio were the guest readers. December 8th was a holiday party held at the Oakbrook Library. Food and an open mic marked the occasion. Final winners have been chosen for our yearly poetry contest, and thanks go to all the volunteer judges. Illinois State Poetry Society is happy to announce the publication of the fourth volume of *Distilled Lives*. Society membership information and how to order *Distilled Lives IV* can be found at [illinoispoets.org](http://illinoispoets.org). ~ *Susan T. Moss, President*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF INDIANA** recently held its Annual Fall Rendezvous

featuring several presenters and writing workshops for the weekend. The Keynote Author was Jessica Reed, a physicist and poet, who shared her observations and read from her recent book, *World, Composed*. We heard how to bring poetry into our communities, about the techniques of translating poetry from other languages, about the bumps in the road and celebrations of self-publishing, and other activities and guidance for our gathering. Now available is our volume of *Ink to Paper*, an anthology of winning poems from our 2018 State Poetry Contest and the winning poems from our Manningham Student Contest. It is available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or by purchasing from a Board member. After the holidays we will have available the 2019 Annual Poetry Contest brochure on our website, [poetrysocietyofindiana.org](http://poetrysocietyofindiana.org). We remain focused and intent on building our membership and supporting our current members. One service now being provided for members is support and guidance in self-publishing chapbooks. This includes editing, design, cover choices, fonts, pages, pictures, and typesetting. Staff can assist in getting the publication on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) for sale. Publication support, from beginning to end, is one way to meet the needs of our very prolific and gifted group. ~ *Deborah Petersen, President*

**LOUISIANA STATE POETRY SOCIETY** held its fall business meeting at Quality Suites in Baton Rouge on Saturday, October 27th. Business was taken care of, then Kaylon Allen of the Founder's Group (Baton Rouge) gave an excellent presentation on the craft of poetry and the ways it can inspire us, whether we are creating poems or reading poems. She is a true asset to our group. After the meeting adjourned, members met at Ralph and Kacoo's for a good meal and plenty of visiting. Cliff Beck of the Monroe Chapter of LSPS hosted a brunch at his home on Saturday, November 3rd, for the group. Cliff is as good a host as he is a poet. Everyone enjoyed his shrimp and grits, quiche, and fresh fruit. His wife, Susan, baked a cake—"if I'd a known you were coming, I'd of baked a cake." And it was a good cake. ~ *Carolyn Files, Past President*

**MAINE POETS SOCIETY's** next general meeting will be Saturday, April 27, 2019, at the First Universalist Church, 169 Pleasant St. in Auburn. Attendees are asked to bring a bag lunch. A \$10 registration fee for members and guests will help defray the cost of renting the facility. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. The morning session will include an open mic and a mini workshop. In the afternoon, Carol Bachofner, as judge

of the members-only contest (a persona poem with a twist), will announce the results of the contest and share some of her own work. The meeting is expected to end around 3:30 p.m. Once again, there will be regional meetings during the winter months. See [mainepoetsociety.com](http://mainepoetsociety.com) for details. ~ *Sally Joy, Reporter*

**MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY'S** President, Linda Owen, has announced MPS-South Branch member Judy Davies as its 2019 Poet of the Year, granting her the privilege of having a chapbook of her poems published by the society. More information about Judy is available on [misspoetry.net](http://misspoetry.net). MPS Spring Fest Contests are underway: the student contest is only open to Mississippi students, while the adult contest is open to all poets, and has a February 15 postmark deadline. Awaiting the winners of the student and adult contests are cash prizes, publication in the *Mississippi Poetry Journal*, and the opportunity to read their winning poems at the Spring Fest at Cabot Lodge Millsaps, Jackson, Mississippi, April 6-7, 2019. All contest details are available on the MPS website. ~ *Janice Canerdy, Secretary*

**NEW MEXICO STATE POETRY SOCIETY** held a Random Acts of Poetry Day in October. Jules Nyquist had a Poetry mapping workshop. Barbara Rockman taught a class of awesome poets, deep into "poetry as prayer." We handed out to random passersby decorated handkerchiefs with personalized poetry. Many members held readings and workshops throughout New Mexico during the month. Janet Ruth and Faith Kaltenbach gave a presentation titled "New Mexico State Poetry Society: The Transformation of Poetry," in celebration of National Poetry Day (also celebrated in the UK and Ireland), and read their poetry. Several members presented in Corrales to educate people on Native American literature and on Simon Ortiz's work with Dr. Minge. The generational work that influences Casa San Ysidro was discussed as well. NMSPS honored member Susan Paquet by including her name in the Land of Enchantment Poetry Contest category (Contest #50) in 2020. A few months ago she had a celebration of her life that many attended. Susan died at home on November 1st. Her spirit will be missed by many. Congratulations to all the New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards winners and finalists for 2018. Several members were winners. Jules Nyquist won for her Poetry book, *Homesick*. ~ *Bernadette Perez, President*

**OHIO POETRY ASSOCIATION:** Milestones are an important part of the human experience. They are critical to defining who we are as individuals, communities, organizations, or even nations. In 2019, OPA will celebrate another milestone: its 90th anniversary as an organization. Originally founded as the Verse Writers Guild of Ohio, OPA has been supporting poets and promoting poetry throughout the state for generations. OPA has had several milestones, from becoming an official non-profit in 1998 to publishing major anthologies and helping pass legislation to create the post of state poet laureate. For next year, OPA is planning major events to celebrate. OPA has assumed continuation of the popular Sun & Moon Poetry Festival and will move it to Yellow Springs, Ohio. We will be co-sponsoring an ekphrastic poetry event with the Cleveland Museum of Art and may be hosting two of America's best poets for National Poetry Month. Also, we would like to make the annual OPA picnic even more special. Finally, we hope to get another retreat organized and are seeking help to organize the effort. We invite our friends in other states to join us in celebrating OPA's 90th birthday and to help make memorable poetry experiences in 2019. ~ *Chuck Salmons, President*

**PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY** held their Fall Luncheon and Meeting in October. Members gathered in Mechanicsburg to partake in lunch, two poetry workshops, two open mic sessions, a General Business meeting, and an Executive Board meeting. New business included the election of new officers for a two-year term. ~ *Steven Concert, Treasurer*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF OKLAHOMA** will celebrate our eighty-fifth year in 2019. 2018 was a good year for us; we had new members join and former members return—always exciting! PSO observed National Poetry Day on October 13th with the theme of "Change." We marked the day with our annual Poetry Day Contest results and awards, a luncheon, and members discussed and shared their various poems about change. PSO will hold its annual Spring Banquet in March. Winners from the Spring Contest will be announced, prizes awarded, and poems read. We are looking forward to another year of growth as we continue to get the word out about poetry today and the Poetry Society of Oklahoma. One of our members has offered to have members email her when they have a poem or book published or an event of some kind such as speaking or book signing. She will email the information. She will also collect

information about books published as well as recent publications with information on how members can get copies of them. We thank her for doing this to keep our PSO members updated and informed. For information check [angelfire.com/poetry/ps/](http://angelfire.com/poetry/ps/) as well as our Facebook page. ~ *Patti Koch, President*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE'S** Jerri Hardesty presented at the recent Festival on "Performance Poetry," or how to make oral poetry come alive. Tips from her talk: remember to use emotion, maybe a few gestures/body movements, be a bigger version of yourself, and *practice*. Jerri ran a workshop in which everyone read a poem aloud, then coached us through various performance elements. The day concluded with announcing contest award winners. Next year the annual Festival will be in late October. More news on this later. To commemorate National Poetry Day, Mayor Jim Strickland of Memphis issued a National Poetry Day Proclamation. This was a first for us. The Proclamation can be found on our website. President JoAn Howerton and Vice President Russell Strauss appeared on WMC TV regarding PST and its history. Russell also read some of his poetry. We are conducting a Student Contest, open to all Tennessee residents. We have updated [tupoetry.org](http://tupoetry.org) so it is easier to navigate. We continue to discuss ways to increase our membership both for our Memphis Chapter as well as PST NE and PST Knoxville. Both of our other chapters are increasing their membership by emphasizing student contests. Plans are in the making to have another chapter in middle-Tennessee. ~ *JoAn Howerton, President*

**POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS'** 62nd Annual Awards Banquet was held in Dallas on November. The theme was "Our Poetry Garden ~ Where Poems Bloom in All Seasons." Beth Turner Ayers was Chairman of the event and welcomed attendees. After the meal was served, President Aman Khan made introductions. Greetings from NFSPS were brought by Past President Budd Powell Mahan, as Chairman of the Hilton Ross Greer Outstanding Service Award, who announced that the 2018 recipient was Jimmie Inez Sessions. He then announced the names of the winners of the new Autumn PST Student Contests. Students who were present read their winning poems. Nancy Baass, PST Annual Contests Chairman, was unable to attend, so her Annual Contests Report was given by Past President Catherine L'Herisson. She, along with Irene C. Robertson, Ann Howells and Aman Khan, announced the names of the winners of the PST Annual Contests. 1st Place

winner was Terry Jude Miller. Other entrants receiving recognition were: Michael Minassian, 2nd Place; Robert Schinzel, 3rd Place; and Budd Powell Mahan, 4th Place. ~ Nancy Baass, reporting

**UTAH STATE POETRY SOCIETY** held its annual book of the year celebration on October 13 in Layton, Utah. Geraldine Felt read from her winning book, *Dancing with Monarchs*. Five of her sons joined in reading poems from the book. The reading was attended by over 75 poetry lovers! UTSPS also held a board meeting before the *Monarchs* reading at a Layton restaurant. The board members present voted to change our society's board structure from a very large number of officers to a more manageable set: President, President-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Chair, Contest Chair and Immediate Past President. Now the challenge is to agree which board roles will manage which society activities and programs. Our 2019 annual poetry festival is scheduled for April 12-13 in Provo, Utah. Our keynote speaker and workshop leader will be Aaron Abeyta, professor of English at Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado. ~ Paul Ford, President

## POETRY CONTESTS

### 2019 BLACKBERRYPEACH PRIZES FOR POETRY: SPOKEN AND HEARD CONTEST

The NFSPS 2019 BlackBerryPeach poetry contest will be accepting your best 4 poems in written and spoken versions beginning on January 1, 2019.

NFSPS has created a video for YouTube featuring the 2018 winners performing at the Convention in Denver (2018 BlackBerry Peach Awards). Check it out to be inspired by seeing and hearing last year's winners. Headliner of the video is 1st place winner of the 2018 BlackBerryPeach Spoken and Heard poetry competition is Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer of Placerville, Colorado. BlackBerryPeach is a major NFSPS competition that challenges poets to present their original poetry in print and spoken word.

NFSPS Vice President Joe Cavanaugh, chair of the contest, stressed the importance of reaching out to all poets, recognizing spoken poetry in its many forms as a powerful poetic genre. The 2019 competition will open on January 1, 2019, until March 15, 2019. He urges all interested poets to check out the guidelines on

Submittable.com or nfsp.com under Contests, then submit their 4 best poems to be a part of next year's competition and one of the award winners.

1st place winners receive the grand prize of \$1,000 and will be invited to perform at the NFSPS national convention in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in June 2019. The 2nd place prize winner receives \$500 while the 3rd place winner receives \$250. Each prize winner will be invited to perform as part of the Awards Ceremony at the convention. A video of the convention performances will be posted on YouTube. As well, NFSPS will publish the prizewinning entries of four poems from each winner, in a 6" by 9" book which will be for sale at the Convention and will be available on Amazon.com.

### MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY

Details are available on misspoetry.net. Submission deadline: March 1, 2019, for all categories except the student contest, which had a Dec. 1, 2018, deadline.

### PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY

PPS' 67th Annual contest is underway with an entry post-mark deadline of January 15, 2019. Our contest features 12 open categories and four members-only categories. Cash prizes total \$1,065. We give three cash prize awards, plus seven Honorable Mentions per category. First, second, and third place poems are published in our annual *Prize Poems* book. All winners will receive award certificates and can read their winning poems at our annual Awards Ceremony. A contest brochure is available for download from the Competitions page at nfsp.com/pa.

## POETRY ARTICLES & NEWS

### KEEPING "ON TRACK" WITH NUMBER NINE, OR HOW TO BE A MEMBER OF NFSPS

By Lucille Morgan Wilson,  
NFSPS Treasurer

Membership in the National Federation is not an individual matter but is only through a state poetry organization that is part of the Federation.

Rule 9 in the 2019 NFSPS contest folder defines "member" eligibility for our contests: entrant's name must appear on the annual list of a state society's members given to the NFSPS treasurer by January 15th. Names are to be in alpha order, with lists sent either on line in accessible mode, or as hard copy by regular mail. Check for dues at \$3.00 per member, payable to "NFSPS," should accompany the list or follow very soon to Lucille Morgan Wilson, Treasurer, 2325 61st Street, Des Moines, IA 50322

Because there is much variation among state societies about when membership years start and end, we do have a grace period. Additional new members and renewals up to March 15th, as provided in a supplemental report to the Treasurer (with additional dues payment) will also be honored. This means a considerable savings in contest fees but also opens to NFSPS members those twenty categories designated, *Members Only*.

It is appreciated if lists contain complete contact information which speeds up the process when there are questions during the year. Affirmation of membership is used for other NFSPS contests too (eg, Stevens and BlackBerryPeach competitions). Member lists are never given out for commercial purposes.

A question that frequently arises: "Who do we count to determine our dues payment?" Honorary members who may be excluded from paying dues to the state society but have the potential for entering contests should be included in your member count; students, or institutions such as libraries and schools that may be on your mailing lists but are not dues-paying members need not be included.

Any questions about dues or member lists may be directed via email to Lucille at: lucille\_e\_wilson@hotmail.com.

## SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPRENTICE POETS

By Ron Weber

As is probably the case with many of us for whom poetry has long since become a defining part of our lives, we find ourselves reflecting periodically on many things having to do with this unique art form. Along the way we realized a number of things not readily apparent at the beginning. With that in mind, here's some random thoughts for apprentice poets, whether you're 16 or 60.

It all starts with creativity. Look beyond what you see. Peek behind what you're looking at. What might you find if you free your mind and look behind life's curtains. Einstein himself instructed us that "imagination is more important than knowledge."

You may be a bit different, but you're not necessarily special because you may be driven to write poetry. If you lose touch with real life and real people, so will your poems. Poetry is about the broad range of life's realities, from the most intense to the subtlest of nuances.

Keep in mind that most people are just not going to connect with verse the way you do, no matter how hard you try. I have some dear friends that I've taken to poetry readings so often that they've learned to

snore in stanzas. Poet Randall Jarrell said, “I think that one possible definition of our modern culture is that it is one in which nine-tenths of our intellectuals can’t read any poetry.” Keep your perspective well-founded in reality. Before you can be a serious poet, you must be seriously realistic.

Embrace and cherish your sense of humor. There may be times when that’s all there may be between you and absolutely losing it. Having a strange and inexplicable affinity with poverty can also help immensely in attempting to be a poet, particularly in terms of doing it to make a living. Oh, and wearing somber clothing, or having a miserable childhood, or ringing your hands over man’s inhumanity to man are not prerequisites for writing good poetry.

When submitting to publications, start a new hobby collecting rejection slips. It will add a bit of morbid interest to being turned down. Besides, you will get more of them than you will published pages. And hey, you can always point out that *The Paris Review*, or *The New York Review of Books*, or *The Atlantic*, et al, read your poetry..., and you can prove it! Self-pity never helps anyone. Get over it.

Please, don’t write any more poems than necessary about the following topics: lost love, time slipping away, suicide, loneliness, the insensitivities of life, futility, clouds, yourself and coming of age epiphanies. Write a few, if you must, and get it out of your system. To quote Oscar Wilde, “All bad poetry springs from genuine feelings.”

In perfecting your craft and style, keep in mind that overly abstract, obscure, and highly personalized poems are many times only an exercise in talking to yourself. Gazing in the mirror for any length of time, whether literally or figuratively, can be a meaningless, boring activity.

If you are going to claim to be a poet, then be one! Internalize it, be proud of it, and don’t be fearful of mentioning it in casual conversation. Defend it as needed. The worst part of being a poet is not disdain, ridicule and rejection; rather, it is having to face utter indifference.

No matter how many poems you get published, no one is going to knock on your door and pay you big bucks to muse on some obscure mountain top in Tibet and shoot the breeze with the Dalai Lama between poetry manuscripts. As William Carlos Williams once pointed out, the challenge is to find what “concerns all men,” not simply what concerns poets.

In closing, there are three essential rules for writing good poetry. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.

## HOW TO MAKE A JUDGE HAPPY

By Susan Maxwell Campbell, past NFSPS Contest Chair, and Barbara Blanks, Poetry Society of Texas

### *First and Foremost*

1. Read the competition rules.
2. Check the sponsor’s website for additional rules.
3. Follow the rules.
4. Email, phone, or write the contest chairperson about your questions.

### *Getting Your Poems Ready*

- Keep to the suggested font and size, please—reading a stack of poems can strain the judge’s eyes. Words only! Don’t add anything, no matter how cute. By the way, some judges like a left margin of 1.5 inches since thumbs have to go somewhere, preferably not over your words. Just a suggestion.

- Single-space your poems. Most rules require this. If you 1-1/2-space or double-space, your poem won’t even be considered—all that work for nothing. And you will never know why you didn’t win.

- Staple multiple pages together if the rules require it, and if they don’t, don’t. (See how easy this is?)

- When counting lines, count all the lines with print: the second (and third) lines of titles; dedications; epigraphs; titles or numbers of sections; and notes. If the contest requires you to identify the form (like the type of sonnet), that notation is excluded from the line count.

- Lines that are too long may circle around to hang you. NFSPS rules say every single line must keep to 50 characters (letters, spaces, and punctuation). Longer lines may be divided at the discretion of the *Encore* editor, and if a poem is already close to the limit, your poem might burst its seams—and that creates problems when the public reads them. Neither poet nor judge likes stones thrown at them.

- Seriously: Divide the poems into two stacks: those without ID (which go to the judge) and those with ID (which get processed for winners later). Dividing huge batches of papers is *not* entertaining to contest chairs. Really. Don’t irritate them!

### *Putting Your Packet Together*

- Please don’t send oddball sizes of index cards. NFSPS rules say use a lined 3 by 5 index card. And you know that top red line on an index card, don’t—please—don’t write on it or above it. That’s for our records. Legible contact information is a good thing. If you can’t manage that, try a return-address label.

- More tape on the envelope is not better; wrapping in a simple manner is practical at our end, too. Plain envelopes 8 ½ x 11 or

9 x 12 are excellent. You do want us to be able to open it and process your entries, right? Rest easy—we’ve seldom seen a mangled envelope.

- And one more thing, please try not to wait until deadline to mail your entries. Tons of last-minute mail produces nightmares about being buried alive. Chairing a contest is more work than you can imagine, and we appreciate your cooperation. Really!

### *Post Script*

This “How to Make a Judge Happy” article grew out of a conversation we co-authors had regarding our experiences with judging numerous contests and chairing contests. And rather than quietly grumble, we felt the need to let writers know potential problems and to steer them away from pitfalls. We are keenly aware that these observations on counting lines and counting characters in a line are not set in stone either by NFSPS (at the moment anyway) and do not necessarily apply to all contests available to the poetry community. Our bottom line is this: always, always check rules and do all you can to follow them. Rules level the playing field, and not even brilliant content prevents disqualification for not following them. Trust us, all contest chairs really are happier to deal with your questions beforehand than to have to make decisions that keep winning poems from getting to the prizes.

## POETRY DEFINED

By Emory D. Jones, Mississippi Poetry Society Past President

Poetry is well-crafted. It expresses, in a uniquely personal way, a universal truth. The poet gives it his or her own perception, and the recipient receives it in his or her own way. This perception may not be the same for both the poet and the audience, but it is nevertheless true for each one.

There are many forms of this art. Starting at the seemingly simplest, there is the **haiku**, a short Japanese form of seventeen syllables broken into three lines.

A second type of poetry is what is called Formed Verse. In poetry of the English language, it is determined by what is called line length—the type of foot and the number of feet per line. The most common feet in English poetry are the following:

- Iambic—an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable
- Trochee—one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable
- Anapest—two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable
- Dactyl—one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables

Line length can be identified by the number of feet in the line as in the following:

- Dimeter—two feet
- Trimeter—three feet
- Tetrameter—four feet
- Pentameter—five feet
- Hexameter—six feet

The meter of a line is a combination term using the dominant foot and the number of feet per line, such as iambic pentameter.

The **iamb** is really the major building block of verse. The other feet are primarily variations in the line.

Probably the most familiar kind of formed verse is the **sonnet**. A sonnet is defined as fourteen lines of iambic pentameter with a set rhyme scheme. Rhyme is identity or close similarity of sound in the stressed syllable(s) at the end of a line.

Another common type of formed verse is the **ballad**, defined as quatrains made up of alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter with the rhyme scheme of abcb.

Another type of formed verse is the **villanelle**. The highly structured villanelle is a nineteen-line poem with two repeating rhymes and two refrains. The form is made up of five tercets followed by a quatrain. The first and third lines of the opening tercet are repeated alternately in the last lines of the succeeding stanzas; then in the final stanza, the refrain serves as the poem's two concluding lines.

Another highly structured type of formed verse is the **sestina**. In a traditional sestina the lines are grouped into six sestets and a concluding tercet. Thus, a sestina has 39 lines. Lines may be of any length, but their length is usually consistent in a single poem. The six words that end each of the lines of the first stanza are repeated in a different order at the end of lines in each of the subsequent five stanzas. (This kind of recurrent pattern is "lexical repetition".) The repeated words are unrhymed. The first line of each sestet, after the first one, ends with the same word as the one that ended the last line of the sestet before it. In the closing tercet, each of the six words are used, with one in the middle of each line and one at the end.

Another type of formed verse is the **triolet**. It is composed of eight lines in which the first line is used three times and the second line is used twice. The rhyme scheme is AbaAabAb. It is usually iambic pentameter.

Another type of formed verse is the **limerick**, a five-line poem, usually humorous. Lines one, two, and five are trimeter and lines three and four are dimeter. The meter may be any standard meter.

Another type of short formed verse is the **etheree**. This is a ten-lined poem based

upon syllable count running from the first line which has one syllable to the tenth line which has ten syllables.

Another short-formed verse form is the **kyrielle**. This is a series of quatrains with couplet rhyme in which the final line of each stanza is repeated as a refrain.

The **pantoum** is a poetry form composed of a series of quatrains; the second and fourth lines of each stanza are repeated as the first and third lines of the next. This pattern continues for any number of stanzas, except for the final stanza: the second and fourth of the final stanza repeat the first and third lines of the first stanza. Ideally, the meaning of lines shifts when they are repeated although the words remain exactly the same.

A kind of hybrid form of verse is the **gloss**. In this form a poet takes verses from another poet's poem and expands them. It can have any rhyme.

Poems expand language through comparisons—one thing is like something else. The direct comparison, using the terms *like* or *as*, is called a **simile**. In Robert Burns' poem "A Red, Red Rose," the opening *like* is a simile: "Oh my love is like a red, red rose." The indirect comparison in which the characteristics of one thing is attributed to another thing is called a **metaphor**. In Dylan Thomas' poem "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," the opening line is a metaphor for death.

**Sound values**—there are several ways to repeat sound in poetry. Of course, there is rhyme. Then there is double rhyme in which the last two syllables have identical or similar sounds. Triple rhyme is identity or close similarity of sound in the final three syllables. Rhymes can be found within lines as well as at the ends of lines. These rhymes are called internal rhymes. **Masculine rhymes** are rhymes in which the rhyme is in the final stressed syllable. **Feminine rhymes** are rhymes in which the identity of sound comes on unstressed syllables.

Other sound values are **alliteration**, **assonance**, and **consonance**. **Alliteration** is the identity of consonant sounds in the initial syllables of words within a line.

**Assonance** is the identity or close similarity of vowel sounds within lines.

**Consonance** is the repetition of consonant sounds in the final syllables of words within a line.

**Free verse** is a type of poetry that puts special demands upon the poet. In writing free verse, the poet must be especially careful in his choice and placement of words. Because there is no imposed structure, the free verse poet must shape his poems to share a special experience with his audience.

Poetry, then, is well-crafted. It expresses, in a uniquely personal way, a universal truth. The poet gives it his or her own perception, and the recipient receives it in his or her own way. This perception may not be the same for both the poet and the audience, but it is nevertheless true for each one. The various devices of versification are just the tools with which the poet works to achieve this communication.

## POEMS TO WHICH I RELATE

By Gail Denham, Oregon Poetry

Association member

Early in my career as an illustrative photographer, I learned the importance of a focal point in every photo. Each photo must highlight one object, build around that focal point. During these 40 plus years, I also wrote stories, poems, news articles. I realized a focal point was important in my writing. I especially want the reader to perhaps laugh, ponder, cry, or connect with my theme.

In my view, the focal point should be real, down-to-earth, or leave a takeaway. In some poetry, words seem placed simply for their beauty or for effect, not necessarily to forward the poem's impact.

In my poems, I prefer meaning to be clear, simple even. Some favorite poets are William Stafford, Billy Collins, and Wilma E. McDaniel. My poems may center on a sibling spraying his brother with the sink's sprayer hose. Another might feature sun pattern on a wood floor, a rocking chair, trees dancing to wind music, a child's description of elephants. Imagination is in the air. I listen to conversations at coffee shops, talk to seniors, snatch idioms from authors, catch a thought from humorous TV ads.

I believe poetry should be understandable, meanings clear, subjects universal, perhaps humorous. Often I make up words, show characters with flaws, odd habits, or unusual dialog. I feel poems should make you laugh, cry, care, share a connection with the author. I ask myself, What was the focal point of this poem or story? Simple descriptions, dialog, imagery, humor, clear meanings are reasons, for me, to keep reading.

### President's Message from page 1

willing to take time away from their everyday lives to learn something new; other people who want to "better" themselves as poets and writers while expanding their poetry horizons.

When you come to convention or attend a state society meeting, you'll discover that you're not alone in wanting to improve your skills. Some of the best workshops and presentations I've attended have been ones I had no idea about before. Some of the best read-arounds have been in a crowded hotel room late at night during convention!

Perhaps this one is self-evident: attendance at convention and meetings is admitting that you're worth it. It's admitting that you still have things to learn and things to share. That you can get better. When you purchase that convention ticket or when you walk up to the registration desk, you're saying that you're investing in your own growth and have a vested interest in the poetry of your peers.

In addition, conventions are fun!

I'm not a master networker. I struggle with finding the right way to break into a conversation with people I don't know. But I've gotten better by attending conventions, by sitting at lunch tables with people I don't know. I've made some amazing connections and even more amazing friends. Don't miss out on these opportunities.

I get it. Conventions can be expensive. From the convention ticket to the plane ticket, from the meals to the bar tab. And that doesn't even include the time away from your life.

However, conventions provide a unique experience in a single package. A good convention enables you to grow and challenge yourself.

All of this has been on my mind as we prepare for our next convention. If you are compelled to not attend, please share with me why. I'm really curious why people don't attend and maybe, just maybe, I may be able to find a solution or at least understand a little better. Hope to see you in Santa Fe!

Finally, I want to take the time to thank Dena Gorrell, a member of the Poetry Society of Oklahoma, for her extensive service to NFSPS. She did an outstanding job as First Vice Chancellor for many years and always encouraged and educated chapters about celebrating Poetry Day. Dena, the National Federation was privileged to have you on the board. Personally, I am eternally grateful to you for all you have taught me and the many times we have talked over the years. Thank you, Dena! We all hope to see you soon.

*Your sister in words,*

Julie Cummings, 33rd NFSPS President

### CONTEST BROCHURE EXCHANGE

To make it easier for members to find contest information from member-states, NFSPS has created a webpage that lists individual state poetry societies that run contests. This page includes a link to download contest brochures which are provided in a .pdf format. In order to be listed, at least some of the contest categories must be open to all and not limited to just state society members. Contest links can be found at [nfsp.com/statecontests.html](http://nfsp.com/statecontests.html). This page will be updated as new contests become available.  
~ *Steven Concert, NFSPS 4th VP*

### ENCORE 2018

NFSPS' anthology of this year's top 150 prize-winning poems is on amazon.com for \$13. Buy 2 copies and get free shipping. All royalties support NFSPS. ~ *Kathy Cotton, Encore Editor*

### NFSPS 2019 CONTEST BROCHURE CORRECTION

The NFSPS board would like to apologize to Florence Bruce, long-time Correspondence Secretary for the Poetry Society of Tennessee. In the 2019 NFSPS contest brochure we inadvertently implied Florence had passed away with "In memory of Florence Bruce" as part of the description for Contest #43, Poetry Society of Tennessee Award. Florence would like her NFSPS friends to know that she is "at home now, driving, and living independently." The NFSPS board is happy to eat a little crow while Florence is among us!

### SPRING 2019 POETRY WORKSHOP IN ZION

Zion National Park and poetry make a wonderful combination, so don't miss the chance to write poetry while immersed in the beauty of Utah's oldest and most-visited national park before the crowds arrive. Poetry in the Park, held Friday, March 1, 2019, will feature award-winning poet and Brigham Young University English professor, Kimberly Johnson, whose "Paying Attention" presentation will help poets better notice details around them to improve their poetry. Hosted by the Utah State Poetry Society and the Zion National Park Forever Project, the event will also include a guided nature walk, time to compose poetry, and time to share poetry with other poets in attendance. Lodging will be available at winter rates and attendees can bring their own lunches or dine at the Lodge's Redrock Grill. For more details, visit [poetry-in-the-park.com](http://poetry-in-the-park.com). Poetry in the Park can be coupled with the Red Rock Creative Writing Seminar the next day, Sat. March 2, in nearby St. George for a fantastic writing-intensive weekend. Details are at [redrockwriters.org](http://redrockwriters.org) under the Annual Writing Seminar tab.