Special thanks to Jeanne Hanrahan, Maureen Roen, Jill Brenner and Blanca Villapudua for their hard work and dedication to the Tempe Writing Contest and the *Tempe Writers Forum*. 
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TEMPE WRITING CONTEST
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March 25, 2019

There is something very special about the Tempe Writing Contest. Maybe it’s the fact that since 2014, hundreds of aspiring writers have entered the contest or attended writing programs and conferences at the library. It could also be the knowledge that several contest winners have gone on to become published authors. Or maybe it’s this year’s expansion of the contest to anyone in Maricopa County, opening it up to writers across the region. It’s hard to pinpoint the exact reason this contest shines so bright. There are so many.

Now libraries nationwide are taking notice. Tempe Public Library is one of thirty finalists for the Institute of Museum & Library Services National Medal, which is the library and museum equivalent to an Academy Award. The library’s writing programs and contests are one of the reasons it is receiving this prestigious honor.

In a world that’s been overtaken by social media and news headlines, the value of a good book is still appreciated. A good story helps us escape. It can teach us about new cultures, open our minds to new ideas. Even in the digital age, books are still an important part of our lives, whether we’re cracking open a hard copy or opening up an app to read.

This year’s Tempe Writing Contest submissions will take readers on journeys from clowns to Thanksgiving, capturing the imaginations of readers of all generations and genres. It is an impressive compilation of writing.

I would like to congratulate this year’s Writing Contest winners and
Cover Contest winner, as well as all the writers who submitted their work. Thank you for sharing your talent with the community. I encourage each of you to continue writing and sharing your work with others.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to the Tempe Public Library and Arizona State University’s creative writing community for their efforts in compiling the Tempe Writers Forum, Volume 5. This amazing work couldn’t have been done without their commitment and continued partnership. Friends of the Library also played an important role by sponsoring the prizes for this year’s contest this year. Partnerships like these are what set Tempe apart from all other cities.

Tempe is committed to providing a high quality of life for its residents, and for all Tempe Public Library visitors. Thank you for your contribution to our growing arts community. Your talent and dedication is helping us reach that goal.

Sincerely,
Mark W. Mitchell
Mayor
City of Tempe
February 28, 2019

Dear Friends,

Arizona State University is excited to celebrate the fifth annual Tempe Writing and Cover Design contest and this resulting publication—volume five of the Tempe Writers Forum. We are thrilled to sustain ASU’s partnership with the Tempe Public Library, an important commitment for us.

Five years is a milestone! Each year the contest has matured in some way. This year the contest was opened to emerging writers living across the Valley. We were especially gratified to receive the most submissions ever from high school students.

At ASU, we are driven by a charter that impels us to advance research and discovery of public value and assume fundamental responsibility for the economic, cultural, and overall health of the communities we serve.

Helping people to gain voice through writing is an important part of our responsibility because becoming a more practiced, confident writer contributes to success in many arenas of life.

This annual contest offers opportunity and incentive for individuals to hone their craft and to build community around their art.

Many classes and workshops are available at ASU, at the Tempe Public Library and in the community to help you gain writing practice and feedback from peers. I hope that you will take advantage of these opportunities.
Enormous thanks go to all those in the Tempe Public Library, the City of Tempe, at ASU, and in the greater community who have collaborated to enthusiastically support this contest and encouraged and evaluated submissions.

I especially thank the scores of writers and graphic designers who shared their work. You have enthralled us, moved us, and delighted us. And to anyone reading this note who considered entering the contest but didn’t, I urge you to share your writing next year.

Sharing our stories—and experiencing others’ stories through the arts—expands our empathy, ignites new ideas about possibility, and enhances our humanity.

Duane Roen
Dean, College of Integrative Sciences and Arts
Dean, University College
Vice Provost, ASU’s Polytechnic campus
March 15, 2019

Welcome Back readers and local authors alike! This publication is by far my favorite and contains the works from the very best local authors from 2019 as selected during the fifth annual Tempe Writing Contest. This annual project between the Tempe Public Library, Arizona State University and our community continues to foster our vibrant storytellers and those venturing out as writers for the very first time. The Tempe Public Library encourages the next step in the process, where emerging authors can find a safe and supportive environment to help them along their journey to becoming a published novelist, poet or essayist.

I am so proud that the Tempe Public Library is a nurturing and resourceful environment for local writers—a safe place where they can critique and learn from each other and discuss the joys and sorrows of their passion and create their stories. If you, too are a budding author, please check the Library’s online calendar and newsletter for groups and classes that might help you take that next step in your efforts. www.tempepubliclibrary.org

The Tempe Writing Contest illustrates the dedication our Library has for our writing community, and another reason the Tempe Public Library was selected as a finalist for the 2019 National Medal, the highest honor bestowed upon a Library annually by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. This validation of the innovative programming our Library creates and facilitates for Tempe, provides the inspiration and resources to make dreams come true.
Congratulations to all the authors and illustrators and the very best for future writing success!

Kathy Husser
Deputy Community Services Director - Library
Fiction
By the time the clown arrived, one of the children had vomited up ribbons of neon-colored frosting from too much cake, two were in a sugar coma on the oversized beanbag, four others were glued to the viral video of the Vermont newborn triplets farting in unison, and my daughter, Beatrice—the birthday girl—had her right arm jammed into a length of irrigation pipe in the backyard where she'd been trying to retrieve her birthday gift from a year ago, a Maine coon kitten with one eye the color of lime green sherbet, the other a sky blue marble.

If her mother were still here, she'd have known exactly what to do.

But she was not.

Beatrice had five birthdays with her mother, likely only one she might even remember as she got older and the memories of her own early years faded, like they do for all of us.

Her mother was smart, however.

The gift of the cat, she knew, would not only be something Beatrice would remember because the cat would, hopefully, live till she was a teenager, but that cat would also help...
cement in her five-year old brain that she did, in fact, once have a mother—and that mother loved her very much.

I was bound to make this sixth birthday another one she would remember. I’d stick to the plan my wife had written down for the party.

So, I ordered up a clown.

“We’ve only got a girl who failed out of clown school,” the man said when I placed the order. “The rest of our veteran clowns are booked that day. But she’ll be good. Takin’ one of them remedial balloon courses. Had a little trouble on the poodles. But real good at simple wiener dogs,” he chuckled.

“Get it?” he asked.

“Sure,” I mumbled, wishing Julia was still alive to talk about birthday party balloons.

“A wiener dog’s just a blowed-up balloon,” he said through wheezy laughs.

“I guess that will do,” I remember saying, not thinking—like my wife would have—to call another event clown vendor.

For a month before the party, and knowing it would only be good to invite Beatrice’s kindergarten classmates whom she got along with, I thought—inexplicably—that telling Beatrice her mother had planned every inch of this party before she died might lock into her mind even more how much her mother adored her.

But, ultimately, I knew that with each plan I made over the previous month, each gift I bought, each decoration I envisioned putting up—all of it, every last bit—was me performing a farewell sacrament.
This ritual had exactly one purpose: to try and prop up a body that would collapse in the drugstore aisle where they sold Julia’s favorite coconut body spritz.

A dozen times or more, after I sprayed the whole sample bottle onto my forearm at three in the morning and tried to will my dead wife back to life, the teenage clerk brought me tissues on this once-a-week ritual of grief that I held back from Beatrice because I had to cradle her in my arms every night as she fell asleep and asked me why mommy left her with someone who “can’t make my egg-in-a-hole right.”

After I put Beatrice to bed each night, I went through more of Julia’s clothes, filled a garbage bag and set it by the front door so I could drop it off at the thrift store with Beatrice after I picked her up from school. This, too, became a ritual and slowly Julia’s side of the closet emptied out until there were just a handful of her favorites left.

The thing I saved for last was a moth-holed, mustard yellow, ill-fitting sweater she loved any excuse to wear—even if there were just a chance of a slight breeze kicking up—and which I’d made fun of because it looked so ragged.

She always told me it was the most comfortable piece of clothing she’d ever had.

As I touched it each day on the hanger in the closet that was slowly emptying out, her voice faded another notch. She was becoming more of a ghost.

After I checked on Beatrice each night and saw her sleeping soundly, I took the sweater to the recliner, sat down and draped it over my face, lost entirely, forcing myself to keep
the contours of her body and the lilt in her voice at the front of my mind so she wouldn't fade.

Sometimes Beatrice would wake up in the morning and find me there with the sweater wrapped around my head. She would sometimes pull it off, put it over her head and nudge me till I got up. Or say, “I dreamed about Mommy. She said she loves us.”

I hugged her, said “Yes,” and instead of depositing the sweater into the thrift store bag like I promised myself I would every night, I went straight back to the closet and gingerly placed it on the designated padded hanger.

For a few months, when Beatrice was sad or when I became blue, we put a few pillows on the floor of the closet and laid down, looking up at the sweater hanging above us and shared whatever we'd done that day with the ghost of my dead wife.

----

I did a quick count of the birthday guests to make sure none had gone missing, went outside into the warm rain and knelt down in the wet grass. I slithered my arm into the other end of the irrigation pipe where Beatrice’s arm was inserted and thought I could help unstick her with a little nudge. The moment I got my own arm up to my shoulder, I felt the cat’s tail and saw Beatrice at the other end easily slipping her arm out. She stood up, the cat in one hand and the other filled with cake. The cat’s face was covered in frosting.
“Honey, I thought your arm was stuck.”
“No, daddy, not stuck. Just feeding Crayon.”
She wandered off back to the party.
I tried to pull my arm out and quickly realized that, somehow, I was the one who got stuck. I told myself this was a sign to give up on this long-abandoned project to funnel grey water out of our house and into the garden. All that grew there anymore were weeds and it felt like that was appropriate.
I closed my eyes to will up the energy to continue monitoring a houseful of children with no interest in being monitored. A few moments later I was startled by the bleat of a bulb horn being squeezed above my head. I opened my eyes and saw what seemed to me the saddest clown ever. Its face was made up in colors that were dripping down the white cheeks and the big red smile was starting to turn downward.
The clown was holding a kid’s jacket above her head, trying, unsuccessfully, to protect the makeup job from being ruined.
“I’m stuck,” I said to Lucy, but she’d turned already, her gigantic floppy feet slapping across the puddles toward the house.
I then freed my arm, the quickening rain likely having had a bit of a lubricating effect.
Wet and flecked with mud, I followed the clown inside the house, grabbed a towel from the hall closet and came out to the living room where Lucy had one of the girls in her lap.
She was pulling balloons out from hidden pockets in her polka-dotted clown suit and making birds and giraffes and poodles. I guess Lucy had passed the remedial course. But even the yellow octopus she created didn’t stop the girl in her lap from crying.

“I think I might be scaring her,” Lucy said.

I knelt down.

“Angie, do you want to go home?” I asked.

She nodded and said, “My tummy hurts.”

I started in on the calls to the parents, telling them that I thought the party had to end early because Beatrice was getting a bit tired.

“And they probably overindulged in cake,” I added at the end of each call.

“Might want to see if your little one goes on a sugar high. Or barfs.”

----

Once the last kid went home—a girl whom I walked out to the car with a bagful of the last of the cake (she was the only one who didn’t seem to get any ill effects and I was happy to see it go)—I breathed easier and wondered exactly how I’d continue to navigate any more of Beatrice’s birthday parties.

I made a silent promise to myself that the rest of them would have strict limitations on invitees.

And less cake.

When I walked back into the house, Lucy had Beatrice
in her lap and was reaching into hidden pockets in the clown
suit, blowing up more and more balloons and attaching them
to one another so that at the end she had made a caterpillar that
was as tall as Beatrice and as colorful as a peacock.

It looked like it could crawl out of the house and turn
instantly into a butterfly, then sail off into the sky and transform
into a squeaky rainbow.

In the kind of slow motion reserved for unavoidable in-
cidents, I could see the overindulgence in cake was finally going
to hit Beatrice. I reached out to pull her from in front of Lucy,
where Beatrice was standing and stroking this new balloon pet,
but all my action did was accelerate the vomit like a loose gar-
den hose that someone turned on to full blast.

In seconds, Lucy’s clown suit was streaked with extra
colors.

Instead of freaking out, as I’d have expected anyone in
her position to do, Lucy pulled one of her bright blue clown
handkerchiefs from a pocket and wiped Beatrice’s face.

“Are you sick, sweetie?” and pulled her onto her lap.
Then, to me, “You must have a little soda here from the
party? Pour me a cup.”

I handed Lucy a cup of Sprite and she held it to Bea-
trice’s mouth.

“Sip on this. It’ll make your tummy feel better.”

“You must have kids of your own,” I said.

“Nope. Not yet. I just remember this from my child-
hood. And I’m studying to be a pediatrician. This,” she said and
honked her clown horn lightly, “is to pay the bills. But the car-


bonation does wonders to settle the stomach. I guess I could’ve saved a billion dollars in tuition,” she said and stroked Beatrice’s forehead.

“What are we going to do about your clown suit?” I asked.

“When I go further away, I usually bring a change of clothes,” she said. “It gets a bit clammy in the costume. But I live just a few miles from here so I’ll just wear it home. I’ll be okay.”

“Absolutely not,” I said. “I’m sure we’ve got something for you to change into. There’s got to be some clothes from my ex-wife that will fit. You’re about her height. Beatrice and I have been going through it all over the last year and we’re down to the last of it. If you’re not too weirded out, you’re welcome to change.”

I picked Beatrice up off Lucy’s lap and set her on the couch.

I went to the front door and grabbed what was the last bag of Julia’s clothes and started pulling out a few pairs of jeans, some T-shirts.

“Sure, that would be fine,” Lucy said. “I have to get home and wash the clown suit, too. I’ll get fined 20 percent of my next paycheck if I don’t.”

Beatrice asked for more soda, drank it down and it seemed like she’d completely forgotten about being sick just minutes before. The balloon caterpillar that Lucy had made kept Beatrice entranced.

“Daddy, can we listen to Steve Kittens?” she asked.

Beatrice meant Cat Stevens. Julia’s favorite movie was
Harold and Maude, the soundtrack for which was end-to-end Cat Stevens. We probably watched it 50 times with Beatrice, the music being the primary influence on her as the film’s intricately-staged fake suicides, intergenerational romance, and middle finger thrown up so perfectly at conformity would have been well beyond Beatrice’s understanding. But the music. The music infected her.

I opened up the record player and took the Harold And Maude album out of its well-worn sleeve and started it up. I’d spent hundreds of dollars on the rare limited release and it had become our family’s anthemic music cure-all.

Beatrice started dancing with her caterpillar as the record’s B-side’s 1st track, “Where Do the Children Play” rolled out of the speakers—“...I know we’ve come a long way. We’re changing day to day. But tell me, where do the children play?”

Lucy said, “I haven’t met many people who know Harold and Maude. It was my mom and dad’s anniversary film. They met at a revival showing at an art theater in New York.”

Lucy and I sat and watched Beatrice dance with her balloon partner through the next song, If You Want to Sing Out, Sing Out and it struck me she was pretty much living as perfect a life as her mother could wish.

For someone who had tried to will a sign from my wife and who knew there was no such thing as contact from the dead, I chose to give this coincidence some meaning.

“You can change in the bathroom, Lucy.” I said. “And since it’s already wet and getting a bit chilly, I’ve got something else for you.”
I went into the bedroom, pulled the sweater off the hanger and held it to my chest.

“Goodbye, Julia. I found someone who’s going to appreciate this. I’ll tell her all about you.” Then, thinking about Maude’s line in the movie that was Julia’s favorite. “This clown today, sweetie—you’d get along with her—she’s your species.”
Mark Sutz lives and writes in Tempe. He is a freelance writer who has ghostwritten heartfelt apologies to save relationships, a book collector who enjoys finding first editions at thrift stores, and a late-night walker who feels best under a starry sky. Chat with him at masutz@gmail.com.
Gas Leak

by Catrina Schuler

College Fiction
The smell really wasn’t too bad, in fact I was starting to get used to it. I had the advantage of numbness because I lived there—though numbness was something I was never particularly good at. My landlord agreed that it, indeed, smelled very bad, but he couldn’t pinpoint what it was. “Just let me know if it starts to smell like rotten—”

“Rotten what?”

“…rotten eggs,” he said. “That’s a gas leak. But—Bailey,” he placed a hand on my shoulder and leaned in close, “tell me first, OK?”

I knew that my house was less expensive than all the other houses on my street, that it had been “unfortunately and illegally” constructed, though he’d never gone into the details of what that actually meant.

“Couldn’t my house explode?” I asked.

“I will buy you a hotel if there’s a gas leak, but you need to tell me first.”

---
I was anxious about all that gas-leak nonsense for weeks. I think I was mostly nervous because my landlord had basically told me if it happened, there would be nothing I could do, I would have to wait for him (also something I was never good at) and I didn’t want to do that. If our house were to explode, I would be here all alone with Beatrice, my roommate, who teased my anxiety more than she ever tried to remedy it. I don’t know what I’d do if I ever actually started to smell that, I feel like I would lose all sense of myself.

As often happens with my anxiety, I became exhausted from my worrying and eventually found comfort in the bad smell that constantly lingered in my home: as long as it remained, that meant that there was no rotten eggs smell. I was eager to tell Beatrice this.

Without looking up she had said, “Or, you just can’t smell it. Because this other smell is so strong.”

Her nonchalance was bothering me as much as my anxiety was bothering her. She was right, absolutely. What if our home already did smell of rotten eggs but this other smell—this other god-forsaken, gut-wrenching, unbearable scent—masked it? We’d never know. We could die in our sleep. Our house could be on the verge of demolition any second, and we wouldn’t be the wiser.

We knew where it was coming from. Although it drenched the entire house, it was strongest when you stood next to the basement door and sniffed it as it seeped through the cracks. We went down there, together. After we found what was causing the smell, a silence befell us. I tried to break it, but
Beatrice went weeks without breathing a word.

After two months of this, I was feeling more alone and anxious than ever before. I contacted my landlord again and explained my predicament. “It doesn’t smell like rotten eggs right now,” I explained, “but what if it did? And this other smell is still here and I can’t smell it?” (I coated my voice in a whisper so as not to clue in Beatrice that her words had gotten to me.)

“But it doesn’t?” he assessed, over the phone. “It doesn’t currently stink?”

“It does,” I said, “but not of rotten eggs. At least, not that I can tell…”

“Well then, what’s the issue?”

I had swallowed several deep, stench-stained breaths while he continued to pester, “Hello? Hello?” on the line before I said, “Can you come over?”

“Can I what?”

“Can you come over? And smell the house?”

“I have owned this property for a year; I know what it smells like.”

I took a deep shaky breath and on its release, he shattered. “I’ll come over.”

----

“Where’s Beatrice?” he asked as soon as he stepped inside. I watched his nose twitch, his eyes water, all his senses simultaneously adjust to the new state of olfactory discomfort.

“Does it smell like rotten eggs?”
“No, where’s Beatrice?”
“She’s in the basement.”

He raised an eyebrow. “What on earth is she doing down there; that’s where it smells the worst.”

“We got in a disagreement. Over the smell. We went down there one day, to figure out the smell, and she stays down there all the time now. She won’t talk to me...” My voice hitched and so I swallowed and walked quickly to the kitchen.

“What’re you making?”
“Beatrice soup.”
“Pardon?”
“Her favorite soup.”
“I see.” He stopped at the door to the basement. “So... you found the smell.”

I nodded.
“Did she see it?”
“What?”

“Nevermind.” His face abruptly shifted into a softness I hadn’t seen before – almost as like a prisoner’s last reluctant but forced-peaceful look before the flip is switched on the electric chair.

“Let’s go,” he said, and he smiled at me. For the first time, since we’d met, he smiled at me. Something like almost-understanding settled between us as we went downstairs, our eyes watering – his from the smell, my own from the peace that comes when something suddenly dissipates your loneliness. I had a feeling he would understand me, and that I understood him in a way that Beatrice wouldn’t understand.
It was a really shitty house, to be honest with you. The lights don't work too well in the basement; you have to take the stairs in the dark. There's a single electric bulb dangling from the ceiling that illuminates—or is meant to illuminate—the whole room. Beatrice was there, as always, a silverish tint masking her skin. From the smell, I thought, and the light. She's ridiculous for staying down here, for not talking to me.

He wandered through her and them, like a kid looking at icicle lights during Christmas, moving their large clumsy limbs out of his way as need be. They didn't glow, they merely reflected the light from the bulb. Rotting flesh can be iridescent. Or at least the beetles and flies were. He looked at me over his shoulder. “When'd you guys first come down here?”

“I came down here the day we moved in. Beatrice has been hanging around down here just for the last two months.”

“I see.” He glanced at me. “Well, at least I think I do...”

“What's that mean?”

He turned to face me. “Was Beatrice ever worried about the gas leaks?”

I grew uncomfortable. Now I was in the electric chair. “Not that I could tell. Or that she told me.”

“Why'd she come down here?”

I thought for a moment, my eyes wandering to ceiling. I tried to read her glassy eyes from my viewpoint. Unblinking. That was something else she'd picked up recently. She never talked, but she'd stare at me, eyes wide—accusingly. It wasn’t my fault she didn’t think gas leaks were plausible. “I took her down here. After we fought. She'd told me that this other stench could
just cover up the eggs. I took her down here to figure it out. Finally figure out what was causing the smell.”

“And...she stayed?”

“She stayed.”

We were both quiet for a moment. “The tenants before you,” he said, and gestured to the ceiling, “they called me constantly, always complaining about one thing or another. I blamed myself for everything they called about. It didn’t smell then, but there was always something wrong – always some sort of minor complaint causing them to lose sleep at night. One day they called me about a leak in the basement. I was so anxious driving over, for the sixth time that week—six times! Nearly every day, can you believe it?” He sat down on the bottom step so I sat down beside him. “I decided that day, as I was driving, I needed new tenants. I needed them out—or at least, to stop calling me.”

A sense of uneasiness flooded me momentarily. Oh, God...I had been calling him. “Sorry I called you so much.”

“Don’t be. I told you to call me first. And you can see why.”

“Will air freshener work?”

“What?”

“On the smell. Will air freshener get rid of the smell of the bodies.”

“Already tried that. Honestly, this place would have to be burned to get rid of it now.”

Of course, why didn’t I think of that?
I was cooking for Beatrice but I was feeling angry at her simultaneously. I was frustrated with the smell—that awful, awful smell, her smell—so I turned on the stove, and the oven, I lit some candles. I went to the basement, and I doused Beatrice in air freshener and lit a scented candle near the tip of her dress to get rid of that awful, awful smell. I finished making my soup first, I sat across the street, feeling its warmth swell in my hands, as I watched it burn. He had been right. You couldn’t smell anything. I called him up.

“You did what?”

I wanted company, and after our moment of similarity, he had become one of the select few people who could soothe my aching mind. He got me. He got me, like no one—like Beatrice—never did or could. “You should come over.”

His car pulled up nice and slow in front of my house as if his Cadillac itself was incapacitated from smoke inhalation. He got out, without taking his eyes off the flames snaking from the windows, and walked over toward me.

“I wasn’t implying you actually burn it to the ground.”

“Better safe than sorry. The only way nothing bad can ever happen is if you do it yourself first.”

He wobbled a little at the sight of it. He motioned to sit down beside me. “I guess...that’s true.” He looked over at me. There was an appreciation in his eyes that no one has ever laid on me before. “I...get anxious too.”

I ladled out a bowl and handed it to him. “I know. So
you’ve said.”

“I like you,” he said. “You really haven’t been too bad of a tenant. I’d set you up in a new place, but now it would seem you’re a pyromaniac so that’d be insane.”

The switch flipped on the chair. “Oh,” I said.

“Yeah, sorry…”

“It’s OK,” I said, taking the bowl back. “I’ll just take your place instead.”

“What?”

----

I waited for him to be fully gone before I grabbed the keys from his pocket. As I got in the driver’s side of his silverish Cadillac I looked out to my landlord laying on the side of the road, blood and soup mingling on the pavement near his head and that smell, that awful smell, was coming back...
Catrina Schuler was born in Maryland, but moved to Arizona when she was 5 years old. Catrina recognized writing as a hobby in her earlier life, and took a more concentrated focus in high school as she began to study genre specifics, like Gothic Literature. She is now a sophomore at ASU pursuing a Creative Writing degree.
Wash the Dishes

by Robert Yalam

High School Fiction
Dishwater climbs along the protruding veins of her bony arms as she scrubs a baking tray. The window above the sink tempts her to lift her gaze into the yard and admire the majestic palms and staunch valencias. A whistle from the sprightly chickadees drifts through the mesh screen. Ripples on the pool’s surface reflect the sun’s radiance in the light breeze. The calm drafts carry a subdued citrus aroma that livens the chemical odor of the dish soap. She attempts a smile, and feels the chalky lipstick crack along the fine wrinkles of her pursed lips.

The echo of her husband’s descent on the staircase snaps her attention onto her morning regimen. Discarding the dishes, she shuffles to prepare his toast and coffee, with two creams and a half teaspoon of sugar. She braces herself for a slammed door, a shattered glass, a new dent in the wall for her tardiness, as she sets the table for one.

One of his pills rolls from the tablecloth, and she bends to grab it against the screaming resistance in her knees. He emerges from the hallway before she can rise. The stack of magazines he sweeps from the counters alerts her of his presence as they rain upon her hunched back. He wastes no time to
admonish her. A stern smack on the back of her neck concludes his tirade with practiced finesse.

She returns to the sink, presses her creased apron with her hands, and picks up the sponge. The landscape through the window can no longer penetrate her paralyzed mind. She escapes to their bathroom, the husband too engrossed in stock reports to acknowledge her vulnerability and shame. A dusting of refined powder. A quick brush through her matted salt and pepper curls. A taupe smock that hides her weak frame. Her preparation for the day is complete. He enters, jostling her modest cosmetics into the corner of the counter, and she shuffles past to avoid pestering his byzantine ritual.

Resting in the foyer, she admires photographs of their children, whom she had never met, of their wedding, which she hadn’t attended, of the mother, whom she had never posed with in some quaint garden. The face in each image reflects a joyous serenity that rejects any parallels with the present woman. The highlights in her eyes no longer radiate innocence and intrigue, instead now dimmed by the fatigue of her unacknowledged labors. His entrance in the room revives her attention. The tailored polo and trousers, the polished patent loafers, and the sculpted wave of his charcoal hair all entice her, briefly clouding his temperament. He strides past, ignoring the photographs and her daze of sentimentality; mention of the past had never invoked sympathy within him. At least he still retained the memories.

The ride to the doctor’s office is hushed. Radio static and blank stares through the windshield fill the vacancy left
by their mutual abandonment of polite discourse. The routine visit for his seemingly exponential health concerns is placid, broken only by a snide comment in the reception hall. Absent is any concern for her warped hands, her fleeting cognizance, her chest’s knotting pains. Her only memory of a personal medical appointment is for a flu vaccine sealed with a cartoon-themed bandage. As he indulges in sedatives and morphine for a stiff knee joint, she is suffocated by her body’s deterioration, with no diagnosis or medication to ease the afflictions.

Upon their return, their lives continue, isolated. He migrates to the piano, where he practices classic melodies of soft jazz. He seems buoyant and high-spirited; his fingers dance on the keys as if they are falling into a profound, unyielding romance. The glossed varnish of the instrument’s wood remains unscathed, with a hateful purity and innocence that antagonize each shard of shattered glass, each crater in the wall, each lacerated heartstring in his wife.

Meanwhile, the woman hovers in the foyer. The image of the forgotten wedding mocks her—though the groom is still her husband, she is no longer that bride. Even the grayscale print cannot mask the woman’s past serenity, her security, her spirit. The adjacent mirror exposes her true poignance. The slender frame in the column white gown is radiant; the woman brooding in the entryway is a hollow remnant, void of the other’s beauty.

The afternoon passes without disturbance. Within the recallable past, it has been their way to ignore the implications of marriage. Any gesture of love has fleeted from their memo-
ries; their relationship is more consistent with a neglected contract than a vulnerable interdependence. They bed together, and wake each morning in a stoic routine. In the fading moments of dawn, she peels her face from the tears pressed into the top of her pillow, and shambles down to the kitchen to wash the dishes.
Wash the Dishes

Robert Yalam

Bobby Yalam is a rising senior at BASIS Scottsdale, Class of 2020, with a passion for psychology and writing. He is fascinated by the inner-workings of the mind and seeks to understand them through his writing and various extracurricular activities. Though he draws inspiration from everything around him, his muse will always be his dog Elvira.
unfinished

by Lisa Becker

Adult Poetry
unfinished

You were on page 72.
I tried to read it for you but
I couldn’t get past that dog-eared page and
your clothes were still in the dryer and
I couldn’t wash them again for a long time after that no matter
how much I wore them plus
you left a hair on the soap in the shower so
how could your hair be there when you’re gone and also
your toothbrush.
It was brand new and everyone knows you keep a toothbrush for
three months so how could a toothbrush outlive you I can’t
understand
why you didn’t fix the towel rack we knocked down when
we made love up against the wall and after we finished
you started your new book but
you only got to page 72.
Lisa Becker

Lisa Becker is a proud Arizona native, and travels around the state whenever she's able. Though she's lived in many other places, the desert always calls her home. Lisa volunteers with Gilbert Fire/Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and has worked on several human and civil rights campaigns. She's usually found reading and spending time with her loved ones. Lisa is working on her first full-length novel.
Scientific Method of Grief

by Jae Eason

College Poetry
1. Ask a Question

*Is it dad? What’s wrong with dad? Is he okay mom? Dad? What’s wrong?*

Concrete catches my body; my screams surrender to sorrow & we learn what it’s like to lose limbs.

2. Do Background Research

*Monday September 28th, 1959. He was placed in his mother’s arms and the hospital stamped negro on his birth certificate.*

He talked about Virginia like he arose from its dirt. Youngest of ten; he sang stories about fingers worn from cotton, bellies full of berries,
the love he loved for my grandmama.

Burning his name into the grass—home is where his mother lays.

3. Construct a Hypothesis

Risks include: breathing problems; bleeding; blood clots; re-narrowing arteries; heart attack; death.

His heart broke for the first time in 2016. Doctors sliced him in half; dug metal into his arteries.

My love aches for him on the phone—he sings *Happy Birthday Baby Girl*, into the receiver; letting go of pinched passageways.

He smokes too often [pretends like he doesn’t] & never misses doctor’s appointments—pins the dates on the fridge, his own twelve step program.

4. Test with Experiment

I’m wading through concrete to get to him. It’s hard to run fast over two thousand miles.
I want to re-route the map; his skin has gone dry and you only have so much blood to write with.

5. Analyze

**Samuel L. Chapel: Moyock, North Carolina.**

We carry his body on our backs. My knuckles are caught on brass handles—if I hold on longer maybe he’s allowed to come back.

*God loves cry babies; the preacher preaches—*
* I cry because I don’t have any good words to say.

6. Conclusion

*He is the wind that surrounds me.*
Jae Eason is from Long Island, New York. In their fourth year at Arizona State, they study English Literature and work as an editorial assistant at Hayden’s Ferry Review. Their poetry is the study of how everything in the world connects and the spaces that lay in between.
Life

by Kameryn Bond

High School Poetry
There are the soft whispers in a cozy library
The pounding footsteps in a race
The fuzzy feeling of February
The stars in someone’s face

The scraping of a skateboard
The cawing of a crow
The strum of a ukulele chord
Pedestrians running to and fro

The monsters under the bed
The dancing in the snow
A newly couple wed
The sunset that’s aglow

The rain that’s pounding on the roof
The dog’s barking in the yard
The swift fading of the sunroof
The cracked road that’s been tarred
Life

The warm smell of salt in a restaurant
Someone shouts into frigid night air
The unmistakable thrill of the hunt
The sun’s heated glare

Life is like a puzzle, and every little piece
Fits together.
And if any go missing,
It’ll never be complete
Kameryn Bond is a fourteen-year-old freshman in the Peoria Unified School District. Her hobbies include writing, reading, running, cooking, and listening to music. She currently sprints for varsity track at Centennial High School. Kameryn Bond hopes to receive a scholarship to a university in order to become a screenwriter in the film industry.
Nonfiction
Thanksgiving

by Andrea Rogers

Adult Nonfiction
Our tires come to a slow stop, dusting the air behind them. Indiana was a green memory. The land here stretched out flat in all directions, dry and powdery and brown. The sun, a worn gold pendant, hung suspended, timeless against a dirty sky.

We have stopped in front of a small board house, once white, now a weathered gray. I climb from the backseat of the Oldsmobile and stand waiting for my mother. From somewhere nearby, a child comes running up to me. She stops and stares. We are different in every way. She is younger than my seven years, but older in a way I don’t understand. She looks at me in my polished oxfords and red and blue plaid school dress. She has no shoes and wears only a stained white cotton shift. Her face, streaked with lines of sweat and tears, is framed with blond hair twisted and matted into little ropes. I am her enemy and she knows it. She glares at me with such fierce hatred that I almost fall backwards, but my mother grabs my hand pulling me toward her.

Our feet make no sound on the soft dirt. My toes are covered with dust by the time we reach the door. My mother
knocks and we wait. From inside, I hear the creak of a rocking chair, and a woman, large, but bent with age, opens the door wordlessly to let us in.

I blink into the darkness of the house. The room is empty except for the one chair where the woman had been sitting. She tosses her hand toward an open doorway, motioning us on, then returns to her rocking once more. Still, all this and nothing had been said. I look back at her. She seems to be waiting for something.

The room we enter is lit by a window near the foot of a narrow bed. A man lies there under sheets worn thin by wear. We stand at the side of the bed looking down at him. He is old. His hair lies in thin strands against his scalp. The skin on his face is transparent, yet the roundness of his cheekbones push it up, stretching its thinness like crisp parchment. He turns toward my mother, “So, you came after all?”

I sense a movement at the window; a sudden change in light. I move to see as they continue talking in hushed voices. On the glass, a smear from a child’s hand quickly withdrawn traces across the steamed breath of a fading mouth print. What is left is my reflection looking back at me.

Outside, a broken tree stands, defiantly breaking the line of the horizon. The branches have long been gone. Only the trunk remains, one limb aiming upward. Lightning has struck the tree, I think, only I can’t put the image of wind and rain into this scene of desolation.

My mother and the man talk quietly, but with a tension a tightrope between them. Like a soldier, she stands stiffly
at attention. A great distance lies between the pauses in their words. At one point he reaches up his hand seeking hers, but she doesn’t take it. I can see pleading in his eyes.

He is begging with a look. Her fingers open, but as she lifts her hand, his face changes to a smirk. Her hand drops to her side and she turns to me, “We need to go now.”

I leap the distance between us and grasp her hand. We pass the old woman, letting the screen door slam behind us.

Kneeling on the backseat, I watch the road unwind like a ribbon tossed away. The shack fades away and our car weaves homeward. I lean my chin on the back of my mother’s seat and ask, “Who was that man?”, but I change my mind when I see her tears. I figure I already know.

What I do not know is how it came to this between them, but I learn and begin to understand. She was his first-born child. He named her Jesse, the name for the boy she was supposed to be. Eleven months later she rocked her brother’s cradle. She seemed to draw his wrath, so she found a hiding place under the stairs. By the age of eleven she was the leader of a small band of soldiers who maneuvered under her command. More than one night the army defended their mother against the father made unrecognizable by alcohol. The younger ones, under orders, surrounded their mother, while the eldest flayed him with a broom, shortly defeated, he would retreat as he cursed this homegrown “Japanese Army!”

I was in my twenties before I learned about “Kansas.” The wind was battering the windows that day, sending a chill into the room. My arms were full of kindling for the fire I was
starting in the fireplace, when she began. “My dad moved us to Kansas after his store failed,” she said. I set the wood and lit the chips underneath. A flame flickered. I sat on the hearth to listen.

“I had to sneak out every night, well past midnight, to take firewood from the neighbor’s stacks. The place we had was just a cabin with big holes between the logs. I thought we would freeze to death there.”

I could see she was distraught with the memory of her theft, apparently not seeing it as I did, an act of conscience. “You didn’t really have any choice.”

“I know,” she replied.

I didn’t ask for any more information.

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Many years had passed and my mother was dying. In September she developed pneumonia and her weight dropped to 104 pounds. By November, she had not only resigned herself to death, but seemed to be hoping for it.

On the night of Thanksgiving, I went to the hospital. The nurse at the desk looked up to acknowledge me, giving me permission for this late visit with an understanding nod. My mother is sleeping, but restless under the eternal nightlight above her bed. Her forehead tightens into a frown.

Gradually she sensed my presence and opens her eyes. Looking at me intently, she asks, “Why can’t I die?”

I am not sure I am qualified to answer this question.
“How can I know that?” I ask.

She starts blaming it on her ancestry, the sturdy Dutch grandparents, and the German immigrants who sired us all. Apparently, they too had outlived their time.

It seemed silly and I smiled at her. She sees it, too. She squeezes my hand and falls back asleep.

By two a.m. even the straight-backed visitor’s chair can’t keep me awake. She frowns and mumbles. She is reaching upward, motioning, pleading to God, “Let me go…let me go…let me die!”

I touch her hand, “Mother?”

Quickly, she pulls her hands to her chest. She seems embarrassed. I know of no other way to help her, so I ask, “Maybe God has something you need to finish?” She looks puzzled.

“Is there someone you hate or haven’t forgiven?”

She ponders this hesitating, “I don’t know of anyone.”

We have come this far for some reason. “What about your father?” I suggest reluctantly.

A long sigh escapes, “Ohhhh him.” She does not see me. She is collecting, sorting… I wait.

I know so little about them, her and her father. I imagine her hands holding the things I do not know. She grips each bitter relic; clenching, unclenching, again, and again and again until finally surrendering she says, “I can…I will forgive him.”

At this moment I see her in a vision. She is standing at the far end of a deeply furrowed field. The soil is rich and dark; the furrows deep, ready for planting. Behind her the sky swirls and moans. A storm is coming. Her hand is at her forehead, as
if she is looking into a bright light, still trying to see me so far away. As I watch, I become aware that she has changed. She stands tall, outlined against the darkened sky. I see her as she once was, in a box of family photographs. She is young again.
I am both a writer and an artist, parts of me that give me great joy with serious demands. My art has dominated but within it the writer exists. A deep desire to depict beauty and the essential truths of life keep me occupied. I have much to say.
Don’t be Afraid of the Dark: A Personal Narrative

by Avery Underwood

College Nonfiction
Don’t be Afraid of the Dark:
A Personal Narrative

“Don’t be afraid of the dark,” my mother would whisper. “Don’t be afraid, my sweetheart.”

It’s nighttime and the three-quarter moon outside my window creates elongated shadow-clouds on my wall that seem to shift and morph in time to my breath.

My mother is warm and heavy beside me. We are bundled together under thick covers patterned with cartoon ponies. My single bed is big enough for us two and I snuggle closer, her breath tickling the back of my neck as she says, “Hush, girl. Don’t be afraid of the dark.”

I am eight and soon my mother is snoring softly beside me. She lay down beside me to help me sleep, but the rigors of her busy day—work, work, and more work—sap her strength. As soon as she stops long enough to rest, she’s in dreamland.

Don’t be afraid of the dark, my mother always says. And why would I be?

I slip the purloined book and my tiny red keychain flashlight out from the hidey-nook between my mattress and the wall. It is *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King and I am halfway through this tale of a dead child resurrected by his father’s
Don't be Afraid of the Dark: A Personal Narrative

boundless grief. Some of it is over my head, but I do what I do with all books: read what I understand and let the rest drift away. Travel down into my subconscious where it colors my dreams and shapes the shadows on my wall as my sleeping mother sighs softly, lost in grownup nightmares of overtime shifts and growing stacks of unpaid bills.

Reading by the flashlight’s dim glow, I learn of ancient Indian burial grounds and the lengths that a parent will go to in order to save a child, to keep it safe even from death itself. My blanket is tented over my head to keep the dim light from waking my mother. She needs her sleep. She is so tired.

I read of a father climbing over treacherous deadfall branches with his dead son in his arms and think about love and sacrifice. I wonder whether my mother would do the same for me, given the same set of circumstances.

This is not my first grownup book, but it is the most pleasurable.

On the shelves of my shadowy little room stand paperback sentinels: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; Alice in Wonderland; Little House on the Prairie. Children’s books, to be sure, but adventuresome ones. Not baby books, but ones which serve as doors to other, brighter worlds. I’ve read those books time and time again, and once their secrets had been unleashed, I ventured into my mother’s room. Peered up at shelf after shelf of paperback mysteries and self-help tomes and thick literary classics with tiny type that makes my head hurt. On the topmost shelf lived the forbidden books: romance and horror novels with gaudy bright covers picturing lovestruck couples
embracing and splatters of blood.

I snuck out the romance novels first. Left my own books in their place, turned spine-side in, like changelings in a newborn’s bassinet.

Read of heartbreak and passion. Worlds beyond my understanding and which did not capture me like the terror residing within the covers of a battered old Stephen King paperback.

I craved horror.
I craved fear.
I craved the escape which came from novels about death and gloom and graveyards.

And so I dragged the step stool flush with the bookshelf and stood on my tiptoes to reach the highest shelf. Could not quite snag the black-spined King novel that was my prize and so I climbed the shelves, my bare feet leaving behind a trail in the dust.

Snuck out of my mother’s room with the paperback hidden beneath my sweater and secreted it in my special hiding spot, to be read late at night only.

In the here, in the now—although these are still only memories, grown vague and rosy with the passage of years—my mother muttered in her sleep and rolled up into a ball. I turned the page and fought against the fatigue which tried to claim me.

Faintly, I could hear the downstairs people arguing and the yap-yap-yap of the little dog who lived in the apartment above us. The scabrous click-click of his nails on the floor that was my ceiling gave me the shivers. It was too easy to imagine the long fingernails of a dead child making the same sound as
Don't be Afraid of the Dark: A Personal Narrative

he scratched on his parents’ front door, trying to come home again.

There was school tomorrow. Another long, dull day spent practicing spelling and reading from primers that I’d mastered two years before. I didn’t dare sneak *Pet Sematary* into my sparkly pink knapsack. If my teacher, Mrs. Cherigan, found the paperback, there’d be a phone call to my mother for sure.

It had happened before.

Did you know your daughter’s reading adult books? Did you know we caught her reading some trashy book to her friends at recess? Did you know, did you know, did you know?

Of course she knew.

It was our mother-daughter secret.

The books were forbidden, and yet they were not. It had not escaped my attention that there was always a convenient footstool placed beside my mother’s tall bookshelf, nor that the batteries for my flashlight were always replaced before it went dead. I had seen the corner of my blanket tent twitch and sometimes it seemed like my mother was only shamming sleep.

It was not until recently that I asked her about those nights. Did she know what I was up to? Had I really fooled her with my childish subterfuge?

My mother, grayer now and with countless laugh lines around her eyes and mouth, just smiled. “What do you think, honey?”

Answer enough.

But at eight, I was just pleased to have pulled a fast one on my mom, who rarely missed a trick. At eight, I thought I was
more mature than my peers and sneered at the baby books they pulled out at reading time. At eight, I knew there were more worlds than those found in stories about missing puppies and kids raising money to save their school library.

There were other worlds. Darker worlds.

At eight, I learned what I had long suspected: a book was a door into another land and what lay beyond its cover, in the wild depths of its pages, could be fair or could be foul. A book showed you things made of some writer's imagination but which somehow extended the imagination, as if the book itself was some magical elixir which amplified your thoughts like a stereo speaker.

Through the thin and slightly brittle pages, Stephen King whispered his tale of the desperate father and the boy named Gage, run down in the highway by a tanker truck. But these words and ideas and terrible images also served to turn up the visual volume on my own thoughts and fears and dreams.

I imagined myself dead on the road in front of our apartment building, the neighbors leaning out their windows to gawk at me.

I imagined my mother staggering under my weight as she tried to carry me to a place where she could bring me back and make me safe again.

I imagined my nails, dirty with gravedirt, scrabbling against the pitted wood of our apartment's battered front door. Would my mother’s eyes widen with surprise or terror when she opened the door to see me returned to her?
A book is a power source, I learned from *Pet Sematary*. I read hundreds of books before that one, and thousands more after it, but that one stays with me over the years: it taught me that there is pleasure in terror and that our imaginations are limitless wildernesses that are filled with both treasure and beast.

It taught me that the best place to read a scary story is beside someone warm and safe who is willing to rescue you from the swampy depths when the story pulls you too deep.

*Don’t be afraid of the dark*, my mother would whisper. I wasn’t then, but only because I didn’t know any better.

*Don’t be afraid, my sweetheart*, I hear her say. But sometimes I am. Because my imagination knows no bounds and things hide in the dark.

Scrabbling things with dirt-clogged nails.
Avery Underwood

Avery Underwood is graduating in May with a master's degree in biology at Arizona State University, where she also graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in genetics. As an Arizona native, she is committed to giving back to the underserved community in Tempe. In her free time, she enjoys playing her cello and hiking the beautiful Arizona landscape. One quote she lives by is: “Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly” by Langston Hughes.
Of Oceans and Adulthood

by Josephine Boring

High School Nonfiction
“Things will get better.”

Some people have told me that it is up to the self to get better. But let me assure anyone who believes that, the voices won’t let you. At least by yourself, they won’t.

That’s right.

By yourself, the voices outnumber you.

Which is why people pop pills to cure them of their woes. Any other way, you’d be by yourself. But being alone with the pills offers very little help, either. They mock you in all of their pristine glory, perfectly round and perfectly white. Everything you aren’t. It tugs you down to think about how you need to be fixed with drugs.

Now now, you cry, what about therapy? To that I ask, how much does it help to talk to someone about what it feels like to drown? It grabs your leg and pulls you under to think about how you need to be saved from the watery embrace of death. No one wants to be described as the victim. So why must people constantly remind you that you are a victim, and that is all that you’ll ever be?

A victim of that feeling of drowning in that inky black ocean. The ocean that glints in the moonlight with the top layer of grease that moves with the waves. The ocean that tastes so
Of Oceans and Adulthood

strongly of salt and chemicals it brings tears to your stinging eyes. The ocean that makes you cry and cry and cry until you can't cry anymore. At that point you aren't a person anymore, you are a victim with hollow insides and smiley outsides. Oh, how you love the ocean.

I used to be excited to see the ocean for the first time. I had been dreaming about it, ever since I was a little kid. I was excited to run my fingers through the beautiful silvery waves that sparkled in the sun and swirl around in the waves until fish surrounded me and played with me like any other princess. What happened?

I grew up.

The ocean became a disgusting thing that was chock-full of things that would hurt you without a second thought. I was blown back and pushed under by the too-powerful waves. I couldn't breathe or see for at least thirty seconds. It was then I realized—the ocean was just like the real world.

And just like the real world, I ran away from the ocean. I ran away again. I should have stayed. I should have stayed and taken responsibility for my actions, took responsibility for the horrible things I've done no matter the consequences, took responsibility and become an adult. I would love my new life as an adult, wise and withholding, bearing my mask of wisdom. I could very slowly go insane. Hidden from view, I could dig my nails into the side of my head, tearing flesh from the sides, feeling the sweetly warm blood between my fingers, screaming at the top of my lungs, not from the pain but from the voices. There is nowhere to go, nowhere where I am safe. Nowhere is a desperate place, full of lost souls and pathetic people. I remember my pitifulness as I remember a best friend or family member. Uselessness and redundancy fills, congeals,
and mires my being, like slime in my veins. Could I escape this inescapable feeling of drowning? Could I break free, away from the choking feeling that grasps me tightly, and flee to a place greener in which I can breathe, so that I can finally gain back a bit of the innocence I had lost as a child, and as content and as sane, as blinking fireflies?

I could, you know. I can choose my own fate. Others manipulate how they feel so that they always seem happy—even if it is at their own expense. The moon comes out, tides waned from the shore, signs of things getting better.

Because that is what everyone promises.

“Things will get better.”
I am truly a mediocre girl with mediocre talents. My only notable quality is my determination--I worked hard to improve my writing, and it ended up helping me reach my goal. It goes without saying, to have fun with something, you have to be good at it; I work hard to have fun.
Book Cover Design
by Hannah Roehr

Book Cover Design
This piece is a double-exposure drawing representing creative freedom. The human expression of freedom is shown with the lifted, open hands. Hands are also a tool used for writing. Nature’s expression of freedom is shown through all sorts of colorful, bright butterflies flying up. They demonstrate all of the creativity and variety that comes from writing. This drawing is fit for the Tempe Writers Forum because authors are expressing themselves freely in their writing.
Hannah Roehr

Hannah Roehr is a sophomore at Arizona State University studying Business, Public Service and Public Policy. She works at the Arizona State Senate as a Page. Hannah enjoys drawing and graphic design in her spare time.
Tempe Writing Contest
2019 Reviewers’
Biographies
FICTION

Tom Bonfiglio’s stories have appeared in two dozen publications, including Fiction, Lake Effect, Wag’s Revue, Evergreen Review, Fringe Magazine, mixer and The Literary Review. His story, Jamestown, N.Y. received Special Mention in The Pushcart Prize Anthology. He teaches writing at Arizona State University.


Marc Mason lives in Tempe and teaches in the Academic Success Program and in the Masters of Liberal Studies program at Arizona State University. His works include the young adult novels Schism: Out of the Shadows, Battery: the Arrival and the sequel Schism: Fearful Symmetry; non-fiction books The Joker’s Advocate, and The Aisle Seat: Life on the Edge of Popular Culture; and comic books Red Sonja: Raven and Red Sonja: Sanctuary. His most recent short story appears in Athena Voltaire: Pulp Tales.

POETRY

Andrea Janelle Dickens is originally from Tempe, but spent much of her childhood in Virginia. She currently teaches in the Writing Programs of the ASU English Department. She is the author
of *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* and of several dozen published poems. Her poems have recently appeared in *The New South, streetcake, Found Poetry Review, *82 Review, Of Zoos, and anthologies by Kind of a Hurricane Press and Silver Birch Press.

**Rosemarie Dombrowski** is the inaugural Poet Laureate of Phoenix, AZ and the founding editor of both rinky dink press and *Write On, Downtown: A Journal of Phoenix Writing*. She is also the curator and host of the Phoenix Poetry Series and First Friday Poetry on Roosevelt Row. She is the recipient of five Pushcart nominations, a 2017 Arts Hero Award, the 2017 Carrie McCray Literary Award in Nonfiction, and a fellowship from the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics. Her collections include *The Book of Emergencies* (Five Oaks Press, 2014), *The Philosophy of Unclean Things* (Finishing Line Press, 2017) and *The Cleavage Planes of Southwest Minerals [A Love Story]*, winner of the 2017 Split Rock Review chapbook competition. She teaches on ASU’s Downtown Phoenix campus, for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and at Changing Hands Bookstore. [www.rdpoet.com](http://www.rdpoet.com)

**Ryan Holden** received his Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Arizona State University. His poems have been published in *Hobble Creek Review, Adirondack Review*, and *Ampersand Review*. He currently teaches at Arizona State University.

**Patricia Colleen Murphy** founded Superstition Review at Arizona State University, where she teaches creative writing and magazine production. Her book *Bully Love* won the 2019 Press 53 Poetry Award. Her book *Hemming Flames* (Utah State University Press) won the 2016 May Swenson Poetry Award judged by Stephen Dunn, and the 2017 Milt Kessler Poetry Award. A chapter from her memoir in progress was published as a chapbook by New Orleans Review. Her writing has appeared in many literary journals, including *The Iowa*
Tempe Writing Contest 2019 Reviewers’ Biographies

*Review, Quarterly West, American Poetry Review,* and has received awards from Gulf Coast, Bellevue Literary Review, among others. She lives in Phoenix, AZ.

**Kelly Nelson** is the author of two poetry chapbooks. Her work has appeared in *Anomaly, Seattle Review, Forklift, Ohio, Best American Experimental Writing* and elsewhere. She holds a PhD in cultural anthropology and teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University.

**NON-FICTION (PERSONAL ESSAYS, MEMOIRS)**

**Rebecca Byrkit** MFA in Poetry from the University of Arizona, is an award-winning author of four books of poetry, published by SUN/gemini Press and Kariboux, Ltd. Her work appears in *Ploughshares, Best American Poetry, Crazyhorse, Arizona Highways, Black Warrior Review, Rolling Stone* and *New Letters*, among many other journals and anthologies. She is a founding faculty member of the Masters of Liberal Studies program at ASU, teaching Memoir and Personal Essay, Poetry and Memory, The Arrival of Belief, and advises graduating candidates on their Applied Projects. She is an affiliate faculty member with the ASU English Department (Creative Writing), as well as the Virginia G. Piper Center and Barrett Honors. She has served as faculty editor/advisor in creative nonfiction with *Superstition Review* for nine years.

**Cat Pleska** is an author, editor, educator, publisher, and storyteller. She often leads writing workshops in the community and is a former essayist for West Virginia Public Radio, book reviewer for West Virginia University Press and the *Charleston Gazette*. Her memoir, *Riding on Comets*, was published by West Virginia University Press, May 2015. *Riding on Comets* was short listed for the 2015 book of the year in the memoir category by *Foreword Magazine*. She is editor of *Voices on Unity: Coming Together, Falling Apart*, published by Moun-
tain State Press in 2017. She holds an MFA from Goucher College in Baltimore in Creative Nonfiction and is a full time Instructor for Arizona State University’s Master of Liberal Studies Program.