

Spirit First Poetry Contest 2019 Winning Poems

We are pleased to announce the winning entries for our tenth annual Spirit First Meditation Poetry Contest. This year we received 1,347 poems from 48 states in the U.S. and from 41 foreign nations, including Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland (Republic of Ireland), Japan, Kenya, Lagos, Malawi, Malta, Myanmar, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Scotland, South Africa, Southern Cameroons, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Tanzania, The Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe (we also received numerous poems without location indicated).

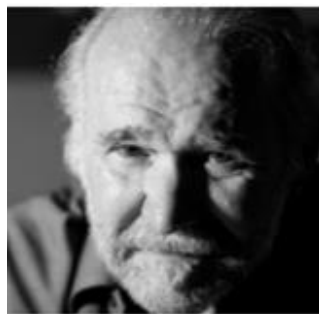
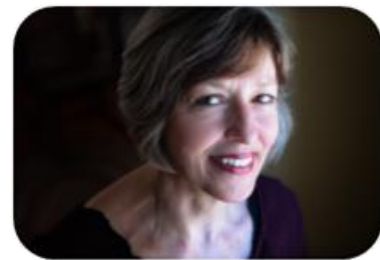
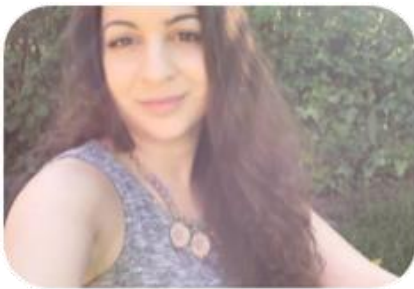
We are always thrilled—and amazed—to have the participation of so many meditation and mindfulness poets from all over the world, and we are honored by your presence from home and abroad. This poetry event is such a great joy for all of us at Spirit First, and especially for our devoted judging committee (a group that grows every year!).

This year we again present a Micro Poetry Award. Our micro poetry category includes poems up to about 20 words, encompassing short forms such as haiku, tanka, and senryu but also including short poems without fixed rules. Every poem received is considered in our main contest, but we then also set aside short forms for a special category award. This year we selected two poems for our Editor's Choice Award.

Thank you to all the many beautiful poets who participated—please know that we deeply appreciate every poem, every word. Your writing on the themes of meditation and mindfulness is important to the world, and what a great work it was to select winners from so many exquisite, meaningful poems (incredibly difficult work). Thank you for being part of who we are. We hope you will join us for our 2020 Spirit First Meditation Poetry Contest—we look forward to reading your words and being touched by your spiritual journey.

Thank you to our judging committee for your thoughtful, dedicated work.

Congratulations to all our winners!



First-Place Winner

SEA GLASS

by Diana Poulos-Lutz

I found sea glass
at the shore,
washed up on the sand
with broken shells,
still wet,
sparkling and shining
green, brown,
and blue.
I picked up a piece
and ran my fingers softly
over the flat surface
and firmly
over the edges.
The glass did not
cut or hurt,
as it had been tumbled
and tossed in ocean waters
for some years—
how many I'm not sure.
I picked up some more
pieces and decided to walk
in the water
and on the sand
for miles and days and years.
I want the sand to do
the same to me.
I asked the ocean
to smooth my jaded mind,
so that I won't
hurt,
as readily,
as broken
glass that has never met the sea.



Diana Poulos-Lutz started her journey of mindfulness and meditation as she began long walks along the beaches of Long Island, NY throughout the seasons. As a photographer, and an admirer of the natural world, she began writing poetry to express those moments of reflection and spiritual connection.

Diana has a B.A., M.A. in Political Science from Long Island University as well as an MPhil, Master of Philosophy in Politics, from the New School for Social Research. She has taught Political Science courses for several years at Long Island University. Some of her areas of interest are women's rights, civil rights, democratic theory, and civic engagement. Diana is an active citizen and currently works at a public high school. Diana's poems have recently been featured on literary and media sites such as New Verse News and Pantsuit Nation. She has performed as a featured poet at various venues on Long Island and she is the winner of the 2019 Nassau County Poet Laureate Society poetry contest. Diana's poetry is inspired by her deep connection to the natural world, along with her desire to promote equality, peace, mindfulness, and empowerment. You can find more of her poetry as well as her nature photography at: <https://www.facebook.com/dpouloslutz>

Second-Place Winner

WINTER MORNING

by James Crews

When I can no longer say thank you
for this new day and the waking into it,
for the cold scrape of the kitchen chair
and the ticking of the space heater glowing
orange as it warms the floor near my feet,
I know it is because I've been fooled again
by the selfish, unruly man who lives in me
and believes he deserves only safety
and comfort. But if I pause as I do now,
and watch the streetlights outside winking
off one by one like old men closing their
cloudy eyes, if I listen to my tired neighbors
slamming car doors hard against the morning
and see the steaming coffee in their mugs
kissing their chapped lips as they sip and
exhale each of their worries white into
the icy air around their faces—then I can
remember this one life is a gift each of us
was handed and told to open: Untie the bow
and tear off the paper, look inside
and be grateful for whatever you find
even if it is only the scent of a tangerine
that lingers on the fingers long after you've finished eating it.



James Crews lives on part of an organic farm with his husband in Vermont. He is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Book of What Stays* (Prairie Schooner Prize, 2011) and *Telling My Father* (Cowles Prize, 2017), and his work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Raleigh Review*, *Crab Orchard Review* and *The New Republic*, among other journals. Crews also recently edited the anthology, *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness and Connection* (Green Writers Press, 2019). He teaches creative writing at SUNY-Albany.

Third-Place Winner

PRAYER TO BECOME SOIL

by Joanne Esser

Even after the storm that rips leaves
From the trees, even as branches crack
And fall, through the empty limbs

The sky remains. Under it, I stand
Empty-handed. I pray: Make me
Into something solid that will last.

Crumble me into soil beneath that sky,
Dark, thick, moist. Composed of
What has fallen apart. Humble

Enough to embrace the smallest seed.
Help me be modest, quiet, patient
So new roots might push in.

No longer do I want to be the plant,
The flower or fruit. Now is my time
Of stillness, to be the black ground

From which brighter things emerge.
As my blossoming ends, may I become
That which holds what is about to begin.



Joanne Esser writes poetry and nonfiction in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has also been a teacher of young children for over thirty years. She earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Hamline University and published a chapbook of poems, *I Have Always Wanted Lightning*, with Finishing Line Press in 2012. Her full-length collection of poetry, *Humming At The Dinner Table* will be published in October 2019 by Finishing Line Press. Other recent work appears in *Common Ground Review*, *Nostos*, *Welter*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Miramar* and *Passager*, among other journals.



Editor's Choice Award

MATINS

by Ann Glumac

I worship in the early dawn,
an ecumenical affair.

The muezzin is a warbler of some kind,
his call a whisper that darts and weaves
through the soft green leaves of June.

The water is temple,
chapel, mosque; a holy,
holy place
where I am supplicant.

I breathe in the Holy Spirit,
incense of lilacs, apple blossoms,
Balm-o-Gileads,
the clean smell of fish.

I give thanks. For the bindi
of the red-winged blackbird.
For the tapers of river grass
lit by the rising sun.
For the pollen dusted like blessing ash
in quiet bays and inlets.

I am infused with grace,
so grateful for this moment
I thank them all:
God, Allah, the Creator, Yahweh.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

One cannot be agnostic in this boat.



Ann Glumac lives on the banks of the St. Louis River in Duluth, Minnesota, where she is inspired every time she looks out the window. A writer and a poet, a trainer and a consultant, she currently is at work on her second collection. Ann also edits poetry manuscripts and conducts poetry workshops.

She writes to capture moments large and small, to make sense of them and to share them with others—creating, with her readers, a common experience, a place they go together. While composed of words, her poems owe their vitality to this interaction between writer and reader.

Her 2014 debut collection, *A Skim of Ice on Still Water*, was a finalist for a Northeastern Minnesota Book Award.

Editor's Choice Award

BANGKOK JEWEL

by Derek Hanebury

Derek Hanebury is a Canadian writer of poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. His first book of poetry, *Nocturnal Tonglen* (Ekstasis), was released in 2006, and his second volume, *Songs for Aging Children*, will be forthcoming soon. His poems have also been published in numerous magazines and broadcasted on CBC radio. He has a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from UBC and taught writing at North Island College on Vancouver Island until his retirement in 2017.



BANGKOK JEWEL

by Derek Hanebury

Taking a break from the sun and the great souvenir search, I unzip and stand
facing the urinal leaking two Thai teas I downed an hour ago
with a platter of *khao phat Amerikan*
when something shifts in the edge of my eye;
remembering the green viper I watched yesterday
scale the plaster wall and coil into a hole above the door, I am relieved
to recognize a woman spidered onto the floor, spread out like an opened lotus,
her thin arm washing the polished cement with wide-circling swipes of a wet rag.
She keeps her head bowed to her work just as I keep my eyes forward now, observing
stippled plaster and wondering if she'll wait for this white guy to finish his whizz before
she finishes her floor. I push a little harder when I see she is circling in my direction,
angling under the row of urinals, but those Thai teas were tall and my poor tourist's bladder is
still stretched like a water balloon full to bursting. What can I do, but pretend she isn't there on
the floor, halfway closer to me now that I can see the strands of grey in her dark hair,
the thin ropes of muscle braided through her tawny arm?

Mother? Grandmother? The dutiful Thai wife doomed to clean the floors of public bathrooms
while her husband hunkers down at the bar?

Just under the whish of my pissing, I hear it then, a whispering sound subtle and soothing
as water over sand, the words indistinguishable at first beneath the flowing water but growing
now that I tune in, her every outbreath singing it to herself:

Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum.

A Buddhist then, polishing the floor while chanting a mantra to scrub the illusions from her eyes,
not just cleaning a floor but scraping the sticky samskara off the Buddha self,
using every breath to find the jewel in the lotus. And I wonder how real I am to her now, or if I
even exist as she handmops the floor in slow circles; like ripples in a koi pond, she moves

towards my feet, my face flushing in the steaming Bangkok heat as the waves of her washing
edge the dust from one side of my sandals, the next pass skewing slightly to leave me marooned
on a small island of dry concrete,
surrounded by a tide of *Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum*;
not sure if my eyes are open or closed then, my exposed self awash in the mantra and the energy
of this bird-boned woman serving her Lord, turning the room into an ocean, into a temple,
with her *Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum*, until she is somewhere behind me, and
with a shudder and a shake,
I'm finally empty.

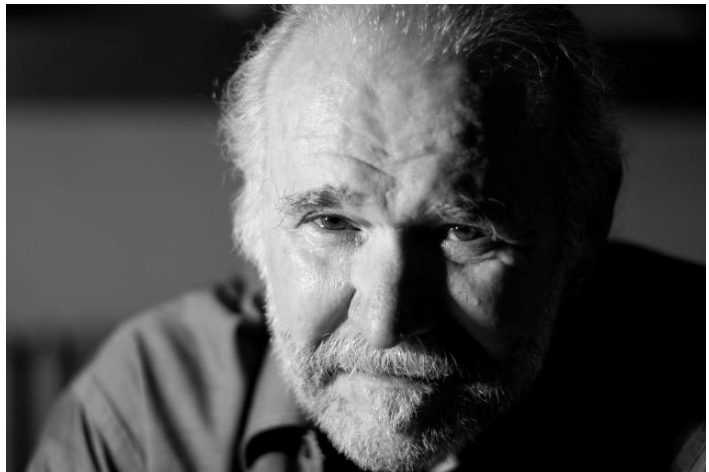
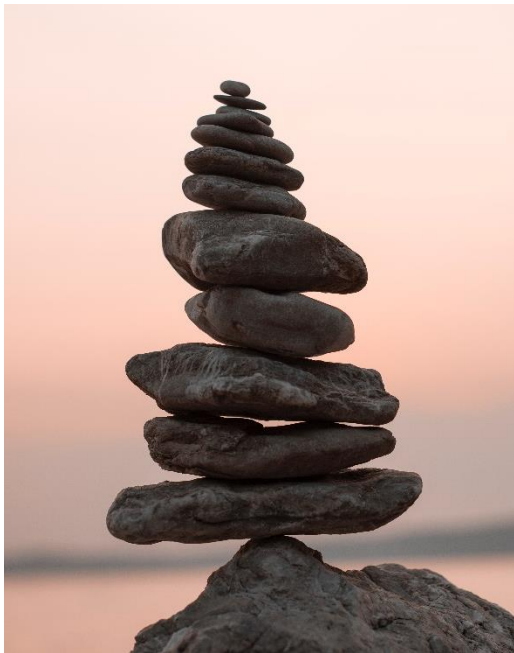
Micro Poetry Award

THAT PLACE

by Charles Rossiter

Doing perfectly nothing,
doing nothing perfectly.

Either way
is a good way to be.



Charles Rossiter, National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Recipient, hosts the twice-monthly podcast series at www.PoetrySpokenHere.com. His work has been featured on NPR, at the Chicago Blues Festival and the Dodge Festival in NJ. Recent books include: *All Over America: Road Poems*; *Winter Poems*; *Cold Mountain 2000: Han Shan in the City, Lakeside Poems* and the just-released *Green Mountain Meditations*, all from FootHills publishing.



Spirit First