

ADULT DIVISION POEMS:

FIRST PLACE, LUCILLE MORGAN WILSON AWARD:

INCINERATOR

My mother kept our house hot. Our kitchen a mirage of heat
and dish water. Yellow grease spots crackling on the ceiling, food pantry
frozen chicken in the crock pot & week old bread for the dogs.
All of our spoons burnt black & boiling. I tried to spit shine an inheritance, a family addiction,
I mean heirloom. My mother's 90 day chip sits at the head of our dinner table.
House humid and humming, my mother says: I feed & I feed & I feed
the ones I love. Everything I touch gets
fat, she says. Except for herself. Kept thin as smoke. Almost see-through
sometimes. A lunch of cigarettes & Tylenol on teeth.
Sweltering, she says, when it gets bad enough
she'll even fish her hand down inside.
Pull out a handful of guts, anything to be made lighter. Thin as a match.
She says I've always been her sweet one, blood made of syrup. Thick & slow.
It's how I've never been a fast anything. Marshmallow joints. Powdered sugar
stuffed into cheeks. Strawberry jelly pink. Never not been soft.
My sister, me and her, we used to share clothes. Used to sneak
snacks underneath the covers together. Sticky in July, melting.
Used to be sweet. Used to be full. And let ourselves be.
I rise every morning still wishing we could be more like the sun
warm and round and in love with our own light

Leah Waughtal-Magiera
Des Moines

SECOND PLACE, LUCILLE MORGAN WILSON AWARD:

SITTING BESIDE MY DYING BROTHER

With neither toys nor playful hands,
nor a Frisbee, nor a fork for Sunday
pancakes—syrup dripping,

nor a jack to fix a flat, nor words—
as he has drifted enough away
to not hear mine, nor me his,

what is left is our breath, rising
and falling, like two oars of a boat
rowing home.

Bill Graeser
Fairfield

THIRD PLACE, LUCILLE MORGAN WILSON AWARD:

(un) yielding

golden shovel after Letitia Elizabeth Landon

still beneath the light of late winter from her window, she
lies mottled and swollen in her paralysis, she is
breathing loudly from her mouth like a
knot of tangled brier
lodged in her throat; sputum rose
this morning, glorious gurgle to break her silence whose
oppression hangs violet veils across the room: browning buds
fallen one by one from a bouquet on the table yield
a peculiar spent beauty nestled atop each other, a fragrant
decay wafting past proper disposal, past the harvest
when she wore womanhood like apples on her cheeks, for
the days and nights wrapped in her wilding thoughts, the
time she spun honey
her hair a crown of bees.

Dawn Terpstra
Lynnville

SPECIAL AWARD FOR FIRST-TIME ENTRANT:

KETCHUP

I hate ketchup.
It's not ketchup's fault.
Ketchup didn't do anything to me.
It's just every time I see a crimson pool on a plate
I'm taken back to being seven -
to Bosnia, to the war, to the refugee camp -
to being covered in chicken pox and
the doctor camouflaging me from head to toe
with a bright red paste.
It looked like blood.
I thought I was going to die. That we were all going to die.
Some of us did.
But I lived and came to America - to Iowa -
where they put ketchup on everything...
except for steak.
Ketchup on steak is a big mistake.
And I don't make mistakes.
I survive.

Hilary Naab
Monticello

FIRST PLACE, HUMOROUS VERSE:

“RETAIL”- IATION

Razor blades and axes,
Assorted power tools
All need to be enlisted.
This rival knows no rules.
To free imprisoned products
Requires something drastic,
For teeth are not sufficient
For items trapped in plastic.

**Lori Shannon
Manning**

SECOND PLACE, HUMOROUS VERSE:

PREMONITION

I know how I will die
I can feel it in my bones
My kids will unplug my life support
to charge their dying phones

Jan Blankenburg
Donnellson

THIRD PLACE. HUMOROUS VERSE:

"RE-DO HAIKU"

If only I knew
how to do haiku.
Always a snafu
with sensory view.
Count syllables, too?
Wrong again! Oh, phew!
If I had a clue?
What a haiku coup!

Mary Jedlicka Humston
Iowa City

FIRST PLACE. GRANT WOOD POETRY PRIZE:

**AMERICAN GOTHIC;
OIL ON BEAVER BOARD by Grant Wood**

She's sick of no end to work
on the farm, squashing chances
of meeting a husband -
no end to her father's madness.

She wants to attend the square
dance in town. Year after year,
her father says, No. She
cleans the horse stall, pitches

in new hay, brings the mare
fresh water and grain. Apron
stained and stinking, her new
dress is ruined. He's dressed

in overalls and a jacket, waiting
to pray for the judgment day,
here for a picture in front
of the Dibble house. He is stern,

resolute as he holds a pitchfork.
She is ready to scream, ready
to run. Her mind set, she is ready
to be dazzled with hope.

Pat Underwood
Colfax

SECOND PLACE, GRANT WOOD POETRY PRIZE:

WHY DO TREES GROW?

In my tenth year, I wondered why trees keep growing.
Outside my window one stood, skeletal but vibrant,
Benchmarks of its lifespan as it looked down at me,
Its rings my age.

Did they grow to reach the sky before their neighbors?
I knew trees clamber over each other to sup on the sun's rays,
Much like my brothers and I did at the call for dinner.
The one who got to the table first ate the most.

Did they grow for their own sake?
I closed my eyes and visualized my limbs growing,
Marking my height with pencil marks on the kitchen wall,
Believing I could will myself as tall as the house.

Did they even ever stop growing?
My envy turned green as a leaf,
Over branches that might span from our roof to the heavens,
When only my ears and nose would ever grow endlessly.

Or did the tree ever stare at us below—
My brothers, matured and moved on, me, close behind—
And pine for the day when it would be old enough to uproot,
Tiptoe away on its tendrils, never to return?

Red and Yellow House in Munich, https://twitter.com/Grant_D_Wood/status/1632349162850119683

Jim Hackett
Cedar Rapids

THIRD PLACE. GRANT WOOD POETRY PRIZE:

THE OTHER SIDE OF TIME

Barbed wire subdivides and scars the open range,
writing the last chapter of the "Old West," forsaking
old soul cowboys who deny and resist change
while dreaming about wild horses in need of breaking.

The winter of 1940, arrives. Winds, sharp and commanding,
find the cowboys missing and snow drifting deep
around fence posts and unfortunate creatures standing
too long in the cold dreams of an old cowboy's sleep.

Dream horses gallop from the other side of time,
into predawn, to wait for phantom cowboys pretending
time has not passed them by. But cowboys fail to climb
from sleep, unwilling to challenge barbed wire fencing.

Dream horses and their shadows arrive in the moonlight.
Nostrils flare, manes fly. Pulling up short of barbed wires,
they stand with the brutal cold and never-ending night
to watch and wonder what the world desires.

February - 1940, lithograph.

Kathy Meyer
Winterset

FIRST PLACE. TRADITIONAL FORMS:

AS IT RISES ONE DEGREE

Glaciers weep into the sea, unseen tears, as it rises one degree,
the polar bear mourns swallowed shores, as it rises one degree.

Fields whose flowers danced in the sun, now lie wilted and bare,
a thirsty earth gasps for rain, as it rises one degree.

Forests, once a verdant sanctuary, now flame and smoke,
ablaze with despair, dreads of evacuation, as it rises one degree.

The sea, a cradle of storms, births giants in its depths,
their fury unleashed on land, as it rises one degree.

Coral kingdoms, vibrant with life, now pale and still,
their colors fade, as it rises one degree.

Grains that fed nations, wither in their fields,
harvests of hunger reaped, as it rises one degree.

Permafrost exhales ancient ghosts into the sky,
a cycle of warming locked, as it rises one degree.

I remember the sound of laughter in my neighborhood walks
now I hear hushed fearful concerns, as it rises one degree.

Maryam Daftari
Fairfield

SECOND PLACE. TRADITIONAL FORMS:

WE MAKE OUR OWN MOUNTAINS

We have no mountains, only corn.
From the ruins of wild grasses, we've made ordered files
of seven-foot forests that cover hundreds of miles,
and we grow them only to grow more corn.

A small percentage feeds our forlorn cows;
more is destined for adventures in hybridization,
the expectant pollen doomed to sterilization –
the plucking of the children who trudge the rows.

Harvest comes and we make our own mountains
from surplus seed piling up at every elevator,
abandoned without a single protector,
hopefully oblivious to the snow and rain.

These mountains of corn taunt me with an indifference
That tempts me to climb and sink down into their kernels.

Joshua Borgman
Creston

THIRD PLACE. TRADITIONAL FORMS:

GRAY VEIL OF JANUARY

Morning sky is not the color of life
when opening kitchen curtains today.
Awakening past my five-forty-five
I find a death palette of placid grey.
So tempted to traverse them closed again
stopping, I stare at pale sycamore arms
reaching where winter's now boldly set in,
squalling winds having stripped branches of bark,
frustratingly clawing a lifeless skies
arms struggle to tear open clouds so low
planning to explore this winter disguise,
to lay bare spring's gold, craving warm hellos.
Desire eclipsed by blizzard eruption
thunder snow bludgeons civilization.

Pamela Blomgren
Oskaloosa

FIRST PLACE, HAIKU:

quiet snowstorm
the muted colors
of a barn quilt

Mary Ann Conley
Marion

SECOND PLACE, HAIKU:

maple
turning
red
sky
at
night

Del Todey Turner
Waterloo

THIRD PLACE, HAIKU:

hometown Thanksgiving:
we laugh together
as adults

Angela McGlothlen
Cedar Rapids

FIRST PLACE, NATIONAL/WORLD EVENTS:

UNKNOWN FATE OF HIND RAJAB TRAPPED UNDER FIRE*

An urgent call came in. Small voice. Faint plea.
Red Crescent help desk workers patched it through.
I'm 6-years-old. Will you come and get me?

A tank is next to us. Close as can be.
There's shooting, screaming. Tell me what to do.
An urgent call came in. Small voice. Faint plea.

In Gaza. Trapped. Their carload tried to flee.
Advice: Hide quick! And don't let them find you.
I'm 6-years-old. Will you come and get me?

They're dead she said of all her family.
Then she said *sleeping*, but they won't come to.
An urgent call came in. Small voice. Faint plea.

Night fell. *I'm scared*. And it's too dark to see.
They called a truce. Sent in a rescue crew.
I'm 6-years-old. Will you come and get me?

The team hears car doors, gun fire. Sirens queue.
Then lines go dead. The child? (Lost.) No one knew.
An urgent call came in. Small voice. Faint plea.
I'm 6-years-old. Will you come and get me?

**Villanelle based on a Feb, 5, 2024, BBC article on the Israel-Gaza War.*

**Lisa Morlock
Johnston**

SECOND PLACE. NATIONAL/WORLD EVENTS:

GAZA: THE BOMBING OF JABALIA REFUGEE CAMP, OCT. 2023

Today, away from me, across the ocean
they are lost, the water gone, the ground
broken into feeding troughs for stray dogs.
Grown men are swallowed
beneath the last horizon impossible to find.

Children snatched from childhood
are gathered in grey blankets;
soldiers in olive green trucks
hand the mothers lost memories;
there is no sky.

Today, away from me, across the ocean
I see people disappearing
in explosions of blue; powerful words
from someone with medals
say each bomb is a benediction,
blessing the killing fields of Palestine.

Mary Lautzenhiser Bellon
Knoxville

THIRD PLACE, NATIONAL/WORLD EVENTS:

A GOOD DAY

Deputies carry another body bag
into the morgue.
A few minutes later, a forensic pathologist
begins his examination.
Just another migrant death in the desert.
Another young man with dreams
that will never come true.
Another loved one lost to his family.
But when the doctor cuts away the shirt,
he sees something startling:
a huge tattoo across the man's chest.
A unique tattoo.
He calls the man who
strives to identify the thousands
who have died in the desert.
Maybe this one can go home.
The pathologist wonders how long
he can continue a career
where a good day means
he can send a body home for a funeral.

Engel Indo, technology liaison for Pima County Arizona Medical Examiner, identifies bodies of migrants who are found dead in the desert so they can be returned to family

Anna Nicholas
Cedar Falls

FIRST PLACE, POEMS FOR CHILDREN:

MONSTER SANDWICH

I didn't want my sandwich so
I hid it in the fridge,
way in back beneath the casserole.
Nobody could see it,
I hid it so good.
Pretty soon it was covered with mold.
It grew some bluish whiskers,
then a skinny neck.
and next an ugly face with yucky teeth.
It ate the food that hid it,
and then it grew some arms
then ate the food above and underneath.
It ate all the leftovers,
the butter, fruit, and cheese,
and then it sprouted legs every which way.
It grew so big and strong that
its limbs broke out the sides!
Then the whole fridge up and walked away.

Joyce Allen
Ankeny

SECOND PLACE. POEMS FOR CHILDREN:

I LOVE TO HEAR THE RAIN

I love to hear the rain
As it hits the window pane
Washes all beneath it clean
Makes the plants all fresh and green

I love to hear the rain

I love to hear the thunder
As through darkened skies it rumbles
Sometimes soft and sometimes loud
As it leaps from cloud to cloud

I love to hear the thunder

I love to see the sunshine
On the morning dewdrops shining
Through the tallest treetops winding
As it color codes each flower
Unaware of all its power

I love to see the sunshine

Joan Daily Rammelsberg
Marion

THIRD PLACE. POEMS FOR CHILDREN:

PUSH TO THE SKY

Daddy sends a child aloft,
creek, creek,
creek, creek.

“Higher, Higher,” cries the child.
creek, creek,
creek, creek.

Joyful shrieks pierce the wind,
creek, creek,
creek, creek.

“Grandma, Grandma, push me high,”
creek, creek,
creek, creek.

Swing with love as days go by,
creek, creek,
creek, creek.

Nancy Hanaman
Rippey