

2021 Poetry Challenge - Common Threads / Sweetelle / Fruits & Vegetables



Each year, Highland Park Poetry issues a Poetry Challenge to spark the imaginations of poets of all ages and levels - from experienced, published authors to beginning writers; from adults to students. For the 2021 Poetry Challenge, participants were given three options: write about **Common Threads** (*looking at what ties us together - literally and figuratively*), **Fruits & Vegetables** (*recognizing the United Nations' declaration that 2021 is the Year of Fruits & Vegetables*), or write a **Sweetelle** poem, a form created by Allison Joseph. The Sweetelle is a ten-line poem composed of 14-syllable lines with a refrain or repeating line for line one, five and ten.

Poems were selected by our guest judges. British poet Tina Cole judged all the poems about Common Threads. Texas poet Sylvia Riojas Vaughn made the selections for Fruits and Vegetables. Chicago Poet & Poets United Founder Jennifer Brown Banks chose the Sweetelle poems.

We thank all of the poets who shared their writing with us. We also thank the many photographers and artists who provided striking visuals to accompany the poems. We thank the many teachers and parents who encouraged their students to participate. We thank our guest judges for their time, energy and enthusiasm for the project. Highland Park Poetry also wishes to thank Christine Hartman and the Ice Hat Creative team for hosting our virtual Poetry Challenge recognition event, the Spring Shindig of Virtual Verse!

Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Dotson
Founder & Program Coordinator
www.HighlandParkPoetry.org

Common Threads



Colleen McManus Hein, Photographer

Lauren A. Zilberstein

1st Place, Elementary Student

I Will Crochet You a Heart

Yarn is a thread
 As common as the rest
 But it is similar
 To the thing in my chest
 That beat, beat, beats
 When I smile or look above
 I'm talking about the thing that lets me love.
 Yarn is thick, hard to cut, or grate,
 Just like the connection that you feel on a date.
 When wearing yarn, you feel warm and cozy,
 Just like how you feel when you're with he, them, or she
 True, it's hard to work with, but when it's finished,
 You feel so free.
 Just like confessing your love to a special person.
 It's all intertwined, like crocheting a heart,
 And the love is still there no matter how far apart.
 No matter the person you give your heart to
 The yarn will stay there like a quick kiss on a canoe.
 And when our fingers meet at last,
 I'll thank the clouds for my crocheting past.

Christine Swanberg

1st Place, Adult Non-Resident

Blue-Jinxed 1

Suppose one day long past your prime, you made
 a poor judgment call regarding laundry, mixed
 vintage tablecloths in hot water, paid
 the price with all the backgrounds blue-jinxed.
 Suppose you pulled each precious piece to find
 them all a little blue: beige to baby blue,
 red to lavender. Then the day defined
 itself in blue: email stuck in cyber glue,
 the phone call that jarred your mood, the invoice
 incorrectly calculated, a friend's
 unexpected lecture, the needling choice
 to respond or not when something dear ends.
 On those days when blue prevails from the start,
 there's not much you can do but guard your heart.

Poem first published in *Casa De Cinco Hermanas*, 2015
 Also published in author's collection *Wild Fruition:
 Sonnets, Spells, and Other Incantations*
 (Puddin'head Press, Chicago, 2017)

Julie Isaacson

1st Place, Highland Park Resident

Woven Together, Forever

I

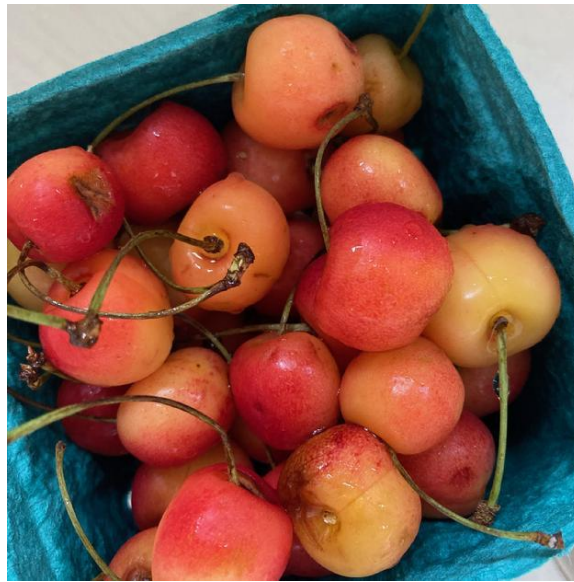
At high sea in the Caribbean,
A singer from Iowa takes the stage on the cruise talent night.
Later, I speak to him in the Karaoke bar, to learn he was from
Bettendorf, across the river from my hometown of Rock Island.
“Your maiden name was Halpern,” he says, “from the Department Store?
I remember a kind and funny man who used to fit us in shoes.”
“Yes...that was my father. He fit me in all my shoes, too!”
“Wow. That’s amazing.”
“Yes, I guess we’re sole mates.”

II

Ten years after my mother’s best friend moves to Las Vegas
I plan a visit to her elder memory facility.
Her daughter warns me, “She won’t remember you; she didn’t know my brother.
Please don’t be disappointed.”
She doesn’t know my face, my name.
Blank stare at the mention of my parents, our hometown.
I open a car-warmed box of mandel bread, my mother’s recipe.
Suddenly, her eyes focus. She speaks, feebly, slowly,
“This is like home. Like home. Now I know who you are,
this is like home.”
.A tearful, powerful moment of grace and love, as she savors a bite.

III

On my 50th birthday, I honor my deceased father, Paul,
by reading Torah, the portion Pinchas, his Hebrew name.
The sun shines on me while I read, and I believe I feel his love.
After I chant, a man in the hall asks if I could assist him to a chair.
“You have the voice of an angel, and you seem very kind,” he says. “What’s
your name?”
“Julie.”
“Ah, my daughter’s name. Nice to meet you, my name is Paul.”



Jen "Pen" Richards, Photographer

Bella Pehar

1st Place, High School Student

Life Is Not a Dress

I wish life formed a pattern that we could follow daily.
 Instead we are the seams being ripped apart
 Day by Day
 Mistake by Mistake
 Failure by Failure
 Perhaps our lives could be sewn in a perfect seam
I wish.
 Fabric lining up perfectly.
 Instead we idolize the fast fashion,
 the awry people, substandard people.
 Hidden beneath wealth and fame, unsought to bat an eyelash about anything except
 themselves & their profit
 If life was a garment it would not last.
 For life cannot be made from a pattern or sewn in straight seams; predictable and planned.
 We do not keep the same thread
 Needle or
 Fabric.
 For everything in life will never perfectly stitch together.
I wish for life to be like a dress:
 Heavenly
 Draping off the shoulders of flawless models
 Who consume
 The Fame.
 Instead we are the fabric store:
 Cluttered
 Messy
 Never put together.
 I wish to be a dress.
 Not a fabric store
 A dress.

Jameson Wood

2nd Place, Elementary Student

Life Is Everywhere

Life is something, everywhere you'll see.
 Life is in plants and crops,
 Life is in the air.
 Life has a span,
 Which eventually dies.
 Life can be predictable,
 Though it can be unpredictable at times.
 Sometimes, life bails on you,
 leaving you dead.
 It might sound harsh,
 But heaven's a good place, I'm sure.
 Life is like nothing other.
 Life is everything. Life is nothing.
 Life is out, life is in, life is in-between.
 Life can be a pain sometimes,
 Other times, it can be a helper.
 Life is loved,
 Life is hated.
 Life is up, life is down.
 Life is left, life is right.
 Life is all around.
 Life is important,
 Life is unimportant.
 Life can flee from you,
 Life might stay with you.
 Just remember:
 Life is something, everywhere you'll see.



Natalia Zagata, 9th Grade Student, Lemont High School

Carol Spielman Lezak

2nd Place, Highland Park Resident

Family Ties

Dorothea Leonore—Dora to her friends—
born 1897, not particularly tall
but with an imposing queenly presence
her fine white hair swept up atop her head
her regal posture, her majestic profile.
And her hands—so strong, so powerful.
Large hands, tipped with almond-shaped nails
painted in jewel-toned fuchsia in the 1960s.
Her last decade.
So many appellations—Dot, Dotty, Dorothy,
but to me, Nanny, my grandmother.
My best friend.
I saw those hands in action...
her graceful flowing cursive or modeling clay
and more impressive her fine needlework,
those capable hands threading the tiniest needle
with brilliant multi-hued embroidery floss
nipping off lengths with her teeth,
sitting for hours, cross-stitching yards of fabric
heaped on her lap to one day grace a table for ten.
Stitching stitching
the yards and yards of thread and
the hours and years into her craft.
A half-century since time stilled those hands forever—
her embroidered linens tucked safely away
preserving those uncommonly fine threads
that still tie us together.

Marek Magnus

2nd Place, High School Student

Skinny Friendship

Skin protects us from outside harm
It certainly is a need
Damage to the skin will alarm
While all pain will cause to bleed

When you get a cut or a bruise
You must clear it of any grime
You must stop and not use
You must give it lots of time

For when it's done with recovery
It toughens and strengthens
This skin, a new discovery,
Resilience is lengthened

Some skin doesn't always repair
It leaves a mark on us
It reminds of time you can't bare
It's a scar, of disobeyed trust

The best skin is kept, strong and true
And some of that skin is you

Cheryl Caesar

2nd Place, Adult Non-Resident

Twine

Folk music twines. Male and female
voices close together, crossing
over, twist like threads
of a friendship bracelet.

She sings with her whole body, raising
a hand to lift her voice. Her trunk
weaves the melody from side to side, as the two
voices swell and recede, intimate as waves.

When he picks the strings, she touches
invisible piano keys.
At sixteen, I sang
folk songs with my father, played guitars.
I worried about authenticity. Could I sing

a man's part, to "Green Grow the Lilacs"?
"She sent me an answer,
all twisted in twine..." Could I sing
of poverty, riding the rails, marching
in a picket line? Now at sixty

it has all come round again. The Civil War
has twice returned. Age and gender
are an illusion. "Tell me why the ivy twines..."
sing the contrapuntal voices.
Even the word "ravel" means its own opposite.
In the end, there is no unravelling.

Poem previously published in *Journal of Expressive Writing*, May 2020.

Kate Hutchinson

3rd Place, Adult Non-Resident

After Ice Skating

Muffled – the perfect word
for how sounds disappear
into bathroom air when our damp
outerwear hangs all about –
snowpants draped on the shower rod,
scarves, mittens, extra socks
and my long tasseled stocking cap
crowding brackets of the towel rack
like a patchwork tapestry
knitted by some crazy aunt.
That smell of melted snow –
damp and earthy, mud and mist –
is childhood laid out to dry
while we sit on the little rug,
pink-cheeked and matty-haired,
rubbing life back into our toes –
white winter joy between us.

Henry Gamson

3rd Place, Elementary Student

Fate

As new life begins to bloom
Fate steps up to her loom

Progressing through life
Connected through strife

Common threads knot
In a web wrought

Of silvery silk
Spun of mortal ilk

Linked by the earth
And the homesteads hearth

Common threads join
Heedless of coin

Progressing through life
Connected through strife

And as death knocks upon their door
Fate begins to spin once more

Asia Piggott

3rd Place, High School Student

What Bonds Us?

Pain and Trauma
It bonds people like no other.
With this these kind of bonds
It can go one or two ways.
You come together as one
Thrive to build a better life
For today's tomorrow.
On the other hand
That bond will bring people together
Yet becomes their greatest demise.
The level of understanding will be everything
It's almost like you've been drowning
And at the peak of death you're
Brought back to your awaking.
Just to be embarrassed
Then tossed aside like you're nothing
Like the experience you all shared
Was nothing. The results of pain and trauma
Understanding those experiences
On your own will make you better.
Once you break that barrier can help others.
I believe that the reason why people
With these common pain and trauma
Tended to explode at the end
Is because they don't understand themselves
So they look for that understanding in others.
Just for it to backfire.
I would know.
We all know.



Emma Alexandra, Photographer

Emma Alexandra

3rd Place, Highland Park Resident

Kilims in Krakow's Central Square

Polish kilims announce their soft colors
like medieval heralds distant in time,
present in a magically woven reality.

Yakub shears their lilywhite sheep in early spring.
With fleece dutifully washed to its purest,
wife Zofia and sister Anna spin fleece to yarn.
Their hand spindles are ballerinas.
They pirouette to traditional rhythms, folk songs.

Mountain villages gift bountiful colors.
Orange from Danuta's carrots, rich reddish brown
from her garden's beets. Yanek's cherry orchard,
lends surreptitious pink, his sister in law's,
Lilia's red cabbages, blue. And, translucent yellow,
born from sunflower petals, chamomile, marigolds...

Kilims in Ludmilla's shop in Krakow's Central Square
heed the call from the Tatry Mountains' southern breezes.
Pass on the spindle, loom, preserve common threads, craft, artistry.

Terry Loncaric

Honorable Mention, Adult Non-Resident

Make America Love Again

Make Americalove again.
Tune out the anger.
Hear the stirrings
of awakening souls.
Make America
hope again.
Call out
the false prophets
for daring
to divide us,
to incite us.
Rise above
the despair,
the dissent,
the discord.
Take America back
in the music
of the multitudes.
Make America
love again.

Esther Hague

Honorable Mention, Elementary Student

Rumors

Once there was a story
simply said and told,
people touched and pulled the strings,
until the new one was not the old.

And when the threaded words
came back to the first teller,
what a knotted, tangled string it was
like something buried in an old cellar.

Arfa Omer

Honorable Mention, High School Student

This Light We Share

There is a thread that connects us all
Not of gold and silver
But of pure, luminescent light
The light that resides within all our souls
And reaches out with open arms
The light within knows
It knows we are all uniquely alike
Sure you're from here and I'm from there
But inside, shines the same light
And across the globe our lights reach out
to strengthen our bonds and create a new dawn
One for all of us, a dawn where we will look
to the light, to the thread that connects us all,
and blaze our own path, our own intertwined destinies



Jennifer Dotson, Photographer

Dominique Galiano

Honorable Mention, Highland Park Resident

Truth Be Told

We are human, we are no one, without one another
 Walk the march, cross the line, and be the change in your lifetime
 Tear gas, bricks, broken glass, anger harbors desperate dads
 We hold these truths to be self-evident...scream it, prove it!
 We are human, we are no one, without one another
 Raise the rent and close the schools, wear a mask, new normal rules
 Six feet of separation, can't detach friends, our love wins
 As our family bubble, extends the light, good will unites
 Sing out, the common good of man, faith and strength bridge our land
 We are human, we are no one, without one another

R. M. Yager

Honorable Mention, Adult Non-Resident

Sashiko

The sharpest needle
 with the brightest thread
 thrust back and forth
 through the tattered holes
 of the uncertainty
 in our daily lives
 will keep the fabric
 of our humanity
 woven together

Poem previously published in *Step Away Magazine*
 – Lockdown Issue, a U.K. journal, in 2020.

Tina Cole - *Judge for Poems About Common Threads*

A Wall I Used to Know

I put my years into the gathering of stones, ochre, grey, mouse-back brown. Took foolish delight in the precarious balance of layers, in each familiar mosaic and highway. Then this progress of spores, at first innocuous beige-yellow then leprechaun green. I tried to ignore the deceit of this changeling but unease festered. Clocks adopted crepuscular time. Weeks became like tiny engines shunting themselves up and back along short tracks, returning to stations where they did not re-couple. And all the while the parasite kept creeping, stone no longer stone. New plans were needed. I attempted to pack up dirty duvet clouds, took down the dark curtain of sky, screwed it up like many blank diary pages. The shopping trolley and golf clubs retreated further into the closet, sheet music lost its song, was relegated to locked bureaus with a dead decade of Kodachrome. Future events passed their sell by date, tickets invalid, even the smallest distance became a destination. I took to watching movies in the dark, imagined stepping into the light after the film had ended but the late news reel was full of contradictions, around each corner shadowy obstacles jack-knifed. The year laid itself down like a lane with no horizon where each tree whispered in different languages. Inside four walls, silence and separation knitted into me. I let cold seasons pull their blankets round while the wall morphed into a foreign landscape.



Image from creative commons

Tina Cole lives in the U.K. near the border with Wales. She is a retired headteacher, (principal) and consultant to universities supporting teacher-training. She is now a poet, reviewer and leads workshops with both adults and children. Also, she is the organizer of the annual children's poetry competition – yppc2019.org, currently stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her published poems have appeared in U.K. magazines such as, *Brittle Star*, *Creative Countryside*, *Poetry Café*, *Mslexia*, *Aesthetica*, *The Guardian* newspaper and in many poetry collections. In 2020 she won the Yaffle Press Poetry Competition. Her second collection – *Nothing but the Strength of Names*, will be published later this year. She is currently undertaking a Master's Degree course in creative writing at Manchester University.

The Sweetelle



Janz Duncan, Photographer

Court Williams

1st Place, Highland Park Resident

Her Fire

Volcanic heat lies deep beneath a pool of cool water,
I long to dive in headfirst, be immersed in all you are,
To explore your depths and dare to awaken hidden fire,
The cold shocks me, and yet the fire draws me ever deeper,
Volcanic heat lies deep beneath a pool of cool water,
Goose pimples tingle my skin, anticipation and awe
Draws me deeper, the passion of your fire gives you power
That both scares and excites me, dark brown eyes, a calm surface
To fall into and lose myself in your passionate soul,
Volcanic heat lies deep beneath a pool of cool water.

Michelle LM Gale

1st Place, Adult Non-Resident

Missy

Only my Nana called me by the unique name Missy.
I was never certain if it was compliment or curse.
I only knew I liked it and the pretty sound it made,
It sounded just like Christmas wrapped up in a rubber band.
Only my Nana called me by the unique name Missy.
Following in her path, after she quietly passed on.
Two babes born out of wedlock, one hundred years apart,
She lost her beloved son; it must have broken her heart.
At night, I reach with my mind, to listen to her whisper,
Only my Nana called me by the unique name Missy.



Ashley Lubkeman, High School Student Photographer

Ashley Lubkeman

1st Place –Sweetelle &

*3rd Place – Fruits & Vegetable ,
High School Student*

Madeline Glazier

1st Place, Elementary Student

Eight Weeks

Memories of last year's crop, are the tomatoes ripe yet?
After school, racing down the drive: backpacks whipping behind
Tastefully lethargic of previous annual crops
Indisputably despondent at a vision of green
Memories of last year's crop, are the tomatoes ripe yet?
Other crops harvesting, disregarded as the days pass
Unswervingly consumed watching the chameleon fruit
Tracing the route home out the bus window, eagerness builds
Slapping shoes on the drive, cutting the corner praying for red
Memories of last year's crop, are the tomatoes ripe yet?

Noise

girl shouts loud but all that comes out is deafening quiet
stews in static, stains her focus with constant stridency
silence seems to be a boundless void with no end in sight
bound to claw her way through at the very first sign of light
girl shouts loud but all that comes out is deafening quiet
silence leaves her alone with her thoughts, mind running
rampant
surrounds herself with happy noise, rhythm running through her
whether loud or quiet, noise seems to be all-consuming
she learns of silence and all of its fruits, not so scary
girl shouts loud but all that comes out is deafening quiet

Esther Hague

2nd Place, Elementary Student

Found & Lost

This poem is about the things that disappear quickly
Take rainbows, for instance - they hold so strong for seconds
But when the sun hides in the clouds, they slowly disappear
Déjà vu means seen before - there for a minute, then gone
This poem is about the things that disappear quickly
When you catch snowflakes on your palm they glisten and glimmer
But then they melt (like all ice does) and their beauty is gone
Like smoke - the way it twists around the candle and then fades
Ephemeral thoughts that reside on the tip of your tongue.....
This poem is about the things that disappear quickly



Janz Duncan, Photographer

Charles Davis

*2nd Place – Sweetelle &
Honorable Mention – Fruits & Vegetables
High School Student*

Beets' Memoriam

Beets slightly sweet, red and round, grown in the brown underground
Beets with dinner of red meat, for dessert ice cream too sweet
Beets in their winter season, some fallen to the wood floor
For lunch beets with goat cheese and pecans for no good reason
Beets slightly sweet, red and round, grown in the brown underground
Beets pickled in mason jars with salty brine, tops screwed on sound
Beets seem to be all I eat, I must have bought them on sale
In time beets grow stale, replaced by greens like spinach and kale
Farewell beets until we meet again, for now I'm beet free
Beets slightly sweet, red and round, grown in the brown underground

Alwyn Gornall

2nd Place, Adult Non-Resident

The Last Leaf

So many things I wish to do before the last leaf falls,
but time rushes by as fast as sand through open fingers.
The last leaf and I turn towards autumn as daylight fades;
I cannot afford to waste the time that's left, as there are
so many things I wish to do before the last leaf falls.
In the spring I survived the fog-storm of my teenage years.
In the summer I rode upon the time-tide of adulthood,
surfing waves of responsibility and commitment,
then in the blink of a clichéd eye I'm retired and have
so many things I wish to do before the last leaf falls.

Dominique Galiano

2nd Place, Highland Park Resident

Lively Spirits

Queue up the dream, wind up the music, spin with the magic
The venue packed, the balcony stacked, high energy flows
On stage, a misfit band ignites, and sweats beneath hot lights
Livestream smiles, dance free in the aisles, we grey haired teens revived
Queue up the dream, wind up the music, spin with the magic
A finger snappin', cold drink coolin', hot feet rockin' beat
We sang off key to those old songs, Dylan, Stones, Little Feet
The band jammed on and we belonged, together, as one light
Old bodies, lively spirits young hearts, sparked fires in the night
Queue up the dream, wind up the music, spin with the magic





Janz Duncan, Photographer

Judith Stern Friedman

3rd Place, Highland Park Resident

Heirlooms

Our inner souls endure in all things we create by hand.
What thrill in imagining shapes, shades, possibilities!
Fussy-cut fabric, matching seams, trying to be perfect—
But imperfections hide in every human expression.
Our inner souls endure in all things we create by hand.
Fingers pair tiny needle holes with micro woven threads.
Lost in the rhythm of pricking up and down, up and down....
Found in the flow of forgetting *Then, How?*, focused on *Now*.
Layered life, stories sandwiched for waiting generations.
Our inner souls endure in all things we create by hand.

Curt Vevang

3rd Place, Adult Non-Resident

Nature's Artistry

Hiking on an Eden like trail, beneath cloudless heavens,
the glare of the sunshine intrudes upon my squinting eyes.
Step by step I hear the crunch of acorns beneath my boots.
The curled fallen leaves still display the structure of their veins.
Hiking on an Eden like trail, beneath cloudless heavens,
a scene worthy of a villanelle, perhaps a sonnet.
Or should autumn's prism be captured in water color?
Perchance an oil in deep crimsons, greens and amber yellows?
Might this be the genesis of a woodland rhapsody?
Hiking on an Eden like trail, beneath cloudless heavens.



Steve Sadin, Photographer

Olivia Geringer-Spagnola

3rd Place – Sweetelle &

Honorable Mention – Fruits & Vegetables

High School Student

Fruits Yum

There you are, the exotic, tasty, juicy food to eat –
from apples to bananas to oranges to kiwi,
I crave your delicious taste daily in the morning.
You sit there in the fridge or on the counter, just waiting.
There you are, the exotic, tasty, juicy food to eat.
Watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, oh dear, oh my!
How you make my mouth water, my stomach growling, starving.
My stomach clenches with delight at the sight of you there.
I reach, I feel you there in my hands, I'm happy at last
Right in front of me, the wonderful type of food to eat.



Natalia Zagata, 9th Grade Student, Lemont High School



Neal Herbert, Photographer

Henry Gamson

3rd Place, Elementary Student

Colorful Perspective

Reddish flashing black white glistening powder flashing brown
A red black fox chasing a brown mouse in the shining snow
Shimmering blue with bright white glimpse of brown swipe of silver
A brown mouse slipped on ice and dodged a foxes silver claws
Reddish flashing black white glistening powder flashing brown
A red black fox pursues a brown mouse while kicking up snow
Blinding flowing white spots of freezing blue darting silver
A gleaming stream throws drops of cold blue water while fish bolt
This is a way to see the world, in flashes of hue
Reddish flashing black white glistening powder flashing brown

Paulina Freedman

Honorable Mention, Highland Park Resident

Ode to My Favorite Earrings

Of all the now useless things, you are the most beautiful
You glitter invitingly, dangling from my earring tree,
Awaiting pale earlobes from which to cling like ornaments
Miniature shining chandeliers of sparkle and gem
Of all the now useless things, you are the most beautiful
You are too good for the grocery store, too glittery
To wear with sweatpants and concert t-shirts from freshman year
You deserve a little black dress, curled hair and mascara,
To dance and sway in hypnotic elegance on warm nights
Of all the now useless things, you are the most beautiful



Image from creative commons



Image from creative commons

Gail Denham

Honorable Mention, Adult Non-Resident

Cooking Shows

The famous judges, all fine chefs, take determined chances
 When contestants flip open their surprise baskets to cook
 Inside, they find poison fruits, weird veggies and wild hot spice
 Sauces, strange wines, exotic and barely edible foods
 The famous judges, all fine chefs, take determined chances
 bravely forking odd combinations, hoping food is safe
 Rattlesnake, raw fish with wild eyes, and the pink ears of pig
 Courageous, fair judges spoon up broth with greenish-brown hues
 Wheat grass, flat beans, churned, fast, with olive oil and vinegar
 The famous judges, all fine chefs, take determined chances

Jennifer Brown Banks - Judge for the Sweetelle

Poems

A Poem By Any Other Name

A poem by any other name is unlikely sweetelle
 You have to be quite clever to construct one very well
 Criteria calls for ten lines with repeated refrains
 Fourteen syllables per each line it should also contain
 A poem by any other name is unlikely sweetelle
 Speaking creatively, it can be heavenly or hell
 Right now the verdict's uncertain with three more lines to sell
 A poem by any other name would perhaps be sweeter
 Than the challenge behind this complicated brain-teaser
 A poem by any other name is unlikely sweetelle

Jennifer Brown Banks is president, founder and creative director of Poets United to Advance the Arts. Her award-winning work has been featured in numerous digital and print publications, which include: *Poetic Voices*, *I am not a Silent Poet*, *The Write City Magazine*, *Curbside Splendor*, *Rolling Out* and *Chicken Bones*. She has authored seven poetry books and has contributed to several anthologies. Banks is also a content creator for Newsbreak.com, penning pieces on a myriad of topics and timely events. She formerly served on the Board of Directors of Chicago Writers Association for ten years. When not at the keyboard, she loves being "creative" in the kitchen. Learn more at her popular blogs Pen and Prosper and Poets United to Advance the Arts.blogspot.com

Fruits & Vegetables



Jen "Pen" Richards, Photographer

Miranda Stewart

1st Place, High School Student

farm fresh flavor

The perfect banana shade is #3:
chartreuse slowly peeling away
from a golden underbelly.
#3, hitting a crescendo of ripeness
clearly fresh from the bunch, fresh from the tree.
In my dreams, I never have to eat another
overripe anything, because in my dreams
I look out through starry glass in my kitchen
and see a rainbow skyline. Grand apple trees
with neat rows of legumes peeking out through alleys,
kitty-corner to newly installed citrus,
hues of yellow and orange kissing brilliant blue sky.
Dirt under my nails, recently earth-bound potatoes
frying in the pan, and a world of sustenance rooted,
fused with the bones of my house.
My fingers pluck harp strings from branches
letting melodic notes land gingerly amongst clover and dandelions.
To always have one's cake and eat it too –
the beauty of a backyard garden.

Neurine Wiggan

1st Place - Vegetable, Adult Non-Resident

Gazpacho By Mozart

It takes one hour of my life to make gazpacho,
that cool nectar of summer,
chilling a bowl, round, white oyster crackers
sprinkled on top of blushing red juice.

It ties me to the earth
as much as any hoeing, ironing,
any necessity that blunts the mind.

As I wash, skin, chop, dice,
I discard vegetable detritus onto an open
newspaper I can't help reading.
Green onions pop away from the blade.
I crack little skulls of garlic
with the flat side of my knife.

How am I not like these earthly children?
They give to me now but in the fullness of time
I will give myself back to them.

Only soup and Mozart lift the gloom.
I imagine again my progenitors,
servants in the bowels of baronial halls—
the many who kept the few alive—
listening to banquets and parties above
filled with the music of desire.

Though I am downstairs cutting,
I am upstairs dreaming.



Regina Siske, Artist

Carole Croll

1st Place - Fruit, Adult Non-Resident

Grape Tale

Cooled in the splash of a summer rain,
warmed in the gold of its sun, we are
the fruit grown patient and round
as spiders splayed and spun.

We are the fruit discovered today when
birdsong attended the dawn, chosen
and plucked by the fingers of God
before the mist was gone.

We are the gift of a heart-shaped leaf,
a rugged, coiling vine. We are
the fruit now pressed and aged,
tomorrow's finest wine.

Oliver Gordon

1st Place, Elementary Student

Watermelon; Then There Is Cantaloupe

I sit on the beach eating my watermelon, so sweet
I sink in my teeth and you fill up my mouth with greatness
I sit closing my eyes chewing my watermelon. Mmmm
Watermelon, you are red, round and juicy, watermelon
I sit on the beach eating my watermelon, so sweet
I sit thinking how I will miss you when I'm done eating
I think that I will never eat a good fruit again, sigh
Then I hear of a fruit called cantaloupe, I try it, yum
Bye bye, watermelon; hello, cantaloupe, so good, but
I sit on the beach eating my watermelon, so sweet



Idella Pearl Edwards, Artist

Judith M. K. Kaufman

1st Place, Highland Park Resident

Bounty/Deeply Colored

As the days wane and
night arrives at five,
I expect gray to
predominate

But no ... not so
in my winter garden

deep purple cabbage and onions,
brilliant orange pumpkin and squash,
lush greens and mustardy cauliflower
grace my kitchen table

and though God has chosen now
to strike at my heart
I pray this deeply colored bounty
is a sign of blessings to come.

Dennis Trujillo

1st Place, International Adult

Gourds on the Roof

I bought the old house with one aim --
to grow gourds on the flat-top roof.
I fashioned a framework with wood
and brown twine for the dancing vines

to climb. Yellow flowers flickered
like holy flames. A clutch of green
gourds peeked from beneath fan-shaped
leaves like jaguar cubs. They reached

the size of juggling clubs, sprouted
warts, and flaunted orange and white
stripes. Dried, they became waxy
instruments of magic. At night

they began to resonate inside
my dreams revealing ancient secrets
of the Incas – techniques for terrace
gardening, tips on raising llamas.

Poem previously published in author's collection *Dragonflies & Algebra* (FutureCyclePress, 2020).



"Holiness of the Garden" - Ruth Feldman, Photographer

Astrid Sykes

1st Place, 4th Grade Student

Tasting Truth

Three berries
I drop into my mouth
Honey berries taste sweet
Inside my mouth.
I bite deep
A miracle berry
Oozing
Now, lemons, limes
All things sour and sweet
I bite a lemon
All a taste of sugar and sweet
After that I start on the rambutans,
Their fleshy white pulp
Sweet as honey straight from the hive
Creamy and soft they dance on my tongue
With all their marvelous flavor.
Then I go to the tamarinds
My mother carefully prepared,
Sucking them up
In one big gulp,
And lick my lips with apprehension of what came next
Then I saw a big plate of Spanish limes,
Smacked my lips and puckered up
For the delicious fruit.
My mouth exploded with flavors.
Last but certainly not least,
The mangosteen
I peeled off the hard covering
Revealing its flower like pattern
Creamy, sweet flesh
I finished the last of the fruit
Then went back to my brother.

Emilia Kobylarz

2nd Place, Elementary Student

Fruits

Fruits and veggies are great for you,
But fruits are tastier and that is true.
The crunch of a pomegranate,
The sourness of lemons,
You can't deny it's true.
So go eat a fruit
It's great for you!



Gail Goepfert, Photographer

Avery Aloma

2nd Place, 4th Grade Student

What I See

As I glanced down at my list, I saw what was perfect.
I ran past apples, strawberries, and pears,
Past women with hoops in their ears,
Till I found a shelf
Such pieces of art
I came to a stop,
I picked an avocado to put in the cart.

Lillian Leon

2nd Place, High School Student

Fruit Poem

Calloused hands grip the knife
Gentle but firm
An act repeated with time
One slice, maybe two
The fruit of the earth
It's full of life and it cries
Sweet tears stick to your palms

Maybe even more calloused hands
Once sliced fruit for you
An act repeated with time
Tools too sharp for nimble fingers
Flavor too good to miss
And so, like millions before you
A humble human instinct
Cut up fruits for your babes
And one day they will do the same



Regina Siske, Artist

Christine Swanberg

2nd Place – Vegetable, Adult Non-Resident

Witch's Red Onion

Ah my ruby my pretty
Baby Medusa How I rip
Your green cord
From this black earth

Now and scrub you
Hang you in my pantry
Dry my giant's bunion
His little bruised sak

Heart of a man
Who left me long ago
I'm slicing you yes
Into tiny crescents

Fragrant moon slippers
I'm eating you eating
You eating you yes
My savory Christmas salad

This poem was first published in *Farmer's Market*, 1985 as well as in the author's collection *Bread Upon The Waters* (Windfall Prophets Press, UW:Whitewater, 1989).

Sylvia Cavanaugh

2nd Place – Fruit, Adult Non-Resident

Winter's Summer Fruit

Hail the apple
the fruit which blossoms
in high wedding season
and lasts until snow dances
from the winter sky
red-cheeked children
coming in from the cold
for a crisp tangy-sweet wedge
smeared with peanut butter
apple the last holdout of summer
with names like Winesap
your tee-totaling great aunt
who claims to have had her hand
kissed by Liberace
like Ida Red
the girl across the street
whispered about
who ran off to join the circus
or maybe the Sandinistas
or Granny Smith
with her state fair apple pie
and gleaming jars of apple butter
for warm toast
to tide you over
until asparagus steals the show
standing straight and tall



Monica Cardestam, Artist

Emma Alexandra

2nd Place, Highland Park Resident

Watermelons Sweetest

Her voice sings refrain melodious urging passersby.
Buy these fruits from heaven fallen. Taste their ruby potion,
sweetest of the sweetest watermelons in Ain Sebaa.
Dawn to dusk, souk sounds rise, retreat like the Atlantic's waves.
Her voice sings refrain melodious urging passersby.
Buy this fruit. Imbibe like a hummingbird, feel thirst subside.
Morning coolness withdraws its silk veil, reveals budding sun.
Calls to prayer noon then dusk slow shoppers' flow, sheep quiet, spared.
Her voice sings refrain melodious urging passersby.

Jane Wyles – *2nd Place, International
Non-Resident*

Asparagus

Beauty,
you are eaten
in May
but desired all year.
Some weaken;
they scour the veg aisles
hoping for a Peruvian slut
to satisfy a sudden urge...
but her charms are pale
and tasteless -
no match for our
fresh and tender fare,
our glorious, green and slender stalks
patiently waiting
for love to be declared;
to be picked
to be gently stroked,
bent
broken
steamed
drained
and bathed in butter.
Aaah.
Content, and a little unfaithfully
I dream of...
strawberries.



This photo was taken in Cairo, Egypt in the 1940's by Harry Gant Dotson while he was working for the Red Cross during WWII

Jacqueline Stearns

3rd Place - Vegetable, Adult Non-Resident

Daddy's Garden

The center of our family during spring and summer.
Three generations, seated around the wooden picnic table,
eager to dig into hamburgers, hotdogs, and salad,
replete with lettuce and tomatoes fresh from Daddy's garden.
Daddy, teaching my nephew Jimmy how to water the vegetables.
Guiding his tiny hand, as they carefully place seeds in the soil.
Jimmy, watching in rapt fascination, as Daddy adjusts
metal protectors around the tomato plants.
Daddy sharing produce with our neighbors.
"Don't buy tomatoes from the market, " He'd say.
"My vegetables have no pesticides."
Daddy calling me out to the front porch
which is covered in purple onions!
He grins. "I'm drying them out."
Summer meals complimented by
Mommy's fried eggplant, zucchini,
and yellow squash, sauteed with
garlic and fresh tomatoes.
Daddy's garden died when he did.
My memories never will.

Diane Funston

3rd Place - Fruit, Adult Non-Resident

Bartlett Pear

I am ripe.
My skin, cool to first touch
warms to the shape
of fingers caressing me.

My shape,
round bottom, curves,
full yet tapered.

Age becomes me,
my flesh less perfect,
my scent more inviting.

Heady and intoxicating,
I stand unsupported,
or lie with others, lush,
fresh from harvest.

My juices sweeten.
Nectar ready to run
down your chin
as you devour me.



Jen "Pen" Richards, Photographer

Isadora Esson

3rd Place, International Non-Resident

I Planted Tomatoes in the Garden of Our New House

I Planted Tomatoes in the Garden of Our New House
I bought seedlings since I'm a novice and wanted a guarantee of some fruit.
I fed and watered and loved the little plants.
My husband brought home tomato powder,
to sprinkle on when the leaves began to curl.
I googled and learned that I should only water the base of the plant
NOT the leaves.
My babies grew and grew.
They grew over two meters tall.
I put stakes in the ground to help hold them up.
They intertwined and grew into the carrots' domain.
They covered the dill, basil and coriander.
It turns out I planted my seedlings too close together.
My garden bed became a tomato jungle.
The plants grew up the neighbor's wall and down to the ground.
When the fruit began to ripen, I couldn't reach it without stepping on others.
I picked more tomatoes than our family could eat.
I pickled some.
I put them in salads and quiches.
On sandwiches and in fresh pasta sauces.
I let the dog pull them from the vine,
even though my husband said I shouldn't.
They just kept flowering and fruiting.
The stalks looked dead but the tomatoes kept ripening.
It's too wild! My partner exclaimed!
And pulled them out by the roots.
Now we have corn in five straight rows.
Planted at the appropriate distance from each other.
It is very civilized.
But every day when I weed, I see little tiny, tomato plants sprouting,
and I leave a couple to grow.



Susan Martersteck, Photographer

Richard V. Kaufman

3rd Place, Highland Park Resident

Starlight

Plants are sunshine
that you eat.
From light comes
barley, corn,
and wheat.
Chloroplasts are
a wondrous blessing.
We serve them up with
Roquefort dressing.
Next time you're at
a salad bar,
consider that
you're eating
a star.



"My Rapini" - Georgiann Foley, Photographer



Jackie Chou, Artist

Ryan Kim

3rd Place, Elementary Student

Bananas

Oh sweet banana
The yellow fruit

With brown spots
That look like dots

The tasty fruit
That is really mushy

It looks like a phone
But you have to eat it

Unwrap it
And then eat it

And decide whether you like it
Or not



Jenene Ravesloot, Photographer

Leo Pernot

Honorable Mention, 4th Grade Student

Banana

Bananas are yellow
and they are curved like the letter C
Many enjoy eating them,
especially a monkey.

Bananas feel mushy like a squishy
They are as soft as a water bed.
Just be sure you don't slip on a banana peel
You wouldn't want to hit your head!



Idella Pearl Edwards, Photographer

Maya Cohen

3rd Place, Elementary Student

Choices

Fruits and vegetable I love to eat
Such as apples, oranges, and tomatoes
Plums and grapes are a real treat
As well as cherries and potatoes
So when I go to bed I can say
I ate enough fruits and vegetables for the day.

Isla Hague

Honorable Mention, Elementary Student

Apples

sitting in the fruit bowl
a bright, shiny red
begging me to come and take one,
sliced in half with a big spoonful
of creamy, delicious peanut butter or just plain.
If you're feeling extra fancy,
drizzled with honey is a good treat.
They sit there in the fruit bowl
begging me, daring me,
to take one.



"Comedy & Tragedy with Pomcado Critter" - Bruce Whitaker, Photographer

Amelia Balanovsky

Honorable Mention, Elementary Student

Avocado

Creamy and lush green
Avocado, large and ripe
Scrumptious and yummy

Ari Marck

Honorable Mention, 4th Grade Student

Pears

Ah, pears, oh wonderful pears, full of sweetness and juice.
As green as grass and sweet as honey.
Pears, pears, too good to space from eating.
When I see them I get dreamy.
Pears, oh wonderful pears, are my absolute favorite!



Lennart Lundh, Photographer

Kim Reed

Honorable Mention - Vegetable, Adult Non-Resident

Celery, a Sweetelle

Holding stiff against sweet salty waters' sway, celery
 how often I dip deep in Bloody Mary's at morning brunch
 or crunch thin slices swimming with the tuna fish on toast
 I grasp the ridges of pale green body where I find joy
 holding stiff against sweet salty waters sway, celery
 Hidden in my holiday stuffings, fragrance come my way
 Only I am aware of such resistance and despair
 Pleasures in my life enter and pass away so quickly
 From salad to soup time slips into swallowed memory
 holding stiff against sweet salty waters' sway, celery

Judith Stern Friedman

Honorable Mention, Highland Park Resident

Monster Squash

At night in early April, I was done with my deeds,
 When out of the dark, I thought of my seeds.
 I recruited the nearest recycled receptacles,
 To plant what became our pandemic spectacles.

I watered them daily—trays of seeds—one by one,
 And prayed that these babes would have help from the sun.

Then just when I thought my sprouts were ill-fated,
 I discovered my seeds had germinated!

Tenderly tending the spiny shoots,
 I watched them grow tall while sending their roots
 Deeper and wider to nourish their buds.
 The signs were clear: these seeds were not duds.

I took them outside to a raised garden bed,
 Where I watered them, pruned them, made sure they
 weren't dead.

Yearning to drink the sun's magic potion,
They thrived as we watched with growing emotion.

Leaves like the palms of a giant hand,
Tendrils like fingers feeling the land,
Creeping and curling to stretch out their arms.
Bursting orange flowers bred little squash charms.

*Day by day, the gourds grew nearly inches size
To three-pounds, five-pounds, seven-pounds wise.*

Despite the destruction that COVID was dishing,
Politics, justice, every one of us wishing,
Watching our squash grow to edible forms
Taught us that nature defies human norms.

Now as we cut through their ripe-yellow shells,
We are awed by *orange* flesh where sustenance swells.
Feeding our souls, driving hope, dreaming more—
What promise grew from my kitchen drawer!



Gail Goepfert, Photographer

Patrice Boyer Claeys

Honorable Mention - Fruit, Adult Non-Resident

Alpine Strawberries, a Cento^[1]

Dawn silence of the biosphere—
everything's glacial shine
through high still air
beautiful, cold, expansive.

In the dream
the ground is feathered with wild strawberries
and I'm eating
like a blackbird.

Eight strawberries in a wet blue bowl
the juice staining my lips crimson.

It is enough—
the bond of live things everywhere.

Cento Sources: Derek Mahon, Ross Gay, Gary Snyder, Susan Firer, Eileen Myles, Craig Arnold, Tomaz Salamun, George Szirtes, Solmaz Sharif, Jill Bialosky, Todd Boss, Lucille Clifton / Poem previously published in author's collaborative collection with photographer Gail Goepfert, *Honey From the Sun* (2020).

^[1] A **cento** poem is a work of poetry that is composed of various lines taken from different poems. Patrice Boyer Claeys acknowledges the poets whose lines she borrowed to create her own unique poem.

Gretta Musen

Honorable Mention, Elementary Student

Strawberries

Strawberries, strawberries, oh so divine
Every spring they grow off a vine

So many seeds that you can't count
Looks so pretty, just like a fount

Looks so bright and red
And looks so pretty, like I said

So juicy and sweet
So tasty to eat

Summer days are filled with joy
Eat your strawberries and just enjoy



Jen "Pen" Richards, Photographer

Melia Mani

Honorable Mention, Elementary Student

Watermelon Sweetness

Watermelon, sweet
Sugary, delicious, red
Juicy flavoring

J. J. Jacob

Honorable Mention, 4th Grade Student

Apple haiku

Apples are so good
I love the sweet juice inside
Apples are yummy



Image from creative commons

Mark Andrew Heathcote

Honorable Mention, International Non-Resident

Watermelon Slushies

Let's make a strawberry watermelon slushy today.
 It's going to be searing & sticky hot, warm, sunny-day.
 The sun's shining, I anticipate no change today.
 Let's make one into a Popsicle, a melting-puree.
 We can add a little fresh green crushed mint & honey -
 hooray.
 Don't even care if we get a-small-bit of a toothache.
 As long as my belly-is-filled, watermelon shaped today.
 Look - this one's as big as the moon yes, yes, another
 cliché.
 My hearts a big, a big opened up watermelon today.
 Hooray, hooray, watermelon slushies today all day.



Callie Wu, 6th Grade Student, Northwood Junior High

Joan Leotta

Honorable Mention - Fruit, Adult Non-Resident

What I Learned from a Cart Full of Oranges

I've always loved
the tongue tickle
that comes from biting into an orange—
a little tang of acid combined
with a sweet swirl of juice and
candy-like fibers.

Last year, in a small village in Sicily,
I spotted a mountain of oranges
on a cart in the market.

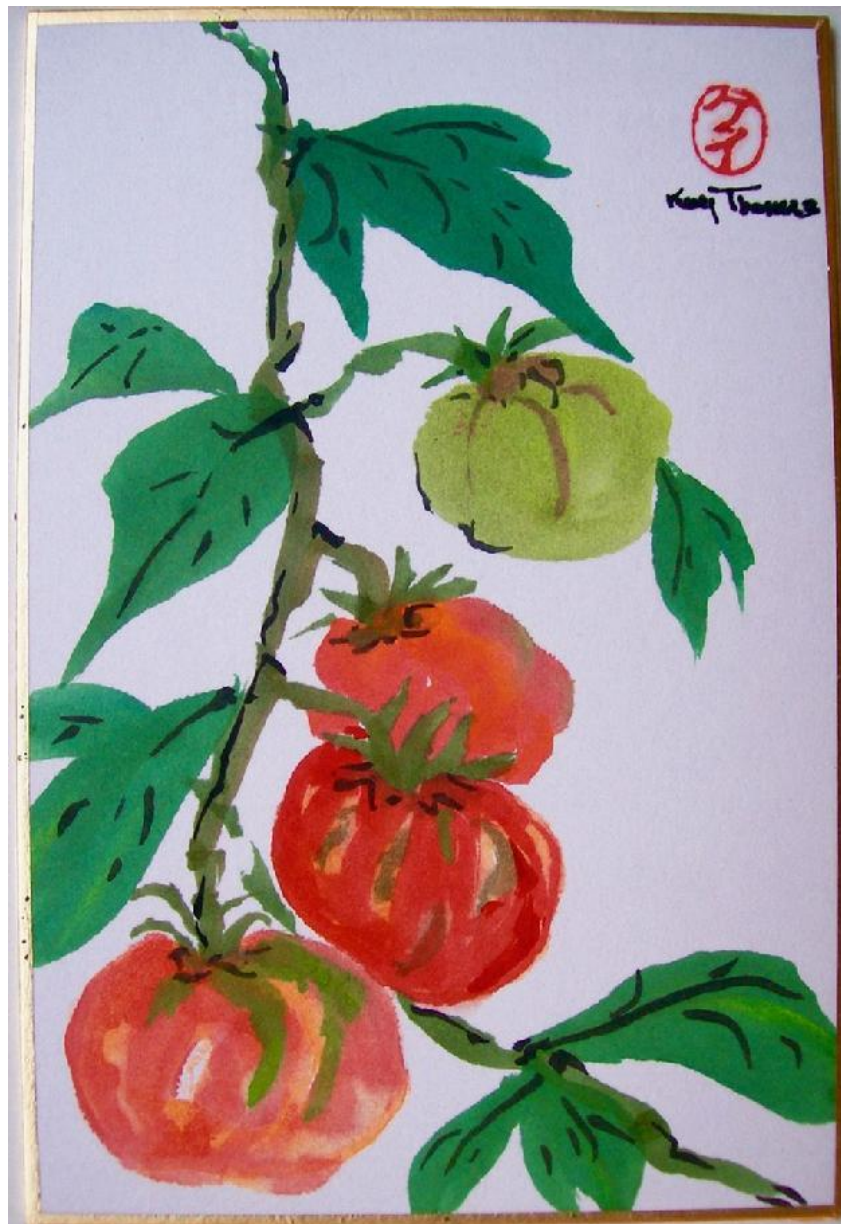
Later, I read that those oranges,
called blood oranges,
are the main export from that town,
my father's hometown.

The town's lifeblood.

No wonder I love this fruit
so much—even my blood is orange.



Emma Alexandra, Photographer



Kay Thomas, Artist

Kay Thomas

Honorable Mention, Highland Park Resident

haiku

last tomatoes
a bright farewell
to summer

Charlotte Digregorio

Honorable Mention - Vegetable, Adult Non-Resident

haiku

drifting snow . . .
tomatoes on the sill
ripen for salsa

Poem previously published in author's book, *Haiku & Senryu: A Simple Guide For All* (Artful Communicators Press, 2014).



"Mato Man" - Bruce Whitaker, Photographer



Kay Thomas, Artist

William Vollrath

Honorable Mention - Fruit, Adult Non-Resident

Apple

ripens wondrously
at the perfect rate
to realize its
myriad potentials
sweet or tart
red, green, or yellow
reaching maturity
embraced by sun and air
only to be plucked
from its lofty cradle
protective seal peeled away
cool juices drained
golden meat consumed
until only
the apple's essence remains
born from a season
of growth
then decay
sweet quintessence
tart stimulation
crafted over time
the apple
generously gifts seeds
for a budding tomorrow

Poem previously published in author's collection *My Third Eye is Blurry* (Highland Park Poetry Press, 2020).

Tim Callahan

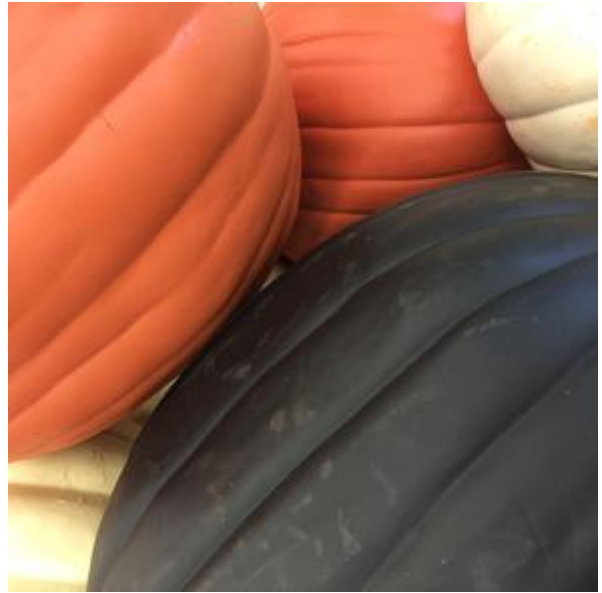
Honorable Mention - Vegetable, Adult Non-Resident

One of Three Sisters, a Sonnet for the Hubbard Squash

So large and broad, these leaves so full of life
have grown on spreading stocks whose tendrils twine
to grasp their neighbors in slow motion strife.
Slow motion, yes, yet in a fevered rush,
each day they further spread their growth so lush
while yet the season is with struggles rife,
while yet their sap flows swift as heady wine,
while yet their yellow blooms bees take to wife.

Their pulse of life so vibrant and so brief
all in a single summer's span is spent
for sake of fruits to spread the next year's growth
as if they were bound by some fearful oath
to be, like Sisyphus, in cycles bent
to seed again a vine and spread a leaf.

** The "three sisters" of Native American agriculture are corn, beans and squash.*



Lennart Lundh, Photographer



Susan Martersteck, Photographer

Jennifer Dotson

Honorable Mention, Highland Park Resident

Invitation to Persephone

Eat the pomegranate, my love.
Peel back the red leathery skin and
Split the globe apart.
Inside are juicy seeds like jewels.
Devour them.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Artist

Poem previously published in author's collection, *Clever Gretel* (Chicago Poetry Press, 2013).

Sylvia Riojas Vaughn - Judge for Poems About Fruits and Vegetables

Cook's Work

She could pare apples and oranges
in a continuous spiral.
Skin slipped away from flesh,
obedient to her will.
I watched,
fascinated,
longing to learn how
a paring knife
with a simple brown handle
could separate
protective rind from
vulnerable juiciness,
could tear pocked yellow skin
from poultry parts,
could saw gristle from beef,
daily,
relentlessly,
mechanically,
even as
my soul served
as her tongue's whetstone,
my severed dreams
falling at her feet,
thrown out with
apple cores
and bruised spots
she cut from bananas.



Jen "Pen" Richards, Photographer

Sylvia Riojas Vaughn is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee. She has been selected as a Houston Poetry Fest Juried Poet three times. She learned to craft poetry with the Dallas Poets Community. Her work appears in *The Arachneed Journal*, *Red River Review*, *Triadæ*, *HOUSEBOAT*, *Diálogo*, *Desde Hong Kong: Poets in conversation with Octavio Paz*, *Bearing the Mask: Southwestern Persona Poems* (Dos Gatos Press, 2016), and anthologies and journals in the U.S. and abroad.

Poem previously published in *Red River Review*, an online journal, in August 1999.



1 Emma Alexandra Kowalenko, Photographer