

Poetry Santa Cruz: An Abbreviated History

My friends and colleagues who comprise the working core of Poetry Santa Cruz have asked me to write a short history of the organization and include a few words about the state of our union for this, our first newsletter. As many of you know, The National Writers Union, Local 7, sponsored a poetry reading series in Santa Cruz for many years, long before Poetry Santa Cruz was even an idea. For about two years prior to the birth of PSC, Phil Wagner and I were the organizers for that series.

Slowly, Phil and I began to transform the NWU series. What had been a once-a-month event featuring mostly local poets evolved into a series that featured visiting poets as well as local writers. Soon we were teaming visiting poets with local writers almost every month. And we were able to attract poets with established reputations, as well as poets with emerging reputations. If the opportunity arose, we presented more than one reading a month. At some point in the evolution of the NWU series, the growing logistical requirements made it logical to seek additional volunteers. And at about the same time, Phil and I began to discuss the possibility of creating an organization that would be devoted solely to poetry. We realized that NWU, Local 7, though it had always been supportive, had a much broader agenda than simply organizing poetry events. Phil and I decided to actively explore the possibility of creating an organization to fit under the simple name Poetry Santa Cruz.

The first people we asked to join us in this endeavor were Len Anderson and Julia Alter. There were a few rocky months as we separated from The National Writers Union. We hadn't

realized it, but NWU had sponsored the local poetry reading for eighteen years, through good times and bad. Ultimately, we secured the blessings of Local 7 and since that time PSC and NWU have had a fine and mutually supportive relationship.

Phil, Len, Julia and I have been joined by Susana Wessling, Maggie Paul and Marcia Adams. Len and Susana designed and built and now maintain our website. Len is also Contact Person and handles most of our publicity. Julia maintains The Poetry Hotline. Maggie conducts interviews with visiting poets. Marcia has taken primary responsibility for fundraising. Phil films our events, often with the help of Bonnie Thomas of the NWU. I book the readings.

We've secured financial and organizational support from NWU, the Cultural Council Of Santa Cruz County, the Santa Cruz City Arts Commission, KUSP Public Radio, Poets & Writers, Bookshop Santa Cruz, Capitola Book Café, and the William James Association. And we're grateful, of course, to you, our members.

In our 17 months of existence, we've brought some of the finest poets in the country to our community. There's much we want to do that we've yet to tackle, but I'll have to tell you about that in a future newsletter. Let us know if you can help. If you've got the time and the energy, we've got work for you. "And miles to go...and promises to keep."

Dennis Morton is a founding member of Poetry Santa Cruz and well known as a host of The Poetry Show on KUSP.

International Writers Discuss the 20th Century

Every Spring in Lake Bled, just forty minutes outside of the Slovene capital of Ljubljana, the Internal PEN Conference brings together poets, essayists, and novelists from around the world in an exchange of political and literary ideas. The conference is a convivial gathering of writers, many of whom have reunited each year in this lovely, small, unblemished country of Slovenia. One of the main events at PEN is the meeting of the International Peace Committee. The members of PEN believe that if writers from around the globe share the culture, concerns, and hopes of their people, we will recognize the humanity in each other and make way for peace.

The theme for the 35th International Congress of PEN in 2002 was "What Is Left To Us of the 20th Century." Writers from nineteen different nations delivered papers on this topic, many of whom commented on the ravages of war in the 20th century as well as the technological progress evident in the sciences. Writers from Austria, Vietnam, Mexico, France, the United States, Montenegro, and Slovenia submitted papers on the topic of "The Writer's Responsibility."

Conference materials are provided in the author's native language, and are printed out in translation in Slovene, French, Spanish, English, or Italian. Live translators sit in booths in back and attendees turn headsets to the channel which features their native language. TV cameras and news personnel record the events and interview writers after sessions, especially if there are any heated debates. This adds a sense of urgency and importance, and again is almost shocking to an American writer like myself who has become quite accustomed to being ignored or kept on the fringes.

As an American writer, the urgency and timeliness of one's work may seem no more than an idealistic notion. Poetry, like much art in our corporate, consumer culture is considered a luxury. But once one hears the voices of writers outside of the U.S., one sees how art and politics are intertwined, how one influences the other. I recall the poet Bruce Weigl explaining how the American soldiers would find poems folded up in the pockets of Vietnamese soldiers. In many countries, poems are memorized, and statues of poets grace the main squares (as

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Small Poetry Presses Thrive in Santa Cruz

The majority of poetry published in the United States is published by small independent presses, which range from one-person labors of love to small (and larger) nonprofit groups. Small presses are, therefore, an important link in the chain of getting poetry from the poet to poetry readers, though most readers have no idea what the presses are, why they exist, and the problems they face as they fight to survive in a publishing world dominated by large corporations.

Besides all of the other things Santa Cruz is largely known for, little known is its possible title as the town with the most independent poetry publishers per square mile. All the publishers I spoke with named the weather, the natural beauty, and the congeniality of the culture here as reasons that attracted them. "Poetry and publishing is seduced by Santa Cruz's overall beauty and charm," explains Brian Morrissey, a transplant from the East Coast who publishes *Poesy*, a quarterly poetry journal.

"Santa Cruz is located in a beautiful spot on the Pacific Coast with a fabulous climate," explains Felicia Rice of Moving Parts Press, which has published handsome and innovative books, broadsides and prints since 1977. "Artists of all kinds have been attracted to the Monterey Bay Area for decades and, at one time, it was relatively affordable." But as Len Anderson of Hummingbird Press, a collective small poetry press formed a year ago by nine local poets, explains, "Publishing requires financial resources yet poetry books have limited markets, so there is considerable risk of burning up what resources the publisher has." Rice explains that Santa Cruz, although attractive to small presses in the past, is becoming a difficult place to run such a business. "There is a pattern of artists discovering an area, moving in and making it more attractive to others until it has outpriced the art community. This may very well be what is happening here."

What are the problems facing the viability of poetry presses? "That old adage: How do you make a small fortune in publishing?" asks Kate Hitt of Many Names Press, which publishes poetry and art books. "Start with a large one!" Large publishers

have a stranglehold on distribution in our very large country. Bookstores generally order their books only from several very large distributors, none of which is interested in poetry from small presses. And if our books aren't in bookstores, our audiences can't find us. Explains Anderson, "Because book sales are limited, only a limited number of poets are able break out into national and international distribution. The internet has helped a bit with this one." Morrissey, who needs to get his magazine into bookstores in order to get readers, explains, "I have distributors all over the country and it costs me almost as much to distribute my magazine as to publish it."

Generally writers themselves, poetry publishers distinguish themselves by not only loving publishing, but loving the writing of, and writers of, poetry. "It is a great joy to hold the author's book in my hand and feel that I had a part into bringing it into the world," explains Anderson. Rice calls publishing "meaningful and chosen work." All publishers, despite what poets who could wallpaper their bedrooms with rejection slips might think, want aspiring poets to succeed. "Practice patience and persistence," advises Rice. "Don't hesitate to self-publish." Morrissey's advice: "Don't shy away from submerging yourself into the word." And Hitt warns, "Get a good body of work together. It may take 40 years to polish or build up, but don't let it go to print until it is fully ready."

Len Anderson sums up why all lovers of poetry should support small presses. "A good book of poems offers us a chance to step into the author's life and experience what it feels like, a life that is being examined and worked on by the poet even as the poems are worked on. This is an amazing gift, one it is hard to put an economic value on. And it is a gift you receive again, every time you pick up the book and read a poem."

Suki Wessling is a founding member of Poetry Santa Cruz and the publisher of Chatoyant, a small poetry press (www.chatoyant.com). Chatoyant's latest book is Some Grand Dust by William Minor.

Book Review: Visiting Writer Ralph Angel

Ralph Angel's third book, *Twice Removed*, is as quiet and Rairy as the black and white photo of the deserted outdoor café on its cover. It is the moments beneath the moments Angel speaks to, the silences laden with echoes that occupy these spare and graceful poems. Such poem titles as "The Nothing That Is," "Even Because," "A Second Silence," "Half Circle," "It Takes a While to Disappear"—indicate that this is no earth-bound journey we readers are embarking upon. The poems are not weighed down by the things of this world, yet the world's details are the poet's mode of transport. Angel's poems tread a place that is "twice removed" from earth—a place inside the self yet beyond the self—a place of spaciousness and freedom even with an acute awareness of being alone amid a world of strangers. Strange people. Strange things. In a sense, all the

world that we take for granted in our day to day lives is offered here as a curiosity—a curiosity worthy of reflection, and sometimes, genuflection. The poems achieve what I have come to think the best lyric poetry strives for—a seemingly effortless transformation of the ordinary moment into extraordinary insight. A dusting of the sacred over the monotony of traffic, restaurants, work. Angel looks with his heart upon the southern California where he now lives: "Even the girl who/ stole your purse tracks you down./You can't accept, of course./Her need is greater." The directness of his gaze by-passes linguistic gymnastics and sentimental romanticism. The poems dwell in lyric time and space—uncluttered, melodic, true. One cannot help but step into these poems and come out a little altered, a little wiser.

Maggie Paul

Shaking the Money Tree for PSC

As we pursue our mission to bring top quality poetry to Santa Cruz County, the issue of funding becomes increasingly important. It is our belief that all artists deserve to be fairly compensated for their work. While we are fortunate that many top poets are attracted to Santa Cruz in spite of our meager ability to pay, we do need to shake that old money tree on their behalf. With increased funding, we can attract nationally acclaimed poets to the local scene.

We are delighted to report that the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County has approved a \$1,200 grant for a second year. Our \$1,600 grant from the Santa Cruz Arts Commission extends to November of this year, at which time we will reapply. We gain additional support and funding from the National Writers Union, Poets & Writers, membership contributions and event collection baskets. While this might seem like a princely sum, it is barely enough to cover event presentation costs and

provide a modest stipend to participating poets over the course of an entire year.

As we gather information about other possible funding resources, your input would be most appreciated. If you know of a public or private foundation, business or individual with a possible interest in the activities of Poetry Santa Cruz, please let us know. We'll do the tree shaking. (Contact marcia@poetrysantacruz.org or call (831) 429-2399.)

Thank you for your support of PSC. We encourage you to think of Poetry Santa Cruz memberships as a unique gift to friends and family or to honor the memory of loved ones who shared a passion for the art of poetry.

Marcia Adams is an active member of the Poetry Santa Cruz committee. She brings her professional background in fund raising and her love of good poetry to this volunteer role.

Have an Extra Hand, Minute, Foot, Eye, Telephone, Heart?

Poetry Santa Cruz is run by volunteers who love poetry, love Santa Cruz's vibrant poetry scene, and want to help. How can you help? Use your imagination! We need volunteers to help with events, promotion, author contacts, photocopying, book sales, our Annual Poetry Bash (see Events, last page), and more. Lend us a hand...a minute...a foot...an eye...your telephone...and your heart!

Logged in Lately?

www.poetrysantacruz.org is your online link to poetry in Santa Cruz and beyond. We have a new online bulletin board that is just itching for a controversy, listings of local authors and their books, events both here and abroad, interviews, and more.

International Writers, continued from Page 1

does the national poet Preseren in Lubljana). The works of a nation's artists are regarded as national treasures. Writers are, in fact, ambassadors of their times, and at this world-wide conference, that importance and urgency is very much in the air. Small countries who share their borders with many others do not have the "luxury" of isolation, nor any illusion that they are the center of the universe. Freedoms are hard won over centuries of war, people struggle to keep their languages alive, and the arts are the heartbeat of each culture's integrity.

Perhaps the most memorable discussion took place at a reception following a reading by the Irish novelist Bernard MacLaverty whose novel *Grace Notes* had just been translated into Slovene. I was speaking with Mirko Mirkovic, the distinguished 95-year-old writer from Croatia and the oldest member of PEN. His father served in World War I. He served in WWII. Mirkovic spoke of how the advancements in technology and the sciences were certainly commendable in the 20th century, but that along with these advancements, it is also true that more and more civilians are killed in wartime now than ever before. "National hatred is a dagger pointed at civilized life on earth," he said. And then he urged us to look to Montesquieu, who in

the Age of Enlightenment said, "If I knew that something would be profitable to my nation but harmful to another one, I would not propose it to my prince, because I am a human being before being a Frenchman, and because I am necessarily a human being, a Frenchman only by accident."

The devotion with which the writers I have met at PEN practice their art is memorable. Admirable. W.H. Auden once remarked that poetry makes nothing happen, but as writers we can provide an account of historical events from an individual rather than a nationalistic perspective. We can leave behind a human account, rather than an ideology. Perhaps what we can make happen is a return to memory which makes us accountable to our neighbors in the present and the future. Such is the writer's privilege, and perhaps, responsibility.

Anyone interested in reading the papers mentioned in this article may contact me at magpaul@earthlink.net, or through the Poetry Santa Cruz website.

*Maggie Paul is a founding member of Poetry Santa Cruz. Her chapbook, *Stones from the Baskets of Others*, was recently published by Black Dirt Press.*

Poetry Santa Cruz Calendar, Fall 2002

Tuesday, August 13 7:30 pm **Dane Cervine, SeSe Geddes, Charles Schubert, Suki Wessling**
Bookshop Santa Cruz

Sunday, Sept. 8 2:00 pm **Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers TBA**
Santa Cruz Main Library

Tuesday, Sept. 10 7:30 pm **Local Poets TBA**
Bookshop Santa Cruz

Tuesday, Sept. 17 7:30 pm **Francisco X. Alarcon and Local Poets TBA**
Venue TBA., Watsonville

Tuesday, Sept. 24 7:30 pm **Cornelius Eady and Meg Kearney**
Capitola Book Café

Tuesday, Oct. 8 7:30 pm **Tony Barnstone and Ralph Angel**
Bookshop Santa Cruz

Sunday, Oct. 13 2:00 pm **Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers TBA**
Santa Cruz Main Library

Tuesday, Oct. 22 7:30 pm **Martha Rhodes and Ellen Dudley**
Louden Nelson Community Center

Friday, Nov. 1 7:00 pm **All Poets' Day Celebration**
Louden Nelson Community Center.

Sunday, Nov. 10 2:00 pm **Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers TBA**
Santa Cruz Main Library

Tuesday, Nov. 12 7:30 pm **Aliki Barnstone and Jennifer Hecht**
Bookshop Santa Cruz

Tuesday, Nov. 26 7:30 pm **Lola Haskins and Local Poet TBA**
Capitola Book Café

Sunday, Dec. 8 2:00 pm **Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers TBA**
Santa Cruz Main Library

Tuesday, Dec. 10 7:30 pm **Tilly Washburn Shaw and Robert Sward**
Louden Nelson Community Center

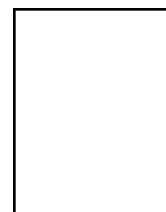
Save the Date: November 1

Last year's Poetry Santa Cruz *Poetry Bash* was fun for all, and we promise to make our **All Poets' Day Celebration** even better! Open readings, corner workshops, raffle, book swap, food, and drinks. If you can volunteer, please let us know. Otherwise we'll just see you there with poems and books to trade in hand!

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Quitting Computer Solitaire, After Playing 17,309 Times

Tilly Washburn Shaw

I actually succeeded in all but two of the games, although a few hands took forever to figure out, seemed like rare hybrids. At the end, on average, I went through the cards in 2 minutes, 35 secs. I imagined myself hurtling through the night, speeding ahead of my headlights. What finally saved me were the total lapsed hours—converted into work weeks, I realized they equaled 5 months.

Yet it wasn't just done to me.
I gave myself over entirely.
I was exploring a drowning.

Tilly Washburn Shaw is the author of Swimming Closer To Shore, due in September from Hummingbird Press. She came from New England to join the faculty at UCSC, where she taught literature and creative writing for 27 years. She will read for Poetry Santa Cruz on December 10.

Upcoming or Recent Books by Monterey Bay Poets:

Ellen Bass, *Mules of Love* (BOAEditions)

Bert Glick, *I Used To Be Me: Selected Poems* (Marimbo Communications)

George Lober, *Shift of Light* (Hummingbird Press)

Morton Marcus, *Shouting Down The Silence* (Creative Arts) and *Moments Without Names* (White Pine Press)

William Minor, *Some Grand Dust* (Chatoyant)

Tilly Washburn Shaw, *Swimming Closer To Shore* (Hummingbird Press)

Robert Sward *Heavenly Sex*, (Black Moss Press)

Mary Lou Taylor, *The Fringes of Hollywood* (Jacaranda Press)

Ken Weisner, *The Sacred Geometry of Pedestrians* (Hummingbird Press)

Gary Young, *No Other Life* (Creative Arts)

Moker's Heartprints

William Minor

One morning he was walking by the insurance company on the corner of Lighthouse and Congress streets in the town in which he lives. An adorable little blond usually sits there, at her desk, and shy but sly Moker was accustomed to sneaking looks at her. The sidewalk by the insurance office had been torn up and fresh concrete had been poured, marked off by barricades and a set of obnoxious yellow streamers. Moker walked around the fresh patches of cement and strolled by the window on what he assumed was solid ground. The girl was not at her desk, but appeared at a far end of the office in a brilliant white blouse, snug curls about her ears and forehead. He suddenly felt a soft caving, but not in his stomach. And it was not that workable warmth that would assail his groin on occasion. The spongy, mushy, cottony, yielding sensation occurred in his feet. The old firm, reliable sidewalk suddenly gave way and, staring at the girl as she returned to her desk, Moker discovered he was walking in freshly poured wet cement, having misjudged or ignored the extent of the work being done. The workmen weren't around, thank God, having left their artistry to the safety of the yellow streamers and barricades, and no one else saw him, not even the girl—so he just walked on, turning one last time to see a track of footprints, embedded forever, indelible—or for as long as that slab of concrete lasts.

William Minor (www.bminor.org) is a poet, artist, and musician who has lived in Pacific Grove for many years. His latest book, Some Grand Dust, has just been published by Chatoyant (www.chatoyant.com).

Who Are These Local Poets?

For each newsletter, Poetry Santa Cruz hopes to feature work by Poetry Santa Cruz members so that our readers can learn more about local poets and their work. For information on Poetry Santa Cruz membership, visit www.poetrysantacruz.org or call our Poetry Hotline at (831) 429-2399.

Heavenly Sex

Robert Sward

Father: Chicago, IL

1. The Law

Opens a bottle of schnapps. "Writer, *schmyter*,
you're unemployed.

Unemployed people must make love
at least once a day.

Talmud says:

A laborer, twice a week; a mule driver
once a week; a camel driver,
once a month. It's the law.

This is heavenly sex. Say a blessing—
pray—"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God..."

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, El-lo-hei-nu...

For your spouse and for your seed.

What is it with you?

I need to explain how to bring a soul into the world?"

2. The Blessing

"Listen:

The soul is the Lord's candle.

So you say a blessing. And you sing to her—your wife:

Strength and honor are her clothing, you sing.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom, you sing.

Her children arise up and call her blessed, you sing.

Rabbi says if knowing a woman were not holy,

it would not be called 'knowing.'

So, after a good *Shabbes* meal—

linen tablecloth, blessed spices,

braided loaves of challah,

a goblet of wine...

Thirty-nine things you cannot do on the Sabbath,

but you can eat. You can drink. You can *schtepp*.

Make one another happy.

It's the law."

Robert Sward is a poet and fiction writer with many books to his credit. His latest book, *Heavenly Sex*, will be out this fall. He will read for Poetry Santa Cruz on December 10.

Congrats! **Morton Marcus** had a poem featured on Poetry Daily in June. Go to <http://www.poems.com/momepmar.htm>

Let Us Know Your News

If you're a local poet and you're publishing a book, receiving an award, or have online publications, let us know. We are here to support you!

When I Get Mine

Kathleen Flowers

When I was ten,
I ate the best
piece of fruit
of my life.
With care,
I dug a hole
and planted that pit
in our backyard.

How the family laughed!
They swore,
Nothing'll grow.
When a sapling sprouted,
they shook their heads
and warned,
Well, it won't bear fruit,
you know.

Mom now lives
in that house alone
and every spring
she has more nectarines
than she can eat,
more than she can
give away.

When I get mine,
we shake our heads
and laugh,
sweet juice
running down
our chins.

Kathleen Flowers has a BA in Spanish Literature and a MA in Education from UC Santa Cruz. Her poetry has been published in *Porter Gulch Review* and *Matrix*.