

This Vehicle Stops at Poetry Readings

Following is a preview of some of Poetry Santa Cruz upcoming readers. You can find our schedule on the back of this newsletter, and more information at www.poetrysantacruz.org.

Kim Nelson is the local coordinator for California Poetry in the Schools. She also teaches poetry writing to incarcerated youth through WriterCorps. Kim's poetry brings us the stories and the hard truths of young people in our prisons, their struggles with themselves, with their pasts and with the future.

Aliki Barnstone's latest collection of poems is entitled *Wild With It*. Whether she is exploring a snowy winter landscape or undressing Jesus, the rich texture of the language and the clarity of the images are rubbing up against the ecstasy that the title evokes. She reminds me that spirituality is driven by love. And she is wild with it.

Jennifer Michael Hecht is a poet and a historian of science who specializes in the history of doubt and atheism. Her book of poems, *The Next Ancient World*, is written as a guidebook to help future armchair archeologists understand our current world. Part of the brilliance of these poems is that each rides on an undercurrent which reveals itself at the end as in a good mystery story, except that in this case, part of what is revealed is ourselves.

Lola Haskins has published six volumes of poetry, the latest being *The Rim Benders*. She writes jewels of poems, journeys in the imagination, in which each line feeds me so well that I have to read the next.

In *The Fringes of Hollywood* **Mary Lou Taylor** evokes the innocence and freshness of her youth in Southern California and illuminates it with the wisdom of a mature woman. She follows a sensuous weave and lingers on the details, but there is a clear guiding intelligence that drives each poem. We are

charmed by what she is charmed by because we are meeting real human beings and I never detect the surfacing of Northern California snobbery, nor the idolatry of celebrities in her or me.

Julia Alter's poems are delicious to the ear, tongue and imagination and win awards wherever they go. Catch her now before the rest of the world finds out.

Dane Cervine is on a path of discovery. What he finds is fresh, surprising, humorous and full of insight.

Robert Sward's new book, *Heavenly Sex*, continues his dialogue with his eccentric, loveable, browbeating, mystical and downright hilarious podiatrist father who powered *Rosicrucian In The Basement*. This time his father brings us good news: "Writer, schmyter,/you're unemployed./Unemployed people must make love/at least once a day." Such prescriptions from the Talmud and surprising metaphysical revelations seamlessly woven with advice on care of the feet and disappointment with his son make this character unforgettable.

Tilly Shaw taught Literature and Creative Writing at UCSC for 30 years and thus has given generously of herself to the literary community. Some of us wouldn't wait any longer for Tilly's own collection of poems, were afraid it might even be lost to us, so we invited her to join Hummingbird Press so we could publish it. Most of the poems in *Swimming Closer to Shore* are a record on the page of the inner life rendered as poetry. They expose the longing, self-doubt, disappointment and criticism, turns of impulse, and hard-won self-discovery of a thoroughly modern women always in the making. Sure enough, I find myself in these poems, too.

Len Anderson is a founding member of Poetry Santa Cruz and Hummingbird Press.

A Community Effort to Publish the Work of Sandra Dasmann

"I'm not done with this yet," Alexandra Daz writes: "this wild aliveness, this difficult and tricky incarnation."

Ms. Daz is also known as Sandra Dasmann, a dear friend who has inspired fellow students for years in the circle of writers under the tutelage of Ellen Bass. Last year national recognition came to her, Philip Levine awarding her third prize in the National Writers Union poetry contest. At a time of her life when her words were really taking wing she was diagnosed with Multiple System Atrophy. She may now be in the last stages of this terminal disease, which destroys the muscles by attacking part of the brain.

"I am the child you could not save," she sings, "dancing wild on childhood's grave, leaping free of the dazzling flow. Lose me. Find me. Let me go."

Sandra's resume includes a degree from UC Berkeley and a career as an art therapist and editor. She was the founder of PLEXUS, a feminist newspaper in Berkeley which continued

publishing for ten years. She is a painter as well as a poet.

Today she has lost a distressing amount of weight, and it is becoming difficult for her to swallow. She works stubbornly on finishing a book of poems, which she desires to leave for her friends and in particular for her two sons, who are themselves struggling writers and artists. Her willpower is awesome to those who know her.

We intend to produce a handsome and enduring volume of her passionate poems and graphics, which must not be lost. If it is possible for you to send \$15 or more, you will receive a copy. Please send whatever you can, including your mailing address, to Ellen Bass, 226 Younglove Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95060, noting that the money is for Sandra Dasmann.

Vito and Shalom Victor are local writers who are organizing this effort for Sandra Dasmann.

On the Question of Exposure

I'm often asked what it feels like to reveal so much of my life in my poems. Usually the question is posed respectfully, even with appreciation. Occasionally it's almost an insult, like the radio host on a recent trip to Vermont who greeted me with, "You really let it all hang out, don't you?" Though I tried to explain that, in fact, I didn't, that a poem is not an open diary or an uncensored spilling upon the page, he didn't listen.

But as many bad experiences will, it got me wondering. What *do* I really expose in my poetry? How *do* I think about that?

First, I should say that not all my poems are literally true. Almost all poets shift certain facts and details in the shaping of a poem, but in some cases, the narrative of the poem is not even mine. More and more, I've been opening up my poems to include both events that have happened to other people and fictional material. I'm able to do this only when the subject is one for which I have a true affinity, one I can enter deeply from my own well of feeling. Sometimes the entire poem relies on experiences that I have not lived through; other times just a section of the poem veers off from my own life. Either way, the voice, tone, and language I use is, I think, indistinguishable from that of poems that closely follow my own history. That is, I don't try to take on the speech of another speaker, as in a "persona" poem. Instead, I use my own voice as I would if I'd lived those events. What's mine is the sensibility, the feelings, the perspective. In poems that are successful, those things are so true that it becomes unimportant whether it really happened to me—or at all.

That said, many of my poems are based on my own life. And some of them are as close to what I have lived and observed as

I can make them. In those poems, I reveal aspects of my life, including my fears and longings, my regrets, my pleasures, and the particulars of my daily life, including interactions with my partner, my children, and others. The reader does look into the window of my life and see the diorama framed there.

But what am I really revealing? That I have had my share of joys and sorrows? That I have made mistakes as a parent? That my partner and I have hurt each other's feelings? have had fights? That I am a sexual person—with desires which sometimes are fulfilled and sometimes not? When I was a teenager and accused my mother of being hopelessly old-fashioned, she said to me, "Your generation thinks it invented sex." Yes. Any of us who are past our teens are—or should be—aware that there's nothing new about passion. It's been going on for a long time, so there should be little shock that people feel this. And about the other things—who hasn't fought with a loved one? who hasn't made a mistake? who hasn't wished for a chance to do it over, to do it better? who hasn't been frightened? who hasn't been struck by gratitude?

It's come to me that I'm not really exposing anything—except that I am an ordinary human being. I think of my poems as being not so much about me, but about a woman in her fifties, living in a family with a partner and children, in the early years of the twenty-first century in the United States. She, the speaker, the "I" of the poem, tells what she can about this reality. I, the poet, stand half a step behind her, listening.

Ellen Bass is a PSC member. Her most recent book is Mules of Love from BOA Editions. You can learn more about her books and workshops at www.ellenbass.com.

Book Review: Gary Young's *No Other Life*

No Other Life, Gary Young's latest book, is a trilogy comprised of his earlier books *Days*, *Braver Deeds*, and the more recent *If He Had*. Each section of Young's trilogy is thematically threaded with new life, premature death, and redemption. Yet any attempt to categorize these delicate pearls of prose poems would only deprive the prospective reader of the magic Young spins with pure lyrical language and an honesty of the soul. Speaking of the young boy's death about which *If He Had* revolves, Young writes: "His folks will never get over this... And I told him, no, they won't." Honesty penetrates the poems, urging the reader to confront the naked truth about some of life's most difficult moments.

The dialogue between parent and child forces the honesty issue; in fact, stands it on its head:

When your children ask, will you always love me, say you will love them forever, and then tell them what forever means... But when they ask you, will I ever die, then lie to them. They're still young, and it might frighten them if you said, no.

In a number of poems, acute observations of landscape lead to absolute truth, expressed in a way that we have never seen

before: "There is a ragged pink cloud in the sky; it wasn't there a moment ago. The worst thing that you can imagine is not the worst thing that can happen to you."

The poems in *No Other Life* articulate the purity and innocence of a point of view that is unencumbered by skepticism and sarcasm. His eye and heart are connected; what comes through one goes through the other, without missing a beat. And what more could one ask of a lyric poet than to rip the seams out of our compartmentalized existence and show us how the threads are so closely woven?

While reading *No Other Life*, the words of Paul Eluard come to mind: "There is another world, but it is in this one." I am grateful to have so fine a poet as Gary Young to remind us to look for "the other world" in *No Other Life* but this one. Suffice it to say, his poems prove Eluard's words to be true, and that poetry is the vehicle where the truth is always news.

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

DIY: Why a publisher loves self-published chapbooks

Although I publish books by other writers, I have a love of those self-published chapbooks that you see usually stacked under the poetry section in your local bookstore. Our locals are kind enough to provide space for these; in others I've visited the authors resort to a sort of "guerrilla" style of distributing their work, and you find it surreptitiously shoved within the stacks of poetry books or independent zines.

Most chapbooks are created on letter-sized paper, folded once and stapled. This is obviously the cheap way to go—you can create it on your computer and have it produced by Kinko's. Some range from the homespun—hand-written or typed, hand-bound or printed in ingenious ways—to the rather elaborate. I found one example at Kepler's in Menlo Park of an author who clearly had friends in the graphic design industry—I bought her gorgeous chapbook for its innovative design and full-color printing more than the poetry!

Chapbooks don't need an ISBN and no distributor will carry them. While this may seem a handicap, I think it actually helps them retain their charm and legitimacy. When a poet produces a chapbook of his or her own poetry, it's a labor of love. The poet can give the chapbook to friends and family (unless the poetry warrants that they not share it!), can offer it up for sale at readings, can send it out to other writers and reading venues, can drop off copies at whatever bookstore will take it and hope that someone will pick it up, admire it, and possibly even buy it.

And you never know where a chapbook will lead you. At the Associated Writing Programs conference last year in New Orleans, I heard a prominent editor explain how he'd gotten his break. He'd sent a chapbook to a number of writers whose work he respected. One of those writers, some time later, was asked by a press for recommendations of young poets whose work he thought was publishable. He mentioned this writer's chapbook as very strong work. Although it turned out that the press in question had rejected the young poet's work previously, they ended up publishing a book of his on the strength of this recommendation!

The publishing industry has lately been shaken by a variety of factors: the dominance of chain bookstores, low profit margins, the gobbling of independent presses by large conglomerates. But none of this can touch the legitimacy of the poet's chapbook. If we are writing to be heard, to share our ideas, to enter into the conversation between thinking people around the globe, then chapbooks are a great way to continue our craft, even if they don't lead to a book contract.

Suki Wessling is a founding member of Poetry Santa Cruz and the publisher of Chatoyant, a small poetry press (www.chatoyant.com). Chatoyant's forthcoming book is Embellishments by Virginia Chase Sutton. Suki has no time to produce a chapbook of her own work at the moment!

Be Hip...with a PSC Membership!

Did you know that Poetry Santa Cruz is an all volunteer organization? No paid staffers, no office space overhead. Every dime raised is devoted to our efforts to enhance the quality of poetry experiences in Santa Cruz County. Your tax-deductible membership contribution of \$25.00 will go straight to local and visiting poets.

Because of cuts by the City of Santa Cruz and the Cultural Council, we need to raise more money from other sources in order to maintain the quality of our program. With your support, we can nourish the growing reputation of Poetry Santa

Cruz as one of the "must read" venues.

Member contributions make a powerful statement about how the art of poetry is valued in a community. For contributions of \$50.00 or more, donors receive a Poetry Santa Cruz T-shirt. Donors above the \$100 level will also receive two free books of poetry from this year's readers. Be hip...with a PSC membership!

If you are so hip that you already have a PSC membership, we want to say thank you once again. Please consider a renewal when your annual membership expires on _____.

This is a _____ renewal _____ new membership.

Please check level of support:

- Basic one-year membership, \$25
- Upgrade to get a cool T-shirt, \$50
- Be a great friend and get 2 books, too, \$100
- Additional tax-deductible donation:
 - \$300 to underwrite a reading
 - \$180 to support the Poetry Hotline for a year
 - \$150 to support our website for a year
 - \$50 to pay one local reader
 - \$20 to photocopy flyers for one reading

Clip and mail this form along with your check payable to **William James Association** to Poetry Santa Cruz, POBox 259, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-0259.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Poetry Santa Cruz Calendar, Winter 2003

Sunday, Nov. 10
2:00 pm
Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured reader Kim Nelson
Santa Cruz Main Library

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

Tuesday, Nov. 26
7:30 pm
Lola Haskins and Mary Lou Taylor
Capitola Book Café

Sunday, Dec. 8
2:00 pm
Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers Julia Alter and Dane Cervine
Santa Cruz Main Library

Tuesday, Dec. 10
7:30 pm
Tilly Washburn Shaw and Robert Sward
Veterans Memorial Building, Santa Cruz

Tuesday, Jan. 14
7:30 pm
Readers TBA
Bookshop Santa Cruz

Sunday, Jan. 19
2:00 pm
Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers TBA
Santa Cruz Main Library

Friday, Jan 24
7:00 pm
All Poets' Day Celebration
Grace Methodist Church Fellowship Hall,
1051 Cayuga St., Santa Cruz

Sunday, Feb. 9
2:00 pm
Poet/Speak Open Reading with featured readers TBA
Santa Cruz Main Library

Tuesday, Feb. 11
7:30 pm
Sarah Arvio and co-reader TBA
Bookshop Santa Cruz

Save the Date: January 24

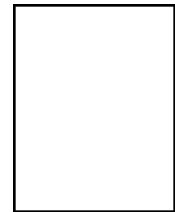
Last year's Poetry Santa Cruz *Poetry Bash* was fun for all, and we promise to make our **All Poets' Day Celebration** even better! Open readings, corner workshops, raffle, book swap, food, and drinks. If you can volunteer, please let us know. Otherwise we'll just see you there with poems and books to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

Volunteers Needed!

If you like what we do, consider helping out. We can use your time and expertise in many ways. We especially will need help with this year's All Poet's Day Celebration. If you can help in any way, e-mail info@poetrysantacruz.org or talk to us at a reading.

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P.O. Box 259
Santa Cruz, CA 95061-0259



BOOKSHOP SANTA CRUZ

Capitola Book Café



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The Morning After

Alexandra Daz

“Would you like to put your hand
on a tree that’s been hit by lightning?”
she asked, and I followed her,
last in line behind the others
down a narrow path that wound
through the woods in a fine rain
that turned to snow & back again.
We ducked under wet branches,
came upon a massive cedar
pried apart by last night’s storm,
in a giant, twisting flash,
like a corkscrew.
I laid my palm against the trunk
closed my eyes, not sure what,
if anything, I felt.
Then I watched her face,
quiet, grave, her fingers
feeling the bark, exploring
the hidden dimensions of damage
the way a mother would
touch an injured child.

See our feature on Alexandra Daz on Page 1.

Recent Books by Monterey Bay Poets:

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

Barbara J. Rios, *Who Is In Charge Here?* (self-published)

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

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

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

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

Logged in Lately?

www.poetrysantacruz.org is your online link to poetry in Santa Cruz and beyond. We have an 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.

Who Are These Local Poets?

Each issue of Poetry Santa Cruz NEWS features work by Poetry Santa Cruz members and prominent local poets. For information on Poetry Santa Cruz membership, visit www.poetrysantacruz.org or call our Poetry Hotline at (831) 429-2399.

Gary Young

When I was five, I knew God had made the world and everything in it. I knew God loved me, and I knew the dead were in heaven with God always. I had a sweater. I draped it on a fence, and when I turned to pick it up a minute later, it was gone. That was the first time I had lost anything I really loved. I walked in circles, too frightened to cry, searching for it until dark. I knew my sweater was not in heaven, but if it could disappear, just vanish without reason, then I could disappear, and God might lose me, no matter how good I was, no matter how much I was loved. The buttons on my sweater were translucent, a shimmering, pale opalescence. It was yellow.

*

My son wakes screaming. His dreams are real; he’s riding a horse, and the horse falls down. He’s so young, I don’t know how to tell him all our joy is wrung from that terror. Did you like it, I ask him. Fall down, he cries, fall down. Did you like riding the horse? And he looks at me, stops sobbing, and says yes.

*

Six birds rise in unison from the roof across the street. They circle overhead, then they land again on the building’s brick façade. It’s dusk, and the birds are a perfect silhouette against the failing light. The dark is almost upon us. There is a ragged pink cloud in the sky; it wasn’t there a minute ago. The worst thing you can imagine is not the worst thing that can happen to you.

See page 2 for a review of Gary Young’s latest book, *No Other Life*. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Poetry Santa Cruz is a poetry promotion and advocacy organization. Our unpaid staff consists of Dennis Morton, Len Anderson, Marcia Adams, Julia Alter, Phil Wagner, Maggie Paul, and Susana Wessling. We are joined by wonderful and necessary volunteers from the community.

Pleasures of the Exotic

Mary Lou Taylor

L.A.

It took us a while,
my father and me,
to shunt off our Midwest
traces. My mother never did.

Unschool'd
in the fluidity of Spanish names,
we stumbled over La Jolla,
Port Hueneme, Sepulveda.

Sin City
my mother's name for Hollywood.
Voluptuous bottoms, long bare thighs,
short shorts were not for me.

New settlers
we were least at home
in the supermarket. We who ate
canned beans had never before
been exposed to the pleasures
of such strange food:

Artichoke
fortress all its own
spiked at each leaf's tip
refusing to reveal its secrets
unless uncovered one by one
like Salome's veils

Avocado
its greenness snug in the palm;
press it, feel it give, cut through
firmly to open its halves.
Some skin peels away
like an opening curtain;
some must go under the knife

Papaya
shaped like a Rubens woman
its color the warmth of the setting sun;
inside, firm flesh, smooth, slippery
its womb black pearls
full of promise

Mary Lou Taylor's first book is The Fringes of Hollywood. She lives in Saratoga, where she serves as Arts Commissioner for the city. She is also an active member of Poetry Center San Jose. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Call for Submissions

Poetry Santa Cruz NEWS is published approximately quarterly. We are hoping to include a variety of voices from our community. If you have a topic you'd like to write about, please contact info@poetrysantacruz.org.

On the Title of "Poet"

George Lober

I hate the way women say it,
the way they roll it around their tongues
like a slice of sweet orange
and then lick their lips for extra flavor,

the way they pinch it
between long red fingernails
and rub it across each nipple
while reaching for the other hand,
for a calculator and adding up
my limited earning potential.

I hate the way men say it
when they round it off
like a vanilla wafer served with tea
in their great aunt's parlor,

the way they dress it
in velvet slippers and a red velour robe,
and then imagine me wimped out
by the scent of engine oil or dirt,
or even my own sweat.

I hate the way anyone says it
who doesn't get that for every moment
spent seeing the wind bend
through mock heather
and remembering your sister's laugh,

there are twenty dark hours
on a rain-swept, empty street
with a pen that doesn't write
as your only defense, and behind you
always, the shuffle of literary feet.

Printed with permission from George Lober's Shift of Light (Hummingbird Press, 2002). He teaches English at Monterey Peninsula College and the Naval Postgraduate School.