

Utah State Poetry Society 2010 Spring Festival Competition – Judges’ Comments

Category 1. Betty D. Grugin, West Virginia

“Open Mic” is a poem with feelings easy to relate to.

“At My Grave” has special meaning for me after the death of my grandson last year.

“It’s not Good to Forget” is full of imagery.

“Vultures” carries a deeper meaning.

“1972—the Search” refers to a special generation.

Category 2. Amy Jo Zook, Ohio

I could wish to see all of these in print. Even some of the special recognitions I have a fondness for, especially the ones about Webster and Eve. I hope they all go on to greater recognition.

Category 3. Anne Caston, Pennsylvania

“Lessons in the Art of Apology” leapt out above all the others as an exemplary poem filled with fresh and unusual vision while attending to the constraints of rhyme. It also is a fine example of accumulation and propulsion as well as imaginative verb “wrenching.”

Category 4. Lola B. Haskins, Florida

It was really hard. There were many things I loved, so I wanted to give more honorable mentions. Finally, there’s no such thing as a losing poem.

Category 5. Doris Stengel, Minnesota

My challenge was to select poems that included ALL the criteria—spontaneous, intense emotion along with imagery and metaphor. Many were personal and emotional but lacked intensity. Only the top three made effective use of metaphor and imagery. Many were good poems but somehow came up short on the specifics.

Category 6. Caroline Walton, Florida

There were so many good poems that I would give citations to all the remaining poems. The #1 poem, “Dot to Dot,” was so different that it caught my eye and kept coming back to the top of the line—so innovative for the subject “without you.”

Category 7. Ann Gasser, Pennsylvania

Thanks for the opportunity to judge these fine poems.

Category 8. Margo La Gattuta, Michigan

Thanks so much. I’ve enjoyed the poems.

Category 9. Anita Tanner, Idaho

I enjoyed reading the poetry.

Category 10. Polly Opsahl, Michigan

I enjoyed reading the poems although deciding on the winners was not easy.

Category 11. Pauline Mounsey, Arizona

I enjoyed judging; it is always interesting to see different people's viewpoints. Let me suggest to the contestants overall that you, please, check your spelling whether it concerns a proper name like *Chiricahua* or the use of a word such as *due* or *do*. Spellcheck doesn't care.

Category 12. H. George Frederickson, PhD, and Mary Frederickson, Kansas

We would like to have awarded all these—and many others—a first place.

Category 13. Lucille Morgan Wilson, Iowa

[Due to a recent injury, Lucille was unable to include comments with her results.]

Category 14. Doris K. Ferguson, Texas

This is one of the toughest jobs of judging I ever had. The talent of Utah poets is enough to blow me away. So many more really deserve prizes!

Category 15. Jeremy Downes, Alabama

Thank you for the opportunity to work with these fine poems!

Category 16. Carlee Swann, Texas

"Hunkered Down" offered a clear, crisp image with a great title and visuals. Some poets tried to pack all of their vocabulary into the helpless 12 lines, overloading the poor poem and losing the simplicity of Wallace Stevens' "wagon" poem. Every line is so important as is a good title and first and last lines. The simple honed images seemed to work best.

Category 17. Marianne Klekacz, Oregon

In this category, one problem is that "Western history" requires a narrative, so the first issue is to remember to write a poem; poetic elements like tone, language, rhythm (or meter), and symbolic language must come into play. Another problem is that we know a lot about Western history, but a poem needs something unexpected in the viewpoint, story, resolution, or something else. For example, a poem about the Pony Express must have something to say about the Pony Express that hasn't been said many times before. The "John and Granville Stuart" story called out in topic but also revealed the little-covered fact that many pioneers thought the life of the mind was just as necessary as survival. Nice quatrains avoided forced rhyme.

"Miss Annie Oakley" is a nicely executed villanelle in keeping with the gentility ascribed to Miss Annie in this poem. And the final stanza's question as to her gentility keeping her from preventing a major war makes us sit up and think. Nice poem.

"Lest We Forget," again in well-crafted quatrains, details all we don't have to worry about because our forebears worried about them first. This graceful and grace-full poem is a lovely hymn of praise.

"Pine Valley" pantoum accomplishes what so many of the repeating forms do well: it focuses on a specific experience, in this case the nearly unbearable heat of the desert summer. A fine piece of work.

"Stagecoach Mary" gives a different view of the mail rider. I loved the twist of irreverence at the end.

“As They Left It” has parts about the Perris Tabernacle as fine as any poem in the category. But the poet could strip away the first two stanzas (which do not contribute to the magic), change the title to reflect the location, and leap into the magnificent description of the Tabernacle. The first two stanzas that have scaffolded the poet, in order to get into the poem, must be taken down when the truly beautiful work emerges.

Category 18. Terry Hermsen, Ohio

Difficult as such decisions are, I enjoyed having a chance to read the submissions.

Category 19. Glenna Glee, Ohio

What an interesting category! Thanks for the opportunity to enjoy these beautiful images.

Category 20. Beverly Monestier, Texas

Many writers were quite creative concerning their ideas but got so caught up with the fairy tale theme that they forgot to write a poem, not a prose story. I was necessarily lenient on this point, but you might remind your members if this is an annual theme.

Category 21. Beverly Taylor, West Virginia

It was a pleasure judging again this year.

Category 22. Roni Jackson, Oregon

So many cleverly written, light-hearted poems meant rankings came down to such things as technicalities in meter or forced rhyme.

Category 23. Sam Zook, Ohio

What a wonderful set of poems! It was hard to make final choices.

Category 24. Star Coulbrook, Utah

In poem after poem, I was impressed by strong narrative style and/or lyrical sense and by the spirit of fun that Ken appreciated so much. Many poems portrayed genuinely delightful characters. I enjoyed the form poems and appreciated those that mentioned or gave tribute to Ken.

“To Have a Son” carried an exceptionally strong voice, cadence and vivid narrative, true to the speaker’s experience.

“Faith Precedes the Katydid” contains just the right amount of detail and humor; its consonance sets the mood and advances the action.

“A World of Water: Debussy’s *La Mer*” allows the reader to hear and feel its music and emotion.

“Postcards” offers wonderful description and detail set in well-crafted lines. It contains great use of quotes and a nice ending.

“Beautiful Hair” has a great story, delicious narrative turn and nice pacing.

Category 25. Steve Concert, Pennsylvania

Thank you for the honor of serving as judge.

Category 26. Mary Christine Delea, Oregon
[No comments offered.]

Category 27. Marcia Camp, Arkansas
Thank you for giving me the opportunity to judge these fine poems.

Category 28. Sy Swann, Texas
The description (“Sound of Music” – a lyric poem; subjective nostalgic, with personal emotion, but not sentimental) confused me. How can you write a truly nostalgic poem without being involved sentimentally?
The poems were enjoyable, but many about fall, dancing, etc. were such worn topics and used all the usual clichés. The first place winner was a handling of a totally different theme, a common horseback ride in which music permeated the feeling and rhythm of the piece. One wonderful poem was, unfortunately, in every sense of the word a narrative.
I challenge you to let go of overworked warhorse topics (music, love, springtime, family) and write about doorknobs, Chinese watercolors, or the mind of a rat!!! Explore fresh new topics to come up with fabulous ideas!!

Category 29. Ruth Harrison, Oregon
[No comments offered.]

Category 30. Angela Barker Thomas, Kentucky
Thank you for the opportunity to judge another batch of beautiful poems. Besides the top poems, one untitled piece would likely have ranked among the top 10 if it had rated a title.

Category 31. Beverly Monestier, Texas
For the most part, winners understood the following:
--Narrative style in poetry does not mean you are writing prose.
--Nobody likes to feel preached to, even if they agree with your patriotic position.
Let emotion and beliefs inspire rather than take center stage and get in the way of good poetry.
--Take the assigned theme and prescribed style but distinguish your entry from all others by creativity in subject choice, fresh angle, vivid imagery, and poetic devices.

Category 32. Sue Stevens Chambers, Minnesota
As usual, Utah poets are top notch!

Category 33. Robert L. Carney, Utah
[No comments offered.]

Category 34. Russell Strauss, Tennessee
Thanks for the opportunity to judge.

Category 35. Pat King, Iowa

Thanks for giving me the chance to read these poems. I hope their writers are inspired to do even more and be even better.

Category 36. Linda Banks, Texas

What a challenge this was!

Category 37. Gail Teachworth, Florida

It has been a pleasure reading so much wonderful poetry. Thanks for the opportunity.

Category 38. Joy Campbell, Pennsylvania

It was an honor to judge this category.

Category 39. David Hedges, Oregon

“Veteran” is powerful and arresting, wringing every last drop from its subject and making every last word count. Bravo!

“Brief Evangelism” is a brilliantly conceived and executed poem, taut as Paganini’s E string—all one sentence without a wasted word. Its deceptively simple language runs deep. I was taken with the contrapuntal modifiers “shiny” and “grimy” and active verbs “hustle” and “cross.”

“Saving the Light” opens with a grabber, something too few poems do. I couldn’t help but follow where the narrator led, and I wasn’t disappointed—though I wanted to transpose the last two lines (minus the *and*), making “others” relate to the narrator, then ending with “Sleeping Beauty . . .”

“Tree House” offers a nostalgic narrative with similarities to other poems I’ve read (and written) about growing up, though the words were fresh. What a delightful surprise when the last three lines vaulted the poem into the top four!

“Submerged” accomplishes a lot in 12 lines, sustaining a strong metaphor with a series of finely drawn images which pulse with the rhythms of the sea. The absence of capitals and end punctuation is effective here.

“The Soils Specialist” is a sentimental favorite, a poem of love and loss that moves gracefully for the most part--the ending is perfect—but seems to falter in spots. Another judge might disagree.

“If I Had My Way” is just right except for the critical last line, which fails to satisfy.

“The poet is not identified” has nice structure and imagery, but the second stanza ends on a weak note. The poet might try eliminating articles and conjunctions where appropriate.

In “Trailing Echoes in Jerusalem” the splendid irony of the beginning and ending are weakened by the distractions of the middle section. Compression will make this poem a top contender.

“Yearning for Sleep” is both poignant and believable and might well rank higher in another contest.

Category 40. Joyce Shiver, Florida

This was one of the hardest contests I have ever judged, and I wanted to award too many firsts.

Category 41. Budd Powell Mahan, Texas
[No comments offered.]

Category 42. Dorothy J. Williams, Colorado

When writing about location, it's difficult to separate the place from the person.

Memories creep in, and personal stories can take the reader outside the place itself.

Each of the top three poems are strong with sense of place. "View from Lafe's Hill," a beautiful piece of lyrical writing, takes one into the scene with just enough balance between place and emotion.

Category 43. Kaye Abikhaled, Texas

Wow! Such fine poetry! Poems expressing what may lie in the fine area between strict ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing met the mark.