

Hello All!

PST-West Tennessee had their November meeting on Saturday 11/3 at the White Station Library. Meeting minutes are attached.

November Program — Sponsoring and Judging Contests

Russell Strauss presented the first of a 2-part series on contests. Part 1, Sponsoring and Judging Contests, included many very helpful tips, including:

- why we should sponsor a contest – to encourage other poets to explore new forms and ideas!
- what to think about when we are sponsoring a contest, including selecting between contest forms and subjects, and making instructions clear
- tips on judging, including developing a rating system (Russell shared his own criteria)
- what to do when the poems you're judging are all great, or all mediocre — how do you select a winner?

See his attached handouts and the meeting minutes. for more details. Russell promises to present Part 2, Tips for Entering/Winning Contests, at a later meeting!

Festival Summary

We had 13 attendees; more than 16+ register to attend, but several folks were unable to attend due to health or family obligations. Jerri Hardesty presented on Performance Poetry — this was a fascinating talk about how to make oral poetry come alive. Notes from her talk are attached, but remember to use emotion, maybe a few gestures/body movements, and be a bigger version of yourself. And remember to practice! Jerri ran an actual workshop, and had EVERYONE at the festival read a poem aloud and then coached us through various performance elements – it was enlightening.

The day concluded with announcing contest award winners. See below for details!

Many thanks to everyone who made Festival possible this year...JoAn Howerton, Festival Coordinator; Leslie Blakeburn, hostess for Friday night's party; William Hill and his wife, who coordinated food; Russell Strauss, who was our emcee; and Janet Qually who was our poetry reader and helped Bill, Russell, and JoAn with many different aspects of the Festival.

We are starting to discuss plans for next year! First and foremost, we will be shifting Festival to late October, 3rd or 4th weekend. More news on this later!

62nd Annual Contests

Contest award winners were sent out last month after Festival, but congratulations again to all who participated! We had several requests for additional information. Here are some fun facts:

- Total number of entrants: 40 (24 members, 16 non-members)
- Average number of entries per entrant was about 10
- Maximum number of entries was 23; we had one person who only entered a single poem
- We had great participation from all 3 PST chapters, plus entrants from: TX, MS, OK, IL, MI, CT, MO, VA, AR, OR, and AL.
- Not counting best of the fest, 101 prizes and HMs were awarded, with over \$1000 in prizes.
- 32 different participants won prizes/HMs.

- Our most “winningest” poet placed or received HMs in 10 different contests.

The number of poems entered in each contest are shown below:

Contest #	# Entries	Contest #	# Entries	Contest #	# Entries
1	41	8	24	15	13
2	30	9	15	16	8
3	27	10	22	17	19
4	25	11	17	18	24
5	11	12	13	19	16
6	16	13	17	20	7
7	21	14	13	21	9

Many thanks to all who helped with the contest – Lori Goetz, Contest Coordinator; Leslie Blakeburn, Treasurer; Jerri Hardesty, Best-of-the-Fest Judge; JoAn Howerton for coordinating all non-member judges.

PST Student Contest

The PST Student Contest information is posted; this is open to all Tennessee residents. See the link below. Note there are different deadlines for different contests/age groups:

- 6-12 grade — deadline 12/7/18
- Elementary students — deadline 2/15/19
- Eye poems (all ages) — deadline is 2/15/19

Also note that winners in the 6-12 grade group are sent to the NFSPS Manningham Trust Student Poetry Competition.

<http://www.tnpoetry.org/blogs/post/Student-Contests-2018-2019/>

Strophes and NFSPS Website

See the NFSPS website for new edition of Strophes. Strophes is published quarterly.

<https://nfsp.com/Strophes.htm>

The NFSPS website also has links to currently open state contests, if you’re interested.

<https://nfsp.com/statecontests.html>

And, the 2019 NFSPS contests are shown here:

https://nfsp.com/poetry_contests.htm

News from Chapters

PST-NE reports that they now have 20 members! They are busy coordinating a Veteran’s Day program on 11/12, and have also set a date for a program (a reading and mini-workshop) with Dr. Marilyn Kallet on Thursday 3/28/19 at 6 pm at the Johnson City Public Library entitled “Writing Praise Poems in Troubled Times”. They are also trying to get the Appalachian Fair Board to add a poetry category and an education table; more information pending. Plans are in the works for public readings in April for National Poetry Month; October meeting minutes are attached.

No news from PST-Knoxville — their next meeting will be after the new year.

West Tennessee — Important News

- December meeting — As most Memphis residents know, the St. Jude marathon is 12/1 (the date of our next meeting). This causes gridlock, and our Midtown poets can't get to the meeting. As a result, we will delay our meeting one week, and instead meet at Leslie Blakeburn's house (1608 Tutwiler, Memphis TN 38107) on 12/8 at 2 pm. We will have a potluck...please contact Leslie (leslieblakeburn@yahoo.com) or at 901-833-1793 to RSVP and coordinate your food item.
- Poetry readings — Russell Strauss is trying to coordinate monthly or biweekly poetry readings, to get more exposure in the community. Please contact Russell (901-490-2299, rstrpoet@cs.com) if you can attend readings in the midtown area on a weeknight so we can plan and get this ball rolling.

November 2018 Members-Only Contest Winners

Form, Any; Subject, Any, but must contain at least 5 different colors; get out that thesaurus and be descriptive (don't use just red, blue, green, etc.)

Sponsor and Judge, Lori Goetz

- 1st — She Sings Her Blues in Shades — Russell Strauss
- 2nd — Colorless — Von S. Bourland
- 3rd — After the Rain — Barbara Blanks

December 2018 Members-Only Contest

Form, Shakespearean Sonnet; Subject, Holiday Theme (any holiday, does not have to be Christmas)

Sponsor, JoAn Howerton

Send all poems to: Pete Harris, 1645 Faxon, Memphis, TN 38112. Poems must be received no later than the 20th of the month (so 11/20).

To see all upcoming member-only contests, please follow this link: <http://www.tnpoetry.org/blogs/post/2018-2019-Monthly-Contests/>

December Critiquing Session

Remember Russell holds his critiquing session 30 minutes prior to each West Tennessee meeting. December's challenge is NFSPS Contest #43, the PST Award — pantoum, 16-32 lines, any subject.

For those who are new, Russell Strauss holds a critiquing session prior to each West Tennessee meeting. He has selected one contest from the NFSPS contest brochure to critique. So, prepare a poem and bring 10 copies to the session (prior to the meeting). We'll read it aloud and offer comments. If you are out of town and want to participate, feel free to send 10 copies to me (Lori Goetz, 2153 Wood Creek Dr., Germantown, TN 38138). I'll consolidate comments and send them back to you. Critiquing topics can be found at this link:

<http://www.tnpoetry.org/files/Russell%27s%202018-2019%20Challenges.pdf>

Thanks, everyone. Have a great month! As always, email with questions!

- Lori

**Poetry Society of Tennessee
West Tennessee Chapter**

Meeting Minutes for: November 2018 **Number in Attendance:** 10

Education/Activity

Presenter: Russell Strauss

- Contests: how to sponsor and judge contests
- Why should you sponsor a contest?
 - Why should I sponsor? And why not an any/any contest?
 - definitely to help PST or whatever organization is sponsoring the contest
 - to encourage other poets to write — the goal of PST is to encourage poets to try new topics, new forms
 - any/any contests always get the most entries because they are easy to enter but they are not ideal to get poets to explore new topics or forms
 - any/any contests are typically ways for folks to “recycle” old poems, but don’t encourage poets to write new poems
 - Two rules to follow:
 - first, don’t sponsor a form AND a topic — too complicated, it is a double burden on the poet
 - sponsor a form OR a topic: you want to sponsor a contest that provides the freedom of choosing form or topic
 - if you are providing a topic, it is ok to narrow the range a bit – specify free verse, rhymed & metered, or humorous...again, leave the poet some freedom
 - if you pick a form, give clear instructions on how to write it (and make sure there are plenty of examples, and it is not a very obscure form)
 - if you pick a topic, be clear with what you want (unclear instructions may result in the judge “throwing out” a lot of entries which don’t comply with the intent of the contest)
 - second, don’t sponsor the same contest for multiple years in a row; example NFSPS contest about domestic cats
 - same poems will be submitted year after year
 - people will get tired of submitting
- Judging a contest
 - Russell passed out some handouts (see attached)
 - judging and critiquing poetry helps improve your own poems
 - critiquing poetry – looking into the merits of a single poem
 - judging – comparing multiple poems
 - evaluation sheet
 - probably not needed for a very small contest
 - necessary for a large contest (like NFSPS, where you may need to judge 100-200 poems, of which 30 may be really, really good)
 - evaluate key elements that are important to you in a poem — what is most important to you? then rank those issues – use a scale to take out some of the subjectivity (like the Olympics)
 - problems you might encounter judging
 - too many good poems
 - too many bad poems

- sometimes you have to give a prize to “a not wonderful poem” because the pool of poems is sub par — don’t put a poem in print with typos, grammar errors, etc. (give it 1HM, 2HM). Pick a lesser quality poem with good grammar, etc. as your winner.
- you can also mark up errors
- dialect is often wrong
 - often too informal
 - most people don’t do dialect right – must be an expert
 - avoid if possible
- be decisive
 - read the poems, rank them, make decisions, finish judging, send it in to the contest coordinator
 - poetry contests have deadlines...don’t drag it out

President’s and Vice-President’s Reports

- PST-NE now has 20 members; Rose Klix has defined membership level clarifications
 - PST-NE has a lot of student memberships, needed to define student levels
 - National Federation — if students want to enter contests, they need to be registered as members (\$3 fee to nationals); or, if not members they can enter non-members only contests
 - Frances says to make it clear we have a state-level PST contest; the students should be cautioned about risk of not winning at Nationals; this year, students are eligible for contest #50 (will be eliminated after this year, combined with Manningham); suggestion that Frances sends concerns to JoAn
 - Discussion – do they need to offer yearbook to students? if yes, then student fees need to cover cost of yearbook
 - Encourage students to submit to monthly contests; put (S) on page to designate student
- PST-NE sponsoring workshop in March – Dr. Marilyn Kallet, “Writing Praise Poems in Troubled times” 3/28/18, 6 pm
- Membership
 - Nick Sweet, Shepherd, TX – new member — voted in as at-large member
 - Also 2 new members in PST-NE
- JoAn and Russell went down to WMC-5 and got good exposure on Bluff City News
- JoAn showed us the National Poetry Day proclamation from Mayor Jim Strickland
- JoAn presented Poet Laureate (Janet Qually) with plaque

Treasurer’s Report

Balance:	\$4018.60
-----------------	-----------

- Will has a bill for *Tennessee Voices*
- Leslie will have income/expenses next month
- We opened up PO Box for bank statements

Corresponding Secretary’s Report

- minutes from September are approved

Business to be Accomplished in the Next Month

- December meeting
 - hold on 12/8, same time (2 pm)
 - we will still have Russell’s critiquing session at 1:30
 - Leslie would be happy to host
 - potluck

- Try to establish a regular reading
 - Karen, Russell and others discussed at reading in the park
 - Russell can try to coordinate with Café Eclectic
 - We need people to commit to come/run it
 - Not commit to every week? Twice a month?
 - Russell will talk to Katherine
 - How advertise? Memphis Flyer, sign on the door/flyer
 - need to do a read around prize — \$10 for best performance, \$10 for best poem
 - how would we judge this?
 - would need to identify committee as judges (2-3)
- Critiquing challenge for December – pantoum (NFSPS #43, sponsored by PST, 16-32 lines)

Action Items

- Festival options
 - Changing festival date shoot for third or fourth weekend in October, next year (10/19 or 10/26)
 - Objective – avoid high traffic weekends
 - 2nd objective – make contest deadline later (September 1st)
 - Lori will send a potential schedule to group for the contest
- Website
 - Will will improve the website, simplify
 - need to go straight to the news
 - JoAn asked him to get to this ASAP, given short term issues with student contest
- Monthly contest for December
 - JoAn is sponsoring, holiday theme, Shakespearean sonnet
 - JoAn’s daughter will be judging
- Spartan City Poetry Society “Switcheroo”
 - bring a poem (unidentified) pass around, then guess who wrote it
 - next Saturday at 4 pm, meeting at Cordova Library
- Bill Hill
 - Christian writer’s group
 - we can coordinate a poetry conference with them
 - Bill will write up something for us
- NFSPS has link with upcoming contests
<https://nfsp.com/statecontests.html>
- We need to post names of monthly winning poems/poets on Facebook page and on website.

November Contest Winners

Sponsored by Lori Goetz; any form, but use at least 5 different colors (get out that thesaurus and be descriptive!)

1st – She Sings Her Blues in Shades – Russell Strauss

2nd – Colorless – Von S. Bourland

3rd – After the Rain – Barbara Blanks

Judging Basics

Although any poet's major aim is to write poetry, writing is not the entire poetic experience. Poets should also read poetry (both their own and the poetry of others), critique poetry and judge poetry. These are all part of the learning experience that makes one a better poet. Critiquing poetry and judging poetry are two different processes. Critiquing involves evaluating a single poem for the purpose of improvement. Judging involves comparing poems to determine which are the best. If a contest contains only a few good poems, this becomes easier, but the judge still must determine a ranking for those poems. There must be some criteria to decide which is the first place poem, which is the second place poem, etc.

In the last two years, NFSPS has had a major thrust toward obtaining new judges who can bring fresh insight into their poetry contests, but many people are still reluctant to volunteer to judge a large contest with 100 to 300 poems. Part of this reluctance is due to the insecurity that some people have toward making decisions in general. When we make decisions for a poetry contest, we should prepare ourselves by studying the appropriate form and every poem should have a fair reading, but there is a point at which a decision must be made. I have known of judges who determined the ten best poems for their contest and then spent weeks moving them back and forth before submitting their decisions. Always consider judging to be a timed activity that should be completed within a limited number of days to be fair to the contest chairman, who must prepare certificates, and the treasurer who must issue checks. Be firm in your decisions once you have made them.

Since the difficulty with judging often involves those very good poems and how to rank them, I have devised a rating system for evaluating those poems. Your rating system may not be the same as mine, but you should definitely have one to help you make those difficult final decisions. I rate the poems on a scale of one to ten on each of the following criteria. This is my rating system, but it may not be yours, though yours would probably be similar:

(Note to editor: I have sent a copy of my original criteria sheet rather than listing them again here. They can be inserted in the article at this point.)

You can see how having a clear sense of what you are looking for can help you to become a better judge. I hope each of you will consider judging in the future and find it a rewarding experience.

Russell H. Strauss

What I Look for When I Judge a Poem

1. Originality. Is there something different and interesting about this poem or is it the same old thing we have seen many times before?
2. Cohesiveness. Does the poem hold together as a unit?
3. Figurative language. Are similes and metaphors used when appropriate? Are they fresh and not trite?
4. Appropriateness to form or topic. Does the poem stick to the rules for the type of poem being written? (Even free verse has rules.)
5. Clarity. Can you easily understand what the poem is saying?
6. Meaning. Does the poem seem to have a purpose? That purpose does not always have to be a serious one. Humor is a purpose. This does not mean that the poem should be moralistic or "preachy"
7. Correctness. Is the grammar, punctuation and spelling in the poem correct.? If the poem depends on factual information (i.e. scientific or historical facts, etc.) are those facts correct? Are words used in their correct meaning? Poets who care about their poems check these things carefully.
- 8 Beginning and endings Is the title interesting and appropriate? Do the opening lines lead us into the poem? Do the final lines bring the poem to an appropriate conclusion?

Spice Up Your Poetry Readings and Events by adding some performance to your poems!

1. What is a performance poem?: sample poem
2. Academic readings vs. performance events: neither is better, but suited to occasion.
3. If you really want to give a full performance, memorize, but it's not necessary to spice up readings, features, open mics, etc.
4. Start by going through your poem and highlighting the most important thoughts, moments of emotional content, and the best lines. Make sure you give those lines the gravity and time they deserve when you perform the poem. Also look for places in the poem that might lend themselves to some physical action, some facial expression, or a particular tone of voice and attitude. You can use your whole body, your voice, your face, your posture, your phrasing, your emotions, and your personality to enhance your poem. For instance, if your poem says "Rise up," then show rising up! If your poem says you are loud, be loud! If your poem is joyful, feel the joy! Avoid unrelated movements or too many movements, just let them flow in natural ways through your poem.
 - a. voice and tone should match the poem, but it's also interesting to play with juxtaposed presentation, especially for comedy.
 - b. emotion - poetry has emotional content; it's okay to show this!
 - c. try out body movements from subtle to bold and decide what best suits the poem.
 - d. when planning your reading/performance, go big and then pull back to a comfortable level.
 - e. practice in front of a mirror, and then perhaps with a small group - it may feel very awkward, but it's valuable - performing is completely different in front of a group.
 - f. do a little acting: be yourself, but be a bigger version of yourself, ham it up a bit.
5. When you are actually reading/performing your piece, try to deeply reconnect with the moment you wrote the piece: the goal is to bring your poem to life for an audience. Have fun!