



# Illinois Poets

News of the Illinois State Poetry Society

October 2020

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Kathy Robinson

Darien - W. Suburban  
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Northbrook)  
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Lisle - SW Suburban  
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## President's Message



Leaves, mums and frantic squirrels burying acorns fill the yard as we enter the autumnal season. This would have been the time for the Gala committee to be planning decorations, food and confirming several programs scheduled for our November 14 event at the Park Ridge Country Club. After hearing responses from ISPS members and a discussion among board participants, all had concerns and felt it was better to cancel this year's Gala. It may be possible to revisit this idea next year, however. Although many of the anthologies ordered by our members were distributed at the Gala in the past, this year they will be dispersed as quickly as possible after publication.

After leading the business portion of July's (virtual) ISPS board meeting, I asked what the attendees were doing with their time and whether they were feeling isolated. One of the repeated takeaways was that poetry writing and sharing are natural ways to use time in positive and emotionally fulfilling endeavors. It's what poets have always done—indulge in solitary and creative thought with the possible goal of participating in an artistic collective whole.

Poetry can be mere entertainment; however, it can also offer powerful antidotes and consoling possibilities. If we write about our fears and sorrows, there is a patient blank page waiting to listen, record, help examine and even put out the proverbial fires that burn within. Words and emotions start to pose questions and if allowed to flow freely, can lead to new insights or at least a release of deep concerns. We can meet ourselves at the edge of despair and come back, after creative and freeing words unfold down the page.

At the risk of sounding as though Covid-19 is a positive thing, it does potentially offer more free time to be in touch with the Muse. In Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*, she states that "the poem requires of the writer not society or instruction, but a patch in the writer's mind and on paper, can't abide interruption." It awakens "the dreamer from the dream."

We don't know when these troubling times will be over and what the future holds, but we do know that there are ways to *choose* inspiration and its healing powers. Poetry is a constant, an ongoing chronicle of our lives with all the vagaries.

Happy writing,  
Susan T. Moss

# New ISPS Poets

ISPS has added eight new members since the last newsletter, for a current total of 166 poets.

**Eva Boczon, Haiku Chapter** “Being born and raised behind the Iron Curtain in communist Poland, and living for over 20 years in the United States as a first generation immigrant, created in me the need for connections with people around me. Since my university years, when I pursued a Master’s Degree in Early Childhood Education, I worked with children with learning challenges. From those personal experiences, I developed a fascination with words and language and how they connect people. Writing seems to be my stronger skill, in contrast to speech. I write to calm tempestuous feelings, and the fruits of these efforts usually sit someplace in my drawer. A few years ago, a photographer friend and I created a book about her journey home after many years of living away. She opened up to me the world of haiku, with its simplicity and complexity all at the same time. And it got me hooked for good, in any free moment I get.”

**Lucia Haase, At-Large**, has been writing poetry for about the past 20 years as the direct result of a spiritual experience. Most of what she writes is in formal verse. She recently had two poems accepted by the *Bible Advocate* publication, and two in *The Raven’s Perch*. She was also included in a recent anthology, *Symphonies of the Wild Hearted*, available at amazon.com. She learned about ISPS from the *2020 Poet’s Market*.

**Julie Isaacson, Highland Park Chapter**, feels fortunate to live in a community so supportive of poets and writers. She has enjoyed appearing on highlandparkpoetry.com several times and in *East on Central Journal of Arts and Letters*. She loves teaching writing and poetry to students of all ages in her private tutoring practice and she looks forward to meeting more ISPS members.

**Michael Lee Johnson, Lisle Chapter**, lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in Itasca, DuPage County, Illinois. Michael has published in 1,078 small-press magazines in 39 countries and appeared in 207 YouTube poetry videos. He was nominated for two Pushcart Prize awards for poetry in 2015 and five Best of the Net from 2016 through 2018.

**Christopher Kuhl, Lisle Chapter** In addition to poems forthcoming this year, Kuhl has several collections of poetry: *Night Travels; Blood and Bone, River and Stone, Memoirs of Lewis County* (mixed genre); and poems on the Holocaust: *Every Day I Will Remember*. 2020 has seen the publication of four very different books: two collections of poetry (*It’s Like Asking Who the Ocean Is* and *Feed the Storyteller Good Things*); a book of short vignettes and prose commentaries (*A Myth of My Own Making*); and, most recently, a volume of Kuhl’s poetry, *Conversation*, that comments on the poetry of selected English Romantic poets. Individual poems and short stories have been published in a wide range of online and print journals, including *Tulane Review, Prairie Schooner, Alabama Literary Review, Big Muddy, Sanskrit Magazine, Superstition Magazine, Inscape Literary Journal* (where his story “Wade” won Editor’s Choice in 2016), *Broad River Review*, and *Round Magazine*.

Kuhl is concerned with the issues of time, place and identity, transcendence, and the nature of truth. He characterizes himself as primarily a pastoral poet.

**Michael Nickels-Wisdom, Haiku Chapter**, has been writing haiku since 1990 when he discovered Harold G. Henderson’s *Introduction to Haiku* in the stacks of the public library where he has worked for 36 years. His poems have appeared in *Willow Review, Modern Haiku, Acorn: A Journal of Contemporary Haiku, Frogpond, American Tanka, Lake County & Its Arts, Asahi Haikuist Network, Under the Basho, Bones: Journal for the Short Verse*, and many other periodicals. His work has been anthologized in *Wild Flowers, New Leaves: A Collection of World Haiku; Haiku 21: An Anthology of Contemporary English-language Haiku; Haiku 2015; and Local News: Poetry About Small Towns*. He has won awards from Tanka Splendor, Haiku International Association, Tokutomi Memorial Haiku Contest, International Kusamakura Haiku Competition, Highland Park Poetry Challenge, and the Northwest Cultural Council. Michael was born in Illinois and lived here for 57 years; he is now semi-retired and has lived in Delavan, Wisconsin for 3 years.

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**Cheryl Weber, Champaign Chapter**, is retired from a journalism career and now an active member of the Osher Lifelong Living Institute through the University of Illinois, where she took her first poetry class in 2018. Since then she has participated in public poetry readings and has published poems locally. She is a member of the Twin Cities Garden Club and the Wheaton Garden Club, where she champions community education and outreach through gardening. She resides in Mahomet, IL.

**Joris Soeding, Northbrook Chapter** Joris's most recent collections of poetry are *Forty* (Rinky Dink Press, 2019), *Home in Nine Moons* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, 2018), and *Yellow Shift and Unruly* (Black Poppy Review, 2018). He is a teacher of 5<sup>th</sup>-grade Language Arts in Chicago, where he resides with his wife, son and daughter.

## ISPS Member News

**Michael Escoubas** has published a new book, *Little Book of Devotions: Poems that Connect Nature, God and Man*. This pocket-size volume has colored-pencil **drawings** by Mary Ritchie. The 32 seasonal poems offer encouragement for anyone who is experiencing depression, post-surgery rehabilitation, or bereavement. Michael suggests, "Gift it in lieu of flowers." For \$10, the 48-page book is at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com); or, you may want to order an autographed copy from the author. Email Michael at [farside747@hotmail.com](mailto:farside747@hotmail.com) or call 309-829-3926.

**Jennifer Dotson** has a new book to her credit, *Late Night Talk Show Fantasy & Other Poems*, published by Kelsay Books in 2020. She takes this opportunity to update her ISPS bio:

Dotson is the founder and program coordinator for HighlandParkPoetry.org, begun in 2007 to offer events, contests, and publication opportunities for poets everywhere. Her work has appeared in *After Hours*, *Caravel Literary Arts Journal*, *DuPage Valley Review*, *East on Central*, *Exact Change Only*, *Journal of Modern Poetry*, *Panoplyzine*, *Poetry Cram*, *Poetry Pacific*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Willow Review*.

Her debut collection, *Clever Gretel*, received the 1st Journal of Modern Poetry Book Award and was published by Chicago Poetry Press in 2013. Her works have appeared in numerous anthologies, including *Raising Lilly Ledbetter* (Lost Horse Press), *Distilled Lives* Volumes 2 and 4 (ISPS), and *A Midnight Snack* (Poetic License Press). She facilitates poetry writing workshops for Highland Park's Library U! program and other groups. Learn more about Jennifer at [JenniferDotsonPoet.com](http://JenniferDotsonPoet.com).

From the Carbondale Chapter comes news of more ISPS publication activity. **Kathy Cotton**, facilitator of the Southern Chapter, has a new collection, *Common Ground*, featuring 74 of her new and award-winning poems. It is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Another of Kathy Cotton's big projects recently was to edit and prepare *Encore*, the NFSPS

Prize Poems 2020 anthology. It has 16 prize-winning poems by ISPS poets who are, in reverse alphabetical order:

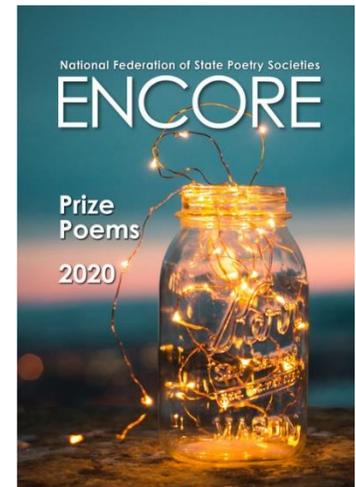
**Curt Vegang, Donna Pucciani, Wilda Morris, M.E. Hope, Marilyn Giese, and Kathy Cotton**. With Honorable Mentions,

a total of 36 awards went to a raft of ISPS poets in the national competition. The

anthology can be ordered from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

**Idella Pearl Edwards** of Marion has published an illustrated poetry collection, *Apples of Gold*. It is one of 15 books by Edwards, all available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

*Beyond the Moon's White Claw*, by **Patty Pieczka** of Carbondale, won the David Martinson Meadowhawk Prize from Red Dragonfly Press, [reddragonflypress.org](http://reddragonflypress.org).



# More Member News

## Melissa Huff Awarded her Second Blackberry Peach Prize

ISPS members were pleased (though perhaps not surprised) to hear that our own Melissa Huff was awarded her second consecutive Blackberry Peach (BBP) prize, sponsored by the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. The BBP Prizes recognize both spoken performance as well as quality of the written poems. Melissa won Honorable Mention for her poem "It All Happens Here," which is powerful as well as timely in an unexpected way.

*[The link to the performances on YouTube is creating format problems when inserted into this newsletter file. If you want to see and hear the BBP Poets read their poems, search your emails for one from William Shakespeare sent on July 4, "FWD: PPB Announcement...". There is an addendum sent on July 6 with links to more of the audio and written files of poems of the 2020 BBP Poets. Melissa's presentation occurs at about 13.38 minutes on the time bar of the main presentation. All the presentations are well worth watching—inspiring as well as humbling to the rest of us.]*

**Congratulations, Melissa!**

If you have bio updates to share, send to [oasis@alharris.com](mailto:oasis@alharris.com); for possible member news, send to ISPS newsletter editor, Kathy Robinson, at [krobdzyns@gmail.com](mailto:krobdzyns@gmail.com). The ISPS website is at: [illinoispoets.org](http://illinoispoets.org).

## Chapter Contacts

While Covid-19 gathering restrictions are in place statewide, please contact the chapter facilitator for information on possible meetings online and how to access them.

Any ISPS member is welcome at any monthly meeting (one or more!) after first contacting the facilitator.

### Southern Chapter (Carbondale)

Contact Kathy Cotton, facilitator  
[kacotton7@frontier.com](mailto:kacotton7@frontier.com)

### Central Chapter (Champaign)

Contact Kathy Robinson, facilitator  
[krobdzyns@gmail.com](mailto:krobdzyns@gmail.com)

### West Suburban Chapter (Darien)

Contact Caroline Johnson, facilitator  
[twinkscat@aol.com](mailto:twinkscat@aol.com)

### Haiku Chapter

Contact Tom Chockley, co-facilitator  
[tom.chockley@outlook.com](mailto:tom.chockley@outlook.com)

### Southwest Suburban Chapter (Lisle)

Contact Barbara Eaton, facilitator:  
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