

## WPA

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*Check out the website  
 for their photos & bios.*

Future Board meetings

May 19 (Ellensburg)

July 14

September 15

(Olympic Peninsula)

November 10

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**The President's Message**

Dear fellow WPA members,

WPA's 2007 Burning Word Festival of Poetic Fire will ignite on April 28 at Whidbey Island's Greenbank Farm, and you can help kindle the fire!

As you know, WPA is a nonprofit run by volunteers. We need all able hands on deck to set up (on April 27th) and run our biggest poetry bash of the year (April 28th). In exchange for two hours of work, volunteers will receive an all-day, all-venue festival pass, along with knowing they are doing their part to support the cause of poetry.

We hope you will volunteer to help Burning Word 2007 be a festival to remember. People are already signing up. Check the list on the next page to find the job that is just right for you.

Let's feed the fire for poetry!

*Victory*

**Hot off the press: Burning Word news**

- Advance sale of all-day passes will start soon at \$12 for members; price goes up to full fare (\$15) as of April 20th. Use PayPal or send in a check. See the web site for details.
- Full schedule of workshops and the readings on two stages are now up on the web site, [www.washingtonpoets.org](http://www.washingtonpoets.org).
- Look for new level of student participation this year.
- Jack Perlutsky will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award and Hugo House is slated for the Faith Beamer Cooke Award. See details on the web site.
- The Bowering April 27th workshop sold out in only one week!

**BAM!**

The Bellevue Art Museum will be the venue for the reading of this year's contest-winning poems. The date is June 10th.

Please check the web site later for more information

**WORD!**, the newsletter of the Washington Poets Association, is published four times each year. The next issue will be published in June. The deadline for submitting material for consideration in that issue is May 25, 2007. Please read the submission guidelines that are on the web site and if you have any questions, contact the editor at [newseditor@washingtonpoets.org](mailto:newseditor@washingtonpoets.org). WPA—"Celebrating the Power of Poetry"

## Many hands make light work: Victory's volunteer list for Burning Word 2007

On Friday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, we need help setting up for the festival, from about 10 a.m. until we are done. If you're able to do physical work and are a good hand, please join us. We can never have too many people helping with those various tasks.

On festival day, Saturday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 9 a.m., we need help with the following:

—Festival ticket and WPA membership sales: In addition to selling tickets and memberships, this task includes answering questions—and smiling a lot!

—Main stage and house management: If you have prior experience as a stage manager, this is a good place to help out. **Experience is required here** so please list that experience when you volunteer.

—Festival bookstore: The bookstore will be located in the back of the Main Stage Barn. You will sell books for WPA members and Burning Word performers.

—Small press fair: Volunteers spell the small press exhibitors, giving them a chance to take a break but still keep their booths open.

—Parking: Not glamorous, but very important. If we get the turnout we expect, we will need to guide people deep into the parking lot and work to keep the flow moving.

—Take-down and load out: All WPA board members and friends of Burning Word who are able, on deck please! The more helping hands the faster we can load out and clean up. Take-down begins at 7:30 p.m. and continues until we are done.

Angela Ramseyer and I will be overseeing and organizing the **Burning Word** volunteers. If you would like to help please email Angela at [ragingpoetic@yahoo.com](mailto:ragingpoetic@yahoo.com).

Looking forward to working with you.

*Victory*

## What did you like most about **Burning Word**?

That question was asked on a questionnaire that nearly 10% of attendees at Burning Word 2006 answered. These answers were anonymously submitted:

- The atmosphere of appreciation.
- Energy.
- I liked hearing the variety, hearing the 2 poets above [Tess Gallagher, Carolyn Kizer] and the great poets in the open mic house.
- Networking, camaraderie.
- Burning Word has a wonderful feeling of inclusiveness—I can be part of this poetry community, even though I'm a beginner. Great enthusiasm from everyone!
- The non-stop poetry readings and the friendliness of the people involved. I loved the Small Press Fair, although I spent entirely too much money!
- People's enthusiasm, sharing, diversity of ages, topics.

Here are three attributed responses:

"There was a spiritual wind running through the entire day. . . . I got home around ten at night, the day gone by in an eye blink, my body feeling the kind of tired after a day of hard but fit/full work at tasks I really enjoy." —*Roy R. Seitz, Index, Washington*

"The Festival booklet is impressive. Feels good in my hand. I love the pictures, the poems and the easy-to-read schedule. . . . What an outstanding assembly of poets. . . . At the open mic . . . there was a lovely collegial atmosphere. Heard some wonderful poems. The Small press section is always abundant—the friendly inviting atmosphere encouraged browsing for a long time. It is amazing to see just how much is happening!" —*Carol Levin*

"Burning Word was a shot in the arm for me. Actually, it was more like worship." —*Meggan Sheble*

<b>George Bowering offers pre-Burning Word workshop</b>	Join poet George Bowering on Friday, April 27, for a four-hour workshop. The workshop is limited to 10 participants. Cost is \$75. It runs from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Greenbank Farm on Whidbey Island. E-mail John Burgess at <a href="mailto:treasurer@washingtonpoets.org">treasurer@washingtonpoets.org</a> to sign up today or if you
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*Sold out!*

## My First Poem

by Michael Daley

Editor's Note—The author of the following excerpt, had, for a period of time, studied for the priesthood but left it. He then was at university, taking every poetry course he could find, studying Dante in Italian, doing some translating, and imitating Pound. The following is his reflection on the value of that kind of apprenticeship.

. . . The habit of imitation I cultivated in my early attempts at poetry was similar. All I had to do was learn how, and my work could stand alongside those in poetry journals. The role of the poet replaced my identification with the priesthood, yet it was a vocation, intimately connected to training in the spiritual life: rigorous discipline, faith in the existence of a soul, an inclination to believe in the efficacy of poems; like good works in the religious life, poems could change the world. I understood why Yeats dwelt so on the *Spiritus Mundi*, and I replaced religious views with Jung's collective unconscious. Although not everyone approaches poetry in flight from a strict religious background, writing to top our contemporaries, or copy great poets, is a step toward the first poem; yet we may work against our inclination and are easily satisfied, demanding less than the art deserves.

Nevertheless, I continued my "long poem," saturated in Olson and Black Mountain imitation, immune to the idea it was inauthentic. I was showing Mark [his mentor] pieces of it at happy hour a couple of times a week, sure it was very good, that I was discovering my own "voice," as he used that confusing workshop nomenclature for the first time in my hearing to characterize the moment a poet masters language. My little allegory, however, was shit. I would like to say it was the

first poem and leave it at that; that everything preceding this stylish dip into the silt bottom of the stream of consciousness was prologue; that resisting my orientation toward the spiritual, I avoided writing a sermon; that allegories of the Middle Ages had not been so obviously a major part of my early reading. To think of "the first poem" as a personal failure is to invert a certain standard. Without a standard how can anyone settle on a definition? There may be millions of definitions, yet if the term "poem" could stand for a kind of light, the best might keep it lit longest, and the worst snuff it out, making it only partly a poem, as mine was, which is to say "half alive," "still breathing," "not quite dead."

. . . Galway Kinnell said a poet must bring his or her entire life to bear in a poem. Such a requirement defines a person as much as the act of making poems. It demands a level of concentration and risk artists and crafts people achieve at peak moments, qualifications unknown to me when I leaped from conscious imitation and studious translation into writing my own first draft of the "epic-lite," a masterpiece of lowered expectations. I suppose that advocating for standards in the early stages of writing is to argue with William Stafford's famous advice to lower one's standards in order to keep writing. Interpreting a "lowered standard" as a battle flag, however, indicates that the pacifist and conscientious objector advocated acceptance over aggressively "writing through."

*“. . . if the term ‘poem’ could stand for a kind of light, . . .”*

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This excerpt is from Michael Daley's new book of lyrical essays, *Way Out There*. When he is not writing essays or poetry, Daley is teaching high school in Mount Vernon.

## Five commandments for poets

by Allen Braden

### 1. *Read (the classics and the contemporary) more than you write.*

The arbitrary formula I give my students is to read one volume of verse for every poem they write. The arguments that come up in every creative writing class are: “We’re writers. We don’t have to read anything.” “We don’t want to be influenced by what we read when we write.” My response? Why did Picasso imitate the Old Masters before doing his ground-breaking work? Why did Ronny James Dio study opera before recording his rock music? They both realized the value of internalizing the tradition from which they came and against which they would rebel. If you don’t know the classics, you risk being cliché without knowing it; if you don’t know the current state of poetry, you may never find a place within your own artistic generation.

### 2. *Value image over insight.*

A good idea can kill a poem before it’s even born. Ideas are for inventors, not musicians or artists. The insights arising from the imagery and metaphor in poetry should have been epiphanies for the poet as much as they will be later for the reader. Robert Frost said, “I write to find out what I am thinking.” Thus the creative process is, in many ways, one of discovery. This means respect your subconscious and respect your reader. Trust the poem’s situation, its music, its honest and authentic imagery, to tell the truth for you.

### 3. *Play with language.*

To find music in language, I often turn to the Irish and Irish-American poets whose ears seek the nourishment that so many of the cochleae of mainstream poets lack. For the sake of their music, John Keats, Gerard Manly Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Stanley Plumly, Amy Clampitt and Mark Doty can be your bright and polished touchstones as well.

*“A good idea can kill a poem before it’s ever born.”*

Your own music can often be coaxed out through playful revision.

### 4. *Write from your instincts not your intellect.*

You have to learn everything you can about the craft and then forget what you know. Turn off your rational side, the critical voice. (This is what William Stafford was talking about when he suggested a poet should lower standards.)

The impulse to write poetry should come from the place where dreams come from. Not just emotional in nature, this impulse builds like a huge wave swelling inside you and pushing you onto the page. It will not be denied; if it isn’t released, it does not sub-

side but returns, only stronger. This is why I advise against scheduling daily time to write. If you do, it most likely will come from your head instead of your true source.

### 5. *Don’t be in a hurry to publish.*

Before submitting something for publication, see if it survives the test of multiple readings, multiple critiques; see if it survives the test of time, if the romance lasts past the honeymoon. Still strong? Then you have something to share with the world.

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Allen Braden, an instructor at TCC, received a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, an Artist Trust grant and fellowship, the *Witness* Emerging Writer Prize and the Grolier Poetry Prize, and is widely published.

## Poetry on Buses

For the last fifteen years, residents of King, Pierce, Kitsap and Snohomish Counties have participated in Poetry on Buses. This program has served as a national model. According to the website, “The theme for Poetry on Buses 2007 is Dreams. Selected poems will be displayed on interior bus placards, published in a book and featured at a poetry reading in November 2007. Selected poets will also receive an honorarium of \$125 for use of the poems on the bus.” The deadline for submissions is April 30th. For complete details, go to <http://transit.metrokc.gov/prog/poetry/poetry.html>.



## What the poet seeks

by Brendan McBreen

Basho said, “Don’t follow in the footsteps of old poets. Seek what they sought.” So what did our poetic ancestors seek? Travel and debauchery? Booze? Money? Enlightenment? All of the above? Did they seek to understand human nature? To understand themselves? Or just the inspiration for their next poem?

Writing isn’t something I do as much as it’s part of who I am, so I’d never thought much about what it is that I seek. When I write humorous poetry, I want a laugh. Even when no one else gets it, if I laughed when I wrote it, then it was worthwhile. Sometimes I have a point to make, but in general, my writing is meant to be open to multiple interpretations.

I like it when people have to look below the surface and think about what I could possibly mean. (Sometimes it seems like people don’t spend enough time thinking.) I especially like it when they have to do some tricky mental yoga to try and grasp the meaning in a poem that is more or less abstract. There’s always someone with different experiences than I’ve had who’ll connect the dots in a different order and then all of a sudden I’m the one doing the mental yoga and stretching my mind. That’s what I seek.

Brendan McBreen, who lives in Pacific, WA. Is a member of the Striped Water Poets of Auburn.

## How to get writing

by Robinson Bolcum

Many of us who enjoy writing find we have occasional difficulty getting started. Once we’ve begun, momentum builds and before long we’re turning out thousand-page masterworks which ascend the bestseller list. Fame shines upon us, eclipsing our wildest fantasies. Yes, it’s an all too familiar story, and has been our fate repeatedly, reliably, and (for many of us) has grown boring.

But when you can’t get started in the first place, is there some trick to inspiring creativity? Happily, there is . . . an’ shamefully easy and obvious.

There are little magnetic words one can arrange on a blank refrigerator door. For every three words, eat something fatty (or otherwise

highly caloric). Use as many words as you like, and keep on cramming the food in your gullet. When you find you simply can’t eat more, bulimia will keep things rolling.

At length, you’ll tumble onto the floor, smelling rank an’ scarcely breathing. Gaze upon the jumble of words up above. You can’t quite read them, but some of the phrases blurrily resound through the glutinous wreckage of your brain. This deplorable condition is the well-spring of poetical genius. Of course, it may kill you. There is mortal risk in any vocation. If, however, your hulking mass is found while there is yet life in it, you’ll find a world of things to say, and a hospital holiday in which to say it.

*[The views expressed above do not necessarily reflect those of the Washington Poets Association or its conscience-impaired legal counsel. Consult a physician before ANY program of intentionally perilous gluttony.]*

## Poetic journaling

by Clark Crouch

How can you catch up with life? You’re getting old and you’ve been sitting on your duff all these years, remembering a lot and writing nothing. But now, you have grandchildren and you want them to know something of their family, of your life, and how you feel about things.

That describes my problem exactly. At age 73, I awakened to the need to provide a cultural legacy for my family. After numerous tries, I rejected traditional prose as the medium to most effectively preserve that legacy. Instead, I adopted a modified journaling technique—a short introductory paragraph to place a topic in context followed by a free-form poetic journal entry.

The result was much like the epistles, the poetic letters of the *Bible*. Following this pattern, fifty poetic journal entries were written, assembled, and professionally published.

The process worked well and I found that the creative juices flowed easier and faster than they had when I was trying to force everything into traditional prose. There was an excitement and an immediate reward as each segment was completed. There was never a hint of writer’s block and the result was an anecdotal segment presented in two forms. Things came together so well that the journaling adventure into family history, tradition, and philosophy was extended and a second book of remembrance was published.

Clark Couch is a new WPA member and a cowboy poet/performer who lives in Richland, WA.

## REVIEWS

*Heat Lightning New and Selected Poems 1986-2006* by Judith Skillman  
Silverfish Review Press, Eugene, Oregon, 2006

Reviewed by Linda Thompson

Judith Skillman's new book, *Heat Lightning, New and Selected Poems 1986-2006*, is a diverse and inviting collection that includes new poems as well as those drawn from seven other books. Powerful emotions are combined with a deep respect for the nuances of language. Two motifs seen throughout this collection are memory and a close examination of her relationship with nature. Memory is resilient in her new poem, "The Glass Chicken". A dead chicken has "grown now cold and hard/ and tough as memory." In "Lilacs" from *Red Town* (2001) memory becomes comforting. The touch and smell of lilacs evoke memories that are not concrete until she feels them through the touch of "a small start of green/ somewhere in the garden. / Anything alive can be felt between the fingers."

Throughout this collection Skillman employs nature overtly and in metaphor. One common subject is her observation of light. The title poem from *Worship of the Visible Spectrum* (1988) announces, "This is the light/ which like a sudden stroke of fortune, / finds itself lodged in a particular flower." In *Opalescence* (2005), she uses light as a metaphor for grief: "The sun beaded/ on a plate, fired glass/ and changed overnight/ into a different star, one/ that cycled through spots/ like an animal every eleven years." Skillman can just as easily elevate the ordinary as she does in "The Mole" from *Storm* (1998). Or, in her description of dead bug from *Beethoven and the Birds* (1996): "Next door a blue light kills insects all night, / with a sound so regular it's almost comforting."

*Heat Lightning, New and Selected Poems 1986-2006* is not a sampler. It is a collection of dreamscapes, memories and observations. It invites us, with a strong voice, to examine our own familiar world and see, through Skill-

man's eyes, a place of natural wonder, to "lie under the spell of idolatry for years" ("Heat Lightning").

*The Crooked Inheritance: Poems* by  
Marge Piercy

2006, Knopf, cloth, \$24.00

Review by James Bertolino

Marge Piercy is among America's most enduring poets. *The Crooked Inheritance* is her 17<sup>th</sup> book of poetry. Her initial collection, *Breaking Camp*, was published in 1968—39 years ago. Piercy is also a prolific writer of prose, with 18 novels and 7 non-fiction books to her credit. She is, without question, a literary phenomenon.

While she is an enduring poet, she's never been a particularly endearing poet. What has made her work essential to American literature has been her relentless commitment to the truth, particularly about being a woman in this culture. Her poems often have a raw beauty—they are built of solid materials, and built well. Piercy's poems work hard. They are useful.

*The Crooked Inheritance* is a generous volume. With 137 pages of poetry, it is double the size of most full-length poetry books. And the poems are generous with her life, her ancestry, her spirituality, her insights and assessments of the world we all participate in. In my estimation, this is the most important Piercy collection since *To Be Of Use* was published in 1973. It should have a place in all community and university libraries, as well as personal collections which value poetry that matters.

Piercy calls us out to witness what has been done, as well as what is possible, including forgiveness: "So much breaks, wears / down, fails in us. We must / forgive our broken promises— / their sharp shards in our hands."

# OLIO

The Olympia Poetry Network is sponsoring a reading by Kathleen Flenniken, on Wednesday, March 21, 2007, 6:30 (open mic) to 8:00 pm, at Traditions Fair Trade and Café, 5th and Water St., Olympia. Coming events for 2007 include the following readings: April 18, 2007 Dead Poet's Reading and Friends, to commemorate National Poetry Month; May 16, 2007 TBA; June 20, 2007 winners of the Jeanne Lohmann Prize will read their poems .

The Paul Gillie workshop series continues at the Timberland Library ( 313-8th Ave., Olympia) from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. with the following:  
April 12 — Chris Dahl  
May 10 — Allen Braden

Workshops for Writers: poetry, fiction, non-fiction. Ongoing, join any time. Any age, experience level. Nancy Rekow, 206.842.4855.

Poetry Night, third Thursdays, 7 to 9 pm, at SoulFood Books, 15748 Redmond Way, Redmond, WA. Featured readers:  
March 15, Chris Jarmick and Jack McCarthy;  
April 19, Madeline DeFrees and Thomas Aslin.  
Open mic follows. Free. For directions, visit [www.soulfoodbooks.com](http://www.soulfoodbooks.com) or call the store at 425-881-5309. For info contact [welchm@aol.com](mailto:welchm@aol.com) or [moonlit.cloud@yahoo.com](mailto:moonlit.cloud@yahoo.com).

*Cascade*, the literary journal of the WPA, is now accepting submissions. For all the details, go to [washingtonpoets](http://washingtonpoets) and click on "WPA –Cascade Journal."

Last year's WPA Stafford Contest Judge, Kelli Russell Agodon, has three poems in the current (Winter) issue of PRAIRIE SCHOONER. Author of SMALL KNOTS (Cherry Grove Collections) and GEOGRAPHY, winner of the Floating Bridge Chapbook Award, Kelli is working on a new collection, THE ALPHA-BET BETWEEN US.

Aequitas Books an imprint of Pleasure Boat Studio: A Literary Press is pleased to announce the publication of *Way Out There: Lyrical Essays* by Michael Daley.

*Sea Lions Sing Scat*, Carol Levin's new chapbook, is now available from Finishing Line Press and can be purchased at their website [www.finishinglinepress.com](http://www.finishinglinepress.com) and click "New Releases."

Writing It Real in Port Townsend Writer's Conference June 21-25, 2007—Sheila Bender, Jack Heffron and Susan Rich offer professional guidance in writing in hands-on workshops. See the website for more information: <http://writingitreal.com/wirconference2007.html>.

*disGrace Notes: Confessions of a Relapsing-Remitting Catholic* is a new book available for purchase from the author, Jack McCarthy, 16600 25th Ave. NE #134 Marysville, WA 98271 for \$10 or go to Pudding House ([www.puddinghouse.com](http://www.puddinghouse.com)) to order ISBN 1-58998-514-X

*LOVE IS A WEED* by Lana Hechtman Ayers is available for \$12:00 from Finishing Line Press, P. O. Box 1626 Georgetown, Kentucky 40324.

The Distinguished Writer Series in Tacoma on the second Friday of each month is now at Kings Books, 218 St. Helens, 7:00 (6:30 sign-up for open mic) . The coming lineup includes:  
March 9 - Aaron Abeyta of Denver CO  
April 13 - Christine Swanberg  
May 11 - Patricia Clark

## Poet laureate bill passes in the House

by Maggie Kelly

By an overwhelming majority, the Washington State House of Representatives passed a bill that would establish a state position known as the poet laureate.

Sponsored by Mary Skinner (Dist. 14), who read a poem, "What Is Poetry?" which was written by our own Ed Stover, House Bill 1279 authorized both the position and \$30,000 stipend for the 2007-09 biennium to cover expenses for the poet laureate's tour of duty.

The tour of duty would bring poetry to a large segment of our state's population and help them express themselves in poetry. In her speech, Skinner cited the impact of the 9/11 tragedy on all our lives and how poetry was the vehicle used time and time again as people tried to make some personal sense of what had happened.

The bill was sent to the Senate where it more than likely will be voted on in the latter part of this month. It might be successful this time since there has been a strong triumvirate—WPA, Humanities Washington and Washington State Arts Commission— working for passage. Congratulations are due to Ed Stover and Karen Bonoudi for their efforts in this regard.