

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

3rd Annual Jack Grapes Poetry Prize: Winners & Finalists

Cultural Daily · Wednesday, September 16th, 2015

The 2015 Cultural Weekly Open Submission period, featuring the Jack Grapes' Poetry Prize, has ended. The winners and finalists decided. All the poems were read blind, ie: the poet's name was removed from the poems and substituted with a number. All poems were read in their entirety.

This year, almost 500 poems were submitted. From them, three winners, three finalists, and ten honorable mentions were selected. They are:

\$250 1st Prize: "Full Buck Moon" – Amber Decker

\$150 2nd Prize: "Her Dead Husband's Ashes" – Kevin Ridgeway

\$100 3rd Prize: "Summer of '85" – Bunkong Tuon

Three **FINALISTS** (in alphabetical order):

\$50: "collect pond park: magic" – Jesús Esparza

\$50: "Deep In The Bowels of a One Note Downtown" – Rich Ferguson

\$50: "Riverbed Planes" – Lisa Segal

Ten **HONORABLE MENTIONS** (in alphabetical order):

"All The Things She Never Told Me" – Lan Tran

"Death Comes To Our Barrio Dog" – Marilyn Robertson

"Exhumed" – Florence Murry

"The Fluffer's Complaint" – Troy Cunio

"How She Kills Me" – Adrian Cepeda

"How To Fall In Love" – Amber Decker

"Let My Children Hear Music" – Troy Cunio

"Liberty" – Mary Rose Smyth

"Second Kiss" – Lisa Segal

"Two Punks" – Elaine Mintzer

Thank you to everyone who entered. Next year's contest, (July 1st – August 31st, 2016), promises to be even more spectacular. So stay tuned!

Alexis Rhone Fancher

Poetry Editor

Cultural Weekly

WINNER

Full Buck Moon by Amber Decker

In small-town America, we grew up expecting
our Saturday nights to be high-octane
and salted with promise.
In high school, we craved the neon glow
of Seven-Elevens after midnight
and rock and roll, fast cars and open roads,
short skirts and alcohol.
We watched the trains come and go
and our hearts, still empty as brand new suitcases,
ached to follow, to wake up
crow-long miles from Bumfuck, Egypt
with summer's long, lean body
spooned against us forever, the moon's white kiss
stippling our skin, something mouth-watering
to remind us that we are all hot-blooded animals
who can be swept off without warning
into the stormy seas of wildness,
and a degree, a job, a marriage, a child, a mortgage
will never make you less
of a beast.
It took three months until I agreed
to let you touch me again.
Stretched out naked next to you
on the lawn in your backyard,
our legs tangled like lit fuses in the dark,
I listened to you mourn
the shed black horns of youth, and
the loss of the stars
to the flood of streetlights.
You ticked off the names of constellations
that floated in the cosmos somewhere above us
in a voice like a scholar
who believes he knows
everything about the world,
even the secret places
where the most delicate parts of anything
that could be startled into hiding
by a gunshot
or an unholy light
would run to.



Amber Decker is a thirty-something poet, alternative model, and musician from West Virginia. Her work has been included in the groundbreaking literary e-zine, Exquisite Corpse, as well as other hip venues for alternative writing: Zygote In My Coffee, Phantom Kangaroo, Hobo Camp Review, decomP, Red Fez, and Black Heart Magazine, to name a few. She is a lover of horses, comic books, RPGs, horror culture, good wine, tattoos, and rock and roll. Her chapbook, True North, is available from Maverick Duck Press, and her latest collection of poems, The Girl Who Left You, was released in September 2014 by California's notorious Six Ft. Swells Press. You can find out more about Amber on [her website](#).

SECOND PLACE

Her Dead Husband's Ashes by Kevin Ridgeway

She had told me about them,
 where she stored them, and
 I was perfectly fine with having
 him around. She had been gone
 for several days before I finally
 opened the drawer and pulled
 out the cardboard box that I
 opened and there he was, a
 pile of gray sand I had heard
 so much about in her colorful
 stories that I got nervous as
 I said hello and introduced
 myself. I was lonely, and he
 completely understood. He
 asked me for something to
 drink so I got us some beers.
 We laughed and talked until
 sunrise. I got emotional about
 her and he cheered me up by
 letting me sort through him in
 search of his remaining teeth.
 All was going well with us
 bachelors until the day the
 Neptune Society came and
 took him away to be scattered
 like all the other people I get
 too close to.



Kevin Ridgeway lives and writes in Southern California. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *BIG HAMMER*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *LUMMOX* and *The Mas Tequila Review*, among others. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. His chapbooks include *On the Burning Shore* (Arroyo Seco Press) and *Riding Off into that Strange Technicolor Sunset: Dallas-FT. Worth Poems* (The Weekly Weird Monthly).

THIRD PLACE

Summer of '85 by Bunkong Tuon

That night, I threw a pebble
 at Cindy's bedroom window,
 said I had to see her after
 her father caught us kissing
 in the library's parking lot.
 She had on this purple jacket
 with a hoodie, smiled, blowing
 bubblegum with her pink lips.
 She led me to the park,
 then turned off the trail.
 Cindy stopped, face turned
 to me, spit out her gum, kissed me—
 the kind that could burst
 a father's arteries: tongue
 lashing, eyes closed, fireworks,
 the world exploding. I thought
 about what her father said—
keep your gook hands off of her—
 and I thought about Cindy,
 how her body shivered
 under my brownness
 as I kissed her white neck.



Bunkong Tuon's publications include poems in *Numéro Cinq*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Chiron Review*, *Más Tequila Review*, *Misfit*, and *Patterson Literary Review*. *Gruel*, his first full-length collection, is published by NYQ Books. He is an associate professor of English at Union College, in Schenectady, NY.

FINALISTS:
collect pond park:magic by Jesús Esparza

My mother, the psychic, says I am too
savvy of the city. I play gameboy with my back to the thin
drywall. A visitor says, 'So what's the pricing plan?' The
front room is stark with a laminated poster explaining
chakras, two small chairs, and a stack of cards.
'How much for the future to be good?' My mother taps her
maroon painted fingernails. My uncle lives with us. I don't
know my father. He is always walking in and out of the
front door. He holds the door for anyone and
everyone. He is very protective of my mother. He
installed a camera so he can watch her
work from down there. I'm not allowed in the
basement. The customer leaves. I
nestle close to mother's legs, look out the
window into the alley. In
Chinatown the New Year is celebrated on the wrong day. The
street sweeper swirls dirty confetti.
Mother rests her hand on top of my head.
Recycled magic falls everywhere.



[Jesús Adam Esparza](#) was born in Pasadena, California. He attended John Muir High School and studied Media, Culture, and Communications and Creative Writing at New York University. When he's not writing poetry he primarily likes to eat, cook, and think about eating or cooking.

Deep in the Bowels of a One-Note Downtown by Rich Ferguson

for Bob Kaufman

The fire hydrant is teaching the local Girl Scouts' Club how to pee while standing up.
 I have a crush on a buffalo on the back of a hard-to-find 1937 nickel.
 My downstairs neighbor is fluent in pain-in-the-ass & I only speak a little nightingale.

The fire hydrant is teaching the local Girl Scouts' Club how to pee while standing up.
 PG& E is threatening to shut off my tears & grave robbers keep digging up
 my old fantasies, threatening to sell them on Ebay.

I once crashed a party in my own imagination, only to be thrown out
 for not being able to conduct a coherent conversation with myself.
 I squeezed my brain into a Victoria's Secret black push-up bra,
 but it did nothing to enhance my intellectual capacity.

The local Girl Scouts are teaching the fire hydrant how to build confidence & character.
 The buffalo I had a crush on, on the back of a hard-to-find 1937 nickel
 has now become extinct.
 My downstairs neighbor has murdered my nightingales.

The local Girl Scouts are teaching the fire hydrant how to build confidence & character.
 My old fantasies have been cobbled into tombstone shoes.
 All my tears are drying out in a prison cell in a town called You're Fuck Outta Luck.
 My downstairs neighbor is the jailer.

If you want to call a lost loved one in the afterlife,
 it should be noted that ghosts have difficulties picking up phones.
 If you want to send me a love letter by echo,
 it probably won't arrive
 until long after my inner child is dead and gone.

That's the trick
 with living so deep in the bowels
 of a one-note downtown;
 the only thing you can rely upon

is the continual cry of sirens.



[Rich Ferguson](#) has shared the stage with Patti Smith, Exene Cervenka, Wanda Coleman, and other esteemed poets and musicians. He has performed at the NYC Fringe Festival, the Bowery Poetry Club, and is a featured performer in the film *What About Me?* (featuring Michael Stipe, Michael Franti, Krishna Das, and others). He has been published in the *LA TIMES*, *Opium*, and his spoken word/music videos have appeared in international film festivals. Ferguson is a Pushcart-nominated poet, and a poetry editor to *The Nervous Breakdown*. His poetry collection *8th & Agony* is out on Punk Hostage Press.

Riverbed Planes

by Lisa Segal

It's the planes.
They take him from me.
In the Melody Bar and Grill,
across from the runway at LAX,
we see the planes touch down
as the August sun drops into the Pacific.
Tonight he will get on a plane
and leave me again.
The sun angles into our eyes,
sits on our shoulders,
melts us as we sit
in the bar's red-flocked darkness.
He cradles my skull in his hands,
his grasp firm, yet light,
like when he guides my head
up and down in his lap,
but this time he uses me
as a shield against the sun.

"You're wet," he says.
He's right.
Every part of me is humid.
My reading glasses have fogged.
Embarrassed, I look down,
pretend to scan his itinerary another time.
I don't meet him that often anymore.
He always returns the parts of me
I try to leave behind.

I live near the flight path.
From my balcony I watch the planes
arrive one after the other.
They're beautiful at night,
their landing lights a string of pearls
stretching back to infinity.
Once in a while the moon
is strung amongst them.
Sometimes clouds keep planes earthbound,
but not today's clouds.
They hold no rain.
I hear, though, during a news break
from the football game on the bar monitors,
that monsoons prevented planes from landing

at Sky Harbor in Phoenix yesterday.
 Rains flooded Skunk Creek and stopped traffic
 on the interstate north of the city.

I grew up in Phoenix.
 I've seen flash floods overflow the Salt River—
 furious red-brown water pounding
 under the Central Avenue Bridge,
 tugging at Sonoran desert scrub,
 chaparral, and mesquite.
 I've seen it overrun the grasses—
 the scaly buttons and silver daisy,
 the sheep sorrel and cat's ear,
 the white clover.
 I've stood nearby and watched the water
 consume all of it.

I've seen the deep cuts in the earth
 after the water rampages through
 and the riverbed has drunk what it can,
 has swallowed all the fury it can absorb,
 then opens new arms to lie in the sun
 and be renewed.
 Here in the Melody Bar,
 with him holding me
 against hot light,
 the right angles
 of my arms soften.

I lift my head and meet his eyes.
 "I'm lonely," I say.
 "When I feel I belong, it never lasts."
 Sweat beads above my lip.
 I taste the salt.
 The torture of perfection
 has cut me enough.
 I no longer yearn for it.
 Finally, the sun drops below the window pane.
 He tilts my head towards his.
 My breath glistens on the inside of my lenses.
 I can't see anything but the lights of an airplane
 coming straight at me.



Lisa Segal is a poet, writer, artist & sculptor. Her book, METAMORPHOSIS, published by Bombshelter Press, includes poetry, prose, and photographs of her sculptures. She is a founding

member of StudioEleven Gallery. Her poetry has been published, or is forthcoming, in Cultural Weekly, The Mas Tequila Review, ONTHEBUS, Poeticdiversity, Fjords Review's Public Poetry Series, and FRE&D. Her paintings and sculptures have been shown in various galleries in Los Angeles.

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