



# Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

<http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org>

## Year in Review – 2017-2018

**Purpose:** Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas (PRA) is a private, non-profit organization established in 1931 to share the love of poetry, encourage the writing of poetry, and support Arkansas poets.

**History:** PRA is the oldest poetry organization in the state. Arkansas Poet Laureates have always been among its members. Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni of Fayetteville (1953 - 1969) and Dr. Lily Peter of Helena (1971 - 1991) are Laureates for whom PRA named its two annual conferences. Current Arkansas Poet Laureate Jo McDougall of Little Rock also is a member. PRA is affiliated with the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS), a non-profit entity promoting poetry nationwide. PRA members also are NFSPS members.

**Membership Benefits:** PRA branches are located across the state where members meet monthly. PRA also offers an online group, plus a quarterly newsletter, website, and periodic e-blasts to share information with members. PRA's two annual conferences provide contests and networking opportunities, plus educational speakers and critiques. Members also may participate in the annual NFSPS conference with poets from other states. PRA members may publish winning poems in PRA's anthology and/or the NFSPS anthology, and promote their poetry books on PRA's website.

**Contests:** Members may enter 15 free PRA contests throughout the year. PRA's annual Poetry Day event sponsors another 26-30 contests, many open to all poets, for a small entry fee. Winners receive monetary prizes of up to \$1,000. Plus, members may enter 50 national contests at discounted rates with NFSPS. PRA also supports a number of student contests annually, including the Sybil Nash Abrams Contest for Arkansas High School and Middle School students, PRA's statewide Jeannie Dolan Carter Collegiate Contest, plus national student contests through NFSPS. Guidelines for all contests are posted on PRA's website and distributed through branches and educational partners.

**Activities 2017-2018:** PRA poets hosted various activities, published books, spoke at events, and promoted poetry throughout the year. Many also received an impressive number of awards. (See details on PRA's website.) Highlights of the year include:

**Arkansas Has New Poet Laureate from PRA:** In mid-April 2018, Governor Asa Hutchinson appointed Jo Garot McDougall of Little Rock as the 7th Arkansas Poet Laureate. Jo is a native Arkansan who grew up near DeWitt on a rice farm. She graduated from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and earned an MFA in Creative Writing there while mentored by the renowned Miller Williams. She is an accomplished poet, author, professor, and recipient of numerous awards including: Arkansas Porter Prize for Literary Excellence, Academy of American Poets Prize, a Pushcart Prize nomination, Arkansas Writers Hall of Fame, and Honorary Chancellor for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. (See more about Jo on PRA's website in a press release written by PRA's Stacy Pendergrass.) Per Arkansas Act 292 of 2017, McDougall will serve a 4-year term. (PRA's Stacy Pendergrass is serving as McDougall's press secretary. To engage Jo for event appearances, please contact Stacy at [pendergrasts@me.com](mailto:pendergrasts@me.com).) Our thanks to Cathy Moran and Stacy Pendergrass for representing PRA on the nomination committee along with representatives from higher education. PRA submitted 2 well qualified nominees – Dr. John Crawford of Hot Springs and Jo McDougall.

**Karen Hayes (River Market):** hosted a *Poetry for Life* event on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at Mosaic Templars Cultural Center in Little Rock. The free event was sponsored by the Arkansas Arts Council as part of the *GetSmART Learning Series*. Karen is a writer, performance poet, speaker, and a certified Alzheimer's Poetry Project coordinator. At the event she led a fun, interactive workshop for individuals 55+. They played with poems aloud, using call and response, and created a group poem together. In November 2017 Karen was featured in the statewide *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* and lauded for her volunteer work using poetry with the Arkansas Alzheimer's Association, plus her many other poetic outreach activities in the North Little Rock area.

**NFSPS 2018 Winners from PRA:** Congratulations to 21 PRA members who placed 55 times in the 2018 NFSPS contests: Russell Strauss, Kate Lacy, Cathy Moran, Renee Ramsey, Pat Durmon, LaVern Spencer McCarthy, Sara Gipson, Dennis Patton, Wendy Visser, Kim Vernon, Ann Carolyn Cates, Barbara Blanks, Gail Denham, Karen Kay Bailey, John Crawford, Laura Trigg, Dena Gorrell, D. Beecher Smith, Rita Goodgame, and Amanda Partridge. Thanks for representing PRA so well at nationals!

**Two Rivers Poetry Branch** continued partnering with Dewey's Café for Open Mic Nights at 7PM every 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday at Fort Smith's main library. Also, River Valley Writers' critique group *Kindly Critics* welcomes writers there twice monthly on Mondays at 6PM.

**Arkansas' 70<sup>th</sup> Poetry Day Conference** on October 21, 2017, was hosted by the River Market branch of PRA in Little Rock at the Butler Center in honor of Arkansas Poet Laureate Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni (1953-1969) who established the first Arkansas Poetry Day in October 1948. Our thanks to Poetry Day Chair Cathy Moran and PRA's River Market Branch for hosting this year's event. Featured speaker was Bryan Borland, poet, author, editor, Pushcart nominee, and winner of numerous honors. For critiquing poems he adapted *Revision Tricks* by Carmen Gimenez Smith. (For example, try reading from the bottom up to see your poem differently.) President Dennis Patton presented PRA's 2017 Merit Award to Kate Lacy of Fayetteville. Our congratulations to Kate who served as PRA's Membership Chair, leader of PRA's online group, participant in numerous committees, and President of the Poets Northwest branch. A business meeting followed lunch. Then Poetry Day Contest Chair Liz Faulkner announced the winners. (See list posted on PRA's website.) Our thanks to Liz for coordinating this year's competition of 945 entries from all over the United States and Canada.

### **PRA Poets published books in 2017-2018:**

John Crawford (Hot Springs) published a new book, "Female Voices from the Bible" and he shared its poems at various venues from July through October. Christian Faith Publishing promoted it.

Karen Kay Knauss Bailey's (Member-at-large, Oklahoma) latest publication *Where Once A Willow* won the Oklahoma Writers' Federation Award for Best Book of Poetry for 2017.

LaVern McCarthy (Member-at-large, Oklahoma) has published a new book called "Images of Life."

Pat Durmon (Member-at-large, Norfolk) published her 4<sup>th</sup> book of poetry entitled, *Women, Resilient Women*. Check it out on PRA's web listing. Also, check out her weekly blog at [patdurmon.com](http://patdurmon.com) or email her at [patdurmon@gmail.com](mailto:patdurmon@gmail.com).

Kimberly Vernon (Gin Creek Poets) has a new poetry book posted on PRA's website: *A Rhyme For Every Season*. It's for sale through Amazon.

### **Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration April 14<sup>th</sup>:**

PRA hosted the 2018 Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration on April 14<sup>th</sup> at the Cox Building in Little Rock. President Dennis Patton welcomed everyone and announced the newest Poet Laureate for the state of Arkansas, our own Jo Garot McDougall. Jo received a call the day before from the Governor's office informing her that she had been appointed. She said, "It's an honor I never dreamed I'd receive." Our thanks to Jo for leading informative sessions that morning. She spoke on the importance of story and how to tell it in poetry using "small bursts of surprise." She also advised poets to write about the reality of being human. Good poetry has the power to touch the human heart. After Jo's presentation, the Light and Serious Verse Contest winners were determined by a vote. JDC

Contest Chair Donna Smith introduced winners of the 2018 Jeannie Dolan Carter Memorial Collegiate Poetry Contest - Jake Sawyer of Mena and Alexandra Borchardt of Monticello - who read their poems. (Our thanks to Mr. Roger Carter for his continuing generous sponsorship of this contest.) Then Student Contest Co-Chair Laura Loughridge introduced winners of the 2018 Sybil Nash Abrams Student Contests for grades 6-12 - Evie Kinsey of Benton, McKenzie Young of Sherwood, and Millie Allgood of Little Rock - who read their poems. (Our thanks to the Sybil Nash Abrams family for their continuing generous support of this contest.) The readings were followed by a brief photo session with the students for press releases. Our thanks to PRA members who helped with statewide outreach and judging of these annual contests. President Patton then led a business meeting. Last year's Sybil Nash Abrams winner of \$1,000 Laura Trigg read her historical poem, "*Separate: The Taborian Hall and Its Dreamland Ballroom*". And finally PRA Contest winners were announced. (See PRA's website for a complete list of winners announced this date.)

**PRA Lost 2 of its Best in 2017-2018:** In November 2017 Arkansas Poet Laureate Peggy Vining passed away. She left a wonderful legacy of family, poetry and educational accomplishments. Peggy was a member of PRA for 50+ years and served 3 terms as PRA President. Governor Asa Hutchinson said, "Arkansas is richer for the life of Poet Laureate Peggy Vining and for the verse she left behind."

In July 2018, Jim Barton lost his battle with cancer. Jim was one of PRA's most active and inspiring poets, PRA's Treasurer, founder and treasurer of the South Arkansas Poets of the Pines Branch, and 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. He left a warm legacy of family, poetic achievements and many mentored friends. We will long remember Jim's words, "Let us be the poets we were meant to be. Live. Love. Laugh. Write (and read) poetry."

### **Jeanie Dolan Carter Memorial Collegiate Contest**

**Continues for 3<sup>rd</sup> Year:** 2018 winners were announced at PRA's Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration in April. JDC sponsor Roger Carter was pleased to see an increased number of entrees from all over the state representing 11 colleges/universities. Prizes total \$1,000 and entry is free. PRA members Pat Durmon and Diane Stefan selected the 2018 winners, plus 3 honorable mentions, representing 5 schools. . (See complete winners' list on PRA's website.)

**PRA Partnered with the 2017 Arkansas State Fair for 4<sup>th</sup> Year:** to sponsor *Best-of-Show* poetry winners in 4 age groups. Winners were announced in October at the Fair and on PRA's website. Prizes included cash for each BOS winner, plus a 1-year PRA membership for the adult winner. Entry is free to Arkansans. (See complete winners' list on PRA's website.)

**PRA served 129 members, 11 branches and one online group statewide this year.**