



# Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

<http://poetsroundtableofarkansas.org>

## Year in Review – 2018-2019

**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 through 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 2018-2019:** 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 71<sup>st</sup> Poetry Day Conference:**

PRA celebrated its 71<sup>st</sup> annual Poetry Day on October 13, 2018 at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, in Little Rock. President Dennis Patton welcomed members and guests, including the four children of former PRA President Betty Heidelberger. Poetry Day Chair Amanda Partridge read the Governor's Proclamation of Poetry Day and a history of past Poet Laureate Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni who established the first Arkansas Poetry Day on October 15, 1948. Then Amanda introduced the featured speaker, accomplished poet and author Pat Durmon of Norfolk, Arkansas. Pat spoke on how poets are storytellers who write about what they know from everyday life. She encouraged poets to have others critique their work. Pat also encouraged poets to enter the "arena," as President Theodore Roosevelt said, to share their work. Pat then presented critiques of member poems submitted in advance. After lunch President Patton held a business meeting and recognized members lost during the year: Arkansas' 6th Poet Laureate Peggy Vining of Little Rock, NFSPS President and PRA Treasurer Jim Barton of Huttig, and longtime PRA member Dean Henning of Alexander. Dennis presented the prestigious 2018 Merit Award to Frieda Patton for her long-time support

and promotion of poetry and poets through the goals of PRA. Finally, Poetry Day Contest Chair Marie Allison announced the winners. (See on PRA's website.)

**2018 Arkansas State Fair Sponsorship** - PRA sponsored the *Best-of-Show* category in the Arkansas State Fair Poetry Contests for the 5<sup>th</sup> year. Congratulations to *Best-of-Show* Winners: Donna Nelson of Kensett (Adult winner of \$25 plus a 1-year PRA membership), Grace Milner of Hot Springs (Senior Youth winner of \$25), and Kiersten Priddy of Nashville (Junior Youth winner of \$15). See State Fair poetry winners listed on PRA's website. (The Fair changed management in late 2018, and is undergoing other changes in 2019. So the PRA Board voted to forego its 2019 sponsorship, and reconsider in 2020.)

**Arkansas's 7<sup>th</sup> Poet Laureate Jo McDougall:** PRA's own Jo McDougall had a very busy first year as Arkansas's 7<sup>th</sup> Poet Laureate. After being nominated by PRA in January 2018, she was selected for the role in mid-April by Governor Asa Hutchinson. She then set up readings, and structured her platform: "*Poetry: ASAP!*" She believes poetry should be Accessible, Surprising, Available, and Part of our everyday lives. She is promoting this message via readings, workshops and talks, especially to young people. In May 2018 the Governor commissioned her to write a poem on "the hopeful future of Arkansas." She delivered it to him in October when he proclaimed Poetry Day 2018 in Arkansas, and he read it aloud at

that event: *"Anything We Want, Anything We Dream; For the People of Arkansas."* The governor invited her to read the poem at his inauguration on January 15, 2019, where she sat with the Governor's family, looking down Capitol Avenue, and then addressing the people of Arkansas with a poem for them, for us. (See it on Jo's website, [www.jomcdougall.net](http://www.jomcdougall.net).) Additionally, the Jo McDougall Poetry Prize was established by *Equinox*, the student creative writing journal, at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock. She also created a new poetry form: the "McDougall Moment." And finally, Jo was awarded the 2019 Porter Fund Lifetime Achievement Award, given every five years for a body of work. A gala celebrating the event was held on June 20, 2019 at the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock, and former Governor Mike Beebe presented the award with a wonderful tribute.

### **2019 Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration April 13<sup>th</sup>:**

PRA hosted its annual Dr. Lily Peter Spring Celebration in Little Rock on April 13, 2019. President Dennis Patton welcomed the group and introduced the Spring Celebration Chair Christine Henderson. Henderson gave a brief history of past Arkansas Poet Laureate Dr. Lily Peter and read her poem, "I Hear a Hawk Calling." She then introduced the day's guest speaker H.K. (Heather) Hummel, poet, author, and Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock. Professor. Hummel spoke on how art is a shared beauty that transforms us when we create it and again when we share it. She said poetry is a way to give a name to namelessness. She also shared critiques of poems that members submitted before the event. Arkansas Poet Laureate Jo McDougall read her poem, *"Anything We Want, Anything We Dream; For the People of Arkansas,"* commissioned by the Governor. Following lunch in the River Market the student winners were announced, and attending winners read their poems. JDC Judge Pat Durmon introduced the three winners of the 2019 Jeannie Dolan Carter Collegiate Poetry Contest. Youth Co-Chair Frieda Patton presented the winners of the Middle and High School Contests. A brief photo session followed, including the student winners, presenters, President Patton, Arkansas Poet Laureate Jo McDougall and JDC Sponsor Roger Carter. Spring Celebration winners were announced by Pat Laster, John Crawford and Dennis Patton. (See winners listed on PRA's website, plus pictures.) President Patton recognized the outgoing Board Members and introduced the new Board Members for the 2019-2021 term: Frieda Patton (President), Laura Trigg (Vice President), Amanda Partridge (Secretary), Dennis Patton (Treasurer), Renee Ramsey (Historian), John McPherson (Parliamentarian), Dennis Patton (Counselor), and Members at large: Donna Smith, Laura Bridges, Fay Guinn, and Christine Henderson. Past PRA President Cathy Moran presented outgoing President Dennis Patton with a plaque in appreciation for his service as President for the last four years.

**Congratulations** to 16 PRA members who placed in the 2019 NFSPS Contests: Barbara Blanks, LaVern

McCarthy, Kate Lacy, Sara Gipson, Cathy Moran, Wendy Visser, Russell Strauss, Pat Durmon, Gail Denham, Ann Carolyn Cates, Dr. Emory Jones, Fay Guinn, Diane Palfrey, Dena Gorrell, Von Bourland, and Dr. John Crawford. Congratulations also to Amanda Partridge (Gin Creek Poets of Searcy) who is the new NFSPS Stevens Manuscript Competition Chair.

**2018-2019 Anthologies** – After board discussion, PRA will do multi-year anthologies in the future, rather than annual, with a few other changes. Our thanks to Kate Lacy and Mark Barton for coordinating PRA's first multi-year anthology in 2019. The book is entitled, "Turning Home." See more on PRA's website.

**South Arkansas Poets of the Pines** (SAPOP) hosted an open mic event on October 26, 2018 at PJ's Coffee House in El Dorado. The event had a Halloween theme and was dedicated to the memory of PRA's Jim Barton. Several members of Jim's family were present, with his son Stephen reading his own work, and his daughter Rae Lynn reading one of Jim's poems. SAPOP also participated in a night of poetry on April 9, 2019 as part of the Arts in April program sponsored by South Arkansas Community College, and co-sponsored a poetry reading/slam on April 18, 2019 at the Barton Public Library.

**Honoree Faye Boyette Wise** was celebrated as a poet on March 21, 2019 at the Four Seasons Residential Care Center in Benton. At age 90, she has been writing poetry for more than 60 years. She received the Arkansas Merit Award in 2002, has been a PRA member since 1982, and is currently an honorary member. She calls poetry "good therapy."

**PRA was well represented** at the annual Lucidity Ozark Poetry Retreat in Eureka Springs during April 2-4, 2019. Pat Durmon was featured poet. She also won the Critic's Choice Award (\$25) which was judged by 35 of her fellow poets attending. Other winners were PRA members, including: Christine Henderson (1<sup>st</sup> Place \$150), Kate Lacy (3<sup>rd</sup> Place \$100), Pat Laster (HM \$25), Donna Nelson (HM \$25), John McPherson (HM \$25), and Fay Guinn (HM \$25). Congratulations to all!

**The Siloam Springs Writers Guild** held their 3rd Annual Writers Conference on Saturday, July 27, 2019 in Siloam Springs. The theme was "Cultivating Your Imagination." Keynote speaker Linda C. Apple opened with "Inspire! Write from Your Soul!" and also presented "Living History." Dennis Patton's talks were "Three Secrets to Winning Poems," and "What's in Your Tool Box?" Elece Hollis spoke on "Creative Poetic Techniques," and "Shouts of Joy." Erin Marshall's talk was "Dreams Worth Chasing." A total of 32 attended the conference, moderated by past guild president, Gene Linzey. Guild member Linda Johnstone prepared a pulled pork lunch.

**PRA served** 117 members and 10 branches statewide, plus an online group this year.