EVENT TITLE:
Scarlet Tanager Books:
25th Anniversary Poetry Reading

EVENT DESCRIPTION:
Scarlet Tanager Books, founded in 1999, publishes work by West Coast authors. The press has a special interest in environmental writing and Native American literature. The 25th Anniversary Poetry Reading will feature poets who celebrate the beauty and warn of the fragility of landscapes from Southern California to Alaska and will include editors of Scarlet Tanager’s groundbreaking anthologies Red Indian Road West: Native American Poetry from California and Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California.

EVENT CATEGORY: Poetry Reading

Moderator: Lucille Lang Day
Poets reading: Ruth Nolan, Anne Coray, Kurt Schweigman, Georgiana Valoyce-Sanchez

OPENING REMARKS:

Welcome to Scarlet Tanager Books: 25th Anniversary Poetry Reading. Thank you very much for being here. I will start by acknowledging that we are on the traditional land of the Clovis peoples, and that many more Native Americans, including the Shawnee and Wyandotte, eventually called this area home. I believe it is important not only to acknowledge Indigenous history and land, but also to know that the Indigenous peoples of North America are still here, and we can support their cultures, their businesses, and their land stewardship.

My name is Lucille Lang Day, and I am the moderator of this event, which is a poetry reading honoring the 25th anniversary of Scarlet Tanager Books. I’m a poet and the founder and publisher Scarlet Tanager. I have authored 11 poetry collections and chapbooks and am also an editor of three anthologies, including Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California, which I coedited with Ruth Nolan, and Red Indian Road West: Native American Poetry from California, which I coedited with Lakota poet Kurt Schweigman. My own Indigenous heritage is Wampanoag.

I founded Scarlet Tanager Books in 1999 because I love literature, and much of the work I loved best had not been available to the general public. This is the work I
heard at poetry readings and writers’ groups, read in small literary magazines, or learned about because the author was a friend of a friend.

A tremendous amount of writing, especially poetry and short fiction, is overlooked by publishers, large and small. You might wonder if maybe the publishers pass on this work because it is badly written, too complex for anyone but a literary scholar to understand, or concerns topics of interest to very few. I found that none of these possibilities held true: much of the work that never finds its way into print is exquisitely crafted, accessible, and concerned with themes of interest to a broad audience. By publishing poetry and fiction, I hope to enable some of this work to reach the audience it deserves.

I consider regional independent presses to be an important part of the literary landscape. We can develop eclectic lists based on a love of literature, without commercial or other constraints. In recent years, I have been especially interested in publishing environmental literature and the work of Native American poets.

The honors received by Scarlet Tanager titles include a *Kirkus* star and a *Kirkus* Best Book of 2022 Award for *A Light to Do Shellwork By* by Georgiana Valoyce-Sanchez, a PEN Oakland – Josephine Miles Literary Award for *Red Indian Road West*, and Artists Embassy International Literary/Cultural Awards for *Fire and Rain* and *Red Indian Road West*. Scarlet Tanager has published several first books, thereby launching the authors’ literary careers. Two of these authors, Anne Coray and Georgiana Valoyce-Sanchez, are reading today. My anthology coeditors, Ruth Nolan and Kurt Schweigman, are reading with them.

**READINGS:**

The first poet will be **Ruth Nolan**. Ruth writes about California's Mojave Desert, where she has lived most of her life. A former wildland firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management's California Desert District, she is the author of two poetry books, *After the Dome Fire* and *Ruby Mountain*, and coeditor of *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*. She is also editor of *No Place for a Puritan: The Literature of California's Deserts*, and she is curator of the award-winning humanities project, *Fire on the Mojave: Stories from the Deserts and Mountains of Inland Southern California*. She is Professor of English and creative writing at College of the Desert and California Indian Nations College and holds her MFA in Creative Writing from the UC Riverside-Palm Desert low residency MFA program.
Ruth’s Introduction:

This set of poetry in my reading today—ecopoems, really—explores the impacts, lived experiences and relationships of wildfire in the broad and shimmering range of ecotones inter-existing throughout California’s Mojave Desert and adjacent Western Sonoran Desert, also alongside urbanization and other major impacts in these fragile wilderness regions, such as large scale solar development. As a former California desert wildland firefighter and single parent of a daughter, I also explore the nuances of the metaphoric themes and implications of living with and negotiating the continued and increasing presence of wildfire in these deserts.

Ruth’s Poems:

• “Problematic Palms”

Because the storied old palm trees were in the way of humanity

Because they looked sexy on film, beatific in sharp Kodachrome edge against the hot white desert light

Because lit up underskirt in all kinds of colors on sultry black nights, they are runway hot even cast in bright white

Because the sharp hooks on their fronds can easily cut through ear cartilage

Because they shag well against grungy or orange smog, take your pick

Because you are still afraid of your childhood San Bernardino at dusk, you are three years old and your father is yelling at you to go get your tricycle from beneath the raspy palm tree down the street before it gets dark

Because beach wood hauled from Blythe to Palm Springs for the modernist facades looks so wonderful decorated in Palm

Because gothic palms are a whole new thing, pick your neon frond

Because palm trees in the canyons are sentinels, providing shade, sustaining life

Because the angry ravens and crows, pecking at the berried fruit
Because they rustle in the wind, sounding like water on sand

Because the palm trees are here to stay

Because palm trees are an invasive species, or not

Because the oldest palm tree in Palm Desert is in front of the Arco station on Highway 111, planted in the 1930s

Because mountain lions prefer the palm oasis deep in the Coachella Valley preserve where people rarely go, it’s a straight path down a long canyon from the little San Bernardinos and Joshua Tree

Because the towns at the bottom of impossibly steep peaks are flush with their moppish, beatific green heads, oh perfect, sun-dappled 70-degree January days

Because, Palm Sunday, Jesus will rise and rise again, every year, from the dead

Because palm trees are easy to negotiate with, they take up very little space in the brain

Because haunted Inland Empire palm tree memories are burnished into your memory, waking you up at night

Because palms are easy to burn away, because something must always be sacrificed

- “Mopping Up.” This poem is from Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California.

- “Wee Thump, Ancient Ones”

- “Teaching My Daughter to Put Out Fire.” This poem is from After the Dome Fire, Bamboo Dart 2022.

- “Fire Behavior.” My last two poems are also from After the Dome Fire.

- “This is the Largest Joshua Tree Forest in the World”
The next poet will be Anne Coray. Anne’s debut novel *Lost Mountain* is published with West Margin Press. She is the author of three full-length poetry collections, a recent chapbook, and coeditor of *Crosscurrents North: Alaskans on the Environment*. She is also the lead editor of *Convergence: Poetry on Environmental Impacts of War*, an anthology that will be published by Scarlet Tanager Books in 2025. Her work has appeared in the *Southern Review, Northwest Review, Poetry, North American Review,* and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. The recipient of fellowships from the Alaska State Council on the Arts and the Rasmuson Foundation, she divides her time between Homer and her birthplace on remote Lake Clark in southwest Alaska.

Anne’s Introduction:

I’m thrilled to be part of the 25th anniversary reading for Scarlet Tanager Books. My poetry collection *Bone Strings* came out with the press in 2005, and working with Lucy Lang Day has been a pleasure. She is incredibly professional, always thorough in responses to questions and fulfilling her roles as editor and publisher in a timely manner. She has remained enthusiastic about poetry for decades; the fact that a single-woman press has survived this length of time is a testament to Lucy’s dedication to literature. To help celebrate these achievements, I’m going to read several poems from my Scarlet Tanager collection exclusively.

Anne’s Poems:

- “Alaskan Born.” This is a poem for my husband, Steve, written before we were married. Speaking of anniversaries, this summer will be our 32nd. Both of us are lifelong Alaskans. When I wrote this poem we were living just north of Anchorage, near a place called Big Lake. The foal in the poem is metaphorical. Celery is mentioned. By this I mean wild celery, which is common in Alaska, as well as its relative, cow parsnip.

This foal that is my love
lies in high grass, discovering
heartbeats, wild iris,
tongues, breath, celery, hair,
wetness, spears.

The earth,
warm with our moisture,
is scented with the crush
of violets and skin.
Seeds that have lain long
rush past willows and birches,
to search the alp lily's bed.

This lush growth
is a late telling,
but I will be one day standing
in pastures of deep-rooted promises,
arthritic, delicate at the withers,
with you, nuzzling.

• “Ars Poetica”
• “Alaskan”
• “Dirge”
• “After a Fashion”
• “One March Animal’s Desire”

The next poet is Kurt Schweigman. Kurt is Oglala and Sicangu Lakota, born and raised in Rapid City, South Dakota, and currently resides in Sonoma County, California.

He formerly performed and published under the nom de plume Luke Warm Water. Kurt has been published in many literary journals and poetry anthologies, and toured extensively across the United States and Europe. He was a featured poet at the prestigious Geraldine R. Dodge 12th Biennial Poetry Festival and was the first spoken word poet to receive an Archibald Bush Foundation artist fellowship. Under his Luke Warm Water moniker, he won Poetry Slam competitions across the U.S. and in Germany.

In the video he will share poems from his recently published 2023 book Confluences of Solitude from Mitote Press and Red Indian Road West: Native
American Poetry from California, which he coedited. Both books are available for purchase at the Scarlet Tanager booth.

Kurt’s forthcoming 2024 bilingual poetry book Roots Define the Reach of My Branches will be published by Gilgamesh Press in Mantua, Italy. He is currently writing his first novel titled Sitting Bull in Paris which is contemporary and historical fiction.

Kurt is presently in Mexico for readings in support of his new book. Although he cannot be here to read live, Kurt wants you to know that he thanks you for listening.

Kurt’s Poems:

- “Earthquakes Defined.” This poem is from Red Indian Road West: Native American Poetry from California.

In my Oakland condo
daughter plays oblivious
to a slight tremor
asking her if she felt it
she did not
I tell her we need
to stand in the arch
of the door between
the bedroom and living
room area for safety
just in case a more
powerful quake arrives

Daughter is curious
on what causes earth
to shake, I explain as best
tectonic plates shifting
it is lost on my 5-year-old
she dismisses a father’s explanation, to replace it with one of her own
telling me, maybe
earthquakes happen
because Wakan Tanka (Great Spirit)
stubbed his big toe


• “Leonard Peltier”

• “Junior’s Dream”

I wanted to say *Red Indian Road West*, which includes the first poem I read, has poets from tribes indigenous to California and also poets who currently reside in California but come from tribes in other states. It was published by Scarlet Tanager. I hope you will pick up a copy and enjoy the work of a variety of Native poets.

• “Sierra de San Lorenzo.” This recording is coming to you from my home in Sonoma County, California. By the time you hear this, I will be in Baja Sur, Mexico, so I thought I’d end with something fitting from that area.

The final poet reading will be **Georgiana Valoyce-Sanchez.** Georgiana, author of *A Light to Do Shellwork By: Poems*, is a descendant of Islander and Coastal Chumash Peoples from her father’s lineage, and O’odham from her mother’s lineage. She is currently an enrolled member of The Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation and chair of the Chumash Women’s Elders Council for the Wishtoyo Foundation. She taught many different classes for the American Indian Studies Program at California State University, Long Beach, including two classes she designed: “World Genocides: An American Indian Perspective,” with graduate student Anna Nazarian-Peters, and “Conduits of California Indian Cultures: Art, Music, Dance and Storytelling.” She retired from CSULB in 2014, after twenty-seven years. She was a board member for many years at the California Indian Storytelling Association, and she continues to be an advocate for California Indian languages and sacred sites.

Georgiana’s Introduction:

• Greeting in Šmuwič, the coastal Chumash language.
• I am grateful for being here with all of you in Missouri, even virtually. It’s something spiritual for me to be with you today to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Scarlet Tanager Books.

Georgiana’s Poems:

• “A Light to Do Shellwork By.” This is the title poem of the book I am reading from today.

   for my father, Joseph John Moreno  
   June 5, 1897 – August 15, 1991

One day
   all of life catapulted into one day
   one moment
   of sunlight
   filtering through the waiting
   of the grownups
   sunlight
   and the laughter of children outside
   warming my father's dying

My father turns his head to acknowledge the sun

       The light       the light
       he says
       and the light within

       It's a good light to do shellwork by

The ocean sang in my father's hands
abalone pendants shimmered rainbows
from the ears of pretty girls
and shellwork dotted driftwood carvings
   cowrie shells, cone shells, volute shells
   red, black, white, blue, brown, green shells
the life they once held
sacred
old stories etched on
the lifeline of my father's palm
I hold my father's hand
my own shellwork words
my poet's eye noting the light
    how through the bedroom door
the ears of fresh white corn piled
on the kitchen table
harvest the afternoon sun
    how light shines through a glass of water
touches
my mother's white hair as she leans to
embrace my father
    the hush of twilight
and how the sunset
    like a trail of wild lupines
or the tracings on seashells
tells stories
of our origin
as it lights up the sky
with fire

• “The Inland Sea”

• “The Universe We Are”

• “Warrior Woman.” This poem was written after my niece, Robin, died of cancer.

• “There is a Fire.” This is for all writers and poets, those who teach writing programs and literature, publishers, and my beloved Scarlet Tanager Books.

Conclusion:

“Thank you again for joining us. We’ll now take questions and comments from the audience.”
BIBLIOGRAPHY:


