EVENT TITLE:
Ages on the Issues:
An Intergenerational Poetry Reading

EVENT DESCRIPTION:
Poets ranging in age from 36 to 79 will read poems that address environmental issues and social justice. In addition to being multigenerational—Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Millennials—the poets reading are multicultural, bringing Latin American, Middle Eastern, European American, and Native American perspectives to some of the most important issues challenging humanity today. This diverse group of poets will create a conversation to inform, inspire, and provide insight for all of us.

EVENT CATEGORY: Poetry Reading

Moderator: Lucille Lang Day
Poets reading: Joan Gelfand, Jaylan Salah Salman, Lucille Lang Day, Noelia Cerna, Mary Mackey

OPENING REMARKS:

Welcome to Ages on the Issues: An Intergenerational Poetry Reading. Thank you very much for being here.

My name is Lucille Lang Day, and I am the moderator of this poetry reading. I’m a poet and also the founder and publisher Scarlet Tanager Books. I’ve authored 11 poetry collections and chapbooks and am also an editor of three anthologies, including Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California, Red Indian Road West: Native American Poetry from California, and Poetry and Science: Writing Our Way to Discovery. My latest poetry collection is Birds of San Pancho and Other Poems of Place, from Blue Light Press.

In our contemporary, youth-oriented Western culture, it’s easy to lose sight of the wisdom of elders. This reading brings elders into conversation with younger poets to address environmental and social issues. Poetry cannot solve these problems, but by enabling us to look deeply inside ourselves and deeply at the world, it can lead us to new insights and also facilitate dialogue. This reading will encompass the diverse cultural perspectives of poets from North America, Central America, and
Egypt. The poets reading with me are Joan Gelfand, Jaylan Salah Salman, Noelia Cerna, and Mary Mackey, and I am eager to hear their words.

**READINGS:**

The first poet will be **Joan Gelfand**.

**Joan** is the author of three collections of poetry, a chapbook of short fiction and a novel set in a Silicon Valley startup. She has taught for California Poets in the Schools, The Writing Salon and the San Francisco Writer’s Conference. Her award-winning book *You Can Be a Winning Writer* was an Amazon #1 bestseller. In January 2024, *Outside Voices: A Memoir of the Berkeley Revolution* was published by Post Hill Press. A member of the National Book Critics Circle and PEN International, Joan is President Emerita of the Women’s National Book Association. Her work has appeared in national and international publications, including *The Huffington Post, The LA Review of Books, The J, and The San Francisco Chronicle.*

Joan’s Poems:

- “Requiem for a Dying World.” Persea, white lotus and dum are ancient fruits, now extinct.

   Crouched figure folds into black chador  
   Four wooden crates balanced on bent back  
   She takes the steps into the Old City  
   One by one as mosque call pities  
   Men from shops and homes.  
   She does not pray inside the Golden Dome  
   She does not sigh or moan.

   The Fertile Crescent shrivels  
   The seed cannot be planted  
   Persea, white lotus and dum  
   Refuse to thrive in drought, dry desert air.

   Over time we lose the taste for  
   Something gorgeous; the sweet
And sour flavor/the one that made you pout and pucker.

Further east, in Turta Gangga, wizened farmer
Reflects under hot sun glinting
Off rice paddy’s geometry.
His children have gone
Wandering, hustling tourists.
What will become of my fields?
Who will plant, nurse each stalk?
His hat shades his face as worry steams
Off his body like hillsides after a storm.

Over the mountains foul smoke creeps
War’s detritus/China’s factories
Sully pristine landscapes
Halfway around the continent
A wide belt of pollution
Clamoring for solutions.

South of the border
Fisherman rig reliable boats
Catch bone and decapitate handily
Just like last year and the year before
Mesquite fire crackles under palapa, guitarras
Snap Latin longing and loving but the catch
This year is rare and too small.

The Fertile Crescent shrivels
The seed cannot be planted
Persea, white lotus, dum
Refuse to thrive in drought, dry desert air.

What was once done with ease
(our women can’t conceive)
Now the labor of specialists
While next door Dubai thrives
On oil, highrises in the desert and you drive
Your battered Toyota to the store
For milk, something to feed your children.
The Fertile Crescent shrivels.
Overhead, jet vapor trails mist
Precious trees with toxic teardrops.
The taste for cash replaces
The taste for something gorgeous
That one that made you pout and pucker.
Persea, white lotus, dum.

At the headwaters, diversion
Kills the Chinooks, starves the natives
So farmers can grow rice
In drought ridden California.
Human/animal/land
That circle broken by man
Who bore a chink in the chain
Took what wasn’t ours for the taking.
Down below the equatorial line Masai, Samoan wonder
Why no rain? Why too much rain?
Can’t grow in the dry. Can’t go in the cyclone.
(We huddle around heaters
Worry about the heating bill)
And special interests lobby bills
Against the earth like rotten chocolates.

Over the mountains foul smoke creeps
War’s detritus/China’s factories
Sully pristine landscapes
Halfway around the continent
A wide belt of pollution
Clamoring for solutions.

• “Ghazal for Baiji.” The baiji, a rare white river dolphin, went extinct in 2007.

• “Good Morning America.” This poem was written after the financial crash of 2008.

The next poet will be Jaylan Salah Salman.

Jaylan’s Introduction:

My name is Jaylan Salah. I’ve always associated writing and poetry with having a voice for the voiceless. It’s not just a matter of talking on behalf of other unfortunate people, but to express things that other people might be feeling as well, but are too scared, too traumatized, too vulnerable to express it. I’ve heard the sentence before from many people, “How lucky you are to be able to express yourself in words. I wish I had this gift.” On behalf of many people whom I’ve met and loved and felt the need to speak for them, to tell their stories, to put their pain and screams out there in the world, these are my poems.

Jaylan’s Poems:

• “They killed my Rosemary garden.”
Rosemary
garden
I planted my garden
but the darkness
came
my garden evaporated
white clouds
fumes
crack
like crackling a dragon underneath a dome
in a seashell
but my garden of Rosemary
Your feet stomped on it
that pain
is greater than your anguish
you are the black, tarry boots
you are the cracked lips
of the destruction
that takes away my Rosemary
and grifts the land by the sea
you won’t give me a pond
to wash my clothes
a stick to guide my sheep
there’s no land for me
to keep my garden
you took the land
burned the garden
ate my food
there’s no flour to make the bread
no oil to light the lantern
there are no tissues to wipe your face
Crying?
Here’s a shrub to dry your Rosemary tears

• “Salma and the Dead Sea”

• “Not any iris, my iris”

**Lucille Lang Day** will read next.

Lucy’s Introduction:

I am going to read three poems concerned with environmental issues and one concerned with colonization’s effects on Indigenous cultures. Climate change, environmental destruction, and extinction of species are huge worldwide problems, but if you look at issues at the local level, there are things each of us can do to help, so I will begin with three poems about environmental issues in Northern California, where I live. Each of these poems contains a partial solution to the problem it describes.
Lucy’s Poems:

- “The Butterflies Are Dying.”

Cabbage whites with black-tipped forewings are not floating this year over broccoli, mustard and watercress.

West Coast ladies with blue spots on their hindwings are not nectaring on blossoms of rabbitbrush.

The number of Western monarchs has decreased to one-tenth of one percent of their former population.

With warmer fall weather, their bodies, regal in orange and black, overheat. Adults and eggs dehydrate.

The butterflies don’t know when to migrate, hibernate or reproduce. They can’t find food, and even if they lay eggs, the eggs are dying. Four hundred fifty butterfly species in the West now face extinction.

Oh, welcome them with milkweed and sunflowers, rabbitbrush, mustard. Today, say *Come to my garden.*


- “Newts in Rain”

- “Winter Salmon Run”

- “Names of the States”
The next poet will be Noelia Cerna.

Noelia is a Latina poet based in Springdale, Arizona. She was born in Costa Rica and immigrated at the age of seven to the United States, where she received a Bachelor’s degree in English from Westminster College in Missouri. Her poems have been published in audio form in TERSE Journal and in print in The Revolution [Relaunch], the Girl Gang blog, Plants & Poetry Journal and The North Meridian Review. Noelia is a book editor for the North Meridian Review and an award winning writing mentor for Pen America’s Prison Writing Mentorship program. Her debut collection Las Piedrecitas is available for pre-order from Black Lawrence Press.

Noelia’s Poems:

- “Liturgy for the Lost”

Last year you pierced your ears.  
You grew up pastor’s daughter  
in a denomination that taught you  
your body belonged to God and to men  
before it could ever belong to you,  
taught you jewelry was a sin and piercings were abominations- 
relegated to something the lost did-

While most of your classmates wore earrings  
from the time they were babies here you are,  
three-four years old and still learning  
how to navigate the holes you chose  
less than a year ago.

There are times you feel less than,  
times when you have to ask for help  
getting an earring in,  
there are the really beautiful but big earrings  
you purchased but are still too afraid to wear.  
There is beauty in fear;  
in knowing you are not ready but that you can choose when you are.

Religion robbed you of choice for so long,
taught you men could say what was acceptable
for your body, do with it what they wished.
Yesterday you cried
because you couldn’t get your left earring to cooperate,
had to call your best friend
have her face time you through it
Know this moment is still a choice.
Know that renovations require moments of breaking.

Today you arranged the new earring stand you bought.
Carefully placed the studs,
unwrapped the heavy pairs of earrings
you so carefully curated
As you look at the happiness on your vanity,
remember the years you would stare at your classmates' ears
longingly
knowing you could rock the earrings
they chose to wear,
the jewelry they didn’t have to hide from their moms,
how you dreamed up the outfits you would wear,
if only.
Know this is celebration.
Breathe in the choices you have made for yourself.

You were once told your body was a temple.
This was the reason you were indoctrinated against piercings,
against tattoos, against choice.
Remember when your Bible was written only men
were allowed to be priests
so it is only fitting they believed themselves gods.
Made you believe choice was a desecration
if it be defilement by man then let it be called worship-
if by you, then let it be abomination.

When you are ready to wear the biggest pair of earrings you own,
remember to brush back your hair,
extend your neck as you walk and let them swing.
Let them be pendants.
Let them be flags.
Let them be Beatitudes.
Blessed are they that renovate temples.
For they shall rebuild peace.

This is how temples are reclaimed.
How holy ground is restored.
Let the congregation of those
still in captivity say hallelujah as you walk past.
Let them say god has brought them out of their captivity.
And she be looking fine in some earrings.
Let the flash of color from your ears show them a taste of holy.
Let the temple be restored to its former glory.
Let the people say-
Amen

• “Love Letter to the Immigrant”

• “Genesis”

The final poet reading will be Mary Mackey.

Mary became a writer by running high fevers, tramping through tropical jungles, being swarmed by army ants, dodging machine-gun fire, and reading. She is the author of 8 collections of poetry including Sugar Zone, winner of a PEN Award and The Jaguars That Prowl Our Dreams winner of the 2019 Eric Hoffer Award for Best Book Published by a Small Press. Her most recent book Creativity: Where Poems Begin was nominated for a 2023 Northern California Book Reviewers Award in Creative Nonfiction. Mackey’s poetry has been praised by Wendell Berry, Jane Hirshfield, D. Nurkse, Al Young, Rafael Jesús González, and Maxine Hong Kingston for its beauty, precision, originality, and extraordinary range. She is also author of 14 novels including The New York Times bestseller A Grand Passion.

Mary’s Introduction:

My issue is climate change. I have lived and worked in biological field stations in the jungles of the Amazon and Central America. I have been interested in ecological issues ever since 1966. I write poems in the voice of Cassandra, the Trojan priestess and prophet, who could see what was coming but whom no one
believed. I write poems for future generations so the beauty of the old planet will
not be forgotten. I write to help us figure out how to preserve joy and hope as the
coming climate catastrophes overwhelm us.

Mary’s Poems:

• “In This Burning World” is perhaps the first climate change love poem. It asks
  the question: “How do we preserve joy and hope?”

on the long road down the hill
the cobblestones tip us like drunken sailors
under a sky smeared with volcanic dust

at the bottom lies a sea
clear and pale as the skin
beneath our arms

in this burning world
where we can never stop to rest
you reach out and brush
the tips of my fingers

our parched skin flakes off
in tiny bits and floats up toward the sun
riding the great cone-shaped thermals
of this slowly turning planet

we are two birds
gliding through an empty sky
lost uncertain
filled with unreasonable joy

From The Jaguars That Prowl Our Dreams: New and Selected Poems 1978 to
2018

• “The Invisible Forests of Amapá” describes the awe-inspiring natural and
  spiritual beauty of the jungle that still exists in a remote part of the Brazilian
  Amazon.
• “The Jaguars The Prowl Our Dreams.” The Orinoco, Rio Negro, Solimões, Tocantins, Xingu, and Javary are all tributary rivers that form the Amazon River. *Tupinambá, Tupiniquim, Aimoré* are Amazon tribes the members of which are now extinct due to European conquest and disease.

• “Troops of Brightly Colored Monkeys”

• “I Am The Prophet Who Stands on The Tracks”

• “Pillar of Smoke, Pillar of Fire”

Conclusion:

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

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**


Mackey, Mary. *In This Burning World*. East Rockaway, NY: Marsh Hawk Press, 2025 (in press).


