

"Here are eight Arizona poets who've been working together for years honing their skills, poets committed to shaping the matter of their real lives into music—eight accomplished poets writing poems that are bell-clear, writing poems made out of the memories and passions that haunt them, the moments that have shaped them and define them. You will not be bored here by rhetorical flummery and affectation; this is an engaging, honest, thoroughly readable anthology. I would not be surprised if you found yourself moved by a good many of these poems, and now and again find your heart broken in the way that authentic poetry can sometimes break one's heart."

—Steve Kowit, *In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet's Portable Workshop*

"*Spilled* brings us poems of love, loneliness, and loss, of aspiration and anguish, of memory and the marvels hidden in the world around us. The language is rich, with deft touches of humor and, here and there, a last line that echoes, long after the book is closed."

—Susan Cummins Miller, *A Sweet, Separate Intimacy*

"The Dry River Poets know what poetry is for. The poems in *Spilled* peer closely at the desert: saguaros rising and fallen, rattlesnakes, and all, although the creatures may be unimpressed 'to hear you're lovely / and in my poem.' The poets aren't afraid to examine issues: the environment, immigration, war. They explore personal history: illness, lost children, love, loss. We witness the way hands 'held and let go,' wonder 'how long does love go on and on / rewinding,' see a dead mother's face as 'a map I could no longer follow home.' The poets understand 'the stubborn diligence of memory': even if we try to pack it away, 'it's all spilling out, all over the place.' They seek to find a voice 'that insinuates itself like smoke in a flannel shirt.'

One poem asks, 'What will relieve the dread of darkness?'

The light in this collection is a very fine answer."

— Meg Files, *The Love Hunter and Other Poems*



Casa Luna Press

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SPILLED

DRY RIVER POETS

SPILLED

a collection by the
DRY RIVER POETS

WYNNE BROWN

NAN COLEMAN

BETTY CREATH

LARRY CRONIN

ANNABELLE DEUTSCHER

STEVEN NAGY

MARDY STOTSKY

SANDRA SZELAG

More praise for Spilled . . .

“Tucson has a vibrant writing community and this anthology of work from the Dry River Poets shows the variety and depth of its talent. From shaped verse to villanelle, from character study to poem of praise, the poetry in this anthology is lush with emotion and expression: Wynne Brown’s expansive empathetic poem-letters; Nan Coleman’s wise, thoughtful elegies and odes; Betty Creath’s visionary, stoic quests; Larry Cronin’s wry, witty psychological landscapes; Belle Deutscher’s sharp, supremely intelligent histories join with Steve Nagy’s lively, gritty Ohio River Valley memories, Mardy Stotsky’s luminous minimalist missives, and Sandra Szelag’s astute, spiritually translucent fables. The Dry River Poets offer a rich reading experience. The poems are alive with scent and color, the taste and touch of life. This chorus of distinct voices reveals the landscape of the Sonoran desert, the landscapes of the past and the landscapes of the human heart.”

—Geraldine Connolly, *Hand of the Wind*



The generous poems in *Spilled* reach out to the reader in confidence and trust, with a direct, long look.

—Wendy Burk



“An engaging collection of poetry, intriguingly wide-ranging in subject matter and tone.”

—Jefferson Carter



"Such enlivening poems! From diverse times and places, they enter the present moment to awaken a spirit lulled into complacency by societal routines. If you want to come alive, sit down and read a couple of these. Your heart will spill over. Your desire to be real will expand."

—Pat Youngdahl, *Subversive Devotions: A Journey Into Divine Pleasure And Power*



"*Spilled* is a collection of diverse and satisfying poems written by local Tucson poets. These poems reflect this desert area well, and, in various ways, move the reader. They evidence how such a group can come together to share poems and still stay true to their individual voices. As with any such collection of serious poets, there are some real stunners in the mix, poems that bring readers to their deepest and most profound feelings of what it is to be alive, to live in the world. Whether happy or sad, wry or wise (and they are, in turn, all of these), these are poems the reader will savor and enjoy, a collection to relish and return to.

—Tom Speer, *My Father's Shoes*, co-author with Carmen Speer of *Tandem Space: Daughter/Father Poems*



SPILLED

A collection by the
DRY RIVER POETS

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SANDRA SZELAG

Casa Luna Press
Tucson, Arizona

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THE DRY RIVER POETS PUBLISH THEIR COLLECTION

Eight of us are mapping our trip to immortality.
We are acquaintances—no, friends
who gather together monthly on the fiery stage of poetry
to practice thrashing our way across the boundaries of style.
We use form, free verse, narrative and rhyme—
just listen to our voices, how wry they are, how lyrical,
how pithy and sharp as we drag our words with us
down this road to publication.

—Annabelle Deutscher

INTRODUCTION

The Dry River Poets believe in the power of words to express our humanity and, in the act of writing poetry, to render proof that one more soul did indeed walk this planet and bear witness to our miraculous existence.

What we say and how we say it *matters*.

Although we live in this time that adores the absurd and worships the meaningless, we profess our love for clarity, for evoking fine detail, for words that convey what it is to be awakened, and—most of all—to express our truths.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Dry River Poets extend heartfelt thanks to

- ❧ Steve Kowit, poet, teacher, mentor
- ❧ Nancy Mellan, for her support and exceptional hospitality
- ❧ The University of Arizona Poetry Center, for providing a home base
- ❧ Wynne Brown, for her many hours of labor under daunting circumstances to design this collection

For Mardy

April 4, 1923 – May 27, 2011

The Poems

Wynne Brown

Diversity appears to be the engine that drives this poet.

Born in the Midwest, she moved to Europe, then to the American South, and from there to the East Coast, and thence to the Southwest for graduate school. From Tucson, life led her even farther south to Australia, then north to Tennessee for 22 years. In 2000, she moved gratefully back to Arizona and now lives in the Chiricahua Mountains where she intends to remain.

Her degrees include a bachelor's degree in printmaking, an interdisciplinary masters in biology/scientific illustration, and a second MS in communication.

Throughout the journey, the fuel that's fed her has remained constant: words, images, the natural world, family (furred and otherwise), friendships—and food.

Along the way, she has worked as a pizza waitress, carpenter's assistant, scientific illustrator with a specialty in drawing spider genitalia, graphic designer, teacher, journalist, copy editor, curriculum developer—and always a writer.

Her books include *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Arizona Women* and *The Falcon Guide to Trail Riding Arizona*, both published by Globe Pequot Press.



ARRIVAL

It's all the fault of the illegals,
says my neighbor, the one who swerves
to squash any snake who dares cross the road,
rattler or not.

I mean, he says, who gave them the right to cross our borders,
fill our schools, crowd our hospitals,
trash our land?

Meanwhile
at my other neighbor's kitchen table,
a man sits, lips and nose blistered, fingers
a mass of blackened cracks, tops
of his sneakers flapping separate from bloodied soles.
He bows his head in prayer before
plunging a rolled tortilla into steaming beans.
Between bites, he speaks in soft Spanish
of the hard walk from Guatemala,
skull-drilling heat,
thirst driving thorns through his tongue,
fear of failure, *la migra* ... death
driving him forward
day after day.

All he wants is water, these beans, and one
call to his uncle in L.A.
to say he made it to this land,
this land
so full of empty promises.

Nan Coleman

Nan Coleman is a California coastal native who lives with her big-hearted greyhounds in Tucson near a wash, a giant saguaro, and a taco shop. You would never find her. Her human and canine family are fairly tolerant of her obsession with words and their constant rearrangement.



PERCUSSIONIST

The conductor leapt and tapped the winds
to pull their inbreaths out. The strings,
distracted, spun you away, you swooned
along the tip of his baton.

Aside, there sat the stolid drummer,
His eyes downcast, hands in his lap
a solitary soul, the lights
a wink of glare on eyeglass panes.

It took long minutes more of stirring sound
to start a stiffening in his spine.
Ear down now on the skins

the man began to stir, suspire,
you watched the music rise in him.
Tall and taut, he took up sticks
and surging from his stool

he fell upon his drums at last.
He drove you: hungry, mad, afire,
and avidly you strove and pressed,
you were alive, were fraught with life and heat—

The winds at last began to shift
the strings began to drift and fail
the great baton grew slow.
Fever spent, you gulped for air, he

gulped it too, and then you heard a hush:
adagio, al fine, falling quietude.
Still as a god the burnished drummer sat,
composed, face lifted to the light.

Betty Creath

... In the beginning, a Hoosier child, greedy for learning,
often jumping to conclusions

... observer of Elvis, the Beatles, and hippies, influenced by their
simplistic idealism

... awakened by
consciousness-raising
groups, *Ms. Magazine*,
children, and foster children
to the complex realities of
other lifestyles

... challenged by illnesses
and deaths, another
discoverer of poetry as
creative self-expression



... for now, still an agnostic Skeptic with a bit of Stoicism, trying not
to be too disappointed in humankind.

SEARCHING FOR MY VOICE

I study among the dunes and dogwoods
I question king snakes and mesquites

I cannot howl like Coyote or Ginsberg
Magpies and meadowlarks with leather tongues lilt tunes
My tongue, my talking stick, anesthetized
to silence lies stiff behind an ivory fence

I'd follow any lead cow, quilt leftovers,
incur an awe-full karma, memorize the dictionary
to gain a cumulus voice that rings like bronze
and insinuates itself like smoke in a flannel shirt

Larry Cronin

Ostensibly a practicing psychiatrist, Larry's literary work is better described as that of a spiritual chiropractor working to achieve a better alignment of all our off-piste notions.

Growing up in Detroit, Michigan, he dreamed of migrating out west. One day on the streets of San Francisco he met a Mexican girl from the town of old Tucson.

Larry fathered all her children and is now working on a series of novels based on the *Book of Genesis*.



CUTTING GRASS

Thirteen, maybe fourteen
Hot humid mornings and late afternoons
Cutting grass on Mr. Edwards' property
In his backyard.
Next door a fox named Robin
Sixteen year old schoolgirl babe
Drives a '69 Camaro and sunbathes as I cut the lawn.
Pacing up to the fence, the grass looks dark
Returning, things seem brighter
Forming stripes in Mrs. Edwards' grass.
She's not bad herself
A full-breasted mid-aged mother with three small children,
Barefoot but beautiful,
Wears a terry cloth robe out to pay me
Revealing silver dollar-sized secrets.
I get four dollars fifty cents to dream on this lawn.
Can't help but wonder when it will all come true
My own machine
Some grass of my own to mow
At fifteen, maybe sixteen.

Annabelle Deutscher (A. G. Deutscher)

From a laid-back childhood on the Oklahoma prairies, this poet trekked to Manhattan, swapped horses for subways, attended N.Y.U. and studied poetry at L.I.U. under the auspices of June Jordan, Ai, and Howard Moss.

She continued her trekking life through up-state NY, PA, OH, AK, MO, AZ, CA, and the Gulf Coast of Florida—all the while writing poetry and collecting stories and characters to inhabit that poetry.

She and her musician husband raised five children and now live in Tucson, where she has retired from trekking but not writing poetry.



MEMORIA

For my sister on her 70th birthday

There we were
trudging down
a country road
two small girls
tugged along by our
imposing old Nanna
whose purse swung
side to side
whose feet marched
steadfastly forward
as if to a
noble destination.

Fine silky dust
settled about us
and sunrise, bathing
the air with its
lush peach color,
hushed our breath.

The house
we were led to
spilled with strangers—
long-limbed, black-eyed
full of voice—
who placed hands
upon our heads
spoke our names gently.
Who are they?
you implored with
your silent eyes
and now that they
are gone—
all of them gone—
the immutable answer
Family.

Stephen Nagy

Stephen Charles Gabriel Nagy, M.A. was born in Wheeling, West-By-God-Virginia and raised in Brilliant, Ohio; thus hillbilly born, hence river rat bred.

He holds a B.A. in English literature and drama from the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, where his professional writing career began as a fund-raising and public relations executive.

He was a 15-year member of that school's repertory acting company, The Anathan Players. Steve also has a Master of Arts Degree from The University of Arizona and has taught Special Education throughout the Tucson area.

He is currently pursuing a Masters in English from Northern Arizona University.



BIG MIKE PAPPAS

I'm telling what God loves:
that Mike Pappas was about the
biggest sumbitch ya ever
did see.

Size 10XL black t-shirts,
always sleeveless. He used
to sit at the end of the bar
downing ouzo—they were
mostly Greeks in that place—
singing “Blueberry Hill”
& eating.

& I do mean the man liked to
eat—anything & everything. Mike liked
to snack on headaches, washed down
with a Heineken on tap.

Once I heard he ate a young couple's
bad marriage & divorce along
with a whole jar of pickled
eggs & pigs' feet.

Once a whack job named Weedo—
who used to say “I'm not from this
planet!” said he was tired of *my shit* &
brandished a grenade, promising to pull the pin.

Big Mike just kept on sipping his ouzo
& singing “Blueberry Hill,” while Weedo
glared at us with his finger in the pin. Before

you knew it, Big Mike ate the grenade,
just like a gyro. He even used some
extra tzatziki sauce.

I owed Mike on that one. So I gave him a whole
leg of lamb to take home.

Neither Mike nor the leg of lamb made it home though:
there was a big layoff at the mill that day. Mike went to the bar.
He ate that whole leg of lamb raw, the sorrow was so pronounced.
They say that's what killed him. That last layoff from the mill.

308 HIGH STREET, BRILLIANT, OHIO, 43913

As I was finished with semester finals and stayed up smoking in the
den,
Watching Kojak reruns, hearing my brothers upstairs in synchronized
snoring,
Ah, how safe, how warm, drinking Irish whiskey and looking out the
midnight
Bay window and noticing not a soul moving along the river wearied
by the winter
Of historical proportions: 1978, the depth of snow outside exceeding
all darkness,
All light; it was hell, they said. That winter was a cruel, beautiful,
frozen pain.

And I, a teenager fresh from school and pizza making, what did I
know of pain?
What did I really know aside from the demands of the libido, secure
in the den
Of my father's house, studying language, reaching to know what's
beyond the darkness
That soon followed when Michael Murphy was shredded by car,
never again snoring,
Never again awakening, eternally sleeping, & one might guess,
eternally in winter,
Six feet below the soggy Ohio soil, and me half hoping he would
appear some midnight

And speak to me of what it is that lies beyond this life of dreams,
beyond midnight
Reckonings of our own spiritual yearnings, our own flesh and blood
scented pain
That renews itself each time we find ourselves wounded, stranded like
a winter

Mardy Stotsky

Cross-country train trips, New York to Tucson in the '20s gave Mardy an early taste for travel. Then there was alternating between schools in L.A. and Tucson, three years in the Navy during WWII, college on the G.I. Bill, living and working in the Philippines and Morocco after marriage, staying put in Washington, D.C. to raise four children, and finally settling in Tucson.

About writing, she says, "Sometimes poems are hard work, and other times, poems arrive almost without me. The compression required in poetry seems natural for me—I am also a painter, minimalist, of course."



INDELIBLE FRIEND

how long will I miss you
every evening in my kitchen
when green skies fade to black
when the music ends
when the book is finished

how long will I long
for the radiance
that bloomed in your garden
now strangers live in your house
your palo verde tree has
lost a limb

how long before I forget
the suddenness of your laugh
paint on a brush
dog on a leash
trip to the city

how long does love go on and on
rewinding

Sandra Szelag

Born under the gritty skies of Chicago's Southside steel mills, Sandra grew up as an ethnic Catholic who asked too many questions.



Questions led her on a path to teaching literature, to social activism, to waitressing while living in an urban commune, to the University of Chicago Divinity School and to ordination as a Unitarian-Universalist minister.

Questions eventually brought her to Tucson, where she fell in love with the desert, stayed to raise children, work as a Pastoral

Counselor and return to her lifelong love of words and poetry.

She lives with her partner of thirty-three years within earshot of coyote howls and javelinas crunching cactus, hikes the desert with her dog, Langston, and serves as a docent at the University of Arizona Poetry Center.

MARCH

On a Wednesday in March
my mother took a walk
to get her hair done
and go to the bank.
I do not know the details.
I was not there. I was told
she stood at the teller's window
feeling faint. In the lobby she found
a chair and sat down to rest.
People greeted each other
and counted their money
as she slipped away without a sound.
I do not know the color of the chair
or the name of the stranger
who noticed she was gone.

I walked into my mother's wake
to the murmuring drone of Hail Marys.
I moved through air grown thick
with the fragrance of yellow gladiolas.
People greeted each other
with soft whispered words.
Her laughter was not there.
I looked down and found a stranger
asleep in her teal green dress. Her face
a map I could no longer follow home.
Someone touched my shoulder
and helped me to a dark blue chair.