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### National Poetry Month: Poetry Contests & Poetry Pen-pal Project

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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# National Poetry Month: Poetry Contests & Poetry Pen-pal Project

Welcome to Poetry Month! The poet laureate of Kansas, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, is happy to announce that during the month of April, in celebration of National Poetry Month, we Kansans can celebrate through participating in the “To the Stars Poetry Contest” and the new “Poetry Pen-pal Project.”

## To the Stars Poetry Contest

For the Kansas Poetry Month Contests, throughout April, write a poem(or poems) based on the given theme and e-mail to [kansaspoetry@gmail.com](mailto:kansaspoetry@gmail.com). Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg. Past poet laureate of Kansas Denise Low will also be a guest judge one of the weeks.

Each contest will focus on the work of a Kansas poet, drawing from *To the Stars*. We will have two categories each time, one for professional writers -- those who have published one or more books of poetry with an established press (not self-published) -- and others. There will be one contest each week. Each contest winner will receive a free copy of *To the Stars: The Ad Astra Poetry Project*, edited by Denise Low with writing exercises for each poem by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg. Winning poems will be published in three places: on a special page created for this contest at the Kansas Arts Commission website as well as on the blogs of Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg (<http://CarynMirriamGoldberg.wordpress.com>).

Please paste your poem into an email and also attach a copy in Rich Text Format (RTF) or as a Word document to [CarynMirriamGoldberg@gmail.com](mailto:CarynMirriamGoldberg@gmail.com).

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## Poetry Pen-pal Project

To help writers better support each other and work in greater connection with each other, Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg is launching a Poetry Pen-pal Project, starting this April and continuing through the end of her term June 30, 2011. This project will match up writers to share, revise and strengthen, and witness one another's poetry. Each participant will be matched up with a writer of a different background and when possible, from a different region of the state so that we can benefit from one another's diverse perspectives. All participants will also be supplied with a packet on effective support, critiquing etiquette, and sharing their writing in print and out loud.

If you're interested, please fill out this word document (ATTACH TO>>>>), and send it as attachment with an email to [KSpoetlaureate@gmail.com](mailto:KSpoetlaureate@gmail.com) by April 30, 2010. Pen-pal matches will be made, and you will then receive information on your match and a packet of information. *Note: all participants must be 18 years of age or older.*

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(put in box on its own)  
National Poetry Month!

Here are marvels of ways to celebrate poetry and National Poetry Month

\* Poetry Month Postcard: To receive a postcard with several poetry writing exercises and other information, please send your snail mail address to [KSpoetlaureate@gmail.com](mailto:KSpoetlaureate@gmail.com).

\* Put a poem in your pocket on “National Poem In Your Pocket Day,” April 29th to hand out and scatter around businesses, homes, and organizations that day. For lots of resources, including great poems to carry in your pocket, check out <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/406>

\* Poem on the Range: If anyone should be doing Poem on the Range, it's those of us who live where the deer and antelope play. Take photos of all that's poetic to you, or make audio and video recordings, and then upload them to a big map of Poems on the Range across American. Visit <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/563>

\* Have a poem a day emailed to you by subscribing at <http://www.poets.org/poemADay.php>.

\*\*\*\*\*PAGE FOR CONTESTS\*\*\*\*\*

### **Contest #1: Rivers of Our Lives -- Deadline: April 7, noon.**



After reading Langston Hughes' “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” use the line “I've known rivers,” and write until you can say no more. Then repeat “I've known rivers” and launch another direction. Keep going until you've said everything you can about rivers. Or focus on one river you've known well, first writing a list of all your stories about that river (or experiences you had that involved the river), and then plucking one story off your list, and writing that story. Another option is to make a list-poem of all the vivid moments you experienced at this river.

#### THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

I've known rivers:  
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:  
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## Contest #2: Mythic Kansas -- Deadline: April 14, noon



After reading Vic Contoski's "Sunset," take a fairy tale, such as "Jack and the Beanstalk," and set it down in Kansas somewhere to write what happens. Or use the sun going down as a background image in a poem. You can also try writing a poem where you repeat a word, such as "rocking rocking the cradle in its branches" to show the action even more acutely in your language.

### SUNSET

Since long before the white man  
rode out onto the prairies  
the sun has been going down.

A towering cottonwood sways in the breeze  
rocking rocking the cradle in its branches.

The hero's eyes turn glassy.  
His hand waves vaguely  
toward something in his breast  
as his knees buckle.

The giant coming down the beanstalk  
feels it start to sway beneath him.

He looks down and sees Jack  
with a silly grin and a hatchet  
looming suddenly larger and larger

as the sun over Kansas  
goes down and down and out.

© 2000 "Sunset" by Victor Contoski, *Homecoming* (New Rivers Press).

## Contest #3: Night & Flight -- Deadline: April 21, noon



After reading Steven Hind's "Great Blue Heron," write of a moment you experienced under "the gravel of stars" or during any very starry night. Or write of sightings of great blue herons (as a list poem or as a description of one particular sighting).

### GREAT BLUE HERON

Behind the pond under a whispering  
scarf of willows, heron does his lone  
knifewalk beside the wind-fretted waters.  
His deft movements make a death  
defying progress: a life of mud transmuted  
into sky life as he rows away on a river  
of air and its melody of coyote song  
through cedars beyond cedars, their  
silhouettes swallowed by darkness  
beneath the bright gravel of stars.

© 2006 Steven Hind "Great Blue Heron," *Loose Change of Wonder*

## Contest #4: Your Life as Garden -- Deadline: April 28, noon



After reading Denise Low's "Columbarium Garden," describe your life, or the life of someone you love (still alive or passed on) as a garden. Or focus on "one ruddy robin in the grass" or another singular creature and write of what watching it shows you of life.

### COLUMBARIUM GARDEN

Cold sun brings this mourning season to an end,  
one year since my mother's death. Last winter thaw  
my brother shoveled clay-dirt, she called it "gumbo,"  
over powdery substance the crematorium sent us,  
not her, but fine, lightened granules—all else  
rendered into invisible elements. That handful  
from the pouch, un-boxed, was tucked into plotted soil,  
the churchyard columbarium, under a brass plaque  
and brick retaining wall, as semblance of permanence.  
Now my mother is a garden—lilies and chrysanthemums  
feeding from that slight, dampened, decomposing ash.  
Her voice stilled. One ruddy robin in the grass, dipping.

© 2007 Denise Low "Columbarium Garden" © 2007