Winning Poems
From the 23rd Annual
John Gardiner Community Poetry Contest

Courtesy of
Friends of the Laguna Beach Library
Dedicated to the memory of

John Abbot Gardiner

Photo courtesy of Mary Hurlbut, used with permission.
John Abbot Gardiner 1947 - 2017

John Gardiner was born in Hawthorne, California, and was proud to be a fifth generation Californian. He studied at UC Irvine where he received a BA in theater arts and he was an early cast member at South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa. He lived in New York for several years, where he pursued his acting career. John loved acting in Shakespeare’s plays. He appreciated the complexity of the language and, much to the delight of those who knew him, could recite passages and speeches from numerous plays from memory.

John was a long-time resident of Laguna Beach and was widely appreciated as a poet, actor, teacher and raconteur extraordinaire. He read at numerous venues throughout Southern California and was invited to read his poems in Prague, St. Petersburg, and Rio de Janeiro and especially treasured the invitation to read in Ireland, home of the Gardiner clan.

John was the much-beloved leader of the Laguna Poets Workshop for the last 15 years and emceed the library's annual Community Poetry Contest for many years. He was working on his 13th collection of poems when he died on October 24, 2017.

- Ann Brillhart and the Laguna Poetry Workshop
Mike Sprake was born in Winchester, England. He studied at Winchester College of Art (1966-67) and studied sculpture at St Martin’s College of Art, London, under the tutelage of many ‘New Generation’ sculptors (1967-70). He went on to study and make Lutes for some of the renowned lutenists of the time including Anthony Rooley and Nigel North. He has been involved with painting and writing since living in the USA, over forty years ago, and is a member of the Laguna Poets Workshop. He has poems published in anthologies by Tebot Bach and Moontide Press.
While reflecting upon this year’s competition and the fact that 2021 is Laguna Beach Library’s centennial, I got to thinking about time, how our lives moment by moment make their way into the future, and what a magical journey it is.

However, if we were to go back 102 years in Laguna Beach, we would find a tiny library tucked away in an alley storefront that was opened by Mrs. Bafford when the population was, in 1920, recorded at only 363 people. What strikes me about this is the desire for learning and the enjoyment of books was present in such a small community. It was only two years later in 1921, that a Library Board was formed to establish the library which has thrived ever since.

We are now, in a sense, living Mrs. Bafford’s vision when we enter the library, when we partake in library activities and the poetry competition. We have all the past people to thank who have served to run and support the library through all the changing decades of challenges, but we also have to thank the present staff who have been keeping the library alive through a difficult and dark year.

The year ahead looks brighter, so keep to your task, poets, keep the pencil sharp, jot down your thoughts and dreams as they occur, capture the magical moments as we move into the future in a town that was inhabited by ‘Laguna Woman, the First American’, thousands of years ago.

- Mike Sprake

Note: A portion of a female skull, dubbed the “Laguna Woman”, one of the oldest in the Western Hemisphere, was found by two young Laguna Beach teens in 1933.
23rd Annual John Gardiner Community Poetry Contest Winners 2021

Adult

1st Place:
Tanner Laguatan
Night Surf

2nd Place:
Roger Owens
Clouds Came Into Our Town

3rd Place:
Erin Halford
Flight
Ninth – Twelfth Grade

1st Place:
Clara Becker (12th grade)
Albatross

2nd Place:
Tannya Gallegos (10th grade)
Depth

3rd Place:
Daphne Boyd (11th grade)
What We’ve Taken For Granted

Sixth – Eighth Grade

1st Place:
Lili Bazargan (8th grade)
The Portrait of Our Lives

2nd Place:
Elise Chen (7th grade)
Reaching

3rd Place:
Natalia Calef (6th grade)
Dancing Clouds
Third – Fifth Grade

1st Place:
Ava Hulett (5th grade)
Precipitation

2nd Place:
Barrett Purko (4th grade)
Summer Fun

3rd Place:
Ava Boussaa (3rd grade)
Splish, splash, Ocean

Preschool – Second Grade

1st Place:
Andrew Zingale (Preschool)
Dinosaurs

2nd Place:
Cyrus Martin Akbarzadeh (Kindergarten)
About the World

3rd Place:
Nele Veeser (2nd Grade)
the sky
In the spring we fostered a dog and taught her to not bite our hands.

We learned that she ran in the shape of little infinities before she peed on the ice plant (she would only pee on this ice plant overlooking the lifeguard tower on Main Beach, the one beside an American flag kept half-mast for what feels now like months) when we learned this, we felt like we became her parents.

We learned to surf on Thalia, we met a doctor in the water and we talked about the novel she wanted to write.

We surfed until last light, the sky a block of concrete levitating above another block of concrete, and between these planets we floated.
To catch a wave by streetlight and moonlight you don’t look for a wave you look for a blackness that’s darker than everything else and you wait for it to approach and you turnaround

We’re looking for another dog, by the spring we hope for a dog that will be with us for years and

a dog that will lick the salt off our ankles a dog that will see our children. I will tell my children about this, what I learned between last spring and this one. I hope I live to have children

I hope they learn to surf when they are young, when their muscles are like a foreign language:

I want them to know how to sense the water in darkness, how to stand on it turn on it and carve

from it what they want
Clouds came into our town
And all towns.
We sat above the sea
And watched
And watched.
We could hear the birds
Louder than before.
No sound on the street.
The earth breathed,
Sighing, relieved
Hoping to heal.
We ran along the sand
Our footprints the only intruders.
Splash on the mind
Splash on the soul
Splash on your heart
Waiting to beat once again
Wishing for a new start
That loves the earth,
The sea,
And the clouds.
Adult: 3rd place

Erin Halford
Flight

tense strokes land and lift
painting a plum hummingbird
in effortless flight
There is a type of bird that lives in a place between the earth and the heavens

Soaring between a sky so well known and an ocean of vast unimaginable toils

The Albatross takes flight mating for life, effortlessly traveling 100’s of miles

Together they glide on tailwinds of the sea harnessing the breeze unneeding to flap their wings

A legend of sin and parts unknown when a sailor killed one the gales stopped
The voyage now cursed
they blamed the bird
long live the lore of the Albatross

Albatross inhabit spaces often forgot
drifting in the sky and living above the deep

Albatross survive and die in the freedom of the sea
Ninth – Twelfth Grade: 2nd place

Tannya Gallegos
Depth

Between the clouds and sea I am nothing
A victim of my own naivety
Afraid of wishing to go higher
Afraid of going under
Why am I trapped in the space between
Of the white looming shadows up high
Of the dark depths of the blue inferno beneath
No clear choice to make
There’s no way I can succeed
They're Mother nature's own simple creations
But seen from the middle, I feel so little
Could there be something
Down under in the salty vast place
Or is there only sharks that prey
Oh no I have to pick now
I can not fly or swim
Thus the future must be grim
Ignorance is bliss but now I know
That Between the clouds and sea
Is the depth of my mentality
Where I can never leave
Many say that between the clouds and sea
Is a glorious beauty
But all I ever find is the ugliness within me
They watch from beyond as we sacrifice ourselves
For perilous feats
No man should survive
As we try to part the clouds and look beyond
Or dive until we reach the ocean floor

Though we like to focus on the calm waves and sunny skies
We all know the days will come
When the clouds darken and
The sea crashes against the shore like
Sharp jaws, looking for something to devour

So we retreat back to the soil
That we tried so hard to escape
Leaving our trash
Our invaluables
Littered across its surface
We cower in our homes and bask in what the vast earth has to offer
It is on these days that the universe reminds us of what we’ve taken for granted
The beautiful land
Between the clouds and the sea
In the between the clouds and the sea
Live our deepest fantasies
Everyone looks at the sky
And sees a different image through their eyes

Our perceptions differ
Yet the horizons we paint are the same
We are all watching the same sunrise
Just through a different frame

It’s interesting to see how every hand
Paints a picture in a different way
Maybe that is why we are all unique
Maybe that is why no two people are the same
Our lives are a canvas
And we add to them everyday
But every painting will turn out different
Because we all go through life in different ways

But some things are universal
The Earth still revolves around the sun
If by the end of our lives, we have spread love
We can add our finishing touches and know, that our painting
is done
Sixth – Eighth Grade: 2nd place

Elise Chen
Reaching

Between the clouds and sea
Are my dreams waiting to be found
If only I choose the courage to say, “I will,” not “I wish”
Turning those milky white clouds
between me and my island of possibilities
Into air, sky, and sun

Here, the shimmering azure sea dances
in the light of one thousand mirrors
Reflecting my swelling heart

I dance in a cloud of marigolds that are waiting to bloom
And taste my sweet dreams’ delight
As the cool breeze lightly brushes my skin like a starling’s wing

And I scrunch warm, smooth sand seeping between my toes
Joyous that I chose “I will.”
I look at the clouds over the deep blue sea
They paint a picture of our interlaced journeys

The clouds paint a picture of me and my friends
Which will be by my side forever, till the end

Friends are important, they are supportive and kind
If you ever feel lonely, you know who to find!

They are with you through the worst and the best
If you have a friend you are truly blessed

I look at the clouds drifting over the sea
I see me and my friends making memories
Third – Fifth Grade: 1st place

Ava Hulett
Precipitation

Cumulonimbus

I think that rain is coming

Sweet, refreshing rain
Third – Fifth Grade: 2nd place

Barrett Purko
Summer Fun

Sitting on the beach
Content as can be
Holding a treasure
Found from the sea
Saltwater skin
Warm glistening sun
Two best friends
Share summer fun
Third – Fifth Grade: 3rd place

Ava Boussaa
Splish, splash, Ocean

Between the Clouds and the sea
I wonder what is in there…I dive to see
Splash, swing, Sway
Fish
Scampering, pinching, crawling
Crab
Pumping, playing, hiding
Octopus
Spiky, sharp, sticking
Barnacle

Playful, singing, swimming free

Dolphin

The giant of the sea, the king, the protector

Whale

I swim to the surface when the sun goes down and all of my memories will stay planted deep in my mind like a tattoo for life
Pteranodon files above the ocean
Waves of blue water
Mosasaurus
Long neck and giant body
Sharp teeth, fins and a long tail
Catching a pteranodon wing
Eating it for a snack
Above the sea were clouds
Above the clouds were space
Above space there was a galaxy
Under the sea there was a whale
Under the whale was a jellyfish
Under the jellyfish was a submarine
In the middle was a boat
In the middle of the boat was a chair
In the middle of the chair was me.
running in the sky
is fun
after school is done
waves splashing below your feet
and birds tweating
next to you
If you fly
you can touch the birds
The Annual John Gardiner Poetry Contest is made possible through the generosity of:

**Friends of the Laguna Beach Library:**

- Karyn Phillippsen, President
- Justin Myers, Vice President
- Susan Kent, Treasurer
- Angela Irish, Secretary
- Jackie Hall, Book Shop Manager
- Martha Lydick, Past President
- Jessica DeStefano, Board Member
- Sandra Hovanesian, Board Member
- Ellen Girardeau Kempler, Board Member
- Karl Koski, Board Member
- Chip Lydick, Board Member
- Ed Petersen, Board Member
- Howard Pink, Board Member
We look forward to your participation in next year’s 24th Annual John Gardiner Community Poetry Contest.

Next year’s theme is

“This Fragile Life”
Booklet and Prizes
Courtesy of
Friends of the Laguna Beach Library

2021