Poet Showcase
an anthology of new hampshire poets

Edited by Alice B. Fogel and Sidney Hall Jr.
Just specimens is all New Hampshire has,
One each of everything as in a showcase,
Which naturally she doesn’t care to sell.

—from “New Hampshire” by Robert Frost
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Introduction

WHY DO WE HAVE SO MANY POETS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE? Is it the long winters of contemplation, the rugged and inspirational landscapes, magic granite particles glittering invisibly in the air? Whatever the reason, life in New Hampshire offers unhurried opportunities for artists to develop a craft that offers—through contemplation and inspiration, as well as observation and ineffable alchemy—a way to give form and language to the experience of our lives.

Not that the poets here would claim to be alike. While all of the poets you’ll find in Poet Showcase have lived in New Hampshire and many are originally from New England, many others are from cities and countrysides across North America, and some are from other continents. The poets on the official New Hampshire “Poet Showcase” website and in this anthology are drawn from every decade of life—from the second to the tenth. But despite this democratic inclusivity, they do have in common the geographic boundaries they call home, and the practice of poetry to which they have committed themselves.

The original showcase began during Patricia Fargnoli’s term as New Hampshire Poet Laureate, which ran from 2006 to 2009. At her request, The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts gave her access to the poet laureate page on its website, in order that she might feature poems by poets from around the state. The poets were chosen by invitation only, but Patricia asked for
recommendations from others and made sure to include both the famous and the less famous, the goal being to find and feature poetry by those who were seriously working at the craft, no matter the stage or degree of their literary career. Patricia presented a different poet and poem every two weeks.

As Patricia herself says, “The project was, I felt, important as a way to give recognition and visibility to the many serious poets in New Hampshire. It was extremely rewarding to me to become familiar with a wide variety of poets across the state, to showcase their talents, and to provide this link between them and their potential readers.” Patricia showcased over seventy poets during her tenure.

Walter Butts followed Patricia Fargnoli as the next New Hampshire Poet Laureate. He was eager to keep the showcase going, as he felt it helped connect poets in New Hampshire with each other, and helped them gain visibility with readers. He could not have been more right in thinking that it also provided a wonderful place for readers to go for good poetry, and to discover local poets they did not know of, who might even live right in their community. Ever mindful of keeping the site’s quality and freshness, Walter invited several writers who had already published on the site to publish again, and also mixed in new ones, adding about eighty more poems to the collection. Walter was not able to finish his term, as he passed away too soon. But his wife, S Stephanie (whose work also appears in the series) says she believes Walter would be pleased that the fruits of his and Pat’s labors went to print.

As the current New Hampshire Poet Laureate, it is my wish too to bring wider recognition to our poets, and to bring more readers of all experience levels and affinities to poetry. Hobblebush Books shares this mission, having over the past five years developed the invaluable Hobblebush Granite State Poetry Series that includes works by six of the poets in these pages. As Hobblebush continues to publish poets who are not simply skilled but have, as the publisher puts it, “lifted words into a new realm of spirit that did not exist before,” this anthology is a valuable addition to their work.

Of course this survey of contemporary New Hampshire poets, however broad, is not inclusive of every soul in our state who
puts pen to paper. And of course the topics covered by our poets are by no means comprehensive here, as there is no end to the possibilities for poetry’s content. But a wide range of poetry’s usual themes appears in this book in new ways that “did not exist before”: war and peace, love and loss, death, age, time, animals and elements, small towns and small moments, the news, the arts, mystery, food, family relationships, God, objects, things we do and things we perceive, and—yes—granite. Surprisingly little about the weather, though. But what are poems really “about”? What these poems, in forms ranging from the lyric to narrative, and including a few prose poems and experimental approaches, are really often “about” is life—and language itself.

One of the added delights of this collection is that each poem is followed by the poet’s original commentary about the origin of the poem. We hope you will read the poem first, savoring its images and its sounds and getting the full experience of the poem, and then deepen your understanding of it by reading the commentary. On their own, the commentaries are a fascinating study in the genesis of poems.

My vision for this anthology is that it be treasured, found on bedside tables, living room couches, library shelves, and classroom desks, that it travel from place to place and reader to reader, in backpacks and shoulder bags and on car seats, loaned and shared, dog-eared and discussed, read and reread, inspiring each of us to look up from its pages, peer deeper inside ourselves, and gaze farther outward into the world of New Hampshire and beyond.

—ALICE B. FOGEL, NEW HAMPSHIRE POET LAUREATE
ACWORTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE, JUNE 2015

Note: Although every effort was made to contact every poet who appeared on the Poet Showcase website, unfortunately we failed to reach some of the poets and they could not be included. In cases where the same writer appeared twice on the website, the editors selected just one of that poet’s poems, so that the total number of poets appearing in Poet Showcase is one hundred and seventeen.
Poems featured in
Patricia Fargnoli’s Poet Showcase
(2006–2009)
Juli Nunlist

VIEWPOINT

If you look this way and that you will see things differently. This way you see the fisherman in the blue cap is holding a net, in fact he is mending it, retying a knot that has come undone at one corner.

You imagine the net tonight filled with the silver gleam of fish scales as his boat bumps against the dock, its deck luminous with his catch.

But if you look that way, you see the fisherman is holding an enormous number of holes tied together with string, and he is trying, by knotting the corner to keep one of the holes from escaping.
What I love in her poem, “Viewpoint,” is the way it’s pared down to absolute essentials, the impeccable line breaks, the lilt of its language and the twist of perception it contains, how it turns the world inside-out and makes me see and think differently. —Patricia Fargnoli
Marie Harris

WESTERN GREBE

Aechmophorous occidentalis
Sun-setting spear-bearer

On any one of his long-strided walks
near the Mandan settlement that first fall,
Meriwether Lewis encountered all manner of shorebirds
and ducks plying the sloughs.
Naturalist, explorer, he shot one of each.
Taxidermist, he sent specimens back East.
Diarist, he described each one shot to the last pinfeather.

I write in my journal
(a letter to you from the West)

... the wind that flattens the tall grass prairie
and keeps blackbirds and meadowlarks low,
deafens foraging waterfowl
to my slow advance.

I am seeing for the first time

for the first time! imagine!

long-legged, blue-legged avocets
giddily spinning phalaropes
the thin-necked grebe with its sharp bill and red eye

So would you, reader,
be my correspondent,
my accomplice?

My Jefferson.
As I write poems occasioned by, say, a book I’ve read or places I’ve visited, I often weave my fascination with birding into the lines. This poem takes that notion even a step further. I was invited to North Dakota and the second gathering of state poets laureate. North Dakota laureate, Larry Woiwode, asked each of us to compose a poem on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition. This was my offering.
New Hampshire, February 7, 2003

It’s snowing again.
All day, reruns
of the blizzard of ’78
newscasters vying
for bragging rights
how it was to go hungry
after they’d thumped
the vending machines empty
the weatherman clomping
four miles on snowshoes
to get to his mike
so he could explain
how three lows
could collide to create
a lineup of isobars
footage of state troopers
peering into the caked
windows of cars
backed up for white
miles on the interstate.

No reruns today
of the bombings in Vietnam
2 million civilians blown
apart, most of them children
under 16, children
always the least
able to dive
for cover when
all that tonnage bursts from a blind sky.
Snow here is
weighting the pine trees
while we wait for the worst:
for war to begin.
Schools closed, how
the children
love a benign blizzard
a downhill scrimmage
of tubes and sleds. But who
remembers the blizzard
that burst on those other children?
Back then we called it
collateral damage
And will again.

I came to write “New Hampshire, February 7, 2003” out of anguish and fury; it was clear that we were going to invade Iraq, that we had learned nothing from our disaster in Vietnam. And day by day I feel ever more strongly that as poets we have an obligation to society to speak out, to bear witness to the events around us. This poem led me to write the nine torture poems that followed and that will stand as a separate unit in my not-quite-finished manuscript, Still to Mow.
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ALICE B. FOGEL is the poet laureate of New Hampshire. Her newest poetry collection, *Interval: Poems Based on Bach’s “Goldberg Variations,”* won the Nicholas Schaffner Award for Music in Literature. Her third book, *Be That Empty,* was a national poetry bestseller, and she is also the author of the guide for readers and teachers, *Strange Terrain,* on how to appreciate poetry without necessarily “getting” it. Nominated seven times for the Pushcart Prize, Fogel’s poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry,* Robert Hass’s *Poet’s Choice,* *Yale Letters,* *Inflectionist Review,* *Spillway,* *Hotel Amerika,* and *Upstairs at Duroc,* an international arts journal based out of Paris. She has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, among other awards.

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