

VOICES ISRAEL  
GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

# NEWSLETTER

## JUNE 2025





# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

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### Dates for your Diary

Save this date for a Voices  
Israel workshop  
24<sup>th</sup> June – Further details on  
page 8

# Chag Sameach!

### Aphorism of the Month

You should try to be as young  
as possible at each age you're  
at.

Ethelea Katzenell



# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

***When June comes dancing o'er the death of May,  
With scarlet roses tinting her green breast  
William Shakespeare***

We're back home after ten weeks in England – the longest time we've been away from home since student years. During the weeks away, I didn't know whether I was coming or going – my head was in a spin. In fact, in some ways, I felt a little like the poet in Marc Chagall's *Trois heures et demie (Le poète)*, *Half-Past Three (The Poet)*. It's a rather lovely depiction of a suave poet in a blue and white suit, modelled on his friend and neighbour, the Russian poet Alexander Mazin. To the poet's right is a green cat affectionately licking him and to his left a half full (or perhaps half empty) wine bottle leaning towards him at 45°, begging to be drunk, like Alice in Wonderland's 'drink me' bottle. He has a coffee cup in his left hand and is writing a colourful poem with his right hand, in his little book of poems. Without a doubt, though, the defining, and most challenging, feature of the painting is the poet's inverted cat-green head. I can't quite get my head around this painting, but it illustrates quite well how I felt during my time away.

Of course, I'm pleased to be back home and looking forward to the summer, particularly to participating again in monthly group meetings and attending the workshop on June 24<sup>th</sup> – see page 8 of the Newsletter, for registration details.

Have a wonderful Shavuot – Chag Sameach!

Kind regards,



Julian

Julian Alper,  
President, Voices Israel.

[Chagall's *Trois heures et demie (Le poète)*, from Wikipedia]

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## MEETING DATES, TIMES AND PLACES - JUNE 2025

<b>SOUTHERN</b>  Meeting via Zoom Sunday, June 22 at 5:00 PM          Coordinator: Miriam Green  <a href="mailto:miriamsgreen@gmail.com">miriamsgreen@gmail.com</a>	<b>TEL AVIV</b>  Meeting via Zoom Thursday, June 26 at 7:00 PM          Coordinator: Mark L. Levinson Mobile: 054-444-8438  <a href="mailto:nosnivel@netvision.net.il">nosnivel@netvision.net.il</a>	<b>JERUSALEM</b>  Meeting via Zoom Wednesday, June 25 at 7:30 PM          Coordinator: Avril Meallem Tel: 02-567-0998  <a href="mailto:aemeallem@gmail.com">aemeallem@gmail.com</a>	<b>UPPER GALILEE</b>  Wednesday, June 18 at 10:30. at the home of Lisa Aigen          Coordinator: Reuven Goldfarb Tel: 04-697-4105 Mobile: 058-414-0262  <a href="mailto:poetsprogress@gmail.com">poetsprogress@gmail.com</a>
<b>HAIFA</b>  Tuesday, June 10 at 7:00 PM at Naomi Yalin's home  Contact Naomi Yalin for details          Coordinator: Naomi Yalin Mobile: 054-794-3738  <a href="mailto:naomiyalin@gmail.com">naomiyalin@gmail.com</a>	<b>NETANYA/SHARON</b>  Monday, June 30 at 7:00 PM at Susan Olsburgh's home  2/6 Zalman Shazar, 3rd floor Ramat Poleg          Coordinator: Susan Olsburgh Mobile: 054-919-3575  <a href="mailto:olsburgh.susan@gmail.com">olsburgh.susan@gmail.com</a>	<b>GLOBAL GROUP 1</b>  Meeting via Zoom Thursday, June 19 At 19:30 Israel time          Coordinator: Shoshana Kent Mobile: +972-52-808-9365  <a href="mailto:y2nosh@gmail.com">y2nosh@gmail.com</a>	<b>GLOBAL GROUP 2</b>  Meeting via Zoom Sunday, June 22 At 19:00 Israel time          Coordinator: Judy Koren Mobile: +972-54-741-7860  <a href="mailto:koren.judy@gmail.com">koren.judy@gmail.com</a>

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR MEMBERS

- To - **Isaac Cohen** for his many successes throughout the month.
- To - **Ruth Schreiber** who has had four poems selected for publication in the June edition of **All Your Poems**. You can read Ruth's poems in the Poet's Corner section of this Newsletter.
- To - **Rosemary Wolfson** whose poem 'Dazzling Inspiration?' was selected for publication in UK Reform Judaism's 'Prayers for the High Holydays - Rosh Hashanah 9th Edition'. You can read Rosemary's poem in the Poet's Corner section of this Newsletter.

## 2025 ANTHOLOGY

Many thanks to our Editor-In-Chief, Judy Koren for sending out the proof of the 2025 Anthology so soon after the end of the judging period.

Don't forget to reply to Judy's e-mail before the start of Shabbat on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June if you have had a poem selected that needs to be adjusted.

Thanks too, to the Editorial Board: Deborah Golden, Avril Meallem and Elana Wolff for all their hard work in judging the poems.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS/OFFERS

**Johnmichael Simon** is offering his **chapbook design services** to Voices Israel members and friends.

If you would like to possess a beautifully presented and published collection of your own favorite poems, please contact Johnmichael for details of this special offer at [johnmichaelsimon@gmail.com](mailto:johnmichaelsimon@gmail.com).

**ESRA Book Shop Haifa** - ESRA (English Speaking Residents Association) has opened a SECOND-HAND ENGLISH BOOKSHOP in HAIFA. All are welcome to visit and explore the wonderful collection of books of all genres. Voices poets may like to donate one copy of their collections to expand our poetry shelf. It would draw attention to your great work. Members who have access to Haifa are welcome to donate or just visit. 5 Rehov Kiryat Sefer - adjacent to Kiryat Sefer Circle on Moriah, Ahuza.  
Opening hours: Sun-Thurs: 10:00-13:00; 15:00-18:00. Friday: 10:00-13:00.





## VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH



Are You an Oleh Who's Published a Book?

We want YOU at the Book Shuk!

Nefesh B'Nefesh is hosting its first-ever literary fair celebrating the voices and stories of Olim — and we're looking for vendors!

Whether you've written a novel, memoir, children's book, or non-fiction — this is your chance to connect with readers, showcase your work, and be part of something meaningful.

Share your story

Sell your book

Meet fellow Olim authors

Inspire the next generation

Apply now to be a vendor

Spots are limited — don't miss it!

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## IAWE Event



Wendy Blumfield has scheduled a Haifa launch of *arc 31: The Phoenix* at her home in Haifa (19 Sderot Wingate) on Monday 9 June at 5 pm. IAWE members and *arc 31* contributors are invited to attend and pick up their complimentary copies of the issue. Places are limited to 20 and advance registration is required by e-mail ([Blumfieldwendy@gmail.com](mailto:Blumfieldwendy@gmail.com)) or WhatsApp (054-524-0412).

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## VOICES ISRAEL – WORKSHOP

**Voices Israel** invites you to celebrate the balmy days of summer with a workshop on



### TWO AMERICAN POETS

A Midsummer Workshop in Haifa

Tuesday June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025

10:30-15:30

**Mercaz Hadarim,**  
25 Rehov Kiryat Sefer, Ahuza, Haifa

**Wendy Blumfield** will present the work of the feminist, immigration activist and poet **Emma Lazarus**

**Pesach Rotem** will present the work of **Bob Dylan**, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, and his literary heroes.

**Presentations will be followed by writing exercises** so bring your lap-tops, pens and paper, quills and ink, whatever inspires your muse.



There will be a break for lunch between the two sessions. **Please bring a Vegetarian Kosher dish to share**  
**The fee for this workshop is 25NIS**

## To register click [here](#).



# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

**Judith Magazine**, a new online **Journal Of Jewish Letters, Arts & Empowerment** seeks submissions – more information can be found [here](#).

**The Jewish Literary Journal** (a monthly online journal) seeks submissions of up to 5 poems - further details can be found [here](#).

**OfTheBook Literary Journal** publishes fiction, non-fiction, and poetry from new and established voices welcomes submissions of up to 10 pages of poetry, with one poem per page. Further details can be found [here](#).

**The Haiku Shack Magazine** is seeking poetry and micro fiction in English for its second issue. Deadline: June 30, 2025 or whenever a total of 40 accepted pieces has been reached. Theme: "What does home mean to you?" - 100 words maximum per piece, up to 3 pieces per person, previously published work acceptable, fee: \$0 (but donations appreciated). Complete guidelines: <https://creativeramblings.com/haiku-shack-magazine>.

**The Deronda Review** is primarily a poetry magazine, but we are also open to short fiction, essay, and memoir. For the magazine itself, prose submissions should be a maximum of 500 words. However, longer prose works may be published on our homepage. Poetry submissions should consist of up to five poems, either in ONE Word document or in the body of the email. Only works with special graphic requirements should be sent in a .pdf. We are open to reprints and simultaneous submissions; if your submission is simultaneous, please tell us so. We recommend that you read an issue (see current issue and "Archives" section), and consider our statement on the aims and character of the magazine, [here](#). We publish one issue annually. Our next reading period will be from May 15 to July 15, 2025. Send to Esther Cameron, [derondareview@gmail.com](mailto:derondareview@gmail.com), or to Mindy Aber Barad, [maber4kids@yahoo.com](mailto:maber4kids@yahoo.com).

For the 2025 issue, we will continue the theme of Trust (primarily among fellow-humans), and add that of Will. Poems on other themes, especially nature and the seasons and any of our past themes (see the Archives), will also be considered.

**Write-Haus Magazine** is now accepting submissions to be included in its fifth print issue, **"In Parentheses."**

**Grammatically**, we use parentheses to present pertinent, but often secondary information. They can clarify a point or offer a quiet aside, sometimes gently, and sometimes disruptively. They sit within the flow of a sentence but often call attention to themselves.

**Figuratively**, we see parentheses as holding the daily happenings of our lives: glances exchanged between strangers on a crowded bus, puffer jackets on a summer day, a missed call, a good morning and goodnight. Parentheses mark the soft boundaries of the everyday—the spaces where we meet each other, even for a moment, in real and surprising ways.

**For Issue 05**, we are looking for poetry, prose, and visual art that respond to this theme—both its grammatical and metaphorical meanings. Send us work that clarifies or complicates; that offers a side note or a second look; that disrupts syntax and challenges form; that reveals the beauty in our experiences whether big or small. From cover to cover, this issue will serve as the parentheses that hold your work, (eternally).

We look forward to reading and viewing your works, **In Parentheses**.

Send your submissions through to [writehausmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:writehausmagazine@gmail.com).

For more details see: <https://write-haus.com/issue-05-submission-guidelines/>

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

**Minyan Magazine** (<https://www.minyanmag.com/>) publishes poetry and flash fiction written by Jews and their allies alongside one another. Although we like work with a Jewish theme, we also enjoy work with secular themes. Send us your best, regardless of the theme! Please note that we are a journal of tolerance. It would be a great idea to look at our previous issues to get a sense of what we publish, and all of our issues are free to read! Unsolicited submissions containing three to five previously unpublished poems or up to three flash fiction stories are welcome year-round.

Poetry Submissions

- Please make sure that your poetry submission contains only one Word document or .pdf with your 3-5 previously unpublished poems.
- Please include your short bio in your cover letter.
- Work should be submitted using our [Submittable](#) link.
- We provide a free option and a \$5 option for expedited submissions. Using the \$5 option guarantees that we will respond within 10 days. This small contribution goes towards keeping the magazine going.

Submissions to **New English Review** (the monthly magazine) should be sent to [kendra@newenglishreview.org](mailto:kendra@newenglishreview.org). There is no word limit, but please keep in mind that your work will be read online. Submissions for the coming month are due by the 20th of the previous month. (Example, submissions for June must be in by the 20th of May.) Timely or news-relevant pieces will be accepted at any time. If you wish to submit please click [here](#) for guidelines on submitting.

**Saturday Evening Post Limerick Contest** – seeks limericks describing Stan Ekman's cover illustration from an old issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Submissions until 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025 – for more details of how to submit see [here](#).

## **Best Spiritual Literature Awards** - Orison Books

Each year from May 1 – August 1 we accept entries of unpublished poetry for consideration for The Best Spiritual Literature Awards. The winner will receive a \$500 cash prize as well as publication in Best Spiritual Literature, an annual collection of the finest spiritually engaged writing from a broad and inclusive range of perspectives that appeared in periodicals the preceding year. (The unpublished work selected for The Best Spiritual Literature Awards will be featured alongside the reprinted material.)

Submit up to 3 poems (10 pp. max) - Simultaneous submissions are accepted.

Entry Fee: \$12

Submission Period: May 1 – August 1

Judge: Yehoshua November

For more information see <https://duotrope.com/duosuma/submit/best-spiritual-literature-awards-ldqfx>

**If any members would like to  
help in compiling this page for  
future editions of Newsletters,  
please email  
[newsletter.voices@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.voices@gmail.com)**

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## The Deronda Review seeks submissions

B"H

Dear friends and fellow poets,

Once again the time has come to call for contributions to *The Deronda Review's* twenty-first issue. A year has passed, another year of war, lit by flares that either blind or show cruelty and betrayal, bravery and endurance, death and the birthpangs of "a terrible beauty," and faith, indelibly for what they are. (This past week, in the news, another bright angelic face, light from a star extinguished...) We have kept track of this, to some extent, in poems posted [here](#), for which we thank all those who sent them.

For the coming issue, as in our previous issues, we are open to poems on the seasons, on the earth, on any of our previous themes – remember – we'd asked for Trust, Utopia, Building, Soul, Poems Inspired by Poems, Flight.... that last might well appeal to some here at this hour when the ground burns beneath our feet, in more senses than one.

But this time we are focused on WILL.

We think of Rudyard Kipling's stanza –  
*"If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will that says to them 'Hold on'..."*  
But if you know a bit of Kabbala, there's more to it. "Will" is the first of ten stages (they're called Sfirot) by which the Infinite articulates itself into Creation (I'm simplifying drastically, of course). In Kipling, Will's the last thing left; in Kabbala the start of everything. They say a black hole may flare out another universe, that every seeming end is a beginning. In any case, to cling to that in us that would envision, trust, and build, or even remember what for now seems lost, requires a strain of Will.

Again in Kabbala, after Will comes Wisdom, which contains all that's to be, implicit; after that Understanding, which anticipates the forms of things.

Well, we shall now leave off expounding that of which we know but little, but hope these rumors of the hidden things may summon to your minds some old or new words of yours, which you will send to us from now until the middle of July.

A further note: this most unnatural year has also brought, like all years, natural losses: Ruth Fogelman, so long a luminous voice, has gone into the world of light. We've gathered her poems we were privileged to share into a retrospect you will find [here](#). To read these poems is to share her life in the Old City of Jerusalem, close to the point where the supernal light breaks forth into this dark and turbulent world. What this past year has borne, is yet unknown; but may the years bring back her inspiration in new-fledged voices of delight and hope.

Listening for your voices, we remain

Esther Cameron  
Mindy Aber Barad  
Editors, The Deronda Review

[www.derondareview.org](http://www.derondareview.org)



# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## OUR MEMBERS' ART

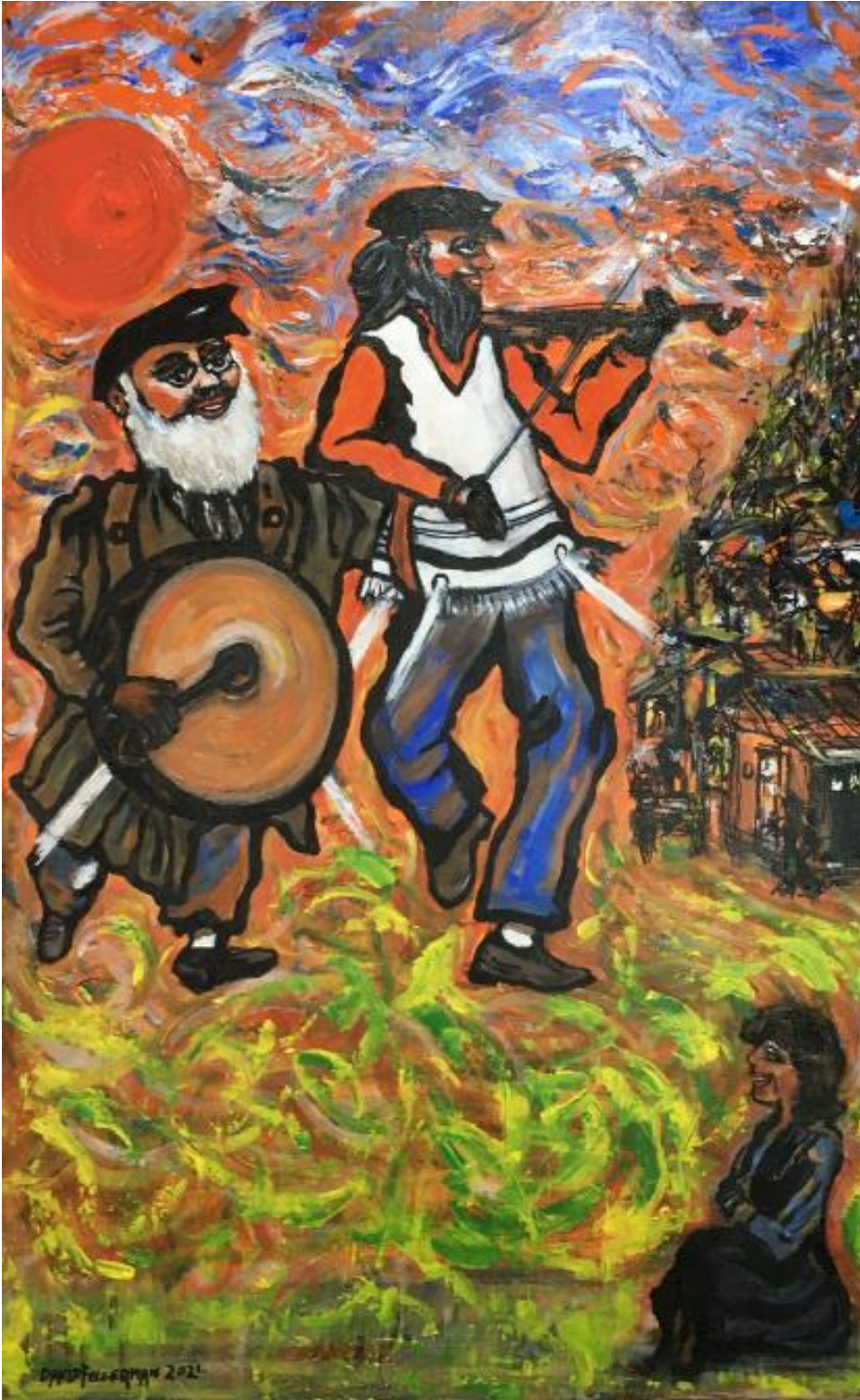
### Eli Ben-Joseph's Collage

I made this collage in my arts-and-crafts class. I turned the images, cut from a magazine, into a Persian kneeling to Athena, a deity symbolic of Athens' prowess. The Persians under King Xerxes attacked and destroyed much of Athens, a democracy, in 480 BCE, but in the same year Xerxes lost the war to the Athenian fleet, commanded by Themistocles, in the naval Battle of Salamis. Many historians and classical scholars consider the Athenian victory consequential to the survival of democracy in the Western World.





## VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH



### David Fellerman's 'Klezmer Joy'

An acrylic painting on canvas attempts to capture the happiness of traditional east European Yiddish music. Two street musicians dance into the shtetl; a young girl looks onto the scene quietly taking in the entertainment. Such was the roots of this wonderfully joyous music born amidst the poverty and suffering of small communities.

Size 50 cm x 80 cm.

More of David's work can be seen here:

<https://artandmemorabilia.com/>



### Front cover – Joanna Stuart's Collage 'Calling Birds'

'Calling Birds' is a digital collage made by combining fragments of colors, shapes and textures taken from photographs made by the artist. The image is printed on archival paper with archival ink. You can see more of Joanna's collages and photographs at

<https://www.joannastuart.com/>.

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## AN INTERVIEW WITH IRIS DAN

By Deborah Golden

I first met Iris Dan when I joined VOICES in 2021 and was fortunate enough to be part of the Haifa Group. I love Iris's work. I am intrigued by the subjects of her poems which are original and often witty, inviting us to take notice of someone or something that do not usually draw our attention [see [poem](#) "People I Met in Library Books"]. I find her poems masterful in the way that they juxtapose vivid descriptions of a person, object, or everyday situation, on the one hand, and the philosophical possibilities that these evoke, on the other [see [poem](#) "Sacred and Profane"]. I am moved by her work - while often erudite and always carefully crafted, her poems are compassionate and deeply humane [see [poem](#) "How I Lost a Homeless Man (and Found Him Again)"].



[[Poems](#) referenced in the text are at the end of this interview]

The following is a conversation that Iris and I held in writing.

**Hullo Iris, thank you for taking the time. Please introduce yourself to our readers**



Thank you, Debbie, for inviting me to talk about myself. I feel a bit embarrassed, don't know if I merit the time and space you are allotting me. Some of the readers outside my VOICES group (Haifa) know me from different VOICES meetings, from workshops, perhaps from the Anthology, where I have been included regularly for many years now. For an introduction, the 100-word bio in the VOICES Anthology suffices: I came to Israel from Romania in 1980, I know several languages which allow me to earn my living as a translator. I write what I hope is poetry. I prefer to put it this way. A statement like "I am a poet" is a little presumptuous, in my opinion.

**Please describe your path as a poet**

When I was a child, an adolescent, some kind of poem, a bit like an incantation, would come to my mind before I fell asleep. I cannot remember anymore what these fuzzy incantations were about, but they were my refuge, my secret world. At some point I started writing, not the nightly stuff, but, say, poems about my expectations from love, from life. I felt about them what I feel now, actually: I wanted them to be known as poems, but on the other hand I wanted my inner life to remain private. To give an example: When I was about 16, my mother found a poem I had written, in which I expressed the highly original thought that I wanted to experience all, including suffering; she probably appreciated it and showed it around to some friends who had come to

the house. When I entered the room, they congratulated me. Well, I felt shocked, exposed, as if the skin envelope had been removed from me and my bleeding flesh could be seen by everybody. This may explain my special relation with the flayed animals in the paintings of Chaim Soutine.



# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

As a student in Bucharest, and later, I wrote quite a lot, in Romanian. I managed to take the poems with me when I came to Israel – some of them were quite dear to me. At customs control, the man who checked our cases went through the poems systematically and carefully, certainly not because he was interested in poetry, but because he wanted to make sure the poems did not contain anti-communist propaganda. Strange to have your poems read by a government official in a dark hall full of blankets, pots, books, and other objects with which one hopes to begin a new life. I still have the small folder of poems, the paper has turned yellow, the ink pale, but some images remain vivid and do not cause me embarrassment.

When I came to Israel, something strange happened to me. I started reading quite a lot in English. I very much liked (and as a new immigrant could afford) the second-hand English bookshops, and somehow a switch took place in my head and I started thinking poetry in English, although English is not my second and not even my third language. It was only much later, and with great anxiety of making a fool of myself, that I sent two poems to the VOICES Anthology. To my surprise, they were quite enthusiastically accepted, and I was invited to a VOICES meeting, at Wendy's house. This is how I became a member of the Haifa group. We were a large group back then, people would come all the way from Upper Galilee... In time it split up in smaller groups that met closer to people's homes... Sadly, some of them are no longer with us, never forgotten. And I miss many friends whom I used to see once a month and now see very rarely, at retreats, if at all. As I miss you since you moved to Jerusalem. And Susan [Rosenberg], who was the beating heart of this group...

So many years have passed, and I have been shown great kindness, but I still feel shy in the presence of native speakers. A mistake that, for a native speaker, is a negligible lapse can take catastrophic proportions for me and make me feel deeply ashamed. I learned to separate myself from such upheavals, and the friendship, reassurance, and often praise I received encouraged me. The greatest honor I received was the first prize in a Reuben Rose competition. The poem, titled "My Fear of Falling through Letters", appeared in the prize section of the 2023 VOICES Anthology. It was a moving, truly validating event, especially by the kind messages I received from respected colleagues. VOICES means a lot to me.

**Please tell us about the languages you know and about writing poetry in a language other than your mother-tongue. What are the connections between your work as a translator and your work as a poet?**

I grew up bilingual (German at home, Romanian at school). I studied Romance Linguistics and Literatures (French Major and Spanish Minor) and I wrote my MA thesis on Romance Linguistics, on the evolution of the meanings of words over the centuries, a subject that still fascinates me. I have a good working knowledge of Italian, Portuguese, and Catalan, i.e. I am able to read and translate fluently from these languages, less to speak because of the lack of opportunity. So, it can be safely said I translate from seven languages, mainly into English and Romanian, often into German, French, and Hebrew.

The knowledge of these different languages is an advantage when researching the treatment of a certain subject in poetry, which I like to do in workshop presentations.

English has been my poetry language for many years now. I sometimes write essays too, and these I write in Romanian. I believe that the presence of other languages in the background can sometimes be helpful. My work as a translator – the paid work, I mean – (I have never earned money translating poetry!) sometimes gives me ideas. I wrote a poem once about translating a legal contract and the joy caused by all the subjunctives, Latin phrases, and archaisms. And stories, sometimes, tragic or absurd.

**What genres of poetry do you like and what poets do you read? Have these changed over the years?**

Hard to answer. Let's say I like the kind of poetry which takes a step back from the raw feeling, either into the encryption of metaphor, or into clinical language. And a bit of irony is always welcome. Which means I am not a great fan of the Romantics or of confessional poets.

Lately I read (and translated) a lot of Yehuda Amichai from Hebrew and of Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs from German. It was holy ground I was stepping on, and the experience of translating them into Romanian was so intense that it practically erased from my memory a poem I had written myself...

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Before that I translated "The Wild Iris" and "Averno" by Louise Glück, the Nobel Prize laureate. She was still alive when I translated her, but I never found the courage to write to her, to ask her how she understood this or that. She died in October 2023, and I had no idea, as I was too shattered by what was – still is – going on in our country.

## **What genre of poetry do you yourself write?**

Hard to tell what genre of poetry I write. When I began frequenting VOICES I wrote a sequence called "The Alchemist's Wife" – I was interested in alchemy back then, and a visit to Prague had added form and color to my mental images. I tried to be the voice of a 16<sup>th</sup> century woman who coldly observes her husband's futile attempts to make gold from base metals, whereas the true alchemical processes were those she was responsible for, cooking, laundering, raising children, remembering her own transmutations in the furnace of love...

I wrote ekphrastic poetry, a genre that remains dear to me. I once wrote a sequence of seven or eight poems based on Velasquez's painting "Las Meninas" – a poem about each person that appears in the painting. As Johnmichael Simon had written a sequence about Picasso's "Las Meninas", we did a booklet together.

Then a sequence called "Suite", about music as I experienced it, at concerts and through diverse media.

## **What gives you inspiration for your poems?**

Travelling is a good source of inspiration, as the unfamiliar geography rearranges the geography of the brain, shakes up and dislodges what seems fixed or calcified.

The Biblical stories, of course.

In fact, everything can be a source of inspiration. Science, philosophy (or rather whatever one believes to understand of it). I once wrote a poem of love and sorrow based on an important work about the similarity between aphasic and poetic language [poem "Aphasics and Poets"].

What I like very much is to catch a moment, or a person, however shortly observed, however distant in time, however vaguely remembered. I often ask myself if it is not immoral to use a person as raw material for poetry. But this is how literature works. And, perhaps, like the alchemists, and with no less futile chances, I attempt to turn the base metals into gold.

## **Can you please describe the ways in which you craft your poems. What is your writing routine? How long do you work on poems?**

When a poem first comes to my mind, I feel elated. Like an electrical current in my mind. Something happens, brain specialists would perhaps tell me that dopamine is being released. When I try to put it on paper, or rather on my computer, the reverse phenomenon takes place. Words are limited and limiting. It is difficult to express a mental image in its fullness, fuzziness, or precision. The moving and interacting particles fatally turn into billiard balls, clumsily moved by a cue. It is frustrating. This, however, is our medium – both the air we breathe and the clay we fashion.

It varies how long it takes me to write a poem. Some "come" easily, others oppose and resist. When I start writing, I have no idea what form it will take on the page. Organization, stanzas, length of line, all this is imposed on me while writing. And I am aware that this is one of the many forms the poem could have taken, and probably not the best. Like life.

## **Are there times when you do not/cannot write and have you been writing during this period of war and upheaval?**

At the beginning of this war, I had a surge of writing. About resilience, about the wisdom of the body when the mind cannot find explanations and solutions. Now I feel a lot more discouraged. I feel squeezed in between extreme views that are very dangerous. I have friends in the kibbutzim in the South – the kindest and noblest people one can imagine – and I do not need to say what happened to them, what they witnessed, what they have to face. I keep thinking how betrayed they must feel – by the Gazans they tried to help, by the government who relentlessly incites against them, by the liberal left in the Western countries.



# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

Oh yes, there are many periods when I cannot write. Sometimes "cannot" means I have all kinds of worries, sometimes (as it happens when I translate great poetry) that my own poetry is worthless, and sometimes because there are several poems fighting with one another in my head. I know the important thing is to start doing something, to put a line down, but this knowledge doesn't serve me much...

**If you were interviewing yourself what else would you like to talk about?**

Oh, I don't know, Debbie. I feel I have taken up too much space already...

**Thank you again Iris for sharing your poetry world with us - I have found this very rich and interesting and I'm sure our readers will too.**

## **Poems** referenced in the interview, © Iris Dan

### *People I Met in Library Books*

World-sense-makers underline the words they don't understand;  
vivid when first drawn, the lines grow old with the pages;  
the initial surprise (indignation perhaps: why can't the writer  
use words everybody knows) fades into resigned puzzlement.

At some point the underlining ceases, and I wonder  
whether they understand everything by now or have  
given up understanding; or, in despair or disgust, given up  
reading altogether, because of words such as evil or filth.

Sometimes, after many pages, it resumes with increased vigor.  
Has the reader, after a period of depression or mindless living,  
come back to life, become penitent? The underlining clones  
itself into eternity, until the end of life, at least of the book.

World-fixers take upon themselves to make an old book  
great again; where a word is incomplete because of a tear,  
they restore it, where an article or a comma is missing,  
they add it, applying themselves to imitate the font.

The page reeks of self-satisfaction, of righteousness,  
of an "if not for me" feeling. Do they expect gratitude  
from subsequent readers? Perhaps it reeks of my own guilt,  
as I would never have noticed the missing characters.

Then there are those whom the book struck with illumination  
in the form of a sentence-long or paragraph-long insight  
to do with the vagaries of fortune or with the power of love.  
Such revelations they frame or mark all over in pink or yellow.

Yes!! they sometimes write in the margin, and add arrows  
and more exclamation points. I cannot but be happy for them,  
for they are the living proof that the effort of reading,  
literature, and perhaps life, are not entirely worthless.

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## *The Sacred and the Profane Numbers*

What are numbers when removed from price tags,  
ID cards, tombstones, mortgage deeds? I am unable  
to grasp their nature. Is there a world of pure numbers  
just like there is a world of pure forms?

I can see the pure numbers as masked apparitions  
never completely revealing themselves,  
perpetually commuting: dancing in pairs  
(odd and even, odd and odd, even and even),

coming together in sets or sequences whose rules  
can or cannot be guessed, scores, droves, hordes,  
hosts, legions, multitudes, now and then making room  
for perfect numbers, surrounded by their brood of divisors

or for prime numbers, in their prim loneliness.  
At times two consecutive numbers step away  
from one another, the gap immediately filled  
with the infinity of numbers between them.

What are they, these choreographic, carnivalesque figures?  
Have they been created together with the universe  
their number increasing as time passes? Are they angels  
enacting before the Creator the abstract laws of creation?

Are they as devoid of free will as the angels? Do they sing  
holy-holy-holy is the Lord of Numbers, Who has stopped droves,  
killed legions, let millions be killed according to His will?  
(How many to make a drove? A legion? What are six millions?)

Are they utterly unaffected by the numbers down here?  
Is 98, for instance, unstained by the fact of being branded  
on the body of the poor cow, has 122517 no complicity at all  
for its presence on the forearm of the frail old lady ?

\*\*\*

Do you remember, child? You came home late after a concert  
schlepping the unwieldy bassoon, and had yet to prepare  
for the math test next day. Will you sit with me, you asked,  
and of course I was only too happy to sit with you, I even

took a ream of sheets for myself, to let math flow between us.  
We began enjoying ourselves, we were in secret competition.  
The numbers tried to confound us, jumped like mischievous fairies  
from one branch to another on the many-tiered fractions,

surreptitiously moved from the left to the right of the zero,  
resisting our efforts to reduce their vital space to a compact,  
manageable, elegant form. They fought a good fight.  
But between the two of us they did not stand a chance.

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## *How I Lost a Homeless Man (and Found Him Again)*

I lost a homeless man between two poets.  
The kind of poets in whose presence  
you do not dare to write poetry. Paul Celan  
flattened me against the wall with the spear  
of his imagery, and I remained there, blinded

by a bloodied sun, a bleeding eye, watching  
the flood raise. Yehuda Amichai took me for walks  
on the well-known roads of this country, where  
at every corner I found myself in some ab-road  
of space and time, in sources outsourced.

The homeless man I had seen reading  
at the entrance of the Municipal Library,  
about whom I had written a poem, has slipped out  
of the page, of the virtual space, of my memory,  
and fallen into an unsaved loop between synapses,

between the realm of the dead and that of the undead.  
Until with a jolt I remembered him and the poem,  
which was quite finished, and fished them both back  
to the surface, first the athletic, well-muscled legs,  
a little blue-marbled just about the ankles,

then other bits, such as the carefully trimmed  
white beard, the eyes plunged into the book, the face  
of an academic or of someone you'd expect to meet  
at the nearby theater if not for the tell-tale water bottles  
and black garbage bags, the attributes of the homeless,

how I imagined the broken basins and rusty faucets of some  
public shower room, him washing his clothes, trimming his beard  
before the shard of a mirror, clinging to whatever dignity he had left,  
avoiding the others, those I had seen sitting, dirty, stultified  
in the olive garden at the foot of the marble steps,

how the words of my two-year old when seeing the picture  
of a man bandaged from head to toe, "Where is his mother",  
shattered my mind, for what mother, dead or alive, lets such  
a thing happen, and then the far more illustrious quotation,  
"And here, but for the grace of God, go I."

He was not a hallucination – he was as real as the poem  
I had lost - the next time I went to the library  
I found him sleeping on the bench under the awning,  
a bag of bread rolls stashed with the water bottles,  
perhaps feeling protected in the shade of the books,

still believing in them as he believed in cleanliness.  
And there, but for the grace of God, slept I.

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## *The Fear of Slipping through Letters*

My handwriting is like me:  
every day smaller, paler,  
more devoid of pressure,  
more illegible;  
every day some function  
some coordination lost  
every day some new  
degenerative changes.

I keep telling myself: it's only  
loss of habit; all these years  
spent by the computer; muscles  
used to hold the pen atrophied,  
tendons pressing the keys  
contracted, cramped by overuse.

When I make a grocery list  
I draw the words carefully,  
attempting to fill in the whole space  
between the imagined lines  
of a calligraphy page, just as  
I applied myself not to exceed it  
when learning to write as a child.

I pen the addresses on envelopes  
with excessive care, even adding  
a flourish or two (and how I used  
to despise flourishes), to make  
the letters more substantial,  
mainly perhaps to create  
gripping points, to leave traces:

the smaller, the more invisible  
I become, the greater the risk  
to slip through the loop of an *o*  
get entangled in the bush of an *m*  
fall into the well of a *u*  
be crucified on a *t*, disappear  
in a forest of symbols  
where nothing is familiar  
not even the form of the *I*.

## *Aphasics and Poets*

As a young woman I read  
about aphasia: "apple peeler",  
"pencil sharpener" aphasics say  
when they mean "knife"  
the unifying concept buried deep  
under the landslides  
of their mind

I laughed then, delighted  
by the wondrous kinship  
of aphasics and poets  
by the joint verbal handicap  
by the fragments of meaning  
clumsily surfacing  
as metonymies or metaphors  
between badly balanced  
tectonic plates.

Now I am old – and afraid  
that a day will come  
when shown your picture  
I will say lady killer  
small town seducer  
borderline pedophile  
boring neurotic

or something even simpler  
such as good-looking man  
or your name or profession  
having forgotten  
the unifying concept  
love of my life



# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## HOW I CAME TO POETRY (OR, RATHER, HOW IT CAME TO ME)

by Donna Bechar



### Part I

I never liked poetry. Wasn't interested in reading and writing poems as a child, adolescent or teenager. Wouldn't go near it if I didn't have to - except for the "Roses are red / violets are blue / sugar is sweet / and so are you" variety, Hallmark greeting cards, or little cut-out Valentine's Day cards with red hearts we children used to exchange in elementary and grade school.

So, neither willingly reading nor writing poetry, my youthful ventures into what I would call 'serious' poetry were coerced by my English teachers in junior high and high school. Although the Classics were unappealing, Shakespeare was particularly a dread. However, in the ninth grade my English class had a field trip to Stratford, Connecticut to see "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Although I welcomed the opportunity to be legally away from school, I was uninspired by the reason.

To my pleasant surprise, however, I actually enjoyed and understood it, since it was updated to early 20<sup>th</sup> century garb and the actors spoke Shakespeare's words so naturally – in their own American accent and cadence – that it seemed as if they were having a normal conversation.

The next time I enjoyed a visit with Shakespeare was when, in 1968 on a date, I saw Franco Zeffirelli's beautiful film "Romeo and Juliet", which exquisitely came to life for me - for not even that play had appealed to me in the course of a classroom read.

But, neither one of those excellent renditions were enough to bring me into the fold, to prevent me from committing the seditious and sacrilegious act of not loving Shakespeare.

Next up, the real poetic coercion came when, in eleventh grade English class, I and my fellow students were forced, by dint of the assignment counting as part of our overall grade, to write an actual poem, on one of five emotions, in the esteemed, put-on-a-pedestal iambic pentameter with rhyming couplets (yeegads!). I chose 'anger'. Anger was an emotion for which I thought I could conjure more imagery and similes.

Well, I did it. Wrote two pages, both sides of the page, and don't know how I managed it. However, admittedly, re-reading in my adult permutation some of those couplets, off-kilter pentameters, and overindulged, over-the-top images is embarrassing and cringe-worthy. But what an accomplishment – I had run the length of the gauntlet. Adding to this momentary pride was my ecstatically flabbergasted shock and elation upon my poem being bestowed an A+!

Now, you might think that should have done it – sold me on poetry, sealed my poetic fate and faith, and had me declaring my devotion to the poetic cause. But no, it didn't happen.

Instead, I mentally wiped the sweat off my brow and said, "Whew! Glad that's over with." Ten years would pass before a poetic muse to call my own would attach herself to me, would sneak up behind me, clap her hands over my eyes, and whisper, "Boo! Guess who!"

Continued on next page ...

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## Part 2

When I was 27, I took a Creative Short Story/Fiction Writing class at the School of Continuing Education at NYU. One evening, I began an assignment – write a short story based on a childhood experience. The outcome, to my utter surprise (and delight), was my poem “The Luncheonette”. (Dared I to even think of it as a poem? Where had it come from?) It was an epiphany to me. Everything I had wanted to say was in this less-than-page-long poem.

Writing it opened up my awareness of how a poem could enlighten and light up one’s own and another’s life, or at least moments in that life. It was a thrill to realize that a moment, an experience, an observation, a perception, an emotion, a thought could proffer a story that could be told in its most concise, precise form. I came to love how a poem could start out as one thing and transmorph to another - how one could begin in one direction, then suddenly veer off to another. And it all fits and does indeed tell a story.

When I hesitantly, sheepishly, apprehensively handed in to the teacher my very abridged assignment, I was not expecting his response. He told me that my writing talent lay, perhaps, with poetry, after all. His encouraging recommendation was the equivalent of ‘get thee to a poetry-writing class’.

So I did...and never looked back.

### **The Luncheonette by Donna Bechar**

the smell of vanilla malted milks  
overflowing the metal cups into  
Coca Cola glasses curved to welcome  
the thick torrent

the sound of frizzling hamburgers  
and frazzled fries like gasping  
fish out of water  
until drowned in sallies of fake blood  
delivered in the delirium of the  
child’s wild hand

the stools – metal stems  
flowering pillbox puffs for  
novitiate whirling dervishes who  
have cleaned the last pickle  
from their plate

and the pregnant pinafores mommy  
elastic-backed bra peeking  
above the border of modesty  
embarrassing the glance  
of her young girl old enough  
to know and young enough  
to care with a defending stare  
at the popped eye of a passerby  
purchasing a comic book  
to kill some time

Donna’s poem “The Luncheonette” was first published many years ago in “Determinations 2”, a New Zealand publication, edited by the late Norman Simms, and was re-published in 2018, in her book, “With Fingers Laced in Roses”.

# VOICES ISRAEL GROUP OF POETS IN ENGLISH

## *ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS*

### ART IS LONG, BUT LIFE IS SHORT

By Reuven Goldfarb



Writing poetry and then transferring the written text from notebook to computer screen, to print-out to printed text and multiple copies, is like the replication of DNA in new cells. Likewise, all cultural transmissions are like adding a layer of code to the social body and perpetuating entities thought essential by the collective wisdom of the time. And as time flows on, a sifting process takes place. Items no longer thought essential are eliminated or stored in less accessible places, if they still have value. They are archived.

It is important, and maybe even essential, to understand this sifting process, what I have called “collective wisdom.” How does it work? Is someone or some body in charge of it? Can it be thwarted or stymied or infiltrated and thereby prevented from carrying out its function? The answer is yes, up to a point.

The cultural mavens of each generation — the critics and reviewers — create a first assessment of value, and the first audience or viewing public

manifests a collective, though diverse, response, a read-out or first impression, mixed or solid, which becomes part of the history of the work.

The gallery owners and other business people — producers, investors, and publishers — constitute another filter or membrane which tests its value and guards against meretricious examples and cheap imitations. The scholars, in and out of the academy, compare it to previous works in an effort to identify its place in history. And all consider its effect on the overall health of the organism from which it emerged and which it must serve to be of value.

The teachers and editors who choose material to transmit, from the vast store available, do the chief work of transplanting the work from its original site into the minds and hearts of students everywhere. The students, the recipients of this treasure, will, by their reactions, determine which will be valued and passed on or be ignored and relegated to second class status, eventually dropping out of circulation entirely, or be set aside to be rediscovered and revalued, and perhaps even embraced and installed in the canon, regarded as a classic, a cultural pillar.

Parents and children can be teachers and students, too. The love of art, like the love of family, leads to new branches and classifications, imports, grafts, and adaptations, even mutations, that benefit the whole.

Occasionally, disaster strikes. A tyrant, who fears dissident voices — for literature is often subversive and transgressive — or a religious zealot, who comes to power — or an ideologue, who rates literature based on his narrowly focused value system — might outlaw, condemn, even destroy all examples of writing and of art that deviate from his party line. Great destruction has been wrought by such tyrants in the past, and even today, their successors continue their handiwork — their vandalism.

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And sometimes natural disasters occur, such as flood, fire, or earthquake. Yet even this wholesale destruction constitutes a kind of sifting process, such that the most valued relics of the past are protected by another kind of zealot, one who loves human creativity and provides a sanctuary for its preservation and dissemination — a librarian, a collector, an aesthete; an archivist, a copyist, a scribe (amateur or professional); a patriot, a fan — a lover of literature and art, who gains nourishment from it and recognizes its human and eternal value, and keeps enough samples safe to transmit it to another generation, in a nobler, safer era.

But losses occur. None knows which losses are truly irreparable and incalculable. I fear such losses have occurred. Human devastation and simple careless ignorance have canceled human creativity and human hope numerous times in human history and still pose a threat today. We must be vigilant, cautious, and active in preserving, promoting, and promulgating that which we love, the cherished work of human hearts and hands.



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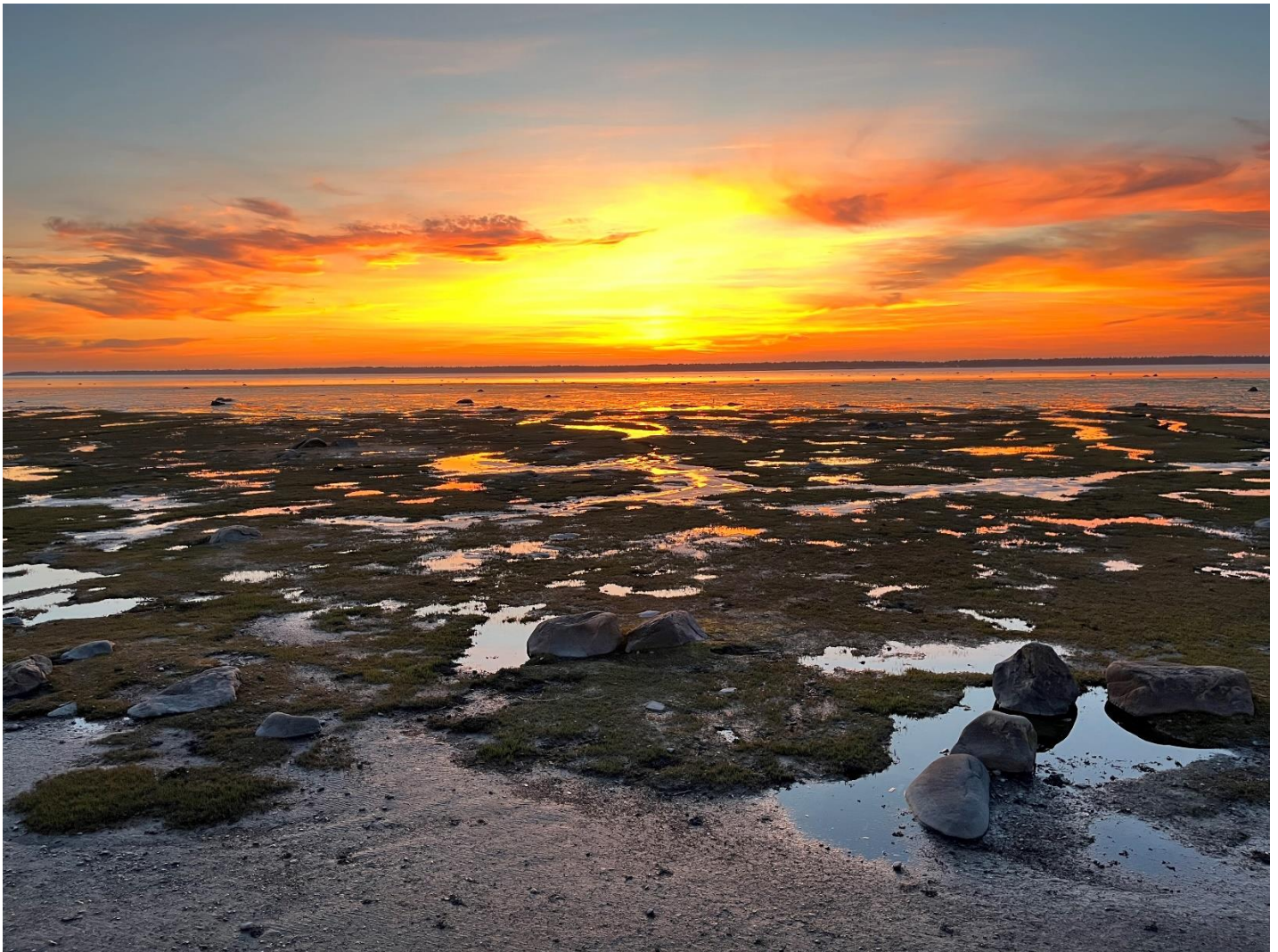
## SUNSET

Poem selected by **Donna Bechar** to accompany her photo “**Sunset in Rimouski**”

**Sunset** - by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

...

With lurid splendor that swift paled to gray,  
I saw the dim skies suddenly flush bright.  
‘Twas but the expiring glory of the light  
Flung from the hand of the adventurous day.



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