

2022 Aline B. Carter Poetry Prize for Young Poets
Poetry Contest Winners
"Family"

Judges:

2018-2020 San Antonio Poet Laureate Dr. Octavio Quintanilla
2020-2023 San Antonio Poet Laureate Andrea "Vocab" Sanderson
Noted Local San Antonio Poet Eddie Vega

The annual Aline B. Carter Poetry Prize for Young Poets would like to thank the Brackenridge Foundation for their support and efforts in facilitating the contacts within the Charter Schools of Bexar County. The event awards high school students for various poetry styles each Fiesta season.

The Award Ceremony was held April 30, 2022 at 10:30 a.m. at the Maverick Carter House (108 Auditorium Cir., San Antonio, TX, 78205).

First Place:

In Two Years, My Parents Taught Me about God Complexes and Destruction
By Ollie McCrary
North East School of the Arts

Second Place:

"If you were wondering..."
By Katlin Martinez
Walzem College Prep

Third Place

Ode to Agarita and Motherhood
By Sunny Vuong
BASIS San Antonio Shavano

Best in Form

Family Isn't Blood
By Kristanna Martinez
Anne Frank Inspire Academy

Honorable Mention

Mi Vida, Mi Familia, My San Antonio
By Olivia Lopez
Great Hearts Northern Oaks

In Two Years, My Parents Taught Me about God Complexes and Destruction
By Ollie McCrary

And my father tells me,
“Bubble Boy, you worry too much”
on the car ride to school, after I apologize for my mother for the fourth time that week.
He says, “don’t you have other things to worry about? Haven’t these last two years brought us
together enough for you to know that?”
And I say “I’m sorry” softly enough so as to not wake up any rage.
Because fathers, they know how to wake up rage.
Dad used to call God down to our first-floor kitchen just to have a talk with my oldest sibling.
He hit pots across pans until God’s shiny reflection glistened in the sweat on his brow.
When the man in the house screams, we all see God.
We all worship him, get down on our knees and call for mercy.
Because if God is just a man who scares you, then you could point him out in any room.
Say, there’s our savior,
He’s the one who runs things around here,
Get down on your knees, and call for mercy,
Name him holy,
Name yourself anywhere but here.

Bubble Boy, you worry too much.
Don’t you know that your fingers are not guns made to shoot flowers;
Don’t you know that you need not fight a battle of beauty in order to validate your place in a
body,
Bubble Boy, why are you so afraid of the mirror?
Beauty doesn’t bite,
That’s just glass, it isn’t half full with rage, and even if it is, isn’t it all your own anyways?
Isn’t all that ugly rage all your own?

You are not built out of violence,
That is just your father’s
And even though your calluses look the same that doesn’t mean your shame does too
Don’t let his scarred hands be scars on your love because Bubble Boy,
You know how to love.

You may not be good at it, but you’ve seen it before, I know,
Even when you are disillusioned and half-sedated between family homes,
Even when your fists are throwing tired punches,
And your rage is turning to love, and your love is turning to religion,

And even when this is a danger
Because you keep praising it even though it is destructive
And even when this is a danger
And you are trying to tear down cathedrals
You are still whispering, just softly enough as to not wake up any rage,
I promise I will be good. I will be good. I will be good.

And my mother tells me,
Pine Street knows violence and religion,
And aphrodite has just launched all of the nuclear arsenal from her underwater naval base just
miles offshore from my hometown,
She is set on destroying the love letter that I wrote to her in the fourth grade.
The one where I addressed her as ‘mermaid bitch’, instead of ‘love goddess’,

She can’t stand to be disrespected,
To be confused with her brother with seaweed in his hair, no,
Gods get jealous easy,
Especially when it comes to family conflict.
They walked the line of heaven and earth before calling
“This too is boring”,
And so they built a bunker just off the east coast to get away from each other, only a few
thousand miles away from Pine Street
Where my fourth grade letter is pinned up in bright red ink,
Where the fourth grade teacher crossed it out and said “bitch isn’t a kind word”
And my mother praised it,
Made her love for me a religion.

Mom knows mistakes, and
irony makes gods jealous.
They built sin after themselves
Monopolized on their bitter conflict
and gave earth money to spend and mistakes to make.
They called for conflict
but Mom,
Mom knows how to make conflict into a vacation.

After an argument we go to the beach,
Where she calls to the ocean “take me away mermaid bitch”
Before handing me a cold juice box,

The god with seaweed in his hair crying again at her bluntness.

Her rage turns to love and her love is a religion
and so you praise it even when it is destructive.

And here on Pine Street
It's getting destructive again.
Which makes aphrodite mad,
because love isn't meant to be disrespected.
And so she builds herself a bunker that she stockpiles with nuclear arsenal.
She calls this payback, as if Pine Street hasn't seen violence already.

Katlin Martinez

My Dad immigrated from an Mexico when he was 15 and my mom has lived in Texas her entire life.

if you were wondering
yes i am mixed
family gatherings have always been
uncomfortable
sticking out like a sore thumb as me and my
siblings sit aside
away from view
legs crossed
mouths closed
eyes open
two lunch tables on opposite sides of the
room
don't try to come near
cause neither will accept you so you grab
your lunch box tightly and you sit quietly in
the middle
yes i am mixed
pick a side i am told
you have to be one or another
don't you dare be both
music with a bouncing rhythm to the sounds
of an out of tune guitar as you watch
feet dancing
side side hip and lean
while the other melody is playing
one two three and spin
both accents never quite sounding right my
lips

a fathers language i never learned to speak
while he grew up struggling to understand
my own
both parents found their way here but one of
them had a harder time finding a place to to
lay their head
yes i am mixed
you are too loud for one side
and to quiet for the other
skills you never learned as a child make you
less of your identity
asking questions wondering if their right or
wrong depending on the tongue you speak
the parts of myself cast off when undesired
forgetting that part of my dna and putting on
a different version of myself to fit the people

in the room
some days i am more of my name than i am
of my own skin
yes i am mixed
i pick myself apart in the mirror not fitting in
with either standard
skin is not pale nor is tanned
my dark hair is set aside by its straightness
as i snip clip and curl hoping to find a hint of
my mother inside of my hair
my heavy jaw and Aquilined
nose used to be a sign of power and nobility

only for it to cut and shaped to fit the eyes
who linger on my face
my eyes in their shade of mud longing to also
be the like the surf of the ocean that you can
find with my father
you see i got both from my parents like a
warning sign of the unknown as all my
feature are just clashing shadows of their
own cultures that was hidden from me
yes i am mixed
my voice will never be strong and stable to
hold the room at a still
yet it still will never be sweet enough to make
them move with emotion
the things i say dismissed even if chosen for
the listener at hand
you see i grew up that way
like an entertainer waiting for her audience
yes i am mixed
the country that always seemed like another
world away
was only as far as a road trip and a
passport
a small journey that i am afraid i'll never go
on
cause my own fear developed from that part
of me that I no longer have but i yearn for
cause when i was young it was ripped out,
without my consent

yes i am mixed
insults and privilege sit in my lap
both parts of me contradicting itself
like a storm sitting in my stomach always
twisting try to find a place to sit comfortable
but it never will
cause no one likes a storm
and from this natural disaster that others
like me were weened off of they say i should
be proud of who i am cause
yes i am mixed
my identity is not wanted unless it's for color
that the ignorant women want for their
children
but the ignorant don't know that with these
hiding hair textures and these unknown
traditions
theres a burden
a burden hidden when she's at her friends
15th birthday party dancing to unmoving lips
unknown words with unturned hips,
shifted glances when your walking with a

parent at a grocery store cause your skin
colors don't interweave with their
understanding of your chromosomes
mud colored eyes watching and whispering
like weeds growing their tendrils at my ears
trying to find a place where they can thrive
and be unwanted

yes i am mixed
like a puzzle piece in the wrong box you
struggle and press yourself to fit in and to be
accepted
you never fit quite right in their picture
perfect landscape scene
snow at the top of the mountain looking
down on desert terrain
two environments at different altitudes
but one always looks down on the other
yes i am mixed
i am more than my fingerprint and my name
but that's not important to them
cause when it comes to the people around
you that's all they see
a scantron-ed list of names, colors, and
mugshots
a college application begging you for your
"colorful opinion"
but how do you tell them that i should be
able to make history with out looking at my
skin or my gender
cause you shouldn't have to categorize
yourself an your identity to make your
existence easier for others to understand
but against my own judgment and my own
verses my graphite letters fill them in
anyway marking boxes and checking labels
hoping that what you are won't take away
my opportunity
if only im this standardized list that we call a
u.s without the us
we could be equal
but people see labels and the syllables in
your name before they see you
before they listen to others like you
who have worked harder but will be
dismissed
yes i am mixed
the centuries of struggles and yearning for
survival that i inherited from my ancestors
turned into a 30 day holiday and an excuse
not to wear my blood stained uniform
i sit here watching others outcast the very
people who helped built America
afraid and embarrassed of new ideas we
shut our selves into our little circles of people
who walk and talk like us
where does that leave others like me
others who cant puzzle piece their stomach
storms into explaining that no matter how
much they ask me to fit their expectations
to fit in their little circles
that these words will always scratch at my
tounge
yes i am mixed.

School: BASIS San Antonio Shavano
Teacher: Kim Kinne
Name: Sunny Vuong

"Ode to Agarita and Motherhood"

The nursery of the San Antonio botanical garden hums, and the evening light is soft-hued through the damp window panes. "Milkweed doesn't burn easily," my mother says. "Like most plants in this city, they must be resistant to the sun—a vehicle for love." I ask with halted-breath why we are most defiant to what raises us, most of all. To what we grow towards. My mother tangles her fingers through mine. Fragile and winding as the Alamo vine. Agava, aucuba, autumn sage, she lists. When they burn, I wonder, what happens to their seeds. To their children. Ashes are funny things. Don't they reek of death and woman? Synonyms for birth? Lending to the fertility of the soil. Without a whisper of burning, there is no chance to grow. The seeds are scattered, hardier for having survived. No trace left of what they came from. A mother is often a vehicle for a daughter. My mother has murmured all of this to me, before. I think this garden is too small and full of youth for the story she means to teach me. I think I understand my mother most when I know I do not. I think that love is too small a word to describe what fills a role so raw and entire as motherhood. What can we learn from handfuls of sweetwood and milkweed and agarita, I wonder, but to learn from the scars of what birthed us that a daughter is nothing but the ashes of the mother who burned for her.

SCHOOL: Anne Frank Inspire Academy (San Antonio)

TEACHER: Zachary Sokoloski

NAME: Kristanna Martinez

Family Isn't Blood

Family is those who leave tamales at your front door
On a festive Christmas eve

It's those who sing at the top of their lungs with you
During the journeys to the market square

They're the people you think of first
When buying treats from the panaderia

Family are those who will stay by your side
Even during the darkest of times

It's the people who are always happy to see you
And even to say your name

They're the ones who don't care for your failures
But pray for your success

Family are people who will laugh your troubles away
Without letting you break a single sweat

It's those who would sacrifice everything to see you smile
Knowing that you would do the same in return

These are the people that you cannot live without

Family isn't blood
It's those who share your soul

Mi Vida, Mi Familia, My San Antonio

By: Olivia Lopez

Family, according to Merriam Webster describes
People with similar hair, alike eyes.
Yet, its meaning extends far beyond this base observation,
Rooted in experiences commanding a much deeper foundation.

My 16 years in SA were not similar to the rest's,
Filled with trips to the park, La Panaderia, or restaurant quests,
A weekend would not go by without the sight of downtown,
Siclovía, theatres, the Pearl, all around

Not to forget the famous SA institutions,
Best conversations transpiring in these city contributions.
My family takes pride in our sweet tea addiction,
We will preach on Bill Miller with the greatest conviction.

With the help of Central Library, I craft a list to explore,
Many events to attend, so many traditions in store.
February arrives, embracing our true Texan roots,
We put on our cowboy hats, jeans, and bedazzled boots.

April signals time to strap on the sash,
Our duty to collect metals, the sound *clink, clash*.
October quickly followed, just in time to cheer,
For the San Antonio Spurs, our team we hold dear.

Then suddenly arrived the time which plagued us all,
Put our various relationships up to the call,
With the physical separation of those we adored,
Was the mentality to appreciate, increasingly restored.

There was no place more prepared for this long quarantine,
With an abundance of outdoor paths to be seen.
I picked up my bike, my guitar, and more,
Dabbled in Tejano music and pop flips galore!

I cherish a humorous memory of a ride at Blue Star,
Our regular twenty miles, feeling exceptionally far,
Nearly passed out, was I, at the sight of San Juan,
The beauty of the mission, yet the severity of the sun.

My father carried me the down the Riverwalk back,
Until my thirst was quenched, and my heart rate, intact.
I recovered with the help of a friendly neighbor,
And the HEB Creamy Creations did quite the favor.

These fond experiences are all but rare,
And for these reasons, I say this with care,
I will return to this great city, as long as I live,
For the culture, the beauty, the mass of tradition to give.
“Remember the Alamo, Viva Fiesta”
Phrases which will remain in me, with no siesta.

From these past two years, I learned a vital lesson
About the true adhesive which fosters connection.
Family is those who are present in it all,
Whether through a pandemic or amidst a great fall,
They are those who will lovingly fight over chores,
Then enjoy an exciting game of pickleball outdoors.

As a young, Hispanic female, I never thought I could be
In a place so fitting to embrace those I loved, while fully embracing me.
San Antonio holds such a dear spot in my heart,
For being the glue of mi familia when all else seemed to fall apart.