



MEDIA RELEASE

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Local Poets Celebrate the Morro Bay Estuary

The third annual **Morro Bay Estuary Poetry Contest: A National Treasure in Words** asked people to celebrate native wildlife in poems of any form, and to capture the essence of the Morro Bay estuary in haiku. 72 poets from across the county and beyond sent in 96 poems for consideration.

Guest judges Marguerite Costigan, Jerry Douglas Smith, and Patty Sullivan were very impressed with the entries. Costigan, the current Poet Laureate for San Luis Obispo County said, "Reading these poems, so vivid and so uniquely individual, I realize they are the perfect metaphor for the Estuary itself—so full of the Waters of Earth, so full of Life. It is nearly impossible to actually choose, judge, separate them. They are a delightful whole."

Though it was difficult, the judges did choose winners. **For the Estuary & Watershed Wildlife category, writers composed poems that focused on animals native to the estuary and the land that drains into it. Dawn Wood, a physician and long-time lover of Morro Bay, won the adult group with her poem, "Love in an Estuary."** Dawn has published poems in medical journals before, and was inspired to try her hand at nature poetry by participating in the contest. She is retiring from practice in Ventura County and looks forward to living in Morro Bay fulltime. **The adult runner-up for this category is Morro Bay resident Lani Steele with her poem, "Local Fauna, Morro Bay Estuary,"** which concludes, "We live here / because we love these waters, / these birds, these wild creatures."

Fiona Reams won the Youth Estuary & Watershed Wildlife category with her poem, "Estuary Bliss." Fiona is a 7th grade student at Los Osos Middle School. Her mother says that she devours books and is following in her family's footsteps with a love of theater and music. Fiona is currently working on writing a play. **The youth runner-up is Luke Mellom with his poem, "The Elfin Forest."** Luke is also a 7th grader at Los Osos Middle School. He enjoys baseball, hiking, and writing.

Haiku—three-line poems consisting of 17 syllables in a 5/7/5 pattern—traditionally focus on nature. **This year's Adult Haiku winner is Richard Immel, a retired Wall Street Journal reporter and magazine journalist.** Richard lives in Moraga, California, but visits Morro Bay often to explore, bird, and hike. His first place haiku focused on sandpipers in the back bay. **Another of Richard's haiku tied for the runner-up spot with Ted Schade's haiku, "Lunch Hunting."** Ted spent over 24 years tackling the problem of air pollution at Owens Dry Lake. He is now retired, and he and his wife split their time between Bishop, California, and Morro Bay.

The Youth Haiku winner is Dylan King. Dylan is a 7th grade student at Los Osos Middle School. He loves living right on the water and enjoys looking through a glass spot in his floor to see the fish gliding by below. **The youth runner-up is Vienna Laughlin, also a member of Los Osos Middle School's 7th grade class.** Vienna loves books and participates in choir.

Judges, contest winners, Estuary Program staff, and community members gathered at Coalesce bookstore to celebrate the estuary and the power of poetry last week. Guest judge Patti Smith enjoyed the reading, saying, "How can you not be uplifted when hearing lines such as, "the drumming of the otter," "whirr of osprey," or, "misty safe haven"? What delight these poets have brought to us!"

To read the winning poems and learn more about the poets, visit www.mbnep.org/poetry2016.

The judging panel included poets Marguerite Costigan, Jerry Douglas Smith, and Patti Sullivan, as well as Estuary Program representative Rachel Pass.

Marguerite Costigan's poetry reflects her love of art, nature, and the music of language. She has read poetry to San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara audiences for 20 plus years and has been published in *Asylum*, *Café Solo*, and *Pudding Magazine*. She's been the featured reader at the live poetry series *Corners of the Mouth*, and San Luis Obispo's annual *Poetry Festival*. Marguerite is the current Poet Laureate for San Luis Obispo County.

Jerry Douglas Smith is a Salida, Colorado native. He's been a storyteller all his life. Living at 7000 feet in the heart of the Rockies, he acquired a natural education informed by rivers, raccoons, Native Americans, smart trout and wise old forests. A backpacker and fly-fisherman, he is a naturalist in the old sense—an insatiably curious student of human nature and the universe. For 2013 and 2014 Jerry was Poet Laureate of San Luis Obispo. He's a founding member of 24-year-old Poets on the Edge critique group. For 15 years, he has hosted Second Sunday at Seven, a monthly poetry reading at Coalesce Garden Chapel in Morro Bay.

Patti Sullivan's books include, *For the Day, Not Fade Away*, and *At The Booth Memorial Home for Unwed Mothers 1966*. Other poems appear in *Solo Novo*, *Lummox*, *ARTLIFE*, and *Lilly Ledbetter: Women Poets Occupy the Workplace*. She assists with the Corners of the Mouth at Linnaea's, Poetry at the Steynberg, and the Annual San Luis Obispo Poetry Festival curated by Kevin Patrick Sullivan. She is also a visual artist with several book covers to her credit and group and solo exhibits.

Rachel is the Communications & Outreach Coordinator for the Estuary Program and has edited several collections of poetry.

Morro Bay National Estuary Program is a non-regulatory, nonprofit organization that brings together citizens, local government, other nonprofits, agencies, and landowners to protect and restore the Morro Bay Estuary for people and wildlife. The Estuary Program has been conducting monitoring and research, restoring natural habitats, and educating residents and visitors on how to keep Morro Bay clean and healthy since 1995. You can find out more about the Morro Bay National Estuary Program at www.mbnep.org.