

# POETRY BOOK

## NIGHT OF APHASIA ARTS 2025



"A Rose Bloomed" Painting by Pamela Van Arsdale

#### A Day in The Life.....

Wake up Tell fingers to work Perform bathroom routine Put on Beethoven's Symphony #9 Turn up volume to 11 Walk barefoot in the garden Squish sugarplum tomatoes with my toes Do cartwheels under the apple trees Drive to the river Climb the mountainside Pick pockets full of Tansymustard Fly to Rome and meet Pope Francis Visit the temple of Apollo at Corinth Make a sandwich Fly too close to the sun Make a molehill out of a mountain Ride a camel to Giza; stargaze atop Khufu Parachute onto Easter Island and decipher the RongoRongo tablets Climb down from the top of the world Take off superman suit Make a cup of Darjeeling Crawl under the covers and hug my sore bones

<sup>~</sup> Douglas G. Campbell

#### **APHASIA**

In a blink of an eye, my voice is gone
Words embedded in my brain fighting to come out
Exhaustion, fatigue, trying to focus
Still can't get the words out.

Speech therapy, support groups, evaluations
It will come back in time
My voice is BACK
BUT I still can't voice my THOUGHTS

By: Crystal L. Stewart-Batson

#### RETIREMENT

It came out of the blue, in a flash of lightning, Collapse, injection, unable to speak.

Doctors, neurosurgeons, therapists. Renewal, rejoice, rejuvenation. Yelling, screaming, whispering.

I can hear me, they can hear me Stroke, Aphasia, Retirement.

By: Crystal L. Stewart-Batson

# Selections from *Even More Suspect Speaking*By James Stephens

#### Three Haiku

Sounds echo boldly.

Nature speaks eloquently...

But not via me.

Aphasia strikes.
Confused, frustrated, angry.
Seek reinvention.

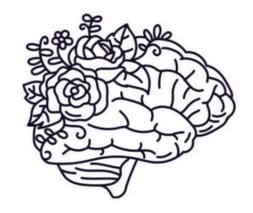
A cloud adorned sky
Grey transmutes into azure
Time to move onward

Adaptable

Persistant

 $\mathbf{H}_{ard}$ 

 $\mathsf{A}_{\mathsf{bility}}$ 



S earching for simple syllables

mprisoned

 $\mathsf{A}_{\mathsf{uthentic}}$ 

## striped bass festival by Robert P. Parker

#1

whirling terns
diving gulls
exploding stripers
our curled lines go
to the chaos
(i love to fish for striped bass)

#2

boy-men waited patiently for dad
with rods beside them
he greeted them in his canvas hat
bending down he acknowledged
that he had seen a satisfactory striper
and turned away to fix
his glass with more bourbon
(i love to catch striped bass)

#3

thirty six pound striper
on the table dead
sharp curved knife
plastic gloves
sliced head off
sliced fins slowly down
kept slicing until tail appears
moved the curving blade to top of the fish
gradually cut rib until tail appears
turned the striper over
begin again for second fillet
(i love to clean stripers)

#4

combine extra virgin olive oil, juice of two limes, zest of two limes, 1/2 cup of cup of of cilantro, two cloves of chopped garlic, salt and cracked black pepper, 4 striped bass fillets (8 ounce), with the tip of a paring knife, make three diagonal slits through the skin of each filet, place the fish in the marinade, turn to coat the fish, cover and refrigerate at least one hour, fire up the charcoal grill to medium high, place the bass and cook for about 8 minutes on each side, or until the fish flakes easily (i love to prepare stripers)

#5

steve: 'striper was awesome. amazing. good for you.'
mom: 'I loved the striper! it's incredible. delicious.'
bob: 'striper, mashed red potatoes, and brussel sprouts. i loved them all.'
dad: 'not as good as the striper was last time we had it.'
moiling through the mashed potato,
we stared at dad. he didn't raise his head.
just kept picking at his striper.
we three raised our mugs high to rejoice the striper.
clinking mugs expressed our admiration for the bass.
we observed pin-prick stars soaring way above our heads.
transforming our universe. glanced down and saw the remains
of our striper. The IPA burp!
(I love to feast on striped bass)

# I Want to Live My Life By Lisa Kenny

Life with Emily & Alfie was amazing,
We are amazing,
Family and friends were amazing,
Then it all hit!!

I had a headache,
I thought it was nothing,
That's when it happened,
An acquired brain injury – a Stroke.

Ale was a mere 4 days old, When I had the Stroke. Two days later they did a brain scan, Now I needed brain surgery!

> I had no speech, Like, Man?! Aphasia, what's that? Oh, uh-fey-zhuh......

> > Then COVID hits, Why? Who knows.

It was hard,
But we had each other.
Stop crying,
Let's do this!
Determined to get out of the wheelchair,
I did it!!

After spending 9 months in hospital,
Yes,
WOW!
NOW,
I want to live my life!!

## Aphasia Ambassador By James Jett

Let me tell a story about, Why am I here? The things I can't say But the messages is clear. A stroke or brain injury feel like a headache but you heart is pure clear. If you don't know Aphasia is, You better listen and learn appear. Aphasia is a disorder and lot of impact here. A language, speech, and understanding, many Aphasia degrees. Live, life, and affection is You communicate appeared. The friends, mates, and your ambassadors for lifelong. Spread the word, having fun.

Soon you'll find a pot a Gold for Life!

#### i have learned...

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i have learned...
   that your first thoughts
      can color your whole day...
i have learned...
   to look between the black and white
      and marvel at the colors...
i have learned...
   that friendship freely given
       is like a beautiful fragile bird...
i have learned...
   anger is easily spread
       hurting more than just one soul...
i have learned...
   that silence can speak volumes
      if the time is taken to listen...
i have learned
   that the most raggedy covers
       hold stories worth learning...
i have learned...
   that eyes of any color
       can't hide what the body can...
i have learned...
   we all have dreams
      waiting to unfold...
and...
i have learned...
to be thankful
for life...
jsburl
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Jan Burl

# Selections from Even More Suspect Speaking By James Stephens

#### **Three Limericks**

An aphasic had trouble with communication So she practised with musical compositions. Speech was better in song And her talking was prolonged But her rhythms were complex syncopations.

A heroic *firefighter*, said the newspaper's media hype Had a brain injury when he was struck by a pipe. He developed aphasia

But my rescues were braver.

They expect me to be the strong, silent type.

An aphasic had trouble with communication
So she practised with all sorts of quotations.
She stuttered and spluttered
With each quote she uttered.
'To be or no for being...um...be...then-when-so-um-why-what-where-um-were...are...is the kes-tion.'

## KER — BLAM by Robert P. Parker

Perched atop a loose splintering board, petrified of dying, boost of adrenaline, arms weaving back and forth to steady my feet, I felt the tips of my toes grip the teetering end of the board. I felt the death defying madness, looked down, and watched eighty feet of yellow gray greasy water in the quaint quarry below. I feasted on determination plus adrenaline. Freedom from the giddy, wonked up board. I soared, glided, fell, wind whistled past my face, and, what's the micro-second before the . . . . . !!K E R - B L A M!!Yellow gray water sprayed in a circle. I panicked. Plunging beneath greasy water I tried to make it to the surface. Liquid rushed in to fill my lungs. Damn it! Remember my legs and arms! I torpedoed to the surface and raised arms to signal that I had made it. Boy-men clapped, whooped, and laughed.

# Recovery of Identity Theft by Jo Carroll

Loss of community stretches in stark silence, forming a fraudulent self-reflection and application

Effectively so sharp, tearing at hidden wounds; theft of identity and information

Fatigued so sudden, by prospect or reality; compromising significance

Daunting mercurial emotions, rearing up on its own accord; mind blurring into the vague

Embroidery of words left in knots, are they questions or answers, comments or concerns

Somewhat unreliable, somehow a time-bending portal; rarely fully open, scarcely fully closed

Before and after gratefully coexist, character survived; interweaving of peaks and valleys One owes this life more than conventional adeptness, the glory is in the connection; not in the ease of speech

A tangential necessity to speak out, registering presence unnoticed to the whole

Defending territory, finding mirth amidst the chaos; variant of the original or utterly unique

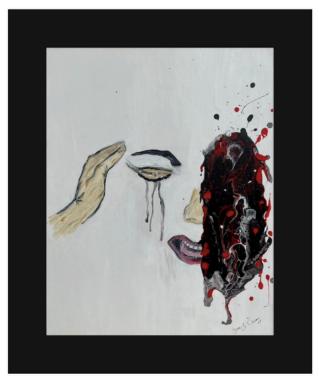
A will to convey, to listen, and respond, in a spectrum of feelings; with purpose and fondness shared

On the other side of vulnerability, new found acceptance of semantic differences

A gift challenging perceptions, bit by diligent bit, whatever sound leaves my mouth; should not spoil the banter

Self disintegration being slowly refracted, through conversation and the aphasia community; identity sharpened back, into a more recognizable definition

A tip-of-tongue curator of fumbling moments, multifaceted state of being, embracing fundamental uncertainties; no longer letting life go directly to voicemail



I've Been Erased Jenn Derry

#### I've Been Erased Jenn Derry

Be aware, a cruel and tortured life I was victim cursed abruptly and trampled on I was lost in the dark distance I've been erased across my frightful face

I've been damaged Numbness and weak with colors splashed in chaos Deep pitch-black of pain, and Red with angry and rage With brutal reality was smudged into isolation

In the depth of silent sorrow, a voice was once free Aphasia's ruthless grasp stole me Attacking my lonely, struggled mind now held captive With tears streaming down from emotional agony And even the loudest screams were muted Chilling echo through the empty vanished existence

## **Poems by Sheela Vinod**

#### **Caricature**

The artist drew the caricature
I was grim in face and the body
I have no structure
I have no energy
The year is not good
The aphasia six and half years

## My expectations

My expectation is humility
My expectation is forgiveness
My expectation is my good behavior
My expectation is peace for
the world

#### My Oubliette

## with respect to Amy Matthews by Kathryn Paulson

This line came from falling in love.

That one came from being pushed out of it.

These age spots lie, tell me I am old
but maybe I was just born in the heliolithic age?

These freckles, my oubliette.
This wrinkle on my temple leads deeper, a true crack into my core.
My skin folds over itself, tries to contain everything that is me.

You see, you live on planet Earth. I fell off, tumbled over my grave and landed smack in the middle of my Traumatic Brain Injury.

And by that I mean, a concrete bullet cased in inky black ice s h a t t e r e d what I thought my life was.

Now I live in a mystical and monstrous place with subarachnoid hemorrhages,

hematomas and deficient temporal lobes. It's where I lose my memories, my concentration is stolen, and my sense of self

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is set on fire.
It's where cerebrospinal fluid
drips
from
my
ear.
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Costly CT scans and unrelenting doctors visits are anxiety ridden rollercoasters, my migraines, King Titan. My underlying soundtrack, a continuous shriek. Tinnitus so loud my bruises blur.

Nerves not sheared, wrap around my neck and squeeze, threatening to take anything that is leftover.

The normal ordinary hidden in my corners leak out get swept along with the dirty into a dustpan then disposed of along with Wednesday's trash. My TBI is where unescapable beauty beats back coal smoke.

Where flashes of lightning illuminate the shadows in my head. Where I battle ragged bellies of clouds that threaten to engulf me at any moment. It is a painfully wondrous place to die.

Kathryn Paulson Fight Evil With Poetry

# Hear! Hear! The Caregivers! by Lisa Smith

Hear! Hear! The caregivers!
The stalwart, the share givers!

Benevolent and considerate, oh, let us say passionate!

I can think of some folks who are kind and noble.

We who are in the abyss, the black hole, try to miss

each joy, each merit of love and lost, must play the part of

Winners. Handshakes and applause, all smile and be grateful, stroke, brain injuries, yes, even paralyzed, be saintly and graceful.

Superman died in a flurry of flashbulbs, press coverage, documentaries on the TV. Superman wife died, afterward, of cancer, with her children with nothing left to release.

#### A POEM FOR ROBBIE

by Ms. Mert Robinson, An Aphasia Warrior

People say your name and think what a shame you're gone.

Still, they know what you've left behind
lives in our hearts and minds today, and tomorrow.

Though the clouds of darkness came your way, you've given us a brighter day. Your love of music will be so very, very special to me.

Sometimes wealth and fame, whispered, "Play my game".

But you, yes you refused to.

A flair touched your soul, though fortune not your gold. The Almighty's gift is what changed you.

A mind like silk would weave your wisdom and words of life, oh, only you could tell. Your love of music is going to be very, very special to me.

In life's fleeting glance, you have met the chance to share all that they can't.

> And though your stay had ended, before you went away you left a legacy. Now I stand listening to your sounds of joy, I think one shy ghetto boy.

Your love of music will always be very special to me. Said I love you Robbie, and you're going to be very, very special to me.

Going to miss one shy, little ghetto boy.

This is a poem for you, the love of my life.

I love you and miss you Robbie.





# "The Feeling of Not Being Able" Michael Obel-Omia

Frustratingly, I muster the words, With prospicience I feel aphasia might; I know the words, damnit, I can feel it Driving Carolyn, she makes the idea, Oh, yes, Niagara Falls, as we talk, But, as we casually chat, as we drive, I grow, more & more, what these look like me Sweating, aphasia, droplets sends away, Oh, yes, Haversack, starts with me, again, "Satchel, duffel, cumbersome," no again! Now, I'm aging 58 years old, Leaving aphasia, or Alzheimer's. We put in the hotel, feckless, in words, Carolyn, is frustrated too! I lubricate, at night, to find these words, Finally, zip line, in the light of day Niagara Falls, zip line, prospicience Haversack, oats, sack bag, oh, yes, hammock: Aphasia has the right me, but, I'll know't

# Selections from Even More Suspect Speaking By James Stephens

#### An Aphasic Villanelle

They said that my aphasia was a matter of degree An issue for my personal communication But this person before you? It's still me. My speech, my talking, is suspect, unfree. It leaves me depressed, angry and full of frustration But, they said, that my aphasia was a matter of degree. Stuttering and spluttering, hesitating and tongue-tied, Wrong words, talking twisted – a matter of malformation But this person before you? It's still me. Uncertain, tentative, confused: you must agree. Despondent, I feel a sense of self-castigation. But, they said, that my aphasia was a matter of degree. 'How can I function in this world?' is my plea Meaningful conversation, always an obscuration But this person before you? It's still me. I want to hide, be reclusive, just flee. They thought I would improve, aphasia a flirtation, They said that my aphasia was a matter of degree But this person before you? It – is – still – ME!





When the world tells you to **stop**,
Remember, your **light** shines the brightest.
In the mirror, you see **me**,
But I see **flowers** waiting to bloom.

Your heart beats to the rhythm of **music**, Your soul dances like **dandelions** in the wind. Don't hide your **imperfections**, For that is where your true power lies.

In moments of doubt, think of **where you have come**,

When you were in a crowd and felt **alone**. Embrace your **awesomeness**. Because no one else can **shine** quite like you.

## Co-created by the members of the USC Aphasia Lab Virtual Aphasia Recovery Group





"A Rose Bloomed"
Poem and Painting by Pamela Van Arsdale

A pale pink rose has appeared
How happy I am to see you have come
A feeling of awe invades me
You delight my soul with your wonderful scent
So fragile! So timidly awaiting in the world
You are my fascination
I see you in that light
I see you in the darkness
Where you glow with your own imagination
I think of you as the queen of the garden
Because you are the soul of spring

#### Checking The Mail - by Sean Mackey

Last Monday Silent letters don't have any sound if you only show them to strangers.

Last Tuesday

An unmailed letter doesn't show your shameful secret if you publish it in a paperback novel.

Last Wednesday An airmail letter doesn't arrive f you keep it in your passport.

Last Thursday
Diary letters aren't secured
If you lost them on your computer.

Last Friday Rejection letters don't hurt you If they were written in a lost language.

Last Saturday Acceptance letters don't limit what you do If you don't open them

Last Sunday A love letter doesn't embarrass you If you have written it yourself.

This Monday Complaining letters don't change your mind If you write back with the same saltiness.

This Tuesday
A sympathy letter doesn't matter to one who lost a friend
If you shut your mouth and listen to the recipient.

This Wednesday Junk mail doesn't waste your precious energy If you burned it in a bonfire.

This Thursday
A certified letter doesn't mean anything
If you have moved out of state.

## The Final Goodbye

#### Naomi Bitter

In the stillness of the room

I watched as shadows danced upon the walls.

Time stretches out before me a cruel and unyielding thread.

I hold my breath waiting for the inevitable.

A heavy silence fills me, fills the air, a weight on my chest that never left memories replay in my mind.

A tapestry of moments shared laughter and cheers.

Intertwine a bittersweet superior blog.

I sit by the bedside, your hand in mine, whispering words of comfort as we both face the unknown.

I brace myself for the final goodbye for the moment when you slipped away, leaving behind a void.

A piece of my heart forever changed.

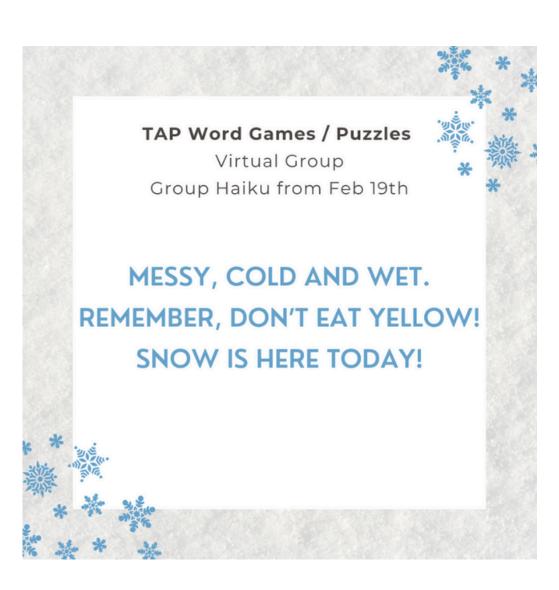
## Summer Sunday By Lisa Kenny

June, July and August, Monday and Friday, Are you ready Friends and family? What a great weekend.

A weekend for Emily, A weekend for Paul, For the family and the girls.

The scents, the sounds!
The sky is blue –
Beautiful,
Perfectly white cotton candy.

Early summer afternoons, Nights for enjoying good wine – Together.





# Thank you to all of the poets that contributed to this book. Your words create vision and inspire those who read them!



National Aphasia Association aphasia.org