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their photos & bios.

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### Stoking the fires for Burning Word

The WPA now has a salaried Burning Word Director, Sue Ellen White, who provides a professional, ongoing effort on behalf of our annual festival.

Hopefully you read the announcements sent out by Membership Chair Nancy Dahlberg in which detail of headliners and reader nominations were discussed.

It will be exciting, experiencing the international flavor. And to add fuel to the fire, you have a chance to nominate the individual(s) you would like to hear reading from the stages. Interested in nominating someone? Go to the website's Burning Word page for directions in doing that. Hurry! Timing is everything!

It is not too early to be thinking of volunteering for Burning Word V. For more information about that or about workshops, go to [www.burningword.org](http://www.burningword.org), contact [burningword@whidbey.com](mailto:burningword@whidbey.com) or call Paul Nelson (253) 735-6328 or Sue Ellen White (360) 341-2434.

### Poet Laureate announcement nears

by Karen Bonaudi

As of *Word's* electronic press time, the selection of Washington's first Poet Laureate is meeting the timeline established when applications have been solicited and received, rowed the field. Because this is a work-one, applications are being treated with submissions for a job, albeit part-time.

Reference calls and meetings with ington State Arts Commission board ap-takes it to Governor Gregoire. Hopefully, she will make the announcement in January. What looks like a bureaucratic approach to a cultural calling is really about keeping the faith. Those working on the program have a covenant with the legislature to meet the language and intent of the RCW; the team also has a covenant with the poetry community of the State.

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finalists lie ahead, before the Wash- proves the final determination and

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Until now the effort has been all about process: securing the legislation, building the administrative team and beginning work on permanent funding. Now it is very much about who bears the obligation and buzz of the state's first laureate. Maintaining a thorough and trustworthy process ensures the quality and acceptance of the person named to the position for 2007-09 and thereafter.

January will also see the kick-off of the \$300,000 endowment campaign. The fund raising team will be seeking grant funding (Humanities Washington has already submitted a request to the National Endowment for the Humanities), major contributions from foundations and supporters of cultural quests, and donations from the poetry community. Opportunity for this grassroots support has been a basic expectation of WPA throughout the years of wishing and working. WPA believes the poetry writers and readers of Washington should participate in commitment to and ownership of the standard bearer.

Like poems, funding starts with "what ifs....?" What if every poet in Washington State each gave \$1 to the cause? Are there 300,000 poets in Washington? Can they be reached? What if communities or poetry venues held poetry marathons to raise funds? What if students got involved? What if....?

As Paul Nelson mentioned in the last issue of *Word*, WPA will be leading the grassroots part of the fund raising initiative. Two things are needed now:

**Volunteers:** Master gardeners to help cultivate, plant and harvest that fund raising effort

**Ideas:** Your "What ifs..." to help fertilize the fund raising organizers

You can contact WPA board member Ed Stover, [stovered@charter.net](mailto:stovered@charter.net), with your information on both. Also let him know how Washington should celebrate joining the 40 other states valuing poetry with a living poet working on its behalf.

Karen Bonaudi, who worked for ten years to help establish the Poet Laureate program, can also tell you how a poem and a recipe are alike, something she learned while promoting potatoes.

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Keep an eye out for the debut of the *Cascade Journal*. The first reading from its contributors will be on Feb. 9th at the Bellevue Art Museum, 510 Bellevue Way NE, Bellevue, WA.

President John F. Kennedy dedicated the Robert Frost Library at Amherst College one month before his assassination. Kennedy said "When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations,... When power corrupts, poetry cleanses."

Contributed by Roger W Hancock, [www.PoetPatriot.com](http://www.PoetPatriot.com), member of Striped Water Poets.



## Why Not Read?

by Judith Skillman

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century world where information flows faster than water, and where often there is too little money and too little time, a writer often feels as if she is stealing from Peter to pay Paul when she picks up a book to read. This is a shame, because reading is both a privilege and an art of its own. After all, many of us who write poetry began by reading poems, appreciating them, and wanting to emulate a certain writer or group of writers. How else would we know what a poem was, and whether or not to set our sights on becoming "deliberate poets?"

However, once we have found our way into print, a peculiar phenomenon (which I have experienced), sometimes occurs. It is a state of not wanting to read. For lack of a better description of this, I'll call it "readaphobia"—a competition with the living, and a fear of the dead. A writer does need a healthy dose of ambition and competition to get anywhere in the "poebiz." But when overriding ambitions for fame overwhelms the generosity of spirit that the act of reading requires, then I believe it is safe to say we have become too competitive.

Nothing is more nurturing to the spirit, nor more helpful to continuing progress as poets and writers, than picking up a good book. Regardless of which genre one's tastes run to, reading is an experience like no other. Through reading we encounter another's essence, or soul, the inner vista of an author. By virtue of endless combinations of characters in an alphabet, readers are swept away by their imaginations, if only they will allow it, surrender to its unique quality. Where else can we embark on a journey that defines and heightens our own sense of self, even as we surrender ourselves to the page.

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Judith Skillman, poet ([www.judithskillman.com](http://www.judithskillman.com)), editor, and teacher also does stained glass work ([www.judithskillman.net](http://www.judithskillman.net)).

## Interview with Mani Rao

by Suma V. Subramaniam

Mani Rao, a poet based in India and HongKong, has published seven strong-voiced and daring collections of poems over the past 20 years. Her poems have appeared in various anthologies and journals. She has been invited to many international literary festivals and activities over the year. The most recent is Kritya 2007, an international festival of poetry in India which took place in the last week of July, 2007.

**SVS: You started writing at a young age. I was wondering if you could talk about how it felt, as a budding poet of twelve, to be writing what's traditionally seen as an exercise for older people. Did you feel your youth to be a liability or an asset?**

MR: It has been a liability before, and a source of surprise after, people have read my work. Those who don't enjoy writing or reading see poetry as an adolescent's passing trend (useful to channel all those bursting hormones) or as a hobby for the aging (now that the hormones are out of the way).

But even among poetry-familiars, there are set expectations about the relationship between age and knowledge. At Kritya, after I performed "The Void Plate," someone told me he had been very moved by the poem, and then asked, "Did you write it?" And I have often been asked if I have had any traumatic experiences. It is as if people want to account for what's in the poetry.

Experience is the substance of poetry, but experience (suffering?) occurs at different speeds and intensities for different people. Neither do we all begin life at the same place – a blank page – unmarked by the learnings of past lives.

**SVS: Born in Mumbai, India, you moved to Hong Kong in 1993 for building a career. Later you quit the high-paying advertising industry to start writing full-time. Could you discuss a little bit about the nature of your attraction towards writing poetry?**

MR: I always saw myself as a writer, but I never tried to live off it—I knew I couldn't. This kept my writing away from commercial pressures. My job gave me a working knowledge (and a stance of non-antagonism towards) new media, which found creative application and led me to the intersections of poetry and other forms. However, across a career of twenty years, my job became more corporate—I quit at a time when it was at its most uncreative. Having done that, I suddenly found maintenance-time, time to take my writing more into the writing industry—submissions and publications,

readings at festivals, residencies - and this has converted to wider exposure and readership.

**SVS: Could you describe how different cultures have influenced your work?**

MR: The cultures I met have expanded the language of my imagination and expression. A simple example, living in Hong Kong meant that dragons got joined by snakes in my group of symbols. Perhaps in addition to the oral range and enunciation I got from Indian languages, I acquired more aural sensitivity by listening to the tonal range of the Chinese language. A usefulness of traveling or change of location is that the unfamiliar triggers inspiration. Even alienation has its uses – being in a surround where you don't know the language can be similar to aesthetic distancing.

**SVS: Who are some of the poets who influenced you and your writing?**

MR: You say poets, so: the Vedas, especially how they sound; the modernists, especially how they form; and what-not from Camus, Gide, Robbe-Grillet, Genet, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Proust, Cocteau, Musil, Appolinaire, Blanchot, Batille, Jabez, Borges, Pessoa, Coetzee, Handke, Dostoyevsky, Neidecker and I won't forget many film-makers including Antonioni, Wenders, Lars Von Trier. . .

**SVS: There seems to be a relationship between your speaking voice and writing voice. . .**

MR: I work many poems at the level of sound. Devices may include shifting of voices, an aside, a chorus, and the utterance of word-parts opening more meanings. But I also write taut, concentrated poems without dramatic sound architecture, and the wordplay in some of my poems can only be seen on the physical space of a page.

When I read, I simply read in my way. But too many people have told me that having heard me read once, they "hear" my voice the next time they read my work on a page. Is this a good thing? Is the experience of poetry more pure without the intervention of the poet's physical personality of voice and nuance? I don't really know.

**SVS: Your latest book, *100 Poems*, published in 2006 by Chameleon Press, is an anthology of six parts covering poems from your earlier works. Could you tell us more about it?**

MR My first two books *Wingspan* and *Catapult Season* are available only from India – some readers in S.E.Asia have all my books but these. My next four books, *The Last Beach*, *Living Shadows*, *Salt*, and *Echolocation* did not circulate widely outside Asia, or beyond readings I did in Australia, Canada and USA. They have different formats –

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one is A3 in size with drawings; one is A5 in size and graphic; two are bilingual; i.e., with Chinese translation; one has a silver cover bound with studs and pages folded Chinese-style ...

*100 Poems* brings together a hundred poems from these six books into a regular book format - it was the idea of Peter Gordon (of Chameleon Press), to make the work more easy to get, without spending the time and money to order from the various publishers and distributors over two decades.

There is also a narrative in *100 Poems* for those who like to see chronology, or the development of style. Thematically they all flow into one book because they hover, more or less, around love, despair and impermanence. I feel this anthology is a good summary of the last two decades, marking the limit I went to: thought struggling with blood, bile, sex, everything physical. An altogether new muse has arrived since.

**SVS: Where publishing is concerned, print vs. online seems to be the big debate now among aspiring poets. Having been in a lot of print and online journals, what is the level of satisfaction you attain in the publishing industry and your advice to aspiring poets?**

MR: Being published does not mean the

same thing everywhere; in Canada, they say, it is hard not to be published. Also, where everyone's a gatekeeper, there are no gates; there are many journals around today, and for every poet, there is likely to be a journal or an editor that fits. It is hard to say whether this will encourage mediocrity or brilliance, hard to say if it will encourage the new practitioners or retard their long-term growth. Anyhow, it's not the number of journals that counts, but the editorial standards, or taste that has to be weighed.

For me, publishing helps put the poem away in a different place, it's a rite of passage into the poem's own life. Publishing has also brought about some of my most lively friendships - someone reads a book or a poem and seeks me out! I like the physicality of print, and the reach of online.

For more information about Mani Rao, please visit her website [www.manirao.com](http://www.manirao.com)

Suma Subramaniam has previously contributed to this newsletter with information about poetry in India. She is an editor for the journal, *Kitrya*.



## Former WPA Board members make and recall history

by Karen Havnaer

Former WPA board member Judith Irwin hosted a luncheon, September 8 at University House in Seattle for Nancy Rekow, Amelia Haller, Barbara Guiland, Connie Hutchison, Karen Bonaudi and Karen Havnaer, who between them represented 54 years of service as former WPA board members. .

After a tasty lunch and enjoyable conversation, the "old timers" each read a poem or two, the readings video taped by Bonaudi. Rekow read "The Ocean In My Brother's Bedroom" and "To Prune the Plum Tree;" Amelia Haller, "The Boat;" Barbara Guiland, "The Wild Lake" and "Rivers of Wind;" Judith Irwin, "October in Seattle" and "Dawn;" Connie Hutchison, "Romp In The Nursery;" Karen Bonaudi, "Another Lake." Karen Havnaer read "Waiting For The Muse," a poem by Betty Fukuyama, WPA's first secretary.

Rekow and Irwin joined the board in 1977. Irwin served through 1986; her special tasks included newsletter editor and secretary. Rekow also served until the mid-eighties as newsletter editor, publicity and "books" chair and her students from Bainbridge Island were famous as participants and winners in the student and Totem contests. Guiland represented Eastern Washington poets and served as secretary in the early '80's. Haller, from Tacoma, was president in '84, '85. Hutchison joined the board in '94, served as contest chair for three years, as vice president in '95, '96 and president in '03.

Bonaudi clearly holds the title—she served at least 17 years on the board in various positions including newsletter editor, secretary-treasurer, contest and "conference" chairs, vice-president and in '00 - '02, as president. (Additionally, she spent the last 10 years persuading the Washington Legislature to establish an office for Poet Laureate of our state.) Bonaudi's favorite memories are of the late '80's and early '90's when there were "five statewide WPA events a year featuring fantastic guest poets, great workshops and lectures as well as the chance to share our work all day and dance all night. Each event was like a gathering with the extended family."

In its 36-year history, the WPA has had nine women presidents. Besides the three at our table—Haller, Bonaudi and Hutchison—the other six were Betty Fukuyama, '76, '77, '90-'92; Margo Reinsch, '78 - '81 '94; Nancy Beres, '93; Theresa Bachman, (aka Alley Greymond), '95, '96; Arlene Paul, '97- '00 and Victory Schouten, '04 - '07. Irwin and Bonaudi are also recipients of WPA's service honor, the Faith Beamer Cooke Award.

## Cowboy Poetry

by Clark Crouch

Charles Badger Clark (1883-1957), the first Poet Laureate of South Dakota and a self-proclaimed "Poet Lariat," is regarded as the classic cowboy poet.

His poetic style, and that of most modern cowboy poets, reflects its origin: poems with true rhyme and consistent meter as "tags" to help cowboys "on the ride" remember the verses. Those qualities also made it easier to set poems to music and a number of Badger's poems became popular songs such as "A Border Affair," which was recorded as "Spanish is a Lovin' Tongue" by Bob Dylan in 1969.

Badger was a cowboy for four years in the Southwest where he had moved in 1906 because of his health. There he wrote his first poem, "Ridin'," which was submitted to *Pacific Monthly* by his stepmother. It was accepted and Badger continued his writing, parlaying his brief four years as a cowboy into a lifetime career as a poet. His first book, *Sun and Saddle Leather*, published in 1915, was a collection of the poems he wrote while in Arizona Territory. It remains in print today and his poems are still recited at cowboy gatherings everywhere.

Badger's poems are consistent with John Drury's definition of the ballad (*Creating Poetry*, Writer's Digest Books, 1991): "the traditional ballad is essentially a song that tells a story in stanzas of four lines with rhyming second and fourth lines and with the first and third sometimes rhyming." However, unlike some other ballads, Badger's poems use true rhymes and a consistent, strong meter, both of which hark back to the origins of cowboy poetry by making memorization easier.

Badger's poetry has four characteristics which are also evident in the poetry written and recited by most of today's cowboy poets. Those characteristics could be called "The Four Rs of Cowboy Poetry" as follows:

- Reason: revealing cowboy, western, or rural themes and lifestyles, whether in modern or historic settings;
- Rhyme: containing true rhymes such as "love" and "dove", avoiding non-traditional rhyming schemes such as the visual rhyme of "some" and "tome" and the inexact rhyme of

"grace" and "ways";

- Rhythm: having a consistent meter or beat, emphasizing the traditional ballad format; and
- Respect: being suitable for mixed audiences even when addressing earthy subject matter, a traditional nod to any ladies who might be in the audience.

Although the traditional expression of poetic thought can sometimes be constrained by the discipline and demands of rhyme and meter, the results can be satisfying, fulfilling, and enduring as have been the poems and songs of Badger Clark, the classic cowboy poet!

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Clark Crouch, a cowboy in the 30's and 40's, celebrates the western traditions in his three cowboy poem collections, *Western Images*; *Sun, Sand & Soapweed*; and *Where Horses Reign*.



## OPN announces contest

The Olympia Poetry Network (OPN) announces its 5th Annual Jeanne Lohmann Poetry Prize, open to all Washington State poets.

With the help of the San Francisco judges who fund the contest, three winners will receive \$200 each and read their winning entries on June 18, 2007.

December 1, 2007 to January 31, 2008 mark the entry period. Please check OPN's website for all the contest rules at <http://home.comcast.net/~yake/opn.html>. The entry must follow all the rule provisions to be accepted. If you have questions or need additional information after checking the web site, call (360) 456-4862.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Fifty Years: Poems 1957-2007*

Knute Skinner

Salmon Poetry, County Clare, Ireland, 2007.

Review by Maggie Kelly

One of our WPA members, Knute Skinner, lives in Ireland. I emailed him to learn, among other things, what he might say about the importance of place in his writing. This request coincided with the debut of his latest book.

This book, a retrospective collection titled, *Fifty Years: Poems 1957-2007*, begins with his first published poem, "Stars." The poems are labeled as "Early," "Later," "Fictions," and "Recent." Most of the poems were taken from 13 books that were published at two-to-three-year intervals from 1965 to 2005.

The bulk of the Early poems were written while Skinner was still in the United States; the majority of the rest were written in Ireland.

Skinner's attachment to Ireland began in 1958, when his father died. With a small inheritance, Skinner traveled to Ireland. ". . . I fell in love," he wrote me, "with the people and the countryside. In a curious way, even though everything seemed strange, I felt at home." So two years after his first visit, he bought a small cottage, and has lived there ever since. By that time he had earned his PhD, but chose to raise a huge garden and "worked in a bog cutting turf to heat the cottage and feed the kitchen range."

Although his permanent home was in Ireland, Skinner taught at Western Washington in Bellingham, where he founded the *Bellingham Review*, and taught "for periods ranging from one to three months a year."

Regardless of which side of the Atlantic he was on, Skinner's work consistently demonstrates several qualities. One of them is his ability to tell a story through detail. Such is the case in "A Small Construction Site in County Monaghan," in which a young worker, like an eager horse in traces, wants to complete a job, but must wait while we watch his supervisor clean, fill, and successfully light his pipe. Suspense builds as the older man talks and tamps and finally can attend to the job.

The reader automatically assumes that the most important thing for the younger man was to learn his trade, but we learn in the last lines that it is patience that he really must learn. That sort

of wit, that twist, is another device Skinner has skillfully mastered. The ordinary becomes extraordinary, and life caught in a small moment is not what it had at first seemed to be.

Also pervasive in his poems is Skinner's sense of place. In answer to a question I had asked him, he wrote, "Place has had a very strong influence, as my neighbours pop up in my poems and a number of poems are set in the country side . . . I live just two miles from Liscannor Bay, five from the Atlantic, where the Cliffs of Moher rise dramatically to about 700 feet from the water. But it's probably the hillside meadows and the ancient stone walls enclosing cows and sheep that appeal most strongly to me."

Reading through this collection, one meets Skinner's neighbors and family, learns things such as how long it takes to draw a pint of ale, and contemplates with the poet what it is like to suddenly catch oneself getting older.

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For more information on Dr. Skinner's book, check out the WPA website or contact Skinner at [www.knuteskinner.com](http://www.knuteskinner.com) to learn details of the book's debut here in the States.

### *True North/Nord Vrai*

Jody Aliesan

Blue Begonia Press, Yakima, WA 2007.

Review by Maggie Kelly

"Being a poet is a job, a calling, a way of life (also a doom, a fate, and a curse). It's a function among other human beings, an absurd assignment. But somebody has to do it." This statement by Jody Aliesan midway through her book does much to describe what *True North/Nord Vrai* is about.

Aliesan works to map out her life, to find its true north. True north is a constant. That is because it is based on the geographic location of the North Pole. It is the north that is indicated on maps. This is in opposition to magnetic north, the north that your compass will read. Magnetic north is unstable, dependent on the shifting around of the iron-heavy molten earth core. .

In order to deal with all of the detritus of the "magnetic north" of her life, Aliesan is painfully frank, observant, sometimes almost clinical in her evaluation. The concept of true north also obtains

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(*True North* review continued)

meaning from Aliesan's fleeing northward into Canada when our country initiated armed conflict in Iraq.

Alieson takes the reader with her on both the internal and external journey that is her life. It is a journey extraordinary in scope. As publisher Jim Bodeen notes, poetry is the heart of the book. But it is also anecdotal memoir, political manifesto, and philosophy. Marginal notes, fragments, copies of her childhood drawings, notes and bibliography—so many kinds of communication collected between two covers that one would tire trying to count them all.

The publication of this book has had an interesting response and Jim Bodeen shares the following with us:

“Jody Aliesan left the U.S. three years ago. We expect that her longtime readers in the Pacific Northwest and farther afield will be interested in knowing what she's doing now, both personally and in her writing. A library service in New York ordered copies of *True North/Nord Vrai* immediately after we registered it with the Library of Congress. University Book Store in Seattle posted the book online two months ago and is collecting orders. Last week we received a request from a professor

of political science in Tennessee who heard of the book word of mouth. Canadians have become aware of Aliesan's presence in their midst; without our approaching them, the Vancouver public library and the city's independent and chain bookstores already offer her most recent books. Alieson has said she will not be crossing the border south again and that *True North/Nord Vrai* is such an exposure that personal appearances would be excessive. We will market her reticence and principle to pique curiosity and to focus readers on the book itself.”

More information can be found at <http://Bluebegoniapress.com>

## Olympia Poetry Network offers workshops

OPN offers free poetry workshops at the Olympia Timberland Library, 313 8th Ave SE, Olympia, WA , from 7 to 8:30 pm. (Take the city center exit, turn right on Plum, go to 8th, turn left and go uphill to the library.) The sessions are led by the following:

Dec 13: Marj Manwaring  
Jan 10: Patty Kinney  
Feb 14: Juniper White  
Mar 13: Kevin Miller  
Apr 10: Kay Mullen  
May 8: Allen Braden

## OLIO

The Distinguished Writers series of the Puget Sound Poetry Connection, 2nd Fri., Kings Books, Tacoma:

**Dec. 14th:** Ann Spiers

**Jan 11th** Emily Warn

**Feb 8** Nancy Pagh

**March 14** Lorraine Healy

**April 11th** Tod Marshall

**May 9th** Charles Potts.

Open Mike Poetry hosted by Christopher Luna  
7:00 pm Thursday **December 13**, 2007, Cover to Cover Books, 1817 Main Street, Vancouver (McLoughlin Blvd. & Main Street) For more info call 360-514-0358 or 360-694-9653 This month's featured reader: Judith Montgomery

Schedules for It's About Time reading series are on their website at: [www.itsabouttimewriters.homestead.com](http://www.itsabouttimewriters.homestead.com). This long-standing group has had to change venues several times and seems to have found a good home at the Ballard Branch of the Seattle Public Library, 5614 22nd Ave. N.W. Seattle, WA. Their first reading at this new venue is Thursday, **December 13**. Drop by if you can and wish them well in their new place.

The non-profit Pacific Northwest Writers Association

(PNWA) has a poetry category in its 2008 PNWA Literary Contest. The **deadline** for submission of three poems is **February 22nd**. The First Place winner will receive \$600, Second Place \$300, and Third Place \$150. Winners will be announced at the 2008 PNWA Annual Summer Conference on July 17 - 20, 2008, at the Hilton Seattle Airport Hotel. For more information about the Literary Contest, please visit the PNWA web site at <http://pnwa.org>, or contact WPA member Rob Jacques at 206-780-8338 or email him at [tauntingsong@msn.com](mailto:tauntingsong@msn.com).

Blue Begonia press has put out a call for manuscripts. Be sure to check out that announcement on [washingtonpoets.com](http://washingtonpoets.com) (our very own WPA site) or at <http://Bluebegoniapress.com> to learn the particulars.

Washington Poets Association is one of the sponsors of the Seattle Arts and Lectures 2008 Poetry Series to be held at Seattle Center's Intiman Theater. The SAL readers will be:

**Li-Young Lee** on Tuesday, February 19, 2008

**Eavan Boland** on Monday, March 3, 2008

**Lucille Clifton** on Monday, April 7, 2008

**Edward Hirsch** on Monday, April 21, 2008.

Subscriptions to the four-part series, priced at \$60, will go on sale December 5, 2007, at the SAL website, [www.lectures.org](http://www.lectures.org), or by phone, 206-621-2230.