

Dear Triad Poets,

Thank you for the privilege of judging your contest. I was impressed by the difficulty of your assigned theme—forgiveness—both because of the difficult emotional task that forgiveness is and because of the inherent difficulty in writing about it. As I read your poems, I was fascinated by the variety of your responses. There were many heart-wrenching stories, often family narratives surrounding those forgiven who included parents, living or already gone, some of them abusive, some only partially forgiven (one only forgiven 5 or 6%)! Likewise, siblings were forgiven, (one who got the farm another should have). Spouses, living and dying or already gone, were forgiven. An old lost love, rediscovered in an old snapshot, was forgiven. Pets made several appearances: a beloved cat was forgiven its taste for finches and a beloved sled dog who could not be saved was entreated to forgive its heartbroken master.

There were also many poems about the hardest of all people to forgive—the self, both “the selves we were/” and “the selves we’ve always been.” Sometimes only a part of the self needed forgiving: an aging body, one’s aging feet, an adolescent self who was an impossible teen-ager.

It seems to me there’s a lot of mystery about forgiveness—who can forgive and who cannot—and many of you took that mystery on. An old man, beaten severely for a crime he didn’t commit, finds it in his heart to wish for a lighter sentence for one of the perpetrators. But others “wear[s] the robe of self-righteousness” and cannot or will not forgive their offenders (including anti-vaxers)!

In short, you all met the difficult challenge and from many angles. I salute you for being undaunted. There were many, many, fine poems submitted, making the judging its own daunting task. Here’s the winners and honorable mentions and some of the reasons I chose them. Thank you for sharing your work with me.

Diane Kerr