

## 2025 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award Results and Poem

Diana Tokaji, a poet from Silver Spring, MD, is the winner of the 2025 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, sponsored by Carlow University's Madwomen in the Attic Creative Writing Workshops.

Named for the late poet and Carlow professor Patricia Dobler, who directed the Women's Center for Creative Writing and the Madwomen in the Attic workshops, this annual contest is open to women writers aged 40 and over who have not published a full-length book of poetry.

Tokaji's poem, "the migration of dahlia /," with its singular, distinct voice and its willingness to risk, distinguished itself from a field of 455 entries by 185 poets.

Poet Jenny Johnson, the judge of the 2025 Dobler Award, wrote this about Tokaji's poem:

"the migration of dahlia" by Diana Tokaji is a poem that makes stunning use of movement. I found myself admiring this poem immediately for its immersive music, material diction, and sweeping leaps through time and space—beginning with the word "go" and ending on the word "wind." Though a narrative is only gestured at I was emotionally invested in the poem's migrations. The voice in the poem invites us to descend and attend to every detail—to minerals like quartz and feldspar and likewise to attend to and witness embodied memories, however harmful. There's an urgency to this descent and a request to count all that could be overlooked, when the speaker says: "count the/dirt count each dirt count it." This lyric descent ultimately leads to flashes of assault, solidarity, and care between the speaker and dahlia. The poem is dynamic from start to end, closing with an image of mica—a mineral that mirrors, like the figures in the poem do, reflecting one another's grief.

As winner of the 2025 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, Tokaji will receive \$1,000; a public reading in Pittsburgh, PA, with judge Jenny Johnson in Spring 2026; round-trip travel and lodging for her public reading; and publication of her winning poem in *Voices from the Attic*.

2025's honorable mentions are:

- "On the Corner of Tremont Street and My Fourth Decade" by Kristin Gallagher from Pembroke Pines, FL
- "Ninth Grade" and "Touch-Me-Nots" by Tori Sharpe from Little Rock, AR

The remaining 2025 finalists are:

- "In the Begging Season" by Marion Brown from Bronxville, NY
- "A Homeland Denied" by Christa Bruhn from Fitchburg, WI
- "from *Lives of the Saints* (St. Lucy)" by Susan Cronin from Ann Arbor, MI
- "Thirty-Nine-&-a-Half-Foot Pole" by Corey Ginsberg from Avalon, PA
- "The Note I Leave" by A. Dearborn Goldsmith from Hingham, MA
- "IMAGINE" by Joyce Hernandez from Yakima, WA
- "Matrescence" by Laura Joyce-Hubbard from Highland Park, IL
- "October" by Amanda P. Smith-Hatch from Ontario, NY
- "Redemption, Eighth Grade" by Mercer Warriner from Valatie, NY

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**Diana Tokaji** is a performance artist who combines spoken word and choreography, featured in London, San Francisco, and the Capital Fringe Festival, where her shows won Pick of the Fringe. Her memoir, *Six Women in a Cell*, won Best Indie Book Award for Nonfiction in 2021. Her intimate resource book, *Surviving Assault: Words that Rock & Quiet & Tell the Truth*, was a Next Generation Book Award finalist. Winner of the Sonia Sanchez-Langston Hughes Poetry Prize judged by Richard Blanco, like many of her essays and poems, the awarded work reflected a social justice issue, in this case police brutality—“*Post-Assault Prescription When I Fear My Spirit Dying.*” Publications include, among others: *Bellevue Literary Review*, *The Mid-Atlantic Review*, *Solstice Literary* (2022 essay finalist), *Frontier Poetry* (2024 Tanka Award), *The Origami Poems Project*, and parenting rags, humor anthologies, feminist presses, and a bus in Virginia that displays her selected poem. Tokaji is a Certified Yoga Therapist supporting female and non-binary survivors of assault and trauma. Currently at work on eight books (yes, in the attic), titles include *Moose on a Red Swivel Stool (story poems)*; *Book of Essays Before I Die*; and *SPOKE: Poems of Squid, Cellmates, Love*.

**Jenny Johnson** is the author of *In Full Velvet* (Sarabande Books, 2017). Her poems and essays appear in *American Poetry Review*, *BOMB Magazine*, *The Rumpus*, and *The New York Times*. Her honors include a Whiting Award, a Hodder Fellowship, and an NEA Fellowship. She is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at West Virginia University, and she is on the faculty of the Rainier Writing Workshop.

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the migration of dahlia /

Diana Tokaji

go to the earth to the bottom of the earth go to the earth and count it /  
when you count it count people when you count it count scat count sand  
count layers count feldspar count quartz count the epistle left to your  
memory count the knuckles on each hand reaching skyward count  
the sky lying flat or face mashed into knowing count the  
dirt count each dirt count it

dahlia swims the black water / fights the night jungle  
she cleans the sports club / feeds her two children

when i am assaulted she caresses my left arm  
and we weep in our reflection with each other

have you ever seen slivers of mica like mirrors in mud /  
carried by water by wind

