

29 October 2015

Information about “The Kowit” provided by William Harry Harding, publisher of the *San Diego Poetry Annual*, and president of the San Diego Entertainment & Arts Guild:

The Steve Kowit Poetry Prize will be awarded annually to the poet whose poem best represents Kowit’s spirit: a combination of passion, close observation, humor, generosity, and irreverence.

Acclaimed poet, editor, and teacher Steve Kowit passed away on the second of April (2015) at the age of seventy-six. He was the author of five full-length collections of poetry, and a popular guide to writing and appreciating poetry, *In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet’s Portable Workshop*. The guide is used as a teaching manual in workshops, colleges, and universities across the country.

Numerous awards have been conferred on Kowit, including among others:

- National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry
- Two Pushcart Prizes
- Atlanta Review Paumanok Poetry Prize
- Oroborus Book Award
- San Diego Book Award
- Tampa Review Poetry Prize in 2006 for *The First Noble Truth*
- Theodor S. Geisel Award in 2007 for *The Gods of Rapture*

(To learn more about Kowit, please visit *Serving House Journal’s* “Memorial Issue” at <http://www.servinghousejournal.com/ContentsIssue12.aspx>.)

Submissions for “The Kowit” can come from any poet anywhere. The call for submissions will be made through a variety of channels, including *Poets & Writers*. A special email address will be created for submissions. An entry form will also be created, with guidelines. Submissions will be open from October 1 through December 31 annually—except for the inaugural award, for which submissions will be open from **July of 2016 through December 31, 2016**, to permit greater time for publicizing the award.

(All entrants may also submit other poems for publication in the *San Diego Poetry Annual*, without fee, following the normal submission guidelines. Please visit www.sandiegopoetryannual.com for details.)

A panel of judges, led by noted regional poets Al Zolynas and Jon Wesick, will choose the winning poem, second- and third-place work, and honorable mentions. The judges have agreed to serve without pay, but may receive a small stipend if fundraising is successful. Al Zolynas is a long-time dear friend of Steve Kowit’s. They

met when both taught at San Diego State University (SDSU). Jon Wesick is a Regional Editor of the *San Diego Poetry Annual* and the leader of a local monthly poetry group.

The winning poem will receive \$1,000. Second place = \$250. Third place = \$100. Honorable Mentions = no cash award. All of the selected poems will appear in print in a special section of the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. Winners will also receive a complimentary e-book copy of the annual.

A nominal entry fee (\$15 to \$20) will be charged. It will include one free e-book copy of the *San Diego Poetry Annual* and the ability of the entrant to buy unlimited copies of the softcover book at cost—the publisher will make no profit on these sales. All fees will be considered tax-deductible donations to the San Diego Entertainment & Arts Guild (SDEAG), a local 501(c)(3) public charity associated with the annual.

Poets of works selected will be invited to read at a special awards ceremony, to be held at the Student Art Gallery on the campus of Southwestern College (SWC). Live jazz music in the courtyard will be featured. The event will be coordinated by Vallo Riberto, director of the Art Gallery, and William Harry Harding, publisher of the *San Diego Poetry Annual* and chair of SDEAG.

The awards will be officially announced each March first, when the *San Diego Poetry Annual* is published. The awards ceremony will take place each April, which is National Poetry Month.

We envision the event as an important annual gala to highlight the involvement of major institutions like SWC in the local arts scene and to promote the arts in our region. At the ceremony, Mary Kowit, widow of the poet, or her representative, will make the presentations. We expect to invite local dignitaries, including political leaders, to join us at the event. We have received preliminary commitments to cover the event from KUSI and KPBS.

Fund-raising efforts are underway. Among the early donors to SDEAG for the award: American Book Award-winning poet Maria Mazziotti Gillan, editor of *The Paterson Literary Review*, which awards the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize annually, on which the Kowit Prize is modeled.

San Diego State University, which provides interns to help typeset, format, and proof the *San Diego Poetry Annual* each year, has also committed to support the Kowit Prize. We envision a separate scholarship prize for SDSU students, to be administered by SDSU, with winners published in either *Poetry International* (the SDSU annual) or the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. Though Southwestern College professor Francisco Bustos, a contributing poet and translator for the Bilingual Volume of the annual, and the SWC English Department, we hope to develop a similar scholarship opportunity at SWC. One scholarship per institution would be

awarded, each worth \$250 annually, plus an e-book copy of the annual and the opportunity to intern for either the annual or SDEAG.

We will be soliciting donations from corporations, arts councils, and individuals in the very near future. Preliminary discussions with the Chula Vista Performing and Visual Arts Grant commission (PVAC), handled through the city's library system, indicate a willingness to support the performance side of the Kowit Prize, which would take place at the gala at SWC each April.

Even with a PVAC grant, funding for the Kowit Prize will remain incomplete, so other sources will be sought on an on-going basis. SDEAG will segregate all donations to the Kowit Prize from its general fund, and no funds earmarked for the Kowit Prize will be spent for any other reason. An independent committee, drawn from the poetry and music communities, will be put in place to audit the integrity of these funds.

We believe that, because of who Steve Kowit was and how he represented the best in all of us, and because of those we have hand-picked to administer this award, and because of the involvement of two major academic institutions, "The Kowit" will instantaneously become the premier award in poetry for our region.

—San Diego Entertainment & Arts Guild, and *San Diego Poetry Annual*