

Surprise Valley Poetry Prize January's Winner

Editor's note: We are pleased to announce the Surprise Valley Poetry Prize, a nationwide contest in which we will publish a monthly winner throughout 2009. At the end of the year one grand prize winner will be chosen by our final judge, Julia Connor, Sacramento poet laureate. For guidelines and awards please call (530) 279-2099 or visit www.modocforum.org.

Going Out

By Marian Kaplun Shapiro

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

Genesis, 12:1

Even the givens are not to be counted on:

what time the sun rises;
whether that berry is edible or poisonous;
whether rains bring flowers or floods;
whether *yes* means *yes*, or *no*, or *maybe*;
whether a wedding gift -- and what? -- is welcome,
or insulting;

And how to translate all the signals. The smile,
the inquiry -- how are you? The kiss. The raised
eyebrow. How to eat -- with which utensil? With
which hand? What's for breakfast? What time
is dinner?

Walking through the corridors of the *correspondance* at a Paris metro station, I hear the thin, ice-droplet air, the Andes at 10,000 feet. I hear Brazilian waterfalls, Chinese rivers, tropical birds singing in an Egyptian sky. A pan-flute curls its pentatonic scale around us, hula-hooping Indian melodies around our waists and hips. Abram (now Abraham) stops.

He knows he left his father's house for this.

Marian Kaplun Shapiro of Lexington, Massachusetts is a licensed psychologist.