Event Title: Beyond the Brady Bunch: Reinventing the Poem of the American Family

Event Description: While poets have long delved into the complications of rendering family on the page, it can be challenging to navigate poems in the vein of parental devotion or childhood trauma when our families break the traditional mold. Whether caring for aging parents or raising kids, these narratives remain utterly familiar while their specifics—queer parents, neurodiverse children, transracial adoption—have never felt so varied. How do we find new ways to write the new families so many of us belong to?

Event Category: Poetry Craft and Criticism

Event Organizer and Moderator: Keetje Kuipers is a former Stegner Fellow and the author of three collections of poetry, including All Its Charms. Her poems have appeared in the New York Times, and in both the Pushcart and Best American Poetry anthologies. Keetje teaches at Hugo House in Seattle and is Editor of Poetry Northwest.

Event Participants: Geffrey Davis is the author of Night Angler, winner of the James Laughlin Award, and Revising the Storm, winner of the A. Poulin Prize. His honors also include fellowships from Bread Loaf, Cave Canem, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Vermont Studio Center, and the Whiting Foundation.

Erika Meitner is the author of 5 books of poems, including Holy Moly Carry Me, which won the 2018 National Jewish Book award, and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle award. She is an associate professor of English and creative writing programs director at Virginia Tech.

Oliver de la Paz is the author of five books of poetry. His most recent book, THE BOY IN THE LABYRINTH is published by the University of Akron Press. He is a founding member of Kundiman and teaches at the College of the Holy Cross and in the Low Res MFA Program at PLU.

Blas Falconer is poetry editor for The Los Angeles Review and teaches in the MFA at San Diego State University. His third poetry collection, Forgive the Body This Failure, was published in 2018. Awards include an NEA Fellowship and the Maureen Egen Writers Exchange.

Opening remarks and housekeeping announcements: Good morning, and welcome to Beyond the Brady Bunch: Reinventing the Poem of the American Family. Thank you all for being here today. Our panelists have written poems about queer parenthood, surrogacy, neurodiverse parenting, single-motherhood-by-choice, multi-racial family identity, and adoption. We represent a diverse cross-section of poets writing (and raising) the new American family, but we’re not the only ones:
Diverse families are hungry for representation, and diverse writers are longing for examples of how to write these daring new poems. Today we’ll discuss how we write the shape of our families onto the page and how that writing shapes us. The conversation will include notions of difference, race, ethical quandaries, & where family and poetry intersect with the personal / political. Our discussion will be influenced, of course, by what it’s been like to write these poems in Trump’s America, and some of us may want to address those awkward moments we’ve had when post-reading Q&A’s have foundered on the rocks of our complicated families.

**Participant Initial Remarks:**

Erika Meitner: I will talk about issues pertaining to writing about being a multiracial adoptive Jewish family in the Appalachian South. I'd like to talk about issues around writing about adoption, and the need to keep certain pieces of information about my child's background out of my writing. I'd also like to talk about issues around large-scale family trauma, and writing about that, as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. The ethics of writing about my kids as they get older is also something I'd like to address. Additionally, I'd like to talk about the complications of writing about my black son as a white mother, both from a personal and political perspective—including audience reception of my own work that deals with race. Lastly, I'm hoping perhaps to discuss things people should be sensitive about when they're asking questions of writers who are part of the adoption triad (adoptees, adoptive parents, or first parents).

Geffrey Davis: I'll likely be talking about my experiences with loading and unloading certain family terms/titles -- father, son, partner, &c. -- and exercising (or exorcising) their associated myths in poetry. I'll likely be talking about my ongoing transition between a poetics of surviving a certain sonhood and a poetics of (re)inventing a certain parenthood. Similar to Erika, I'd also like to address the ethics of writing about my child. And similar to Erika, I'd like to discuss the complicated literacy of race and ethnicity that my multiracial family continues to cobble together both on and off the page.

Oliver de la Paz: I’ll be talking about the issues of writing as a neurotypical parent and the dangers of speaking for my three children who are neurodiverse. The issues I center around are issues of taboo, privilege, and ethics centered around who gets to tell a story and which version of that story is allowable. I’m centering my narrative around my own work and my relationship to it during its production, after its publication, and now as I promote work that is clearly from a vantage point that I’ve evolved from.

Blas Falconer: I'll address adoption, race, ethnicity, and sexual identity to think about "otherness" within one's own family and the larger world. I imagine that, like Geffrey and Erika, I will consider the challenges of writing about my own children and the steps that I take (both during the writing process and after the poem is finished) to try and overcome ethical uncertainties.