

Ten Penny Players, Inc.

tenpennyplayers.org

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393 Saint Pauls Avenue, Staten Island, New York, 10304-2127

In 1967, Ten Penny Players was incorporated as a 501c3 not for profit organization. Barbara Fisher and the late Barbrah Messing established a children's theater in Manhattan's Chelsea community. Initial grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, IBM, the William C. Whitney Fund and Rockefeller Brothers Fund allowed them to produce shows. Years before it was a city policy, each audience member at the Clinton Playground recycled one empty aluminum can as the price of admission to Barbara's antipollution play, "Noisy City Sam".

After the birth of her son, Athelantis (Thomas) Perry, in 1969, Barbara Fisher wrote *Care Without Care* (Avon, 1972), detailing her experiences trying to gain medical intervention. Ten Penny Players' mission moved in a new direction; and Messing and Fisher organized a conference, "The Hurt Child and the Arts," held at Fordham University.

In 1975, Barbara, who holds a degree in Fine Arts from Hunter College, was given a letter press by Verna Gillis of Soundscape. The press allowed Ten Penny Players to begin publishing illustrated children's books and poetry. In 1976 Ten Penny exhibited its publications at the New York Book Fair under a tent in Bryant Park. From 1978-87 Barbara Fisher served as fiscal director for the annual fair. There she met Richard Spiegel, who was the book fair's small press poetry coordinator. Together they formed the Waterways Project of Ten Penny Players in 1979.

On July 4, 1979, at the old undeveloped South Street Seaport museum, in the park in front of Bowne and Co., Barbara Fisher and Richard Spiegel invited poets to a marathon reading from Walt Whitman while New York State poetry presses exhibited and sold their work. Those presses included: Abraham Marinoff Books, American Book Review, A Shout in the Street, BardPress, Contact II, Cross-Cultural Communications, Full Track Press, Glassworks, Home Planet News, Ithaca House, New Scribes, NYS Small Press Association, Nok Publishers, Poetry in Public Places, Red Dust, Shamal Books, Strawberry Press, Sunbury Press, Swamp Press, SZ/Press, The Smith, 13th Moon, and Tiresias Press.

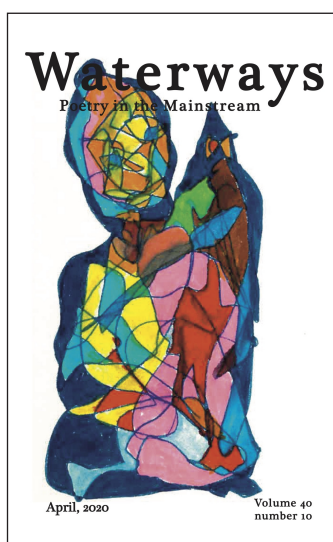
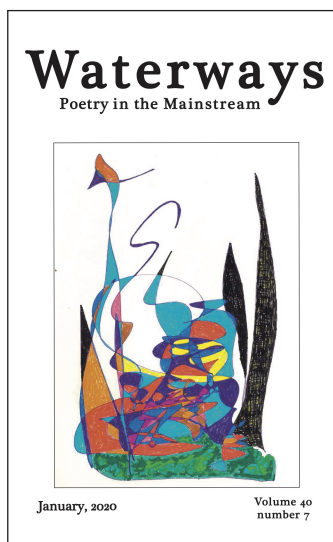
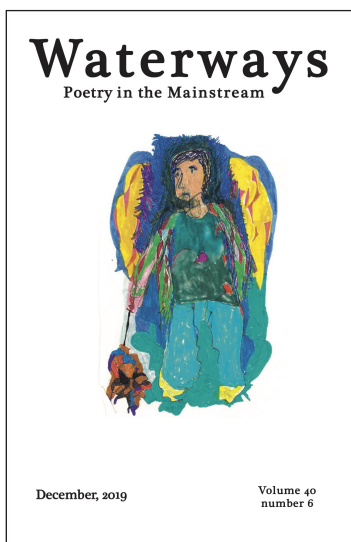


The first year of The Waterways Project was documented in the 1980 publication, “More Than A Gathering Of Dreamers: A Guide to Organizing & Exhibiting at Book Fairs” edited by Ed Hogan. The project grew from a desire to present the artistry of the word to New York residents in their own communities. Book fairs at piers and parks along the waterways reflected a concern for the aesthetics and ecology of New York’s coastline, rivers, and lakes. The South Street Seaport Museum, the National Maritime Historical Society, the New York Harbor Festival and the Department of Ports and Terminals made sites available without charge in 1979 for intergenerational poetry performance and exhibits. Venues included: Pier 13 in Staten Island on July 21st; Pier 84 at West 44th Street in Manhattan on July 28; Nott Avenue and 44th Drive in Queens on August 12; the North River Bulkhead in Greenwich Village (West Street and Bank Street) on August 19th; the Fulton Ferry Landing Brooklyn on August 25th and 26th; and on the Rondout Creek Riverbank in Kingston on September 8th and 9th.

Each event was documented with a poetry publication containing one poem from each reader. This publication became the basis for *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*, a poetry magazine, published 11 times a year without advertisements or prose. Sample copies of the magazine along with the list of themes are freely available at tenpennyplayers.org.

Subways Slams was Ten Penny Players’ 1981 citywide poetry project in collaboration with the Straphangers Campaign held at the subway station under the New York Public Library (42nd Street and Fifth Avenue). Ten Penny Players has consistently conducted programs for adults and children at the branches of the New York Public Library. Beginning in 1981 and lasting until 1995, Richard Spiegel conducted a year round weekly poetry workshop for adults at the Jefferson Market Library. Barbara Fisher’s children’s poetry workshop (1981-1984) at the same Greenwich Village library led to the student chapbook series, *In Search of a Song*.

The Streams anthologies, began in 1987, contributed to the resurgence of interest in poetry among New York City high school students. *Waterways* published more than 5,000 students. Over 400 teachers, administrators, and artists participated in gathering material for *Streams*. From 1989 to 2003 the anthologies were selected by the young adult librarians for The New York Public Library’s annual list of recommended Books for the Teen Age.



In 1989, needing a larger space, Ten Penny Players moved into its permanent home in the Stapleton community on Staten Island. This landmark house built in 1903, is home to a flock of cockatiels, a cat, and a dog. The building houses printing operations, administrative space, and archival storage of print publications.

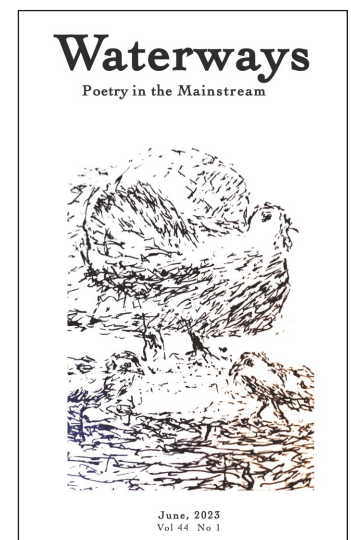
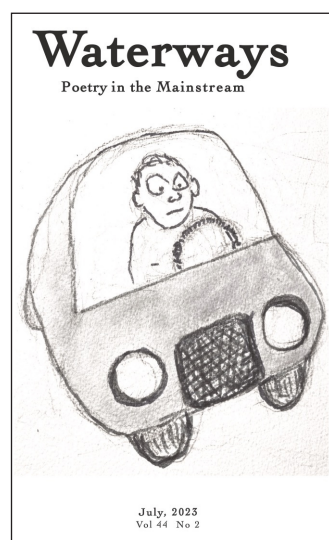
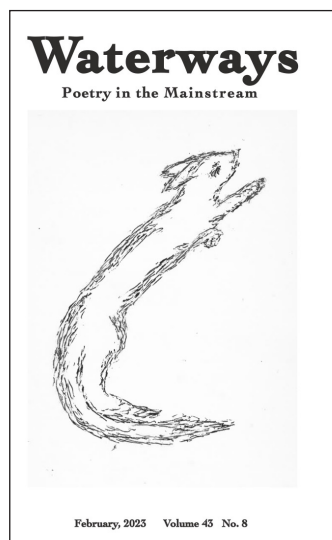
From 1990-2000 Ten Penny Players presented Bibliomania, a program open to all public, private and parochial schools on Staten Island. First presented at the St. George Branch of the New York Public Library, the audience overflowed the space and the program was moved to the Richmondtown Branch. Videotapes of Bibliomania programs were shared on YouTube and Staten Island Cable Television.

From 1990-2003 Ten Penny Players coordinated a Learn and Serve America project involving students at alternative, adult and continuing education schools and programs who participated in service learning activities and reflected upon them. Every May at various locations (Wave Hill, NYU, and the Prospect Park Picnic House), high school students participated in the annual Reflection and Response celebration of students who performed service learning activities. Poetry readings and performances by New York City high school students reflected on their service to the community in nursing homes, hospitals, day care centers and schools. Ten Penny Players published the student art as site-based anthologies which teachers used to motivate further reflection.

Throughout the 1990's, Ten Penny Players conducted professional development in Arts, Special Education, and Technology for teachers attending New York City's Alternative High Schools and Programs.

In 1994, Ten Penny Players began Volumes and Volumes of Poetry. This program was awarded recognition by the late David A. Bickimer, founder of the National Academy of Alternative Education and Director of The Promise of Learning Foundation.

Ten Penny Players Home page went online in 1998. An interactive writing program, Streams On Line (SOL), was developed by Ten Penny Players with support from the Center for Arts Education. The program was available through the Internet as an online writing workshop, beginning in the autumn of 2002, when it hosted 500 participants. (An archive of Ten Penny Players' publications is accessible without charge at www.tenpennyplayers.org).



Poets and artists who have worked with Waterways include Molly Barker, Enid Dame, Fielding Dawson, Ofelia Rodriguez Goldstein, Magdalena Gomez, Janet Griffith, Matthew Hejna, Ronald G. King, Odiumba Kwamdela, Donald Lev, Ellen Aug Lytle, Tom Mitchelson, Chuck Nechtem, D. Nurkse, Liza Jessie Peterson, and Louis Reyes Rivera.

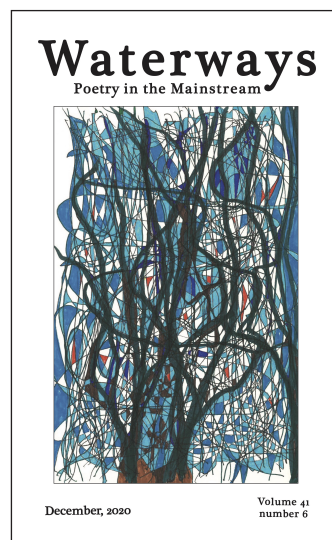
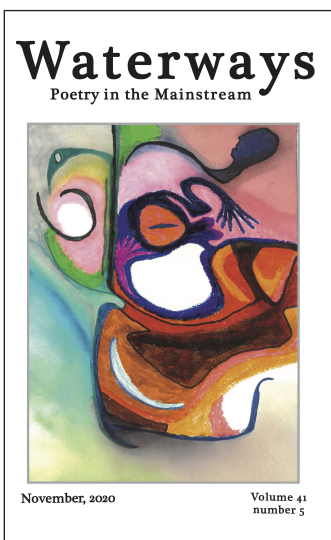
The program has received funding support from the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, Empire State Partnership Project, Center for Arts Education, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, NYS Department of Recreation, J M Kaplan Fund, New York Foundation for the Arts, Learn & Serve America, The New York Times Company Foundation, The Amsterdam News Educational Fund and others. Awards include the Mayors Special Arts Award for Literature, the Pace Promise of Learning Award, and the Association of Teaching Artists' Teaching Artist Distinguished Service to The Arts In Education Field Award in 2003.

Since 2000, Ten Penny Players has acted as partner with NYC's Department of Education in the establishment of a New Visions School in the Bronx. Ten Penny Players had presented arts residencies on Staten Island at P.S. 53, P25 (at SI Mental Health Society), the Children's Aid Society (at the Goodhue Center), Sunrise Senior Living (Staten Island and Sheepshead Bay).

Ten Penny Players continues to publish Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream, a monthly magazine featuring poets from around the world. The magazine has been in existence since 1979 and is part of the periodical collections of the New York Public Library, SUNY at Buffalo, Brown University, and is part of the EBSCO Information Services data base.

Richard Spiegel continues to administer, maintain and expand upon the original Ten Penny Players' website at www.tenpennyplayers.org.

On behalf of the farmers, Barbara Fisher continues Ten Penny Players' community outreach by photographing the participants at the St. George Green Market.



The Waterways Project has promoted populist poetry by reaching out to disenfranchised populations, encouraging a participatory literary democracy, building a prosocial sense of community among forgotten members of society (the recent immigrant, the impoverished, the homeless, the institutionalized, and the incarcerated), and providing a link to the American literary tradition. Waterways believes in the literary standard as expressed by Emily Dickinson: If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way? (Letters of Emily Dickinson)

Board of Directors

Barbara Fisher

Richard Spiegel

Charles L. Nechtem

Hannah Nadler

Paul Auerbach

Joan Porcaro

Staff

2023-2024

(all positions are held by nonsalaried volunteers):

Barbara Fisher, co-director (founder)

Richard Spiegel, co-director

Thomas Perry, outreach consultant