

## “Now That You’re Graduating What Do You Plan to Do with Your Life?”

I’m going to Northern California  
where I’ve never been  
to find sea-swashed  
seashells fainted by the sun  
then flip the subdued specimens  
to reveal streaked underbellies  
like eye shadow wrinkles  
purple and orange at the creases.

I’m going to slip into a Florentine chapel  
maybe Santa Maria del Fiore and  
sing a Vivaldi aria  
send vocal currents up through  
Brunelleschi’s columns until  
they collide at the hemispherical  
vantage point  
spearing echoes back at me.

Then I’ll dive into the Ionian and  
rest upon the hammock of the waves  
land in Santorini in time to hum goodbye  
to the blue caps and swim inland  
where I’ll find Dionysus’ Theatre  
in the shadow of the Acropolis  
and chant choral odes in the ruins  
until the deus ex machina rescues me.

I’m going to choose my own adventure  
write my own epilogue  
squeeze Time’s tiny waist  
til it cries crusty tears of sand  
like the ancestors of those  
cautious seashells hiding  
their pleasures from the world  
for fear of being coveted.

By Mariana L. Seda



(Left: Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, Italy; right: Santorini, Greece. Photo credits: stock.xchng.)

**T**his edition’s theme of higher education inspired many poets to confront the struggles and sacrifices made by students (and family members) in pursuit of a degree: overcoming poverty, learning a second language, and returning to school in midlife.

Poets also offered current students and new graduates advice and perspective about how to feel about higher education — from seeking it to celebrating graduation. The prime example of this long view comes from Mariana L. Seda’s overtly joyful and covertly defiant winning entry, “Now That You’re Graduating What Do You Plan to Do with Your Life?”

She takes that question so often asked of recent college graduates and stands it on its head in cataloguing an upcoming trek. Seda refuses to limit herself to what so many well-wishers mean by that query: “*Congratulations, college graduate! Well done! ... So what next? A job? Grad school? What?*”

Through vivid and surprising images, such as seashells’ “streaked underbellies / like eye shadow wrinkles / purple and orange at the creases,” she reflects a wisdom beyond the title question’s simply pragmatic stance. Her approaching adventures serve as much more than a post-graduation present before the next phase of her life. Indeed, Seda embodies what surely are the highest achievements anyone can hope that a college education brings: that sense of wonder, openness, and exuberance regarding the world’s possibilities as well as the sense of empowerment, freedom and intelligence to embrace those possibilities fully. —*Sandra Meek, poetry editor*

**Editor’s note:** The *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* poetry contest is open only to active Society members, published or unpublished. Submissions — one per entrant per issue — should be up to 40 lines long and must reflect the theme of the edition. One original, previously unpublished poem is selected from all entries to appear in the printed version of the magazine as a complement to the scholarly articles. Runners-up may be chosen to appear online. Because the winter edition will be devoted to those who have won Phi Kappa Phi monetary awards in the past year, the next poetry contest will be the spring 2010 issue. Theme and deadline have not yet been set. They’ll be announced on the Society Web site and in *Monthly Mentions* in the upcoming months and in the winter awards edition.



For runners-up, go online to: <http://www.PhiKappaPhi.org/Web/Publications/Forum/fall09/poetry.html>



**Mariana L. Seda** (Iowa State University) graduated summa cum laude from Iowa State University in May with a bachelor’s degree in English Literary Studies and a minor in Performing Arts. She works as a professional actor throughout the Midwest and plans to move to California with her fiancé next year to continue pursuing her career goals and furthering her education. Email her at [mariana.seda@gmail.com](mailto:mariana.seda@gmail.com).



**Sandra Meek** is the author of three books of poems, *Nomadic Foundations* (2002), *Burn* (2005), and her most recent, *Biogeography*, the 2006 winner of the Dorset Award (Tupelo Press, 2008), as well as a chapbook, *The Circumference of Arrival* (2001). She also is the editor of an anthology, *Deep Travel: Contemporary American Poets Abroad* (2007), which was awarded a 2008 Independent Publisher Book Award Gold Medal. Her poems have appeared in *Agni*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, *Conjunctions*, *Green Mountains Review* and *The Iowa Review*, among other publications, and she has twice been awarded Georgia Author of the Year. Meek also once served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Manyana, Botswana (1989-’91). An active Phi Kappa Phi member since her induction in 1986 at Colorado State University, she is a cofounding editor of Ninebark Press, Director of the Georgia Poetry Circuit and Professor of English, Rhetoric, and Writing at Berry College in Mount Berry, Ga.