

## Press Release and Onix Information



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**Author** – Susan Ioannou

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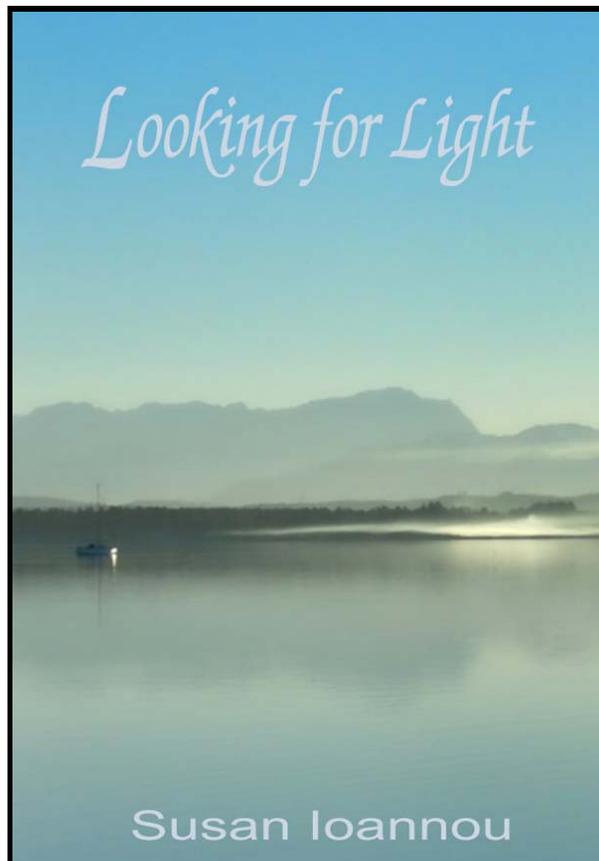
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## Blurbs:

### 25 words

*Looking for Light* ponders how to create beauty and meaning in our troubled world, considering the arts, spirituality, even particle physics, and life's ultimate transformation.

### 150 words

In a deeply troubled world, how is it possible to *Make it beautiful*, as her Muse demands, Susan Ioannou asks in her fourth major poetry collection, *Looking for Light*. In the attempt, she follows the artistic imagination's travels as far as Italy's Bagni di Lucca, fantasizes about a poetry class romance, feels the intimacy between sculptor and subject, and swirls with a dancer's passion. Part 2, *Beyond Knowing*, turns inward, blending spirituality, nature, and the paradoxes of particle physics to puzzle about the experience of God and the mysterious forces that brought us into being and invisibly sustain us, body and soul. Part 3, *Passing Seventy*, explores transformation, both physical and emotional, as the final years of life approach. Not only do ageing's challenges of failing health and family loss reshape our familiar perspective on the present, they drive a larger vision of what may come after the inevitable happens.

### 352 words

In a deeply troubled world, how is it possible to create beauty and meaning? This is the question haunting Susan Ioannou as her fourth major collection, *Looking for Light*, opens. As a poet she must try to reconcile the insistence of her Muse to *Make it beautiful*, with disturbing spectres, such as a homeless man struggling to warm himself on a sidewalk grate. In an attempt to find such a balance, Part 1 follows the travels of the artistic imagination, from an idealized memory of Italy's Bagni di Lucca where the 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet Percy Bysshe Shelley summered, to a train journey through eastern Canada's Matapedia Valley symbolically uniting English, Native, and French. Closer to home, a romantic fantasy is inspired by a handsome student in a poetry class, a sculptor's good intentions challenge—and are challenged by—her subject, and a passionate Latin dancer swirls after perfection. In Part 2, *Beyond Knowing*, Ioannou's questioning turns inward. Blending spirituality and an engagement with nature with the paradoxes of particle physics, she puzzles about the idea and experience of God and the mysterious forces that brought us into being and invisibly sustain us, body and soul. Who would be a God? she asks, but if so, what kind of God? The quest to resolve troubling contradictions ends with a surrealistic, pinball-like balance sheet dream. In Part 3, *Passing Seventy*, Ioannou explores the transformation, both physical and emotional, as the final years of life unfold. With humour and compassion, she writes of the shocks brought by the mounting years: delight in finding oneself still alive on waking, the bizarre disorientation caused by a mini stroke, new stresses building despite the urge to prove oneself to grown children as still agile and able, and the consequent awakening to the struggles of even the tiniest life, a bug trapped in a bathtub. As the prospect of death and mourning draws nearer, there is a coming to terms with what is truly of value, as well as a new awareness that transcends individual human life with a larger vision of what may come after the inevitable ultimately happens.

## Reviews about *Looking for Light*:

Riddle Me This: Hypophora and the question as a device is the poetry of Susan Ioannou

For his part, People's Poet Chris Faiers writes in praise of Susan Ioannou in his introduction to her book of poems *Looking for Light*, calling her one of Canada's "best and wisest poets". I have no quarrel with that description and there is much evidence within the covers of this particular volume to demonstrate what Faiers sites as "true poetry ... beauty, knowledge, and song."

In that her opening poem "Make it Beautiful" ends with the question: "What does it mean to honour the Muse?" and in that this opening poem contains nine questions, and in that I found myself noticing the frequency with which Ioannou employs the question mark in her poems, I found myself sufficiently intrigued to go on a question mark hunt. If I am correct in my count there are ninety-four question marks in forty-nine poems. There are twelve poems that do not contain a question. Interestingly, the closing poem, "The Choice" contains not a single question and it ends with something of a lovely and profound and lyrical declaration: "for underneath *in-vain* and *must-not-do/* is that catch-nail - love - / words hang themselves upon." In his blurb on the back cover poet Ron Charach selects this line as one to highlight in his praise of this book.

Sometimes these questions are simply questions asked of herself, and the answers are left open ended. Sometimes these questions are metaphysical, sometimes rhetorical, sometimes as it is with hypophora, they are followed by an answer, and sometimes we are left to infer an ongoing mystery. She does not shy away from the big questions: "Who would be God?" "In simple things/ do we touch God ..." "- how can a single Spirit/ watch over it all?" "So could/ the black hole of death/ reverse if God blinked?" "How solid can our big world be/ flickering in quantum space?" In many of these poems she confronts the question of mortality and the mystery of individual incarnation. "Is that how the last/ moment will feel: / a distant tiny light,/ awaited star?" She challenges science, that body of received knowledge - what we might call the latest best guess - and what we might remember is only one way of looking into the mystery. In her poem "God Particle," she begins by stating, "I do not believe in the Higgs Boson," and coming to a declaration of belief in the closing stanza, "I believe in the ancient sages'/ music of the heavenly spheres/ concentrating to a solid/ in an immeasurable/ slowing of motion."

Reading this book involves being invited on something of a journey, a quest for meaning. In the opening section of the book we travel to distant places, sometimes in the company of great poets like Shelley, revived in landscape and architecture. In *Beyond Knowing*, section two of this collection we are invited to question the meaning of existence, what Ioannou refers to as "- my uneasy wonder?" In *Passing Seventy* part three, we look into the aging self and wonder "... is it/ our own dreaming/ undreaming we exist?" And the grail at the end of this romance might be language itself, as she writes in her coda, "...I have chosen words to be my light/ and darkness too". This journey is well worth taking. We pose these questions in service of deep need. And although we may not receive an answer, still we go looking for the light. And along the way we shine the light of language and see further into the darkness than might otherwise not be possible.

**John B. Lee,**  
*Poet Laureate of Brantford in perpetuity,*  
*Poet Laureate of Norfolk County for life,*  
*Author of over 80 books.*

This collection questions the role of poetry and art in a world increasingly troubled with violence, injustice and inequality. These poems speak across the gulfs of guilt and moral paralysis with affirmations of love and the belief that art goes beyond “bronzed surfaces” to resonate with compassion and human connection.

*Jannie Edwards,  
Author of *Falling Blues*,  
Frontenac House*

There is more true poetry, more beauty, knowledge and song – direct transmissions from Susan's Muse – in each of the three sections of this collection than in 99% of the entire typical Canuck poetry offering. Miss devouring this book and you'll miss the heart, soul and wisdom of one of Canada's best and wisest poets.

*Chris Faiers,  
Poet, Publisher, Editor  
First recipient of the Milton Acorn People's Poetry Medal*

In our world so damaged, so desperate, and so beautiful, “What does it mean to honour the Muse?” asks poet Susan Ioannou in her new collection, *Looking for Light*. “I have chosen words to be my light and darkness too,” she writes in the epilogue, and I am so grateful that she did. I first discovered Susan Ioannou in 2007 while searching for a poem I could use to compose a piece that was to be performed in the old, restored Britannia Mine in Squamish, B.C. I found her book *Looking Through Stone: Poems about the Earth*, and chose “Oracle Stones”. That evocative poem was filled with gorgeous imagery of stones, pebbles, gems, the sea, and “a sparkling Trickster”. Nine years later, *Looking for Light* blends Ioannou’s considerable knowledge of physics and nature, with her lyrical, imaginative language and searching spirit to ask, “Where is the radiant figure/I crave, to comprehend,/to shiver to accept/the brutal amid beauty,/love in spite of evil/—my uneasy wonder?” We learn of a painter, a sculptor, a Latin dancer; we time-travel with Shelley, conjure the Far North “—how can a single Spirit watch over it all?” Ioannou touches everything: beauty, love, death: “Is that how the last moment will feel: a distant tiny light, awaited star?” Ioannou laments all that we have ruined and lost, but never abandons us to hopelessness. “Contentment is imperfect, truth a cracked glass.” And though we “wrest in things we cannot recognize”, there is redemption, transformation, and this gifted poet’s prayer, “may you glimpse infinity’s *more/as* peace cracks you wide/open into its light”. *Looking for Light* is not only a welcome new collection of poetry from Susan Ioannou. This book will accompany me on my own journey, already a trusted friend.

*Leslie Uyeda, composer,  
Vancouver, B.C.*

In this engaging third period work, poet and career editor Susan Ioannou relentlessly questions the adequacy of words to capture the gleanings of her keen-eyed, open-eared travels through space and time—even words that hang themselves upon the catch-nail of love.

*Ron Charach,  
author of *cabana the big*  
and *Prosopagnosia**

Susan Ioannou seems to have found the light she was looking for! This collection positively gleams with luminosity. From brief four-line snippets to lengthy three-page narratives, her wise insights reflect a fine writer at the peak of maturity. Whether she is pondering the complexities faced by God, or considering age and the passing of time, Ioannou's camera eye focuses on our humanity and the road we are all traveling. A beautiful, finely-crafted volume of poetry.

*Sheila Martindale,  
poetry editor of Canadian Author for fifteen years;  
now editor of Island Writer, Victoria, B.C.*

Susan Ioannou's latest collection *Looking for Light* includes poems about travel, artistic inspiration, the wilderness, aging, God, and the mysteries of existence. Her carefully crafted poems are sensuous, perceptive, revelatory and provocative. Poetry lovers will want to read them again and again.

*R. Franklin Carter.  
An editor in Toronto*

I first discovered the beautiful poetry of Susan Ioannou when I stumbled across her collection *Looking Through Stone: Poems About the Earth*. I was making paintings of stones and rock faces, and Susan's words resonated through each brushstroke. From her poem *Why*, Susan writes: "Great ages echo and shiver / playing themselves out / within our puny bones."

In her new collection, *Looking for Light*, Ioannou gives strength and form to the life experiences our puny bones endure. She continues her process of writing poetry as meditation, drawing details of everyday life, and in doing so she suggests that perhaps there is greater meaning to our existence than we might imagine. She pushes us to stretch our mind and consider other places, other people, and life beyond the television or the thought boxes we lock ourselves into.

The collection's first section, *Make It Beautiful*, reveals a travelogue for the senses and the soul. Ioannou invites her readers to look beyond the daily serving of horrors to find beauty in words, nature, a pelican, strange places, dramatic weather. Her poems honour her muse, her friends, and Pollyanna.

In Part 2, *Beyond Knowing*, Ioannou shares the deep, rich curiosity about life that makes her work so thoughtful. She makes no claim to having all the answers—like any great poet—she dangles the words in front of our scanning eyes like charms on a bracelet, each word imbued with special meaning and memory of what has been and what might be.

As a woman turning 60, I was most drawn to Ioannou's third chapter, *Passing Seventy*. This group of nineteen poems is a lyrical primer on things to come. She contemplates change, loss, grief and marvels at life as her themes. Again, she peppers her reader with poignant questions, "What else can we do? / Listen to weeds? / Sniff a path among stars? / Feel cold imperfection in a drop?"

Or this magnificent moment: "What if, in a little spider / scurrying over its glistening web, / a million years into the future / I have glimpsed myself?"

Ioannou's keen curiosity has provided her readers with another collection that will inspire and contribute to anyone's search for life's meaning and wholeness. She does not disappoint and graciously leaves us with a heartfelt wish: "may you glimpse infinity's more / as peace cracks you wide / open into its light."

*Annis Karpenko,  
artist, Executive Director of  
Visual Arts Mississauga*

Initially, I opened Ioannou's *Looking for Light* just to catch a preview—the next thing I knew I was reading the Epilogue. Seriously, it's that brilliant. She begins by questioning if it is possible for a poet to "Make it Beautiful" in our less-than-perfect world: "... how to scribble words about beauty / despite some fanatic's fuse, / a child's swollen belly, or bullets? / What does it mean to honour the Muse?" Poetry, art and artists past and present segue into a whole as she opines: "for those who create and guide / are never gone / but in their art and love / live on." In Part 2, 'Beyond Knowing', Ioannou strives to make it meaningful, asking: "Where is the radiant figure / I crave, to comprehend, / to shiver to accept / the brutal amid beauty, / love in spite of evil / — my uneasy wonder?" and mischievously demands: "Who would be a God?": "Isn't mere mortal fussing enough of a headache / —to dig from clean laundry two navy socks that match / and remember not to sprinkle the cactus / except every fifteenth day, / let alone halt wars, seed famines, / and recharge a global economy?" Immersing herself intuitively in the physical landscape, she demonstrates a wide range of interests—science, geology, even particle physics, unequivocally stating: "I do not believe in the Higgs Boson"—concluding: "I believe in the ancient sages' / music of the heavenly spheres / concentrating to a solid / in an immeasurable slowing of motion." 'Passing Seventy', Part 3, makes it intensely personal. Sensitively and unsentimentally she addresses illness, death and whatever comes next: "... nothing can slow your step, nor halt / your soft dissolve into air // a shiver not quite caught in the eye / — yet there // as if in an atom's whirling spaces / is fullness beyond prayer // and aching after your absence / we touch you everywhere."

Susan Ioannou's clear and concise poems delineate a deeply idiosyncratic odyssey and, as is true of all such intimate and transformative meanderings, *Looking for Light* gently and inextricably pulls you full circle into her self: "...then I am told that giving all to words / is worth the harm // and do not even mind / for underneath *in-vain* and *must-not-do* // is that catch-nail — love / words hang themselves upon." Making it beautiful indeed.

**K.V. Skene**  
*Author of five titles including,*  
*Love in the (Irrational) Imperfect*

Susan Ioannou's *Looking for Light* is a book of many strengths. Its structure carries us surely and gracefully ever inwards through its first two sections, dealing with travel experiences and then with some of the profound existential questions raised by the world that we've explored—only to focus its third section with laser-like intensity on the more personal matter of aging and what Philip Larkin called "the only end of age." Its depiction of places and persons renders them in full colour, all the more poignantly in face of the partings that are to come. And its deft handling of that primary instrument of poetry, metaphor, wins an often open-mouthed admiration, as "when the sun slips / its bloodied fin / under the waves," or when light is described as "like a clean sheet / the sky pulls taut," or when on a dark lake "the moon / unbinds her braids." However, I felt the strongest aspect of the collection was its use of a two-letter word: "we." These are not solipsistic poems that lose their focus in the first-person singular, nor is their use of the plural in any way preachy. Rather, Ioannou looks at life from vantage points which we (not a rhetorical figure but a real mutuality) can all share, reaching out to her readers and validating their joys and fears as reassuringly characteristic of life in the early twenty-first century. Read *Looking for Light* and join in the looking, seeing in its "we" both a mirroring and an enlightenment. A beautiful and moving work.

**John Reibetanz,**  
*poet*

## Reviews About Previous Books:

### **About *Clarity Between Clouds*, Goose Lane Editions, 1991**

“Ioannou sings the praises of human nature and its strong ability to learn through hardships...an experienced poet who possesses a gift for expressing emotions that surface in the most unexpected situations. The most ordinary details of life, such as balance sheets and kitchen decor, become inquiries into human thought and reflections of very real, accessible feelings...a thoroughly enjoyable, highly recommended light read.” – **Carol Holland**, *Vox Magazine*

### **About *Clarity Between Clouds*, Goose Lane Editions, 1991**

“Susan Ioannou’s *Clarity Between Clouds* celebrates the powers of light and sight...In each case the moment inspires a luminous apprehension associated with love, grace, ease, or certainty. At their best, the verses seem effortlessly melodic...I am especially impressed by the assurance of these poems, which observe but do not strain or moralize.” – **Jon Kertzer**, *Canadian Literature*

### **About *Where the Light Waits*, Ekstasis Editions, 1996**

“Those who are familiar with seeing Ioannou’s poetry in the periodicals and anthologies over the past two decades might be surprised to learn that this is only her fourth book. Her work has appeared in most of the major literaries in this time. Small wonder, then, that only a few years after publishing *Clarity Between Clouds*, she can follow with another superb collection. What we are seeing is the quiet unfolding of a substantial and excellent body of work by someone who belongs in the company of our most skilful poets.” – **Ted Plantos**, *People’s Poetry Letter*

### **About *Where the Light Waits*, Ekstasis Editions, 1996**

“Much like the short stories of Alice Munro in which the ordinary is made extraordinary, Susan Ioannou’s poetry elevates simple nature and everyday experience into the realm of the wondrous and sublime. Commonplace sights and events trigger inquiries into the spiritual, and tiny miracles are everywhere, waiting to be discovered...In her poems there is no separation between inner and outer landscapes, only a dynamic interaction, an intertwining. By immersing ourselves in the nature that surrounds us, we plumb our own inner depths, journeying further into ourselves...Through elegant imagery, Ioannou paints a world in which each small thing, each moment is whole and beautiful, to be cherished for its simplicity, yet exists also as a miracle of complexity, a piece of a larger intricate puzzle. The ability to express this paradox is the hallmark of Ioannou’s immense talent.” – **Nicole Hesse**, *University College Alumni Magazine*.

### **About *Where the Light Waits*, Ekstasis Editions, 1996**

“These wide-ranging poems, which take for inspiration storms and gardens as well as pulsars and galaxies, mostly begin or end with people growing older or observing youth, blending the rhythms of nature’s cycles with those of the human body and of human life...They are thought-provoking to be sure.” – **Chris Knight**, *Canadian Book Review Annual*

### **About *Looking Through Stone*, Your Scrivener Press, 2007**

“...uses geology as the basis for reflections on self, soul, and society...each mineral and metal is a ‘philosopher’s stone,’ a touchstone, permitting and supporting the poet’s speculation.” – **George Elliott Clarke**, *The Chronicle Herald*

## About *Looking Through Stone*, Your Scrivener Press, 2007

“Ioannou’s perspective on the larger human contexts of minerals is sweeping, convincing. She ranges through ancient history, folklore, mythology, medicine, spirituality, technology, finance, and environmentalism, and she leaves no stone unturned...Ioannou’s best poems crystallize imagery and meaning into finely cut and glimmering stones. What holds the book together, therefore, is not its multiple and occasionally contradictory perspectives on the purposes of minerals, but rather the poet’s unswerving fidelity to earth and its language. As she listens and writes, we miraculously hear the stones speak, and ‘their syllables bristle and throb / more than full of themselves.’ ” – **Monika Lee, *Vallum Magazine***

## Foreword from *Looking for Light*:

I’ve known Susan Ioannou and her poetry for well over three decades. All, all the way back to our mutual friendship with the Cabbagetown Kid himself, Ted Plantos. Susan was the Associate Editor with Ted’s mag, *Cross-Canada Writers’ Quarterly* (later just *Writers’ Quarterly*). *WQ* was an important, seminal litmag, a people’s poetry oriented mag, which contrasted with the stuffy hothouse mags produced by Canadian universities. The best, and possibly some of the worst, poets nationwide sent their poetry, screeds, dreams and letters to *WQ*—a creative experience I’d consider far more nourishing than a year or so spent in post grad writing classes, although Susan has taught a few of these along her literary path as well.

Susan has also taken the path few of her contemporaries have chosen. Susan chose a close relationship with her Muse, while others, often with lesser abilities, pursued whatever fleeting moments pass for fame in CanLit. She doesn’t have a list of thirty or forty personal books weighing down her bookshelves; instead she’s waited for her Muse to breathe slyly in her ear, and Susan has always listened attentively. In addition to publishing only her truly inspired poems, Susan did the unheard of, and published an almost equal number of books on the creative process, featuring many of her contemporaries as exemplars in these publications. I was honoured to be among the many to have had their poems chosen by Susan, and for this I’m ever grateful.

So to her collection. This is the summation of a poetry elder, who has now passed the milestone of seven decades, a time when the partyers, glad-handers and professional academics have left the stage, and the Muse’s soft whisperings are but a forgotten memory. There is more true poetry, more beauty, knowledge and song—direct transmissions from Susan’s Muse—in each of the three sections of this collection than in 99% of the entire typical Canuck poetry offering. Miss devouring this book, and you’ll miss the heart, soul and wisdom of one of Canada’s best and wisest poets.

*Chris Faiers,  
Poet, Publisher, Editor  
First recipient of the Milton Acorn People’s Poetry Medal*

## About the Author:

**Susan Ioannou’s** fiction, articles, and poetry have appeared across Canada. She is the winner of an Okanagan Short Story Award, twice a finalist in the CBC Literary Awards, and the recipient of a Works in Progress and Writers’ Reserve grants from the Ontario Arts Council. Some of her poems have been translated into Hindi and Dutch, and others set to music for performance in both Canada and Norway. For many years she was Associate Editor of *Cross-*

*Canada Writers' Quarterly/Magazine* and also led writing workshops for the Toronto Board of Education, Ryerson Literary Society, and the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies. Currently, she directs the online poetry course *Lessons in Writing the Poem*. She is a longstanding member of the League of Canadian Poets and the Writers' Union of Canada. Her website is <http://www3.sympatico.ca/susanio/>

### **Chapbooks:**

*Spare Words*, Pierian Press  
*Coming Home: An Old Love Story*, Leaf Press  
*Who Would Be a God?* (with Lenny Everson), Passion Among the Cacti Press  
*The Merla Poems*, Wordwrights Canada

### **Poetry:**

*Clarity Between Clouds*, Goose Lane Editions  
*Where the Light Waits*, Ekstasis Editions  
*Looking Through Stone: Poems about the Earth*, Your Scrivener Press

### **Children's Novels:**

*A Real Farm Girl*, Hodgepog Books  
*The Hidden Valley Mystery*, Wordwrights Canada

### **Fiction:**

*Nine to Ninety: Stories across the generations*, Wordwrights Canada

### **Nonfiction:**

*A Magical Clockwork: The Art of Writing the Poem*, Wordwrights Canada  
*Holding True: Essays on Being a Writer*, Wordwrights Canada