

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

Newsletter of the Poetry Society of Virginia

MARCH 2014

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Winter will soon end no matter where you live! Spring is one of the most inspiring triggers for poetry, so best wishes for your writing.

Our organization has a full slate of events this spring. On March 21, in Fairfax, Margaret Mackinnon will read from her award-winning book *The Invented Child*. The annual contest presentation will take place in Richmond on April 18. A few judges have already read their packet and put the results in the mail. We had fewer categories but more overall entries! Here are the statistics from the contest committee:

2012 — 1,558 poems entered from 176 individuals

2013 — 1,699 poems entered from 177 individuals

2014 — 1,531 poems entered from 176 individuals

2015 — 1,883 poems entered from 141 individuals

Many thanks to members of the contest committee—Anne Whitelaw, Joan Mazza, Basira Harpster, Derek Kannemeyer, and Kim Drew Wright. Also, many thanks to the Student Contest committee—Florence Martin and Trilla Ramage. We'll report those statistics once compiled. The entries have been sent to those judges.

In May, we will have the annual Poetry Festival on May 15 & 16th. This year our featured reader is Dorianne Laux. Additionally, Dorianne and Joe Millar will conduct a workshop along with many other talented workshop presenters. Be sure to sign up for this one. Thanks to Ed Lull and Mary DeLara for organizing this excellent event. More details as we get closer.

So as you can see, many poets have worked hard during the winter to give us a glorious spring. Hope to see you at one or more of these events.

Guy Terrell



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What Publishers Want Writers To Know

By Sally Zakariya

Want to get published? Many writers these days choose to self-publish their work, but having your work published by an established publishing company generally carries more weight with reviewers, bookstores, and other readers.

Here are some tips for writers from publishers themselves, starting with the most basic.

1. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite. And show your work to someone you trust to give you honest advice. Is your novel or story or essay interesting? Well written? Original? What should be changed? What should be added or cut? Or should the manuscript, sadly, be put out of its misery altogether? (Don't despair: You can write more.)

2. Research publishers. Before you submit a manuscript to a particular publisher, ask yourself: Is this publisher a good fit for my work? Check the publisher's website to see representative titles and gauge what general audience the publisher targets. It's also a good idea to read lots of works in your chosen genre so you'll know what you're up against.

3. Consider hiring an agent. You don't have to have a literary agent, but you might find that an agent opens doors to publishers who might not otherwise be interested. A good agent knows the market and can help you target the right segment of your audience.

4. Send a query letter. Don't send your entire manuscript unsolicited. It will just end up in the publisher's "slush pile" and might be rejected without even being read. Instead, send the publisher (or agent) a carefully crafted one-page letter briefly describing your work—genre, intended audience, and a few words about the content.

5. Don't give up if your idea is rejected. Even the best writers have work rejected sometimes, so consider your first rejection letter (or email) a membership card in an elite club. Post the rejection on your bulletin board for motivation, and keep on sending out query letters.

6. Be prepared for questions and edits. "We like your manuscript, but we'd like to talk to you about some changes ..." Try not to be defensive. It's your baby, and it's perfect in your eyes, but editors and publishers have the experience to know what works in the book market and what doesn't. Revisions and changes are almost inevitable—and besides, you can be proud that you've already cleared the first big hurdle to publishing.

7. Don't expect a big paycheck. Sure, big-time novelists often get hefty advances on their next book, but if you're new at the game, recognize that the publisher is taking a gamble on you. Expect to be given a contract that specifies when you will get royalties and what percentage of sales they will amount to. It's not uncommon for publishers to delay royalties until the up-front costs of printing and distribution have been covered.

8. Brush up on copyright. The publisher's contract will include legal language about rights to the work. It might read something like this:

I, (your name), assign to (name of publisher) all publishing rights to my work tentatively titled (title of work). The assignment of rights includes the copyright and the right to obtain all renewals, reissues, and extension of any such copyright in the United States and in any foreign country. Pursuant to the principle of "fair use," I warrant that the work is original and does not violate the copyright of any person or entity.

It's to your advantage to have an attorney review the terms of the publisher's contract. Be sure you know what rights you are assigning to the publisher and what rights you retain.

9. Help market your book. Your publisher will have established marketing and distribution plans, but be prepared to do your part, too. That might mean helping identify opinion-makers in your field, adding names to the publisher's standing press list, or giving book talks at local schools, libraries, and bookstores. Having your book published—as opposed to publishing it yourself—means you gain the advantage of the publisher's marketing and distribution expertise, but be ready to lend a hand.

10. Give your publisher first refusal on your next work. You might not be ethically or legally bound to do this, but remember: The publisher took a gamble on you, so it would be nice to return the favor.

A Note from Michelle O'Hearn

As a life member, I'm hoping to drum up some support from fellow PSV members on a couple of things.

1. Please support your me by hitting the "LIKE" button on MiCKi's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/mickiohearn>

2. If you're in the Charlottesville area, stop by C'Ville Coffee on Wednesday 3/11/2015 at 7:00pm - 8:30pm for MiCKi's CD Release party and performance. \$2.00 cover with light refreshments and snacks. Full fare and beverages available on-site.

I'm also interested in hosting a Poetry Salon in the Orange / Spotsylvania area and have a few poets nearby who are interested in attending. I'd love to host this at the Wilderness Branch library on Flat Run road, as they have been gracious with other writing/poetry events I've been involved in. A weekend, monthly schedule would be great to start, if that's something folks might be interested in.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions and if you need additional information regarding hosting a salon.

All the best,

Michelle "MiCKi" O'Hearn

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PSV NEWSLETTER EDITOR NEEDED

Melissa Watkins Starr will no longer be editing the PSV newsletter due to medical concerns in her family. If you would like to volunteer for this position, please contact Guy Terrell at guy.terrell@earthlink.net.

The Coda

In that small sanctuary
of his rooms and windows,
he is known and remembered.

Photographs smile and whisper.
Mementoes invite his touch.
The large soft chair
is his rock, his peace.

The day is darkening for rain.
His radio and TV are turned off.
At those gates, the world enters
to irritate and pummel him.

An engine starts; then races.
His neighbor goes to work
flashing ruby red metallic
through the front window.

The day is darkening for rain.
He watches a boy outside
who is searching for a ball
that has rolled away,

and the songs of his companion,
of the desire for her
and of the loss of her,
they have all been sung.

Oh you wind
blowing off the world,
his feet are free.

R.L. O'Kelly 2001



In Her Moment

By Joanne Goode

"Writing poetry is an unnatural act," Elizabeth Bishop once wrote. "It takes skill to make it seem natural." Bishop's poetry is readily available on the web. She can provide much inspiration and instruction.

Elizabeth Bishop's poetry takes me to her *Moment* (italics mine.) "Questions of Travel." "Insomnia." "While Someone Telephones." "A Cold Spring." In a style that is matter-of-fact, wistful, startling, and always bone-marrow honest, Elizabeth writes as if her words are puzzle pieces simply waiting to be placed in the picture. The *Moment* may seem unremarkable— "Arrival at Santos" begins, "Here is a coast; here is a harbor;..." but her descriptive detail and poet's-eye perspective, e.g., comparing the Santos port of entry to a postage stamp—draws my breath, leaves me intrigued, and not a little jealous. She says, "Ports are necessities, like postage stamps or soap."

There is only one volume of collected poems. Bishop was a fierce editor of her work and did not write off the cuff and call it good. But what she did, I believe, was let herself begin with what she could see. She drafted the passion-spark before it was forgotten like yesterday's dinner. Then she examined and rewrote and reconsidered. She believed in the poetry of the Moment.

My husband comes into my study with a piece he wrote during our Sunday outing to First Landing State Park. Oh! I had forgotten the three-legged golden retriever playing in the sand, the woman in lotus pose on the dune, the delightful kiss of southern air letting us feel the promise of summer in early February. He tells me it didn't seem like much when he wrote it down but now, on this gray-wet winter day, it shines like discovered treasure. It feels very Elizabeth Bishop, I tell him.

Heritage

By Nancy C. Allen

Mt. Kilimanjaro,
Land of the Congo.
Fertile where the Nile flows.
Land rising in plateaus.
Snow-capped mountain peaks and sky embrace.
Vibrant land of the rain season,
Flowers full of grace.
Wet grassland,
Golden sand.
Vast where the wild roam,
That's home.
Red-orange sunset flamed against the sea,
That's Africa, heritage to me.

Filamentous Algae

By Joan Mazza

Uninvited, you arrived in late spring. I spied you from my office window, weaving mats on the pond's surface with your long hair. How did you happen to stop here this year and never before?

The lotus were limping into the light, slow recovery after two years of struggle back to life after a browning disease. Bull frogs and crickets come and go; wood ducks' and herons' likes vacillate.

Now you step up to make your claim. Are you strangling or offering oxygen to the catfish and blue gill below? Do you promise new habitat for frog species I can't yet name? Shelter for their eggs?

I want to know. Are you here for health and balance? Or to invade, insisting on a redesign? Others have come this way with praise, before they tell me everything I do is wrong.

Published in Tapestry, Summer, 2014

Kevin John Hart, professor at UVA and internationally acclaimed poet, has announced the debut of his latest book *Wild Track* by Notre Dame Press. Many of us will recall that Hart gave a presentation at the 2013 PSV Annual Poetry Festival where he was also the featured reader at the Williamsburg Library Theater. *Wild Track* is an anthology that brings together selections from seven of his published works. You can check out the details at: <http://undpress.nd.edu/books/P03172#description>

Jacqueline Jules has had poems recently published in *The Riding Light Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Killing the Angel*, *Jewish Women's Literary Annual*, *Garbanzo Literary Journal*, *The Write Place at the Write Time*, *Off Course*, and *Storyacious*. To see examples of her work online, please visit her website at www.jacquelinejules.com/mypoetry.htm

M. J. Kledzik recently published "Planting Bitterroot" in *AGNI*, issue #80 and "Amputations" in *Gargoyle*.

Joan Mazza's poem, "Terroir" is published in *Blue Fifth Review* at <http://bluefifthreview.wordpress.com/2014/11/15/blue-five-notebook-november-2014-14-21/>.

Joan Mazza's "Elegy to Claudia Emerson" is published in *New Verse News*, Dec. 8, 2014 at <http://newversenews.blogspot.com/2014/12/elegy-for-claudia-emerson.html>. Her poem "Filamentous Algae" is in the current issue (#26) of *Tapestry*. **Joan Mazza** was one of three winners in *Writers Rising Up Bill Holm Witness Poetry Contest* (six winter poems), see <http://www.writersrisingup.org/bill-holm-poetry-contest/essay-winners/bill-holm-poetry-contest/joan-mazza-2014-winter-in-variations-bill-holm-witness-poetry>. **Joan Mazza's** pantoum "In Time for Spring" was accepted at *Hartskill Review* for the April 2015 issue. Her poem "Why do you live alone in the woods?" will be published in *The South Carolina Review*.

Melissa Watkins Starr's one-line haiku appears in the current issues of *Bones Journal for Contemporary Haiku* and *paper wasp*, an Australian journal. Her haibun "Remembering Pap" and "Recreating Summer" appear in the current issue of *Contemporary Haibun Online*. Her haibun "Summers with Pap" will appear in the next issue of *Simply Haiku*, and other of her haiku will appear in the next issues of *A Hundred Gourds*, *Prune Juice*, and *tiny words*.

Sally Zakariya has three poems in the November/December 2014 issue of *The Broadkill Review*: "U.S.S. Jeannette," "Home Improvement," and "Maine Ghosts." Her poem "What It's Like When You Escape" is in the Winter/Spring 2015 issue of *Lunch Ticket*, and her poem "The End of the Day" is now a broadside available from ELJ Black Orchid Designs. "Mackerel Sky" will appear in the Spring 2015 issue of *The Northern Virginia Review*.

A Snow Song

By Nancy C. Allen

Snowflakes
Scutter in the open sky
Like ivory parachutes on a journey
Driven by the wind.
A skyful of snow,
Swirling-
Dancing-
Shaking in the wind.
Splashing over my face,
Making icy snow puddles on the driveway.
Silent snowflakes,
Joyful snowflakes,
Bouncing between the pines,
Whirling through the bare oaks,

Bounding across the fields,
Racing against the wind.
Leaving pathways overlaid with snow.
Abundant snow showers surging
upon the river.
Lapping the shore-
Sea winds blow,
Sea birds call,
The season of snow has come.



Tips for Better Writing

By Sally Zakariya

People

have a lot to say on this topic, but let's start small with a dozen tips that work for me and other writers I know:

- 1. Think before you write.** Consider the 5 W's of journalism: who, what, when, where, and why. What do you want to write about? What genre—poem, story, article, book? Who's your intended audience? Where do you want your writing published? Most important why—why this topic? why you? why now?
- 2. Do your research.** No shortcuts, please. I'm not talking about academic research—that's a different ballgame. But other kinds of writing also need to be, well, right. Dig into your subject online or in print. Talk to experts and enthusiasts. Check your facts—even fantasy and sci fi have to get at least a few things right about our universe if they're aimed at readers here on Earth.
- 3. Jump right into your topic.** Inexperienced writers often spend paragraphs (or even pages) warming up before they say anything important. As an old boss of mine put it, "It's like a dog who turns around in the same place three times before he lies down." So lie down already and get on with it.
- 3. Write like you're talking to a friend.** One magazine editor I know tells her writers, "Put your arm around the reader." She's talking figuratively, of course, but it makes sense. Imagine someone who embodies all the qualities of your intended audience—30-something professional, struggling artist, whatever—and direct your words to that person.
- 4. Follow the "3 S" rule.** Keep it short, straight to the point, and simple enough to understand without Google. A note on short: Don't use strings of adjectives. "She smoothed her long, thick, wavy, blonde hair ..." Really? Often, you don't need any adjectives at all. But if you must, use no more than two at a time. One is better.
- 5. Break the "3 S" rule.** Rules are made to be broken, so don't be afraid to use a puzzling phrase, a meandering sentence, or a bit of misdirection when it counts. When does it count? Read on.
- 6. Vary the pace and tone.** Short and straight is one thing, but choppy is another. When Hemingway-esque subject-verb-object sentences start getting monotonous, vary the word order: Start with a clause, throw in a compound sentence, and so on. Forget what your teachers said—go ahead and switch tense and point of view if you've got a good reason. (Make that a really good reason.) Pique the reader's interest with unexpected turns of phrase or plot twists or short, insightful digressions. Think of them like spices: Use just enough to make the dish tasty and no more.

7. Tantalize, delight. Even prose can stand a little poetry, so don't shy away from figurative language. As long as you don't clutter your manuscript with clichés, a few well-placed, inventive similes and metaphors can enliven your writing. Don't worry if these grace notes don't come automatically. They're more likely to occur to you as you rewrite (see No. 11).

8. Proofread more than once. You know what you meant when you typed "pubic school," but look again. Those pesky l's and i's are so skinny your mind skates right over them. Ask a friend to proofread, too—a new set of eyes often catches errors you missed. And don't depend on spellcheck, which will catch words when they're spelled incorrectly but not when there—whoops, they're—the wrong words altogether.

9. Read it aloud. Tune in to the rhythm and sound of your words and listen for their music. You don't have to write in iambic pentameter, but all words have cadence and sound, both of which should be appropriate for the content. Gilbert and Sullivan's "short, sharp shock" works in comic opera, but you probably wouldn't want that hissing alliteration and chopping-block stress in a romantic novel.

10. Cut, cut, and cut again. Start with extra adjectives (you knew I was going to say that), then unnecessary adverbs. But look for bigger cuts, too. Do you really need three paragraphs to describe the décor in the room where the murder takes place? Does the description advance the plot or add depth and character to the story? Maybe one paragraph will do, or one sentence. Or maybe you don't need a description at all.

11. Let it rest. Think your work is finished? Think again. Set your manuscript aside for a few days, then come back and take another look. You'll be amazed how many edits and tweaks and cuts you'll want to make. You'll have to stop rewriting eventually, of course, but you'll be glad you didn't send your baby out into the cruel world before that last buff and polish.

Remember how I said there would be a dozen tips and there are only 11? That's the kind of careless mistake you can catch by reading and rereading.

Do you have a tip that would round out the dozen? I'd love to hear it.



POETRY BY BARBARA CROOKER

ESPAÑOLE: HARMONIE EN BLEU, 1923

~Henri Matisse

Why shouldn't the dead go on speaking?
 Here is a woman in a lace mantilla,
 black fan snapped shut, bangles
 on her wrists, arm resting on a table.
 Around her neck, a choker of pearls.
 She looks in my eyes straight as a shot
 of Cognac. Her mouth parts slightly.
 What is she trying to say? I have been
 listening, hoping to hear my own dead friends:
 Clare, Michèle, Adrienne. Snippets
 come to me in birdsong, in gesture,
 in the dark wing of a stranger's hair.
 But it's like deciphering code, or reading
 through water. The dead have their own
 language. Are they restless, do they long
 to come back, smell peonies in spring?
 Or is being dead enough, the end of the story,
 the book gently closing, and the conversation over?

Poet Lore

SCRIMSHAW

So, I live in Pennsylvania, home of potato filling, cabbage slaw,
 shoofly pie, apple butter, scrapple, red beet eggs, hog maw,
 solid starchy stuff. But when I want to go wild, overdraw
 my account, then I fly to Paris, change to a black lace bra,
 matching panties. Stop at a bistro, eat oysters in the raw
 with brown bread, unsalted butter, wine the color of pale straw,
 then stroll down a leafy street, wander gardens I could draw
 if I had talent. For a country girl, this is shock and awe:
 even a folded napkin, a work of art. I'm sure there are flaws,
 but I can't see them. I prefer Pépé le Peu to Quick Draw McGraw,
 Gérard Dépardieu to Brad Pitt, Isabelle Hupert to Kate Capshaw,
 coq au vin to KFC, Bain de Soleil to Coppertone, scofflaw
 that I am. Ray Charles said, *Tell your mama, tell your pa*
I'm gonna send you back to Arkansas,
 but I don't want to go there, or to Utah or Omaha.
 I want to stay in Paris for that *je ne sais quois*.

PASSERINES

This had been a difficult week, us at cross purposes,
 spring lagging behind, dragging its feet, and days
 on end of steady rain. The calendar said *t-shirts,*
flip flops, sandals, but we were hunched in sweaters,
 stoking the fire. And then, and I know it was not
 a miracle, the rain lifted, and the grass was a jolt
 of electric green. The quarrel we were nursing
 evaporated like morning mist, and there,
 at the feeder, after years of trying—making
 nectar, slicing oranges—was a pair of orioles, startling
 as if the sun decided to fly down from the sky,
 a flashy splash of citrus soda in my ordinary backyard.
Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.
You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

The Fifty-Five Project



POETRY VIRGINIA

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