

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE POETRY SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

OCTOBER 2013

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Guy Terrell, PSV president

On September 20, I attended a workshop led by Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda at the Maier Museum of Art in Lynchburg. You can go online and browse their collection from the comfort of your home. I encourage you to go to museums and galleries near you to get inspiration to write poems.

On September 21, I went to Virginia Beach to the Southeastern Region meeting. That was an extraordinary event, as residents of a retirement home read poems they had written in workshops. Also, members of Hampton Roads Teens With a Purpose performed their spoken-word poetry. They were terrific. Readings from both ends of the age spectrum were astonishing. It was a “Whitmanesque” moment when all types of poets and poetry merged. As Whitman might say, the room teemed with all that America is. These two events bring to mind the first stanza of a poem by Richard Eberhart:

*If I could only live at the pitch that is near madness
When everything is as it was in my childhood
Violent, vivid, and of infinite possibility:
That the sun and moon broke over my head.*

Telling you about these things is not enough. We will post more to the website, but if you can, go to your region’s meetings and other poetry events. It’s a crazy, wonderful world out there, and it needs to be shared.

Recently, several have asked me questions about money matters, so I’d like to take this opportunity to explain our financial status. The Poetry Society of Virginia is a small business that must be able to support all of our activities. Our statements are public record with the IRS. We have investments and checking account. As of Friday, September 20, we have \$62,993.36 in our investment account and a few more thousands in checking. However, the investment account is not totally available to be spent. We have commitments to fund Annual Contest prizes. We have members who have purchased lifetime memberships or paid for multiple year memberships and those funds are in there. We have to maintain a reserve as well. What’s left over to spend on other activities is not a lot. At five percent, we could spend \$3,149.67. From that \$1,310 goes towards endowed prizes. But we don’t always earn 5%. We pay prepaid member expenses and other student prizes out of that amount as well.

The Executive Committee votes to spend available funds when we have a prudent excess. Over the last decade, PSV has endowed with the Academy of American Poets a number of permanently endowed prizes at Virginia Colleges and Universities plus many other annual gifts. If you have further questions, please contact your regional vice president or me.

Guy Terrell

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WRITING A POEM A DAY

By Joan Mazza

Since December 2011, I've been writing a poem every day. To help me stay on task, I send my poems to friends who have agreed to receive them by email. No obligation to read, no need to respond unless moved to do so. Knowing I've made this commitment and that people actually expect and want to read what I write, I am more likely to deliver. A little structure and accountability helps.

Occasionally, these friends will jump on and write too. Or they'll make suggestions for improving the poem, elevating it from its mundane start.

After a while, every writer discovers what rituals, disciplines, routines work best for the creative process. What I've discovered is that my process isn't always the same. For each book I've written, my plan-

ning and writing schedules were different. Although I write mostly in the morning when I'm most alert, I now know I can write any time of day or night. If I wake up and have something in my head that might be worth getting on paper, I grab a notebook or turn on the computer. Regardless of the hour.

Some people need a lot of time to let the phrases,



Photo by Joan Mazza

ANNUAL SOUTHEASTERN POETRY CELEBRATION

Fifty people participated in the free lively PSV Fall Workshop on Saturday, September 21, 2013, hosted by VP Jack Callan and sponsored jointly by PSV, The Great Neck Library, and First Colonial Inn Senior Living, held at the library in Virginia Beach. About a third of the attendees were teenagers and college students and another third were seniors (average age 87). Richmond Poet/PSV member Andrew Cain presented a stimulating workshop, "Poems of Desire." Cain coaxed members of the audience to create seven-line French rondelet poems about something they wanted. An open mic followed, with 25 people reading original poetry. The Hampton Roads Youth Poets ("Teens with a Purpose") closed out the final third of the program with great energy and élan. Eighty-seven-year-old **Art Yevlove**, a resident of First Colonial Inn, read his poem, "I Am Made Of..." which appears in this issue. **Cliff Rhodes**, a member of Norfolk State's poetry slam team, also shared his poem, "Hats," which appears in this issue.

POETRY SOCIETY SPONSORS POET LAUREATE AT

VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS FESTIVAL

Virginia Poet Laureate Sofia Starnes was the featured poet for the 2013 Virginia Highlands Festival Creative Writing Days. On Sunday, August 4, Starnes gave a reading at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, followed by a conversation with the audience and then a reception and book signing.

On Monday, August 5, Starnes presented morning and afternoon poetry-writing workshops on the topics "Mood: From Creative Setting to Vessel for Meaning" and "Out of Emotion, Into Image." Approximately seventy-five people attended these PSV-sponsored events. Attendees increased their understanding of poetry and experienced some of the finest poetry being written today, while enhancing their abilities as poets under Starnes's guidance.

Publication News

Henry Hart's new book, *Familiar Ghosts*, will be released by Orchises Press on January 27, 2014. Check it out at www.mason.gmu.edu/~lathbury/Ghosts%20Page.html.

Joan Mazza's poem, "First Saturday of Summer in Virginia," is published in THE NATION, <http://www.thenation.com/article/176227/first-saturday-summer-virginia#>

Award-winning Virginia poet, **Elaine P. Morgan**, has a new book out, *Flying in Spirit*, available from Amazon.com. Her website is www.flyingspirit.com.

Sally Zakariya just published *Insectomania*. See: www.richerresourcespublications.com/Books/Poetry/Insectomania/Insectomania.htm

Poetry by Joshua Poteat

Illustrating the theory of ebb and flow

When I have had enough of reason
 I turn to the evening boughs
 among the wild fern,
 steam on the horse's back,

the tidy white guts of ants spread
 across the floors, and field after field
 of fireflies saying *I'm here*,
 make love to me, I'm here.

Every bit of it simple, entire, intact,
 maybe even ordinary.
 All the essential lonelinesses
 giving account of themselves.

Illustrating the illustrators

When we wrote the name that we were told
 was ours, the name that contained all
 we would be given and all that would be lost,
 there was a pleasure in the small, exact

movements of our hands, the pencil a machine,
 worshipped, and that was where it began.
 We said *Let us be children together*,
 and we drew our lives before the body.

We drew the coal-quay whores with wooden legs,
 the tow-horses asleep against the fog. Even dusk
 flooded a whole new darkness, a sympathetic ink.
 We said *If death is like this then give us more.*

Illustrating the chinquapin oak

Repeat: *if the leaf is canoe shaped, with a short stem,*
 it is chestnut. If the leaf is thick and pale beneath,
with a slender stem, it is chinquapin oak.
 It is a quiet mistake to make.

Look for the pale side above the wind.
 From the hills it will look like snow returning.
 Walk towards the oak with gnats in your ears,

with the rabbits startled from the bush.

There will be movement in the low branches.
 Small wings and the river's open mouth.
 The dirt rising in every bloom.
 The grouse-light of regret.

You will recall a day like this, sudden, immense
 at your throat, and what it is to live, and to have
 lived.

Illustrating the construction of railroads

At the edges of all fields, there is a space
 for disorder. Blackberry through the gowns
 of black locust, dove weed and spurge,
 the hardened vine of ailment digging in,

burrowed to the clay, to the railroad mound
 where the ties lay unabridged, unraveled.
 These margins exist. They are not meant
 to contain us. From the train they are

an influenza, blood on a monogrammed handkerchief.
 There is agreeable sound here, under the thistle
 the winds raise, a calm verse, deliberate,
 the bees building good honey, quail

choosing seed. It is always late in the afternoon,
 the sun bearing up the wreck of a hayshed roof,
 even the dust abandoned, ditch-water clear
 as silt. Call it a collective, a stir,

the animate heart severed away and the life
 it assembles riding along the potato rows.

From *Illustrating The Machine That Makes The World*, University of Georgia Press, 2009.



Writing a Poem a Day—from page 2

images, and ideas buzz around in their heads before they sit down to write. I prefer to write something, however poor, and then work on revisions. Producing a lot of work guarantees that some of what I write will be good, even if most is junk. And I have the delight of occasionally writing something I think is quite good for a first draft. The more I write, the more frequently I produce quality work. Like practicing scales on the piano, my skills improve.

My theory is that pledging to write a poem every day keeps me in my “poetry brain.” By that, I mean an attentiveness to detail, observing what moves me, listening to people’s voices, tone, and words, and catching phrases that carry a charge. If I’m inclined to say WOW, then I know there’s a poem ready to pop. I jot something down in the notebook I always carry. My goal is to write something that’s relatively complete in one sitting. Your mileage may vary. Maybe it’s a good start toward something longer. The poet Stephen Perry says, “You can’t revise a vacuum.”

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Some days, I spend twenty minutes or less. Other days, hours. Longer, if you count the mental meanderings. I’ve learned that more time doesn’t necessarily mean better writing. I’m amused by my friends who write back, “That’s a winner. Send it out!” I know I just dashed that one off because I was running out of time.

Every day, I begin anew. I might read the news and see if something catches me, or just ponder what is in my mental foreground at that moment and hope to land on a metaphor. More often I stay with the personal— my old obsessions and recurrent concerns. Still, the poems surprise me. I protest, *I didn’t mean to write that!*

Writing in this way, I’m frequently appalled by what I

reveal and hesitate to share the poems. I feel naked and vulnerable, mortified by my petty mind, neurotic fixations, and anger.

Surprise! Those are usually the poems my readers like best, the ones that get published and praised as being strong and powerful. Others recognize their petty impulses, resentments, and weirdness, and they thank me.

The more I read and write poetry, I develop my craft. Paying attention to sound, diction, image, metaphor, emotional tone in the work of favorite writers pays off when I’m writing my own work. I improve just by writing steadily and being willing to revise. But for first drafts, the pressure is completely removed. You can’t expect or demand a good poem in thirty minutes. So just write. Anne Lamott in *Bird by Bird* tells us to “write shitty first drafts.” The task is to get something down, no matter how mediocre.

I don’t know the form when I start out. I’m most likely to write free verse, but I have bursts of writing in traditional forms: sonnets, sestinas, villanelles, even sonnet crowns. Not in thirty minutes, for sure, but certain subjects seem to call for form. Sometimes, I write a few lines and I say, “Oh, I’m writing in rhymed couplets. I’ll stay with that.”

As I said, by writing or making other art, we discover what works best to keep us creating and improving. For now, writing a poem every day works for me. For months, I wrote imitations of poems I liked and that worked too. You can try it for a week or try it for a year and note its benefits. By doing this or changing it, you might figure out a method to keep yourself writing instead of waiting for inspiration to strike from outside. That might be too long to wait.

Newsletter Submissions & Deadlines

The deadline for submissions to our November newsletter will be October 25. This will help us get our copy to the publisher by the end of the month so that it can be sent out by the first of November. **Please e-mail PSV news and other items to mwkstarr@hotmail.com. Be sure to put “PSV Newsletter” in your subject heading.** Poetry submissions are subject to review and will not be automatically accepted. Reports of past meetings are acceptable, but we would like these to include pointers on crafting poetry. Please do not send notices about readings that will have taken place by the time the newsletter goes out. In general, the deadline for each month will be the 25th of the prior month from now on.

Hats

by Cliff Rhodes

She uses words with the same ease
as trees reach for their roots
She makes arguments appear in air
Teasing my taste buds with the thought
of her tongue
tickling the roof of her mouth

Her spoken word makes me forget
what I was going to write on the line after this one
She confuses me
Her poetry is Def Jam on buttered toast
with a glass of orange juice
And a Flintstone vitamin
A dose of her in my day and I'm ready for anything

Her hats draw her attention away
from where I want it
But a lot of times my hats match her hats
so I don't complain
I do my thing and she does hers
Our lives intertwine like lines on a plaid shirt
Our meetings sometimes eating or just eating time
We meet with a mutual friend named God
no façade
just testimony lodged in natural conversation

I asked, prayed, wondered
If this sensation...
What this inability to control the corners of my mouth
connecting both of my ear lobes
with my half-moon smile means

Her smiles and laughs
make me feel...
Good
the letters from her words
curve and contour
like packed feathers on a bird
Her body holds just the right amount of starlight

to reflect my imperfections in her glasses
Which makes her just that much more perfect for me
and her hat sitting atop her beauty
caps it off so it does not spill out of the world.
She could write me a poem
and I'd love her forever
but right now
I'll ask her to wear my hat

Cliff Rhodes is a junior at Norfolk State University with a 3.0 grade point average. He is from Baltimore, MD, and is a member of the Hampton Roads Youth Poets Urban Control Entertainment Crew based at Norfolk State University. He is also a member of Norfolk State's poetry slam team.

I Am Made Of...

by Art Yevlove

I am made of The Bronx, New York -
Bristow Street, Prospect, Interval, and Stebbins Avenues -
as I walked to P.S. 54.
I am made of Crotona Park with its Indian Rock,
perched on a strip of scrubbed, exposed stone -
a moving mountain of flat rock and mud,
scraped away, hundreds of years old.
Tons of petrified matter, mellowed by time and weather,
formed Indian Rock, as life formed me.

I, too, am made of resilience under pressure...

Art Yevlove, 87, is a resident of First Colonial Inn and a member of the weekly FCI Creative Writing Group led by Judith Stevens and Jack Callan.

A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom. —Robert Frost

Fall 2013 Western Regional Meeting Plans Announced

The Fall 2013 Western Regional Meeting will be held on Saturday, October 19, at the Maier Museum of Art in Lynchburg, 1 Quinlan St., from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Poet and painter Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda will return to the Maier to give another ekphrastic poetry presentation and reading, followed by an opportunity to write poems inspired by art on display in the Maier. Poets who attended Foronda's September workshop and submitted pieces to the Maier's Ekphrastic Poetry Webpage will read, and there will be an open mic. At the end of the day's activities, the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum will offer a tour to those who are interested.

Dr. Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda served as Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2006-2008. She has published five books of poetry, and her poems have been nominated for six Pushcart Prizes. Her work has been included in numerous publications, including *An Endless Skyway*, an anthology of poems by U.S. State Poet Laureates. Her awards include five grants from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and a Resolution of Appreciation from the State Board of Education for her contributions as Poet Laureate of Virginia.

Schedule of Events

10 a.m. Doors open & registration. Lunch menus will be on hand to order from Magnolia Foods, which offers sandwiches and salads, for lunchtime delivery.

10:30 a.m. Ekphrastic poetry presentation and reading by Dr. Kreiter-Foronda.

12 p.m. Break for lunch (Dutch treat, pre-ordered from Magnolia Foods during registration).

12:45 p.m. Art-inspired poetry exercises (based on artwork on display).

1:15 p.m. Open mic poetry readings (participants of Carolyn's September workshop will present first, followed by others who wish to participate).

2:00 p.m. Question & Answer period with Dr. Kreiter-Foronda and closing comments.

2:15 p.m. Those who wish to tour the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum will embark for Pierce St.

RSVP and Directions

Debbie Spanich (434) 947-8136 ext. 2 or dspanich@randolphcollege.edu

Sponsored by The Poetry Society of Virginia and the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College. Randolph College's nationally recognized collection includes works by outstanding American artists of the 19th and 20th centuries.

This event is free and open to the public.

Adult Contest Awards Report

by Lauvonda Lynn Young

The 2014 Poetry Society of Virginia Annual Awards Ceremony and Banquet—which will include undergraduate awards this year—will take place on Saturday, April 19, in the Charlottesville area (the venue will be determined soon). Registration and the first part of the Awards Ceremony will be held from 10:30 a.m. to noon. We will break for lunch and to hear from keynote speaker, Lisa Russ Spaar, a distinguished poet and faculty member in the English Department at the University of Virginia, where she teaches creative writing. The Awards Ceremony will resume about 1:15 p.m., with the expectation of a 2:30 p.m. conclusion.

Mark your calendar and please join us on April 19, where you will be afforded an opportunity to hear some great poetry read, to hear a fantastic speaker, and to meet and mingle with sister and fellow poets.

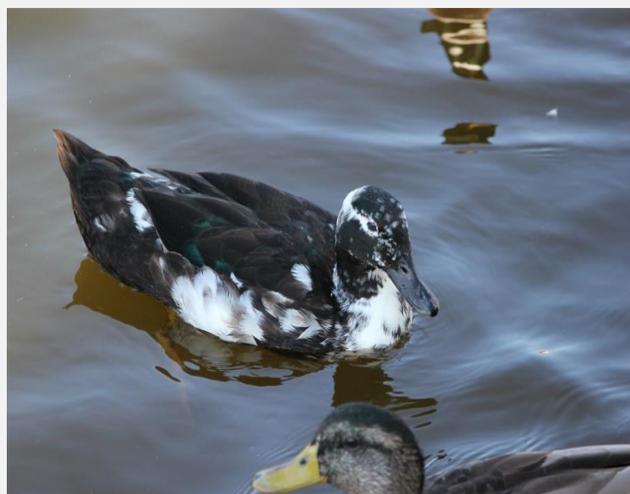


Photo by Shelia Herbison Martin

Help Us Get the Word Out on Our Student Contest

You will find the Student Contest Brochure attached to this newsletter. We need to promote this to schools and teachers. If you can assist in your area, please contact Trilla Ramage at trilla17@verizon.net or Florence Martin at fskuhn@cox.net.

Poetry in the Schools Report

by Beth Huddleston

With fall comes the beginning of a new PSV year and a new year in public and private schools. As poets, we have a marvelous opportunity to spark interest in classrooms about our genre. There are several ways we can do that.

In recent years, public educators have felt the pressure of including only the genres on which the state tests focus. I have always contended that teachers can use poetry as a platform for teaching many of the state reading and writing objectives. Last year we saw the arrival of new state English tests. The Virginia Department of Education shares that a number of the tests in middle and high school feature paired passages, with one passage often being a poem. Hurrah for those who made this change! Of course, that gives us more reason to engage students in reading poetry because students develop higher level thinking skills by learning to make inferences and draw conclusions.

With this in mind, we can support Poetry in the Schools by offering to share readings, by presenting workshops for students and teachers, and by sharing materials and ideas. As I receive requests from teachers, I will match them with poets in their geographic areas. Please let me know if you are willing to serve in one of these capacities.

In addition, please promote our student poetry contests again this year. I realize they may have a different format, but students love to participate if they know about the opportunities. We can pass along our information to local school systems, private school networks, and libraries. Since some groups are developing Facebook accounts, we can share information in this way, as well.

May the fall season spark a wonderful poem or two for you. As I share with my middle school students, "Metaphors be with you!"

T H E P O E T R Y S O C I E T Y O F V I R G I N I A

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