

RITA DURRANT  
1919–2015

“We owe a lot to Rita.” Those were the most-heard and heart-felt words used by her poets when Rita Durrant passed away on January 20th of this year at the age of 95. Most of us studied with her during the 6 years she taught poetry in the Christopher Wren Association at the College of William and Mary, and then became part of The Williamsburg Poetry Guild she founded in 1997 and led for a number of years. A practiced and successful poet and teacher, Rita was also known, and just as importantly, as a generous and encouraging leader—funny too. We, and the newcomers she continually added to the group, were taught to write in many forms, and at times in the styles and subjects of well-known poets.

We’ve kept her careful, beautifully handwritten critiques. A compliment was surely tucked in somewhere amid the gentle suggestions for change, better grammar, and/or further development. Rita also taught us microphone techniques—“never leave the microphone unattended”—and insisted reluctant readers try—“if I can do it, you can.” She and her husband, John, a helpful and pleasant presence at every event until his death in 2002, opened their home to us, and we became close friends.

Even as she acted as Vice President of the Eastern Region of the then PSV for several years, and as its recording secretary for one, she found us choice opportunities to present our work. One was an ekphrastic poetry reading at the Muscarelle Museum on William and Mary’s campus, another, having our poems published in *Images of Williamsburg*, the book in honor of Williamsburg’s 300th anniversary that Rita edited.

After ill health limited her participation, she joined us as she was able, or arranged for us to meet at Chambrel of Williamsburg, her final home. Always, she remained an interested and thoughtful force in the

## Poetry Festival Features Dorianne Laux

The annual poetry festival, sponsored and hosted by Poetry Virginia, May 15–16 in Williamsburg, featured award-winning poet Dorianne Laux. The 2-day event was filled with entertaining and educational programs for Virginia poets and poetry lovers.

In the opening program, Laux, director of the MFA Creative Writing Program at North Carolina State, teamed with her husband, Joseph Millar, also an award-winning poet, in a workshop on developing ideas for poems. Aptly titled, *How to Grow a Tree from an Acorn*, she demonstrated methods for taking a single object and expanding on it. “Every object has power,” she said. “This is a game—like math—solve the problem—start anywhere, then go deeper.” 11 participants shared the results of their 25 minutes of writing about saliva, grandmother’s quilt, a buckle, a horseshoe, canes, and more. Creative juices were flowing.

Later, Laux returned for a session of poetry reading. She presented 10 selections of her published poems, delivered in her distinctively throaty, beguiling style. Following the advice of her mentor, Phil Levine, she writes in her own “voice.” He had said: “Be yourself in your own time.” Her presentation was received with enthusiastic response.

Passing the Poetry Hat was the title of the workshop offered by Derek Kannemeyer, a teacher of Creative Writing and French at St. Catherine’s School in Richmond. He demonstrated how one can take a “remembered moment” or an “observed moment” and develop it into a poem. In an exercise, participants were encouraged to write a phrase about someone doing something uncharacteristic, like “a woman in a bathtub, smoking a cigar” on paper, then dropping the paper in a Dr. Seuss-style hat. The hat was passed and participants drew from it; the task was to write a poem using the situation that someone else wrote as a prompt. The results were surprising and loaded with good humor.

The festival’s welcoming banquet was held Friday evening at Ford’s Colony Country Club. Although the dinner was excellent, the main event of the evening was the open microphone reading. Unlike the work-shopped poems of the day, these were polished pieces, often especially prepared for the occasion. They represented heart-felt emotions and thoughts, openly shared and warmly received.

William and Mary professor Henry Hart, author of a number of acclaimed books of poetry and literary biographies, conducted a program entitled, *The Poet’s Source of Inspiration*. Using works of Wordsworth, Heaney, and Frost, he explored their varied sources of material that led to significant poetry. In an exercise, he had participants poetically suggest a problem, describe the “journey back,” and indicate a solution. Some participants presented poems that ranged from poignant to quite humorous.

Luisa Igloria, Director of the MFA Creative Writing Program at Old Dominion University, led the final workshop of the festival. With the title: *Salty, Savory, Bitter, Sweet: A Workshop of Poetry and Food*, Igloria read and discussed a short selection of poems on hunger and food from different perspectives. Many participants, who had never written this type of poetry, produced and shared interesting and thoughtful poems on the topic.

In recognition of Armed Forces Day, the final event of the festival was a reading by two military veterans. Although their backgrounds are different: Bill Glose, an Army paratrooper in the Gulf War; Ed Lull, a Navy submariner in the Cold War and Vietnam, both reflected patriotism and respect for their comrades-in-arms. It was a fitting conclusion to the 2 days of celebrating the art of creating poetry.

work of the Guild and its members. When she published her poetry book, *Dancing to the Marigold Mazurka*, at the age of 91, we were readers at the publication party. She came, in wheelchair, to our annual Christmas luncheon at Sal’s six weeks before her death, where she and a new member struck up a quick friendship.

Most members of the original Guild are no longer with us, but it has remained a vibrant force under the series of hard-working, capable member leaders that succeeded Rita, a fact that was of primary importance to her.

Rest in peace, founder, mentor, friend.  
~ Joanne Scott Kennedy

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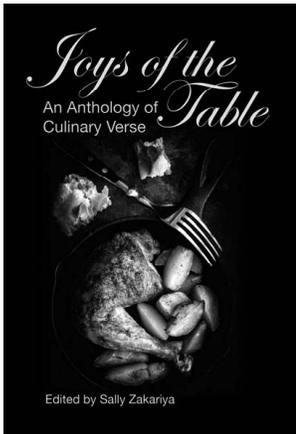
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### Media Release

Contact: Monica Smith – Promotion and Marketing  
1926 N. Woodrow Street Arlington, VA 22207  
Phone: 1-800-856-3060 / Fax: 703-276-0193  
E-mail: [PR@RicherResourcesPublications.com](mailto:PR@RicherResourcesPublications.com)  
Web site: [www.RicherResourcesPublications.com](http://www.RicherResourcesPublications.com)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New anthology of culinary poems, *Joys of the Table* offers recipes as well as verse**



(Arlington, Virginia) New from Richer Resources Publications, *Joys of the Table: An Anthology of Culinary Verse* includes almost 100 poems from 75 poets, a number of whom have also contributed recipes to accompany their poems. The anthology is edited by poet Sally Zakariya, whose books *Arithmetic* and *Insectomania* were also published by Richer Resources.

“Poetry and food just seem to go together, each one a mix of often unexpected ingredients that calls on creativity and nurtures body and brain alike,” writes Zakariya in the book’s Introduction. “The poets I know have a range of relationships with food, from the whimsical to the ascetic to the seriously gourmet, but we all write,” she continues. “And we all eat.”

Poets, poetry lovers, and food lovers alike will find a banquet of insightful, lyrical, and evocative poems that explore our complex feelings about the food we eat, from our earliest memories to our closing days, with love and travel and fun in between.

“Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are,” wrote the French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. The poems – and recipes – in this book have a lot to tell. Divided into five sections – Amuse Bouche, What We Eat, Food and Love, Geography of Food, and Food and Mortality – *Joys of the Table* serves up a richly varied feast that will delight the cook as well as the reader.

*Joys of the Table: An Anthology of Culinary Verse*, 158 pages, ISBN 978-1-63464-036-7, is \$18 from Richer Resources Publications. Order online, by e-mail, or by fax or phone.

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