

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

Newsletter of the Poetry Society of Virginia

SEPTEMBER 2015

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT _____

It is not easy to enjoy a business meeting in the summer, especially if it is dark at noon and neither the sun nor artificial lighting quite illuminate one's documents. And rain impinges, splattering against glass, soaking latecomers who just recently survived the storm-stalled traffic. Do we have a quorum? Let's see... eight, nine, oh here comes ten... just two to go.

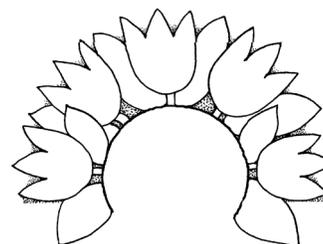
But we did have fun. Starting only 15 minutes late, the Executive Committee of the Poetry Society of Virginia stoked up on coffee and muffins and settled in around a huge horseshoe of organized tables at Ashland Coffee and Tea. In the dim light, it was difficult to see the stragglers come in... 22, 23, 24... Who would have thought on such a bad day?

We were scheduled to meet from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Something of a joke. Most of the veterans expected to swim out to their cars in the neighborhood of 6 p.m. No matter. Lovers of poetry are a patient bunch. They'll read a whole book of poetry twice to find the real gem. In grammar school and high school, they'd grapple with a poem day after day, hour after hour, before at last discovering its intent, and then its beauty. At readings, they sit and wait, wait for that great image or insight, for that which might or might not come blazing forth. If it does not, if it's shy, there's always another day, another reading. In a poetry lover's life, the poetry lover falls in love with only a handful of poems (I mean really in love), and those few he will recite in his brain through thin and thinner, as well as thick. He'll commit them to memory and throw them against the darkness. So that is why we met here in the shadows with the rain trying to get in.

The meeting began with a note that we can use, as we get to go into the classrooms of America and talk about poetry, and read poetry, including our own poetry, to students who might learn to love poetry or who already love poetry and are looking for contact with their kind. I first learned I was going to be a poet in the third grade, and it was due to a little girl I was never going to speak to who wore glasses and soon moved away. She had written a poem the teacher had discovered walking by her desk and had called upon her to read it to the class. In my memory, she stands there, a tiny thing, refusing to tremble. And what a poem! I recall the incredible way that words at the end of lines rhymed and knew for a certainty what world I belonged to and where I was going.

The meeting ended at 2 p.m., not 6 p.m. We determined to have a poetry festival in May, to buy insurance, to create open-mic readings, to find more volunteers to help with our contests, etc. We argued (in the nicest way possible). In the end, we adjourned, virtuous, and ran for our cars.

Best,
Bob



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POETRY

To continue the exciting news from our previous newsletter, our Society is pleased to provide selections and comments from the following 2015 Poetry Virginia Contest Winners.

12. Robert S. Sergeant Memorial: Birds

Crow

By Chapman Hood Frazier

You're the philosopher of funk,
reading salvation in opossum
entrails on the roadside with your
cock-eyed musings and morning
call...

(For the rest, check out Virginia
Poetry Online.)

Comment by Chapman Hood Frazier: "The Crow" is from a collection that I am currently finishing called *Bestiary*. I got the idea from a children's alphabet poster that my son had when he was young. Each letter was carefully crafted into an animal shape, some dragons, some lion-like, and others strange serpents. I always loved that poster.

I began writing this collection about 8 years ago and have been resurrecting it since. Initially, I was determined only to use "North American animals" but in my latest version, I'm using animals, birds, insects, mythological animals as well as human ones.

I actually research each animal, finding out its characteristics and how it works in the world as well as how it is integrated with my own imaginative life. For me, "Crow" is the magical one, the death priest, the diviner, the one who deals with death and, perhaps, is able to see through it into the next life. He is the ultimate deconstructionist, but also a trickster. He is the Corbie or Carrion Crow or Stormcrow, a scavenger, a death bird, but did you know that he is actually a tool user, and can recognize a human face? One day, we may all face the Crow...

18. Raymond Levi Haislip Memorial: Celebrating Technology

A Lacework of Bone

By Erin Newton Wells

Comment by Erin Newton Wells: My poem, "A Lacework of Bone," contains an insight I experienced while having a DEXA (bone density) scan. The density was on the low side. But on viewing the images, I suddenly saw the porous bone as white lace against black. It was exquisitely beautiful. Solid bone would not look like this. I stood aside from a subjective result, bound within myself, and saw it as something larger, more significant. Lace may be bone. Bone may be lace. Disparate things connect and define each other through insight and image, an aha! moment, which is really what poetry is about. The poem came to me as a sonnet, which requires spareness of form and word. This seemed needed to let the one idea speak. But perhaps the idea would not have been recalled or the poem written if the Poetry Virginia contest had not offered a category "celebrating technology" that pushed me to make these connections.

A WORKSHOP WITH JOSHUA POTEAT

Dear Poetry Virginia Members,

I admit, I have been hit and miss with attending PSV events in the last couple of years. Though, this year I happened to make two in two months! And while I have to admit that I was not familiar with Joshua Poteat before I attended his event, I am very glad I did attend. I love maps, so when Joshua's workshop assignment meant we made a poetic map of our childhood house, block, backwoods, village, city, (take your pick of any or all of the above), I started writing immediately. Another poet mentioned that a line in an e-mail could be the start of a poem more than six months ago, so it stuck with me. I used it as the starting point for the poem. I will, under duress, admit to writing through the poems he read us. Lines or phrases of those poems sent me in one direction or another, as a thought elicited by the poems Joshua read resonated in my head.

During a break in my writing and listening, I jotted down a list of the five senses. I put emotion at the end of the list, so I wouldn't forget to think about all six things as I looked over what I had written. I think I touched on them all. That's the first time I consciously wrote down all the senses to make sure I included them all. I think that worked for me pretty well this time around. I will have to remember that little cheat.

Joshua spoke about his writing process briefly, during the question and answer time. But first, he read poems from his three books, including from the galley of his latest, *The Regret Histories*. He writes for himself, not caring if the project he currently works on gets published as long as he has finished his obsession. He stays true to his Muse. He does say he's been lucky in that his projects have been published. Which we all envy, to a greater or lesser degree.

~ Alessa Leming

NYC - TRACES OF VIRGINIA

Two weeks in NYC bombards me with an abundance of sounds, smells, tastes, and sights so different from my peaceful suburb of Midlothian, VA. So intense the sensory stockpile that I seem to find poetry in everything: a subway ride connects strangers like siblings in the womb; tenement tours whisper thousands of stories from across the globe; lunch at Congee Village transports me to China.

And yet traces of Virginia keep popping up in this crazy, chaotic city. At the NYC Poetry Festival on Governor's Island, Nick Flynn reads a poem based on research of Monticello and Thomas Jefferson. The representative from Underground Books points out titles on his table from Virginian authors. A young writer exclaims she graduated from Hollins University when I explain I post social media for Poetry Virginia and ask if I can take her photo.

The festival itself is like most poetry gatherings: earnest participants and low attendance. I walk from stage to stage listening to poets pour kerosene out of their hearts and light it on fire for anyone that cares to be touched. The heat radiates on this small island mere feet from Manhattan. Literally. The heat index is approaching 100 degrees, but still there are poets that wring out words on three stages non-stop from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. There is a lot of poetry to admire. Plus the t-shirts are pretty cool.

Most everyone is welcoming, especially when they learn I'm a Virginian. My red Poe Museum shirt triggers conversations. A lady points toward a couple of colonial-style buildings and says the Indians that were buried over there haunt the island. Three women sit on a bench with old-school typewriters perched on their knees. A sign directs to give them a word and

they'll write you a poem. A man in a cape starts a poem in English then transitions smoothly into Spanish. The word "fuck" peppers almost all the poems. An editor from *Apogee Journal* tells the sweaty crowd that they seek diversity, and then introduces a poet who recites a poem about being gay in America. A woman sports a black tank top with "S is for Soul Sister" stamped across. There are all sorts of people. All sorts of poets. Everyone is a minority here—we all love poetry.

Later, on my last night in the city, I visit the Gotham Writers Workshop. I map my route and exit the subway in the middle of the Garment District. A charter bus blocks the street directly in front of me, and rising up behind it in the distance like an arrow is the iconic Empire State Building. RICHMOND VA is plastered in huge white letters on the black bus, and I wonder if it's a sign I have been away from home long enough.

I forge ahead to the fourteenth floor of 555 Eighth Avenue. There are two rooms of us, and I get sent to the second where I watch out the window Asian women work with huge spools of fabric, while fellow writers trickle in and sit at the table I've dumped my notebook and pen on. A man with reddish hair and a contagious grin informs that there will be a fifteen minute writing prompt, sharing and comments, a socializing break, and then we'll repeat the process. Everybody writes. A few people share. We find the positive in each other's words.

At break I chat with a woman who explains she's not a "real writer" and admits she's always been nervous to read her essays in front of people. At the end of the second session, the instructor looks at her and says his

intuition tells him she would like to share. I chorus, "Read! You can do it." She stumbles and gets through it wide-eyed and red-faced. When she raises her head there's that flicker of accomplishment in her smile, and I know another emerging writer has crystallized.

When the instructor says everybody should come back for the next session I tell the room I'm from Virginia. He grins and says, "No way," gives me a high-five. A young man with his hair in a topknot says he grew up in Midlothian (my suburb!). An energetic woman points out she's originally from Norfolk and walks me to the subway, reassuring me which trains will get me back to Brooklyn and the apartment I rented.

It's a small world packed with people that appear extremely different. No matter what topics drive us to write, what approach, or sentiment, or experience we come from that nurtures our work, poets are cut from the same bolt of cloth. When I saw the young woman hunched over, scribbling frantically into her notebook on the subway, I knew she was a poet and headed to the festival (sure enough, I found her on stage later that day reading her poem about an incident that occurred on her way to the event!). Perhaps Philip Levine said it best in the quote I found while flipping through the *Five Points Journal* that I picked up at the festival, "I believe the truth is we form a family with other poets, living and dead, or we risk going nowhere." I've enjoyed my immersion in NYC writing life, and now I'm happy to bring traces of NYC home to Virginia.

~ Kim Drew Wright

GUIDELINES FOR PEER REVIEW GROUPS

What is a peer review group? It is a group of poets who meet together to discuss one another's poems in progress. A peer review group is different from a workshop. In a workshop there is a teacher and the group members come to be instructed by the teacher.

In this essay we will suggest guidelines for conducting a peer review group. The suggestions set forth here come from the experience of the Poetry Salon in Northern Virginia which has been meeting since 1985. In setting up a peer review group you will need to decide on your own rules. But be flexible. Do not become rule-bound. Keep it light and friendly.

What size should the group be? If the group is less than 6, it may be difficult to keep the discussions going. If more than 12 are present, it is difficult to allow time for discussion of everybody's poem. 8 to 12 seems best.

How often should the group meet? Probably once a month is best. More often and some will feel pressured. Less often and some will feel that the infrequency does not serve their needs.

What day of the week and what time should you meet? Your group will need to decide. Probably best to have a consistent time. It is important to start on time out of respect for those who arrive on time. It is more important to stop on time so group members know they can schedule other activities later.

Where should you meet? In Northern Virginia we meet in the home of one of the members on a rotating basis. At each meeting the members bring snack type food for the group. In forming your group you may prefer to meet in a library or some other public place. Again it should be a group decision.

What are the housekeeping issues? They are few. An announcement should be sent before each meeting. Secondly the administrator plans for the location of the meeting.

A facilitator is needed at each meeting. The facilitator keeps the discussions on track, discourages side discussions, encourage all members to speak out and comment on their poems being discussed. The facilitator may rotate among group members.

What happens at the meeting?

- Each member brings enough copies of their poem-for-discussion so all members may have a copy to read and write comments on.
- The poet reads his poem aloud (or has someone else read it).
- The group members comment on the poem. The reviewers usually write comments on the poem and return it to the poet. The facilitator encourages a full discussion.
- It is best if the nature of the comment be couched as a reaction to what the poet has written. Say for example "I like the story of your poem but am confused by your second stanza. It is not clear who the poet is addressing here." It is not the reviewer's job to rewrite the poem, only to react to what was written. Specific advice on lineation, word choice, punctuation, etc. may be less useful to the poet than your overall reaction to the poem.
- During the discussion of his poem, the poet should remain silent, listening, taking notes. He should never respond to a question or defend his poem. At the end of the discussion of his poem, the poet should thank the group, mention specific comments that he will consider, and respond to any questions that the group members have.

Some typical questions about the poem are:

- Does the poem adhere faithfully to a form?
- Does the poem tell a good story?
- Are the sounds of the poem good?
- Are the images clear?
- Is the poet's intent clear to you?
- Is some of the poem confusing? How?
- Did you like the poem? Why?

The Peer Review experience is valuable in helping us develop as poets. The reviews you receive will guide you in becoming a better poet. Participating in the reviews of others' poetry also shows you ways to improve your own poetry. Join or form a new peer review group. These guidelines may be useful in improving your peer review experience. But remember: be flexible. Do not become rule-bound. Keep it light and friendly.

~ Stuart C. Nottingham

CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG

The Confederate Battle Flag is much in the news today. Many call for its removal from all public places. Others are equally vehement that it is a symbol of our history and should be proudly displayed. It is important to think of this flag's history. Then we can adopt policies that serve to unite, not divide.

Beginning about 1950, as the Civil Rights Movement was moving into high gear, the Confederate battle flag was adopted by those who resisted integration and other civil rights. It was at this time that the flag was incorporated into the state flags of Georgia and Mississippi. The flag in recent years has become a symbol of resistance and defiance of federal authority, encouraging a distancing between White and African Americans. This recent history of the flag is a desecration.

Brave men fought and died under this banner. The Confederate cause was an evil cause that attempted to continue slavery. (For confirmation of this view, read the secession declarations of the southern states, readily available on Google.)

But the soldiers who fought for the Confederacy fought bravely. Their heroism is worthy of recognition. Their flag is worthy of reverence. But not as a symbol of disunity, of hatred. Go to the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond and look at the flags, blood stained and bullet ridden, and reflect on the men who fought under that flag.

Father Abram Ryan, a native of Norfolk, was a Roman Catholic chaplain in the Confederate army. He was a dedicated Southerner, a Virginian. His primary citizenship identity with the state, rather than the nation, was common in 1860. Weeks after the War's end, he wrote a poem, "The Conquered Banner." This is a fairly long poem available on Google. Below are the first and last stanzas. I believe we would be wise to accept Fr. Ryan's view: We fought well and bravely, but we lost; accept that truth and get on with the future.

~ Stuart C. Nottingham

The Conquered Banner

By Father Abram Ryan

Furl that Banner, for 'tis weary;
 Round its staff 'tis drooping dreary;
 Furl it, fold it, it is best;
 For there's not a man to wave it,
 And there's not a sword to save it,
 And there's no one left to lave it
 In the blood that heroes gave it;
 And its foes now scorn and brave it;
 Furl it, hide it—let it rest!

Furl that banner, softly, slowly!
 Treat it gently—it is holy—
 For it droops above the dead.
 Touch it not—unfold it never,
 Let it droop there, furled forever,
 For its people's hopes are dead!

PSV EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING, JULY 11, 2015 _____

Our Executive Committee met in Ashland, VA on July 11th to discuss this year's agenda and future Society goals. Here is a short summary of some our Committee's decisions.

News:

- Notices of new books and anthologies of poems by members of the Poetry Society of Virginia can be included in the newsletter, but not sales price information. This does not exclude information about where the book may be ordered, such as Web site addresses.
- Poetry Contest is underway. We need more committee members. A presentation will take place on the third Saturday in April (April 16th) at a location to be determined by the Committee.
- 25 Virginia schools participated in our Youth Poetry Contest. Total schools: 31. There were fewer entries than last year. Almost half of entries were electronic. We will continue to accept hardcopy and scan onto CD to send to judges.
- PSV will spend \$100 to issue a Press Release about PSV contests to Virginia Press Association.
- Send Archivist Warren Harris hardcopy and photographs, since cannot predict what digital media will still be readable in 50 years. Collections are in the Special Collections area on the 4th floor of the James Branch Cabell library at VCU in Richmond.
- Poetry in the Schools: Many activities planned and underway already. Roanoke Public Schools has a program this fall. Cathy Hailey is deeply involved with Young Writers Program, with workshops on all kinds of writing.

Goals:

- Our President will appoint an ad hoc committee to conduct a study of alternatives to the existing geographic regional form of organization, with completion by July 1, 2016.
- PSV will hold a one-day Poetry Festival in May or June 2016.
- PSV will offer an annual book prize (for a published book by a PSV member). Our President will appoint a committee to discuss details.
- PSV will support the annual VATE (Virginia Association of Teachers of English) conference in Richmond, October 16-18, 2015.
- PSV will sponsor of an October 11, 2015 event at the Hylton Performing Arts Center in Manassas, "In the Company of Laureates."
- PSV will host on its Web site an official magazine to publish contest-winning poems.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the Company of Laureates will take place from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on October 11, 2015 at the Hylton Center for the Performing Arts in Manassas, VA (hyltoncenter.org). It is a unique opportunity to meet and mingle with 20 Poets Laureate and other regional poets and enthusiasts. Workshops, panel discussions, open-mics, book signings, and more. A teen program and activities are scheduled throughout the afternoon. The event is free and open to the public. Bus parking is available and class field trips are encouraged. The event website is located at: <http://www.writebytherails.org/in-the-company-of-laureates/>. The site is continually being updated as new information is available.

Stephen Capaldo and **Aileen Murphy** partnered with Roanoke City Public Schools and Virginia Tech to found a summer Poetry in the Schools workshop to promote the reading and writing of poetry in our classrooms. Find out more at: http://www.roanoke.com/news/epiphany-leads-to-summer-poetry-workshop-for-roanoke-students/article_44c6614f-d883-5d8d-8aba-d18bfd5982fd.html

Derek Kannemeyer, **Mike Maggio**, and **Patsy Bickerstaff** are reading at Book People in Richmond on September 26, 2015.

Mike Maggio is reading from his new book, *Garden of Rain*, at Shirlington Branch Library on September 12, 2014 from 3 to 5 p.m. Please join us!

Joan Mazza recently had two poems accepted at *Allegro Poetry Review*: “A Certain Slant of Rain” and “Love Poem to Brooklyn” for their September and November issues. *SoulLit* has accepted three of her poems: “3 O’clock,” “Abandoned,” and “Speaking Yiddish.” A *Quiet Courage* has recently published her poem, “Too Early to Rise”. Joan Mazza’s poem “Knots” is published at Verse-Virtual: <http://www.verse-virtual.com/joan-mazza-2015-august.html>

Pia Taavila-Borsheim, Ph.D. has new poems in the current and forthcoming issues of *Wisconsin Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Artemis*, *The Bear River Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Backbone Mountain Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Connotation Press*, *The Vermillion Literary Project*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Ilanot Review*, *TAB: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, and *IthacaLit*. Her poem “Yom Kippur” appears in Reform Judaism’s new prayer book for the high holy days, *Mishkan HaNefesh* (Tent of the Soul), published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, NY.

Diana Woodcock’s new chapbook, *Beggar in the Everglades*, was published by Finishing Line Press in July. Order it here: https://finishinglinepress.com/product_info.php?products_id=2417

“Diana Woodcock writes of the Everglades, its alligators and aningas, sawgrass and mangroves, insects and frogs as only one initiated can. These poems testify to immersion and affection. They call plants and creatures and places by name, speak to them and of them intimately. Biological divisions—plant, animal, human—blur and dissolve as the poet knows herself “kin to all of nature.” These are praise poems, ecstatic responses to the spiritual dimensions of landscape and wildness, and from the wilderness they bring us a critical message: “. . . hope’s voice rings louder here / than that of despair.” These lush poems call us to attention and invite us to joy.” ~ Anne McCrary Sullivan, *Ecology II: Throat Song from the Everglades*

Kim Drew Wright’s debut collection of prose poems and short stories, *The Strangeness of Men*, is now available from Amazon and other retailers. A naked sleepwalker, Wonder Woman wrangled by a housewife, a 1913 murder, sex lessons at church nacho night, the mythic Andromeda in an assisted living facility, a Zambian youth besieged by bullies, and a guy in a dog suit are just a few of these 38 quirky tales that will keep you thinking long after you put down the book. Find out more at: KIMDREWWRIGHT.COM.

Newsletter Deadline:
The deadline for our next newsletter
is September 19, 2015.



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