

CALLAHAN COUNTY STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

(All submitters retain ownership)

American Life in Poetry Column 241

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

I love poems in which the central metaphors are fresh and original, and here's a marvelous, coin description of autumn by Elizabeth Klise von Zerneck, who lives in Illinois.

Like Coins, November

We drove past late fall fields as flat and cold
as sheets of tin and, in the distance, trees
were tossed like coins against the sky. Stunned gold
and bronze, oaks, maples stood in twos and threes:
some copper bright, a few dull brown and, now
and then, the shock of one so steeled with frost
it glittered like a dime. The autumn boughs
and blackened branches wore a somber gloss
that whispered tails to me, not heads. I read
memorial columns in their trunks; their leaves
spelled UNUM, cent; and yours, the only head . . .
in penny profile, Lincoln-like (one sleeve,
one eye) but even it was turning tails
as russet leaves lay spent across the trails.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of Poetry magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2008 by Elizabeth Klise von Zerneck. Reprinted from The Spoon River Poetry Review, Vol. XXXIII, no. 1, 2008, by permission of Elizabeth Klise von Zerneck and the publisher. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Words You Can Use

Eutony: When a word sounds good, it has this quality.

Fichu: This would be a light color or shawl for the shoulders. It is not reported that they use this word often in Strawn, Texas.

Grandsionant: If something sounds magnificent or grand, you can use this word to describe it.

Juvenilia: This refers to the youthful or earlier works of an artist or writer.

Wanted: Writers & Poets

Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.
3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

Literary Editor
Eastland/Callahan County
Newspapers
P. O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448
email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

Submissions sought to:

Star

P.O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or libel material.

The Big Read 2010/2011

The Big Read is accepting applications from nonprofit organizations to conduct month-long, community-wide reads between September 2010 and June 2011. Organizations selected to participate in The Big Read will receive a grant ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000, access to online training resources, educational and promotional materials, inclusion of your organization and activities on The Big Read website, and the prestige of participating in a highly visible national program. Approximately 75 organizations from across the country will be selected by a panel of experts.

To download the Guidelines & Application Instructions [visit The Big Read website](#).

The Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

We And A Little Boy

We don't claim to be so very special
And we're not the least bit vain
Yet we did work hard to get by
But when Donny won his medal
We sure knew then that he had attained
But we didn't know the price would be
so high.

Now we are flying that little flag of
black
As other families with sons who don't
come back
We waved when he departed, we were
so broken-hearted
For we knew that this might be his
final act.

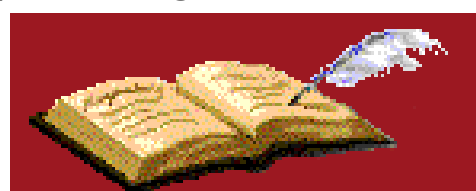
We think back and remember when
little Donny
Was just a baby and our joy
There was nothing we would not do
But now his Daddy and Mommy
They cannot help their little boy
For it was we and a little boy they slew.

- Weldon L. Smith
Eastland, Texas



WANTED: Poetry and/or short stories for this page each week. Mail to: Star P.O. Box 29 Eastland, TX 76448 or e-mail to thebairdspotlight@att.net

The pen is mightier than the sword



POETRY, DAILY

Brenda Starr makes way for Rumi, Neruda, and Merwin.

By Mary Schmich

Poetry Media Service

I write a news column at the Chicago Tribune, and at the beginning of baseball season this year one of my editors phoned with a tough assignment, something, he said, that called for special skills.

Was I being asked to investigate a doping scandal? conduct an exclusive interview? throw out the first pitch?

"Can you write us a poem about opening day?" he asked.

He and I both knew that by "poem" he meant doggerel—silly verse written with a wink—and I obliged:

Yes, baseball's back, at last, at last

To bat away the blues

The games arrive like sunshine

In the bleepin' gloomy news.

Blagojevich indicted!

The economy's a mess!

Plus parking, potholes, crooks and crimes!

We need some anti-stress!

—From An Ode to Opening Day

It ran on the front page, embroidered with old-fashioned bunting that signaled that rhyming verse, like baseball itself, was a relic of a quainter time.

I've always felt slightly sheepish about the pleasure I get from my occasional forays into doggerel. The enjoyment some columnists get from their political fulminations, I get from rhyming "spinach" and "Kucinich."

I feel only slightly less sheepish about how often I exploit the poems of real poets to make a serious point. Poetry and journalism are like peanut butter and baloney: coupling them is not to everyone's taste.

But I can't help myself. Poetry isn't just a way of writing, it's a way of thinking, and I've been thinking that way since at least sixth grade.

At Alexander School IV in Macon, Georgia, Miss Lois Birch, who seemed as old as God, made us memorize poems. The two I remember spring to mind as often as the faces of old friends. I keep them in my head the way you might keep worry beads in your pocket, reaching reflexively in times of stress for their meaning, rhythm, sound.

One is by John Masefield: "I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky, / And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by." The other is by William Wordsworth:

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils.

Whenever I can, I sneak poems into my newspaper column.

After terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center, I instinctively flipped through my most dog-eared book of poems, Wislawa Szymborska's View with a Grain of Sand, and plucked a few verses from "Hatred":

See how efficient it still is,

how it keeps itself in shape—

our century's hatred.

How easily it vaults the tallest obstacles.

How rapidly it pounces, tracks us down.

Her poem gave my prose a power it wouldn't otherwise have had.

When W.S. Merwin won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for poetry, I used the occasion as an excuse to quote from "Rain Light," about a mother's death. I put a link to the entire poem in my column, and hundreds of readers sought it out.

I've bolstered my own summer musings with Mary Oliver's "The Summer Day," whose last line electrocutes me every time I read it: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?"

In autumn, I've quoted from Pablo Neruda's "October Fullness," though it's about October as a time of life more than a time of year:

Little by little, and also in great leaps,

life happened to me,

and how insignificant this business is.

The response to the columns in which I quote good poems is always strong, which is another reason to feel sheepish: even with full attribution, I'm reaping credit for someone else's genius.

Poetry also creeps into Brenda Starr, the soap-opera comic strip I've written for 24 years. Our heroine, Brenda, quotes poetry and muses on it. Heroes and villains alike use it to woo her.

Recently, a mysterious, dashing man named Ringo, from the fictitious country of Kazookistan, dazzled her with verse:

Ringo didn't conquer Brenda, but he did seduce many comics readers who were grateful to discover Rumi and Hafiz.

Newspaper columns, comic strips, and poems may not seem like related literary forms, but they're less different than they look. In their own ways, each of them seeks the same thing: to make meaning in a space whose power lies in always being just a little too short.

Mary Schmich is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune and writes the Brenda Starr comic strip. This essay first appeared in the September 2009 issue of Poetry magazine and is available at www.poetryfoundation.org. Distributed by the Poetry Foundation.

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