



Poetry's Party Begins

by

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April literally showers poetry across America in a continuum of the celebration that began in 1996, when the American Academy of Poets selected the month as a special one for verse. In the wee hours of the very first poetry month celebration, The Atlantic quoted U.S. Poet Laureate Joseph Brodsky. Brodsky made a point still relevant today: "The role of poetry in society depends upon the audience, not the poet."

Over the years, poetry has variously been declared dead, even irrelevant. But those of us who travel to share poetry with audiences know better. Americans love poetry; even the Poetry Foundation discovered this fact in a survey not long ago.

The nature of poetry makes it easy to celebrate in countless ways. **South Carolina poet Jayne Jaudon Ferrer**, who has sold many thousands of poetry books published through large houses, has quietly celebrated for years by selecting a poem for each day of the month. She's chosen classic poems from the past and contemporary poems by emerging voices. She emails a poem each day to her fan list, not seeming to mind the time she must invest.

Asked why she goes to so much trouble, she laughs. "Believe me, you have no idea!" Ferrer not only enjoys writing poetry, she loves to read it, too. She says when she was a child, she "huddled up with the dictionary." There was a certain thrill, she says, "in discovering a new abstraction of words."

Ferrer likes a poem to grab her in the first few lines. She echoes the rush, described so well in the familiar quote by Emily Dickinson: "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry."

"Oh," says Ferrer, "the rush when I come across a poem with vivid images, with use of masterful language, or with pathos or humor smacking me square in the solar plexus!"

Lack of interest by others actually spurred Ferrer to begin her "Springtime Parade of Poems," she recalls. "I went in search of poems to evoke the interest of my brother and brother-in-law. They read *my* poems because they have to! But I wanted to show them there are other poets whose work they might enjoy just as much, if not more."

She says a big challenge is tracking down living authors to get permission to use their work. It can be frustrating. "If people can't find you, they can't read your work. Get a web site!" she advises.

Ferrer has traveled across the United States to read her poems, from coast to coast and to many points in between. A major theme in her lyrically constructed free verse is motherhood. She's one of the contemporary voices some might dub a poetry warrior. "I'm on a mission to show people that if they think they don't like poetry, they simply haven't found the right poem," she says.

While Brodsky might not agree with poetry as a mission, he did have ideas about society's receptiveness and the poet's responsibility. A poet, he says, has a responsibility to write well. "It is society's job to meet him halfway, that is, to open his book and to read it."

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