

So Many Memories

Poetry and Grief

By Kathleen O'Toole,
Takoma Park Poet Laureate

In his stunning book, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, psychotherapist Francis Weller quotes a 12th century poem (author uncertain) to support his insistence that "...we must become fluent in the language and customs of grief."

'Tis a fearful thing
To love
What death can touch
To love, to hope, to dream
And oh, to lose.

A thing for fools, this
Love
But a holy thing,
To love what death can touch.

Poets, and poetry, have always offered a powerful way to honor and celebrate to eulogize those we have loved and lost, also those (both well-known and unknown) who have left a mark on our lives. Not surprising that so many of us have turned to poetry as the names and stories of strangers and celebrities who have fallen to COVID-19 wash over us. I think immediately of the opening lines of Walt Whitman's elegy to Lincoln:

*When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn, with ever returning spring.
Spring flowers, this year too, are both consolation and*

aching reminders of loss. When my first poetry collection, *Meanwhile*, was published, a Takoma Park neighbor mused after a reading: "Why so much death in your poems?" I credited my upbringing in an Irish-Italian family where "Reading Obituaries" (one of the poem titles) was a daily sport, where death was talked about (a lot) and rituals, like laying flowers at family graves, expected. No surprise that the first section of my latest collection, *This Far*, is composed of elegies to what I call "the saints" in my own life, people whose daily lives, work, and acts of compassion, leadership and creativity often go unnoticed.

Some favorite poetic elegies (by poets, in this case, who have also passed on) seem right for this moment, as they honor unheralded subjects, and private moments of intimacy and sacrifice. When the Irish poet Eavan Boland died at the end of April, most tributes pointed out her poetry's power to shine a light on the lives of ordinary people, in history, and all around us.

Many shared her poem "Quarantine," (poets.org/poem/quarantine), which depicts a private act of selfless love at the height of the Irish famine, the sort we are seeing in our own times.

I offer two others for your reflection. Perhaps you'll substitute the names and stories of your own mothers and sisters, or the neighbors, bus drivers, nurses, grocery staff and musicians whose loss you want to recognize.

the lost women

Lucille Clifton (1936-2010)

i need to know their names
those women i would have walked with
jauntily the way men go in groups

swinging their arms, and the ones
those sweating women whom i would have joined
after a hard game to chew the fat
what would we have called each other laughing
joking into our beer? where are my gangs,
my teams, my mislaid sisters?
all the women who could have known me,
where in the world are their names?

Clearances

In Memoriam, M.K.H

Seamus Heaney (1928 – 2013)

III.
When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us,
things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

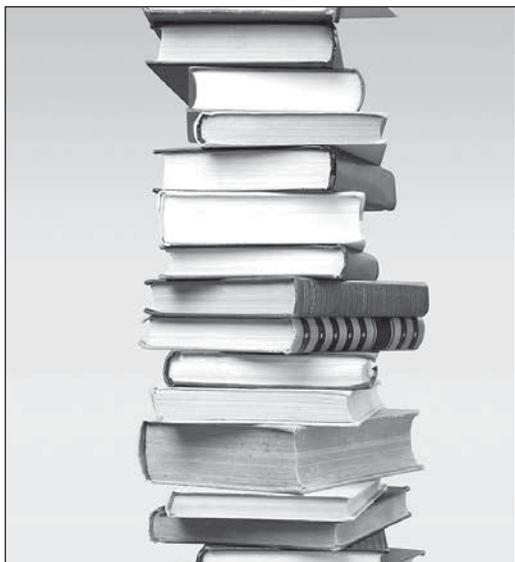
So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards
my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives—
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

Library Continued



It's time to return your Takoma Park Maryland Library Books!

Hooray! Sometime soon, the Takoma Park Maryland Library will launch a contactless checkout "Books-To-Go" service. Stay tuned for details. As part of getting ready for this service, we'd love it if you returned the books you took out in the mad rush before we closed. Please help us get back into the swing of things by returning your books. Our book drop is open 24/7 and checked at least once daily. **No overdue fines, of course.**



LGBTQ Pride Month

June is LGBTQ Pride Month! Celebrate by reading some winners of the Stonewall Book Awards, sponsored by the American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table. To find award winners, go to this link: www.ala.org/rt/rrt/award/stonewall/honored#2018.

Several the kids' Stonewall Award winners can be found as e-books and/or au-

diobooks on Hoopla, one of the Library's digital offerings. If you are not already a Hoopla user, check out this link: www.takomapark.info/library/hoopla.html.

Among the Stonewall Book Award kids' books available on Hoopla are *Hurricane Child* by Kacen Callender; *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* by Rick Riordan; and *PRIDE: Celebrating Diversity and Community* by Robin Stevenson.

Online Programs

Storytime Videos

Children's Librarian Kati Nolfi has created a number of Storytime videos and some songs and rhymes that are easily accessed via the library's Facebook page; Kati creates two or three of the videos weekly.

Comics Jam

Wednesdays, 4–5:30 p.m.

Join Dave Burbank for some fun reading great comics! He concludes the program by taking drawing requests from participants.

Sketch Club

Fridays, 4–5:30 p.m.

Dave hosts this low-key program where everyone has fun drawing to-

gether, but each focusing on his/her own work.

To access both of these programs, go to <https://zoom.us>. Click on "Join a Meeting" and put in Meeting ID 734-913-6285. (If the Meeting ID changes, we will post the new one on our Facebook page and listservs).

Circle Time

Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m.–11 a.m.

Ms. Karen is now doing a weekly online Circle Time via Zoom. Mr. Gabe joins Ms. Karen at Circle Time on the second Tuesday of each month. Through June 9, the Meeting ID is: 897-6962-2209, and the password is: 309390

To keep up with the library's online activities - and other fun book-related things, check the events listing on our website, www.takomapark.info/library, our Facebook page, or our Twitter (@takoma).

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

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set up in the classroom. Students could purchase items that the staff and parents donated.

Latoya's sign language club gave the participants the opportunity to learn a new language. The kids learned the alphabet, colors and how to sign their names. With the cheerleading club, participants

were taught the value of teamwork because they had to rely on one another. Although the current pandemic created some challenges, Alexis and Latoya are still working virtually to create activities for their After the Bell youth, such as a virtual arts and craft project and a slide show of the year in review. These young ladies did an excellent job this school year and are looking forward to continuing to make a difference in the community.