

FOR ALL OUR VOICES

Issue No. 1

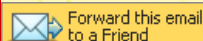
April 2009

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[George Ella's website](#)



Welcome to the first edition of my online newsletter! I'm happy to seed it in April when we celebrate National Poetry Month amid the blossoming, nesting, and leafing going on all around us. Spring! What a relief!



Subscribe to Our Newsletter!

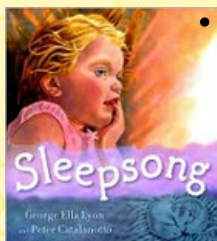
I plan to make this available every other month and to include the following things, more or less:

- News of books & projects
- A poem
- An exercise for you (& your students) to try
- Quotations I find helpful
- Response to questions I've received

So here goes!

("Tulip Way", the photo above, is by [Arn W. Olson](#).)

NEWS



• for children

Sleepsong, illustrated by Peter Catalanotto (Atheneum) came out on December 23rd. (Here's hoping some last minute shoppers found it.) This is a lullaby book and you can hear me sing it on the website. Now when I do school appearances I take my guitar too.

George Ella Lyon
Peter Catalanotto

You and Me and Home Sweet Home, illustrated by Stephanie Anderson (*Weaving the Rainbow*), will be out in the fall

from Atheneum.

My Friend, the Starfinder (illustrated by Stephen Gammell) has been nominated for the Minnesota Book Award. (Stephen lives in St. Paul.)

"Tree Song" is just out in Georgia Heard's *Falling Down the Page: A Book of List Poems* (Roaring Brook Press).

"Favorite" has just appeared in Paul Janeczko's *A Foot in the Mouth*, illustrated by Chris Raschka (Candlewick).

Here and Then: A Tale of Kentucky in the Civil War is being reprinted with an introduction by MotesBooks. It should be out in time for fall classes.

for adults

Back, a collection of poems, will be out this year from Wind Publications. Thank you, Charlie Hughes!

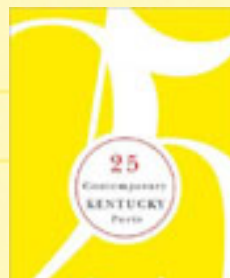
She Let Herself Go, also poems, has been accepted by LSU for their poetry series. It comes out in 2012.

"Mary," a poem about the folk singer Mary Travers, is just out in *Motif volume 1: Writing by Ear*, an anthology of writings about music, edited by Marianne Worthington and published by MotesBooks.

Four poems, "My Grandfather in Search of Moonshine," "Salvation," "Cathedrals," and "Mother's Day at the Air Force Museum" will be published in *What Comes Down to Us: 25 Contemporary Kentucky Poets*, edited by Jeff Worley and due out in October from the University Press of Kentucky.

In Process:

A young-adult novel I began in 2004, then lost to a computer crash, then shelved because my mother was critically ill. Right now it's called *Oh, Baby!*



Music:

Public Outcry, the anti-mountaintop removal band I'm part of, performed on March 25th at "Poets for Peace in the Mountains," held at Al's Bar in Lexington. We were also on the program at "An Evening with the Mountain-Keepers" held at the University of Kentucky on April 9. [Listen to](#) "Just a Mountain."



Upcoming Class:

I will be offering a one-day picture book intensive at the Carnegie Center in Lexington this summer. [Email me](#) for more information.

POEM

Having worked all morning preparing for a teacher workshop, I was driving down I-64 and thinking about how scary the blank page can be when this poem came to me. One of my rules is "Don't write while driving" but what can you do when you're going 70 miles an hour in the center lane? I need a bumper sticker which says "I Break for Poems."

FROM THE PAGE

I am blank
because your heart
is scrawled over with stories.

I am empty
because your life is full.

I am perfectly flat
so you can pitch a tent
a fit
a high sweet song.

I am light
so you can make your mark.

I am open
so you can walk in.

Lean close.
Let me feel your breath.
Ah!
Tell me everything.

--George Ella Lyon

EXERCISE

Think of something you are drawn to but which scares you and imagine it speaking to you. You can write this as a list of comments, a paragraph, questions, however it comes. Nothing is too slight, too silly, too angry, too weird, too anything. Just let the words flow and see what happens.

It helps me to listen for the words in my head and feel them in my throat, as if I were talking. If you can talk, you can write. Don't hold back!

One thing which often stops people is their inner judge who says (no matter what you write), "That's dumb. I can't believe you wrote that. It's obvious you don't know what you're doing. Good grief! This is pathetic! etc." Do not listen to this voice. The only way people ever wrote the poems, novels, picture books, songs, movies, and whatever else you like is by ignoring that voice. We have all got it, believe me. It is not our friend.

The page is your friend, so trust it. Trust yourself. Write!

QUOTATIONS recently copied into my journal

"Myths are public dreams. Dreams are private myths." and

"I have bought this wonderful machine -- a computer . . . it seems to me to be an Old Testament god, with a lot of rules and no mercy." --Joseph Campbell, quoted on *The Writer's Almanac*, on his birthday, March 26th.

"I was 32 when I started cooking; until then I just ate." --Julia Child

"You need only claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done, which may take some time, you are fierce with reality."

--Florida Scott-Maxwell

QUESTIONS

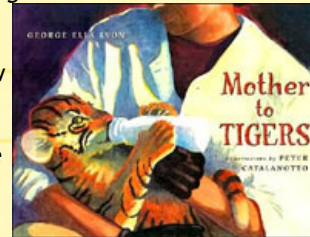
Here's a big one: *How do you know where to start?*

In my experience, you don't. You find out where to start by writing a lot and then looking for the beginning. Writing teaches you what it is you're writing about, what it is about the subject and the material which compels you. That's why it's such deep work and so valuable whether or not anyone else ever sees a word of it.

For an example, look at this scroll of all the drafts of *Mother to Tigers*.

It's 155 pages long but the text of the book fits on 4 ½ pages.
Did I know where to start? Definitely not. If I'd waited till I knew where to start there would not be a book.

You start where the pen touches the page or your fingers find the keys. The piece you're working on starts somewhere in all the writing you will do toward it. Trust yourself. Trust the process.



Happy Spring! Happy writing!

George Ella Lyon