

# FOR ALL OUR VOICES

Issue No. 6

April 2011

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Happy National Poetry Month! I don't know about where you live, but here in Kentucky we've had a very deep winter and a reluctant spring, so I am especially glad for the sunshiny blossoming of everything, for poems cascading all around via emails, blogs, readings, and daily work. This great fizz of festivities has set me remembering my first experience writing a poem.

I was about nine and went to my neighbor Star's birthday party only to be overcome with jealousy. For starters, her name was Star and mine was George. Then she was blond & little & cute, whereas I had to shop in the chubby department. But I was used to all that. The new thing was her gift. She got a pink girl's bike with streamers on the handle, a light, a white wicker basket, and a horn that worked. I had a boy's bike, handed down from my brother. It was red, rusty, lightless. A horn? Are you kidding? Streamers? Basket?

When I got home I had this big sadness inside. I didn't want Star's bike. I wanted *my* bike (which I did get -- a beautiful red-and-cream Schwinn Homet -- about a year later) and I wanted a girl's name. What could I do?

Well, because my father read poems out loud, and I loved their intensity of feeling, I knew that words were magic. Poems could hold feelings too big to keep inside. So I sat down and wrote.

In my poem I had a purple bicycle with all the wonderful features of Star's bike and something extra: it could fly! This was long before *E.T.* The only flying bicycle I'd seen belonged to the Kansas woman who morphed into the witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. So in giving myself this miracle bike that could take me anywhere in the world, I not only set myself free from that little pit of envy but I transformed fear into something wonderful.

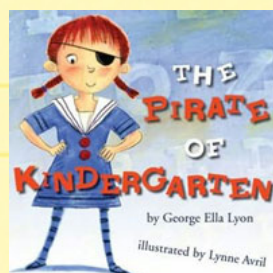
I don't remember the poem itself, but I remember where I sat when I wrote it, the spring wind coming in the window. I remember the joy and amazement I felt when I read it over. The power.

I go to my desk looking for that every day.

## NEWS

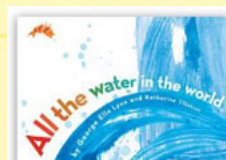
### picture books

[The Pirate of Kindergarten](#) won ALA's Schneider Family Book Award, given for artistic expression of a child's experience of disability. This means I get to go to ALA in June and meet Lynne Avril, whose brilliant and light-hearted illustrations have made it possible for me, finally, to show people what it was like to have double vision as a kid, and to give other kids a chance to talk about our differences.



*Pirate* was also named to Bank Street College's Best Books List.

[All the Water in the World](#), illustrated by Katherine Tillotson, came out March 22<sup>nd</sup>. A Top Ten Pick on the Indie



Next Kids' List, it got a starred review in *Booklist*.



### *fiction*

*Holding On to Zoe* has gone to copyediting. The copyeditor's job is to question everything, so I am preparing to get the manuscript back, feathered with flags. This crucial step always makes me mad. I want to say, I'm done already!! But you know what it's like when you try to read a book that nobody went over with a fine-toothed comb. Tangled. Snarled. So I am waiting with gratitude and dread. Or dreads. (Dreaditude?)

Now I'm working on a novel in poems. That's another reason I don't want to go through *Zoe* again. For me, it's much easier to work on the first draft of something than to revise or -- gulp! -- commit to a final draft. The beginning is like falling in love, and what better month than April...

### *poetry*

My esteemed agent, Brenda Bowen, found a poem in one of my emails and posted it to her blog, *Bunny Eat Bunny*. When I say *found*, I mean I just wrote it as a sentence among other sentences. She broke it into lines and liberated it as a poem! I immediately did the same with part of an email from Richard Jackson, editor of *All the Water in the World* (and all but three of the books for young readers which came before it). I challenge you to listen to words around you read your emails with an eye and ear to possible poems. More on this in the exercise below.

I am delighted to be included in Greg K's "30 Poets/30 Days" NPM celebration again this year. Join the fun at [GottaBook.blogspot.com](http://GottaBook.blogspot.com).

### QUOTATIONS recently copied into my journal

"Tell yourself what you would tell yourself if you were not you."

-- overheard at the Appalachian Studies Conference

"Poems often come to me in constellations, piles, avalanches, and I just hang on till it's over."

-- Richard Hague

"Have you ever written a book that saved a child's life?"

-- question from a fifth grader

### WRITING EXERCISE and POEM

My friend and collaborator Peter Catalanotto tells me that people think they can't draw because they don't really LOOK at things, don't give themselves over to looking, as an artist does. The corollary with writing is that most people don't LISTEN to the voices within them and the voices (written as well as spoken) they live among. I am always taking notes on what other people say -- hence the quotations above. They are part of what fills my journals, and they save me from the boredom of myself.

So, in celebration of National Poetry Month, I invite you to look for unintended poems in the words people offer you, whether in conversation, emails, letters, or just walking by, talking on their cell phones, standing in line at the grocery. Come alive to the possibilities of poetry in your everyday life.

Brenda Bowen's discovery, mentioned above, of a poem in my email is one example of this. Another happened yesterday when my lifelong friend, writer and community college director Bruce Florence, wrote this in an email:

*Also, here in town there is a weeping cherry tree that is very old with a big circumference. A very romantic young man put under it a small round table with white tablecloth, candles. Dinner was served by his Dad as*

*a pre-meal for his prom date. His idea. The rest of the town was entranced. Too many of us drove by, but because the blooming branches fell all around them, they were not aware of the traffic. Or if they were she had the good sense not to comment - - I heard the full story later.*

Here's the poem I found. See how line breaks and a few cuts make room for the words to breathe and let the images shine.

Here in town

there is a weeping cherry tree  
very old with a big circumference.

A young man put under it

a small round table with white  
tablecloth, candles.

Dinner was served

by his Dad --a pre-meal  
for his prom date. His idea.

Too many of us drove by, entranced,  
as the blooming branches  
fell all around them.

Happy writing! Happy spring! May the Poem be with you!

George Ella Lyon