

Baraboo Public Library

Presents

Readings by

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2019-2020 Wisconsin Poet Laureate

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Transcript

Hello. Welcome to my home. My name is Margaret Rozga. I'm the 2019-2020 Wisconsin Poet Laureate. Happy to serve in that capacity. I'm also Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Waukesha.

What I'll be doing today is to read some of my poems and talk a little bit about the process of writing them and how the ideas came to me.

I'm particularly glad to be here virtually at the Baraboo Public Library. Baraboo is a place that I like a great deal. I have been there when the campus at Waukesha was part of the UW Colleges. We were in the same configuration as the University in Baraboo so we often had meetings at each other's campuses and I came to like Baraboo very much then.

I have another Baraboo connection that I'd like to talk about. This one will take a little more explanation. So the backstory is that last fall I was able to go to the island of Islay ("Eye-la"). It's one of the Hebrides off the western coast of Scotland, and I went there because there's another Margaret Rozga. She owns a bed and breakfast on the island, and ever since I knew of her I wanted to go and meet her. So I'm glad I had this opportunity.

While we were there on the island she told us about an incident that happened during World War I when a ship carrying American soldiers to the war in Europe was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Islay. It's a very rough, rugged coastline so not everybody made it to shore but the people of Islay did take care of those who made it to shore, and arranged for a burial of - at least temporary - until the bodies could be repatriated on the island. It's a wonderful story. The sewing circle people got together and whatever red, white, and blue fabric they had, they stitched together the American flag so that the people who had not made it could be buried under their own flag. And at the museum in Islay we found a book about this series of events, and as I read the book what I found

out was that a lot of those soldiers were from Baraboo. So you can imagine my surprise. Here I am so far from home, and I am what one of the things said the people there claim as a significant part of their history connects to very close to home. And I tell you this story because I don't know how well known it is in Baraboo. I hope it is part of the story that Baraboo tells itself about the history of people from Baraboo. And because I have written about Wisconsin – events in Wisconsin history and people from Wisconsin – I like to offer opportunities to others to pick up those challenges. So there may be writers who would like to investigate this further. And at any rate, if there are people who are currently living in Baraboo whose grandfathers or great-grandfathers, whose ancestors were among those people who were cared for by people in Islay, I'd really like to hear from you. And you can contact me through the Wisconsin Poet Laureate website. Okay, so those are my Baraboo connections.

I'm going to move on to talk about poetry. I do write poetry from history, from historical events, among other concerns; sort of an outward-looking poetry rather than an introspective poetry. And a piece that explains my take on poetry. It was for one of the last issues of Verse Wisconsin, where the editors asked a number of us to curate a section of poems. So my section was called, "Poetry, let's go out and play." And this is the introduction to that section. (I'm talking to Poetry in the piece, and I call Poetry "honey".)

Honey, it's great you entertain yourself
But you're getting all tied up in knots.
After the long winter, you need to get outside.
Get moving, stretch your muscles, make some noise
The fresh air and sun will do you good.
You'll love it. You'll feel new energy.
And look. Your friend History is out there
Chalking on the sidewalk.
But she's working all in white.
Here, take your box of colors with you.
Share with her.
And Justice is roller-blading across the street
Hey that looks like fun.
Want me to get your skates up from the basement?
Later we can go to the corner café, find a spot at an outdoor table,
Brush away whatever crumbs, relax, and have a

Chocolate croissant.

Or we could go downtown, check out what shoppers are buying,

Eavesdrop on young executives walking in step to lunch.

And what about teens skipping school? Parking checkers, hotel guests

Exiting and entering taxis?

And clerks, taking their breaks in jogging shoes?

What stories do they have to tell?

Wh-What's that you say?

You-you want to cross the bridge and see what's happening

On the other side of town?

Just as I thought. You're getting the spirit.

Looks like you're ready to turn up the volume and sing

Solidarity Forever with those whose singing cannot

Be arrested.

Once you get started you want to keep going late into the night.

Look at you. Hanging out with all your new friends

Gathered in the light of the moon, spelling out your name.

Poetry, you're a love.

Now I struggle to keep up with you.

So, we're going to do a little chalking with History on the sidewalk today, metaphorically speaking, with these poems. I'm going to begin by reading some poems from *Pestiferous Questions: A Life in Poems*. The life is Jessie Benton Frémont's. She was born in 1824, died in 1902. So this is going to take us back over a century and a half.

One of the reasons that I like to write about History is I feel it's a way to honor my mother, who if she had not been growing up during the Depression, would have liked to go to college and study History. So, here's a poem that sets that theme.

History, flat timeline.

Something to trip up those who walk unawares.

My mother longed to pick it up, but

Her father, her overbearing brothers

Somehow she put it in my hands.

I see a jump rope.

Turn it. Turn another. Jump. Double dutch.

So, the timeline that becomes a jump rope is a central metaphor in the book. And the people involved in this jump rope – the double persons – are Jessie Benton Frémont and me.

One of the things I was concerned about as I was writing the poems is justifying my writing in Jessie's voice...by virtue of what could I do that. Especially when I made up some details. And that concern comes through in this poem called "At the Archives". I was doing research at the American Antiquarian Society, and while it was okay with them to photograph documents for you, photocopy documents for you, they preferred that you use your own camera and just take pictures of them as the document was in a cradle on the desk. The only problem with that was the strong overhead lighting created shadows on the page, and so this poem.

At the Archives

Rule 2. Use book cradles at all times.

No matter how I positioned myself, no matter the angle of my camera,

Given the abundant overhead lighting, I cannot find a way to photograph

Any of the documents I'd placed in the cradle on the table without also catching

My shadow on the page.

So that physical fact of photographing at the Archives seemed to me to be a metaphor for the fact that no matter how carefully I read about Jessie that I was going to be inserting myself somehow - my shadow would show – in what I would write. So that is sort of the caution about when I speak in Jessie's voice. But I did read carefully. At one point she writes to her good friend, Elizabeth Blair Lee, this statement that clued me into the fact that I would have to read behind the lines. "Jessie my dear friend Lizzie - Elizabeth Blair Lee, because our fathers think alike, because we're alike, yet different, because we're close as sisters, because your quiet invites my voice, because I never said so much about myself to anyone but you before."

So I paid particular attention to Jessie's communication with Elizabeth Blair Lee, at least for the period of her life that lasted. Elizabeth Blair, before her marriage, was a member of the Blair family, whose house was across the street from the White House. Her father – Elizabeth Blair's – and Jessie's father, Thomas Hart Benton, the Senator from Missouri, were good friends. The Blair family

was involved in politics...well, we'll get to all of that in a minute. There were some...There came a point at which the friendship ran into difficulties.

But, how did I discover Jessie? I was traveling in Arizona, and I like to read about the place where I'm traveling. So at some historic site I picked up a copy of her collected letters. Her husband, John Charles Frémont, among other things, was at one point territorial governor of Arizona. And so that's why Frémont things were at historical sites in Arizona. The book intrigued me. The Jessie that was so... had such multiple aspects to her personality just pulled me in.

So this poem is called "Let Me Not Misspeak: The Letters of Jessie Benton Frémont".

Let Me Not Misspeak: The Letters of Jessie Benton Frémont.

I opened the book to her letter dated five years after her marriage.

On the page a voice pleading with her husband,

An undertone claiming my ear.

How old are you?

You might tell me, now I am a Col's wife,

Won't you, old Papa? Poor Papa.

I read fiction fashioned out of Jessie's story.

The author, tone deaf, dedicates it to his wife as if she were

Jessie's shadow; he and Frémont, heroes.

Each "she" thus reduced to an Immortal Wife.

I try to imagine a capitol girlhood

Daily guests for breakfast, for dinner.

A small table in a separate room for children

Who misspeak.

Having misspoken, Jessie learns

Prompt others, reply briefly, and smile.

I visit the archives where in Frémont's grand, leather-bound memoirs,

Her introduction celebrates the happy chance which made her the

Connecting link in our manifest destiny,

As if it were all glory,
As if there were no rifts between husband and father,
As if no indigenous people were displaced,
No one lonely, hurt, hurting.

I touch those gold leaf pages.
They impress but cannot convince me.
Between the fragile pages of father- and husband-centered history,
I dig like crazy.

And so I find Jessie. I find her as a schoolgirl. I find her as a young woman about to marry. She marries Frémont against the wishes of her parents. She's very young. She's not yet 18. Her father really...well he finds Frémont, who is an explorer, useful in his work trying to expand the country westward. He does not see him as a suitable husband for his daughter – very bright, very personable, could rank high in Washington society if she made the right marriage. And this is not the right marriage, according to her father. But they elope. And here's Jessie on her wedding night.

Jessie: Brilliant Night

We walked out into the autumn chill changed as if we had crossed more than muddy lanes,
The hem of my dress unsoiled.

The way a blur.

Soon, Love, soon.

Mr. Frémont's words floated with me back to my C Street home.

Inside, all doors were closed, sweetly closed, mercifully closed,

Father going over notes for a speech,

Mother, my sisters' hushed tones.

I dismissed Harriet after she helped me brush my hair.

I opened the window to see the stars.

Mr. Frémont knew how to plot them,

To calculate their position.

Mr. Frémont...John.

Mrs. Frémont.

I was sure we would be all right...soon.

Her father's very angry at the marriage, banishes her from the house. The mother helps to reconcile father and daughter. And her father begins to arrange for Frémont to lead these government expeditions mapping routes westward. So, he's not really there very much for five of the first eight years of their marriage.

That is the first of some unhappiness for Jessie. Their life takes many turns. He - Frémont - happens to be in California during the Mexican War, and is instrumental in securing California for the United States. He becomes one of the first Senators from California but only for a very short term. They live in California for a while, coming back to Washington where she's much happier. She likes the social life, and so on. And they're opposed to slavery. The irony of her father's position is that he's for western expansion but against the expansion of slavery. And a lot of the interest in expanding westward was to expand slave territory.

Three of the expeditions Frémont did were government supported. The last two – he did five in all – were privately financed to map a route for the transcontinental railroad. And here again, this is one of the things I learned doing the research: How much slavery entered into most considerations about political issues. If the transcontinental railroad was built on a southern route, it would be much easier to build, the weather would be better, but that meant that slavery could more easily be expanded westward. If it was built on what is called a mid-continent route, it would be harder to build, they'd have to contend with winter, but it would somewhat impede the expansion of slavery. So John is sent to map this mid-continent route in 1853. The trip really does not go well. And this is Jessie, while John is gone, speaking.

Jessie The Fifth Expedition, 1853

Four months, and no word from Mr. Frémont.

Father cold, unsympathetic.

He talks Kansas, only Kansas.

The territory, divide it obliquely,

As rivers flow, southeast from northwest.

Kansas, Kansas, three times Kansas.

Father talks a mid-continent path for the railroad,

Our Pacific ports.

He believes we can, we must expand.

He lost his Senate seat, and then a House seat,

Still talking expansion westward.

What he dare not say: without expanding slavery.

Father, Father, they don't listen. They won't listen.

You argued statehood the thirty years they ignored Oregon

And let British claims manifestly linger.

Now they want territory because it is Southern,

Because they want slaves.

So, as a person who strongly opposes the expansion of slavery, Frémont is nominated by the Republicans. They were an anti-slavery party originally. They nominate him to be their first presidential candidate in 1856. He loses to James Buchanan, and Civil War breaks out when Lincoln is elected four years later. So, Lincoln appoints Frémont Commander on the Western Front, which is headquartered in St. Louis, probably thinking that the Benton connections in Missouri would keep Missouri in the Union. This also does not go well. Frémont has his own ideas about what will keep Missouri in the Union; one of those ideas being emancipating the secessionists' slaves. If the people enslaved by secessionists are emancipated, then that's reason to stay in the Union because the enslaved people of Union supporters were not to be emancipated, according to Frémont's proclamation, virtually the proclamation that Lincoln later issues. But Frémont does it for Missouri without consulting anyone. It's against Lincoln's strategy. He's furious, and word comes out that Frémont will be displaced, although he's been in the position less than three months.

Jessie, given her political connections, thinks she can save the position for her husband, and decides to go to Washington – Washington City, as it was called in those days. And this is her thinking about the war – the Civil War – and her husband's position.

Jessie: The President Must Listen to Me

Father lived and breathed history.

He took to heart its wars, its issues.

Saw how generals, statesmen, heroes

Stood strong.

Saw how their winning or losing rolled forward

To our own times.

He taught me.

Tonight with the moon's glare on the

Dressing table mirror,
I cannot see myself,
Not clearly,
And there's so much unseen,
Even in daylight,
Unseen by friends, old friends, once friends,
Unseen by men who cannot look themselves in the mirror,
Can no longer look me in the eye.
Among them, Frank Blair.
Father is so kind to him.
Father offered Frank his connections.
How else does a man like Frank, fond of drink as he is,
Gain election to Congress?
I cannot see where he turns against me, against us.
Can he not see soldiers in tattered uniforms, some with no uniforms,
Some even without shoes?
His friends sell the Army blind horses, sick mules, rancid meat,
Thin or rent canvas for tents.
Troops muster in, muster out, unpaid, discharged.
How the greedy love war.
The money to be made.
Can't they see? Such an ill-equipped army cannot win this
Necessary war.
Why do they not see how order is necessary?
A General Frémont must be obeyed.
A chain of command is only as strong as its weakest link.
So many weak links up and down this chain.
The great cause of this war – emancipation –
They do not, cannot, will not see.
They refuse to see how it rallies new volunteers, despite the cold.
The need to bring their own guns and horses, even their own food.
Thus, this war will be won only if we fight for a
great cause.

This mirror, this moon,
I want to see myself clearly.
I will be seen.
I will tell what I see.
Officers duck, dodge, shun, evade responsibility.
They say General Frémont's Guard too showy.
They say his style too aloof.
They disregard his orders
They mock him.
They show no will to win.
They seem not to care.
They want the General replaced.

I will, I must to Washington City.
The President must see me, must listen, must know
Why the General's order must stand,
Why we must emancipate
The secessionists' slaves.
General Jessie, they call me.
Why do they hate us?
Why do they hate me?

Lincoln does see Jessie, but he does not heed her plea. Frémont is dismissed, and Jessie and John go back to private life. John takes up investing in railroads, which also doesn't go well. And at one point Jessie becomes the wage earner in the family, writing articles for the New York Ledger. So there are a lot of adventures to her life. She had many strengths, had some achievements, had shortcomings, had some failures, and they're pretty much all recorded in the book.

But I want to jump ahead now to the final poem in the book. I pick up the jump rope image again, and talk about why I considered writing about Jessie.

Why Jessie?

In 2009, double dutch became a varsity sport in New York Public Schools.
It requires at least three – two to turn the rope, one or more to jump.

History is a timeline.
Those who do not know History
Leave it lying underfoot.
We trip on it...again...and again.

I think today is one of those times where we are tripping on this history, this racial history again. And so I want to move forward in time. Another of those times when history was tripping us up was in the 1960s. In Milwaukee it was a time of Fair Housing marches. And so I'd like to read a couple of poems from my book about those Open Housing marches, *200 Nights and One Day*. The title of the book refers to 200 consecutive nights of marching for Fair Housing, from August 28th, 1967 to the middle of March, 1968. This was not actually the beginning of interest in housing on the part of the NAACP Youth Council and Father Groppi, who led those marches. Vel Phillips - Alder Phillips – the first African American and the first woman on the Milwaukee Common Council, had first introduced a Fair Housing bill to the Milwaukee Common Council in 1962. But it was pretty much ignored all of the three or four times that she introduced it. So we got together and raised the profile of the issue.

This first poem that I want to read talks about the Milwaukee Fair Housing campaign in relationship to the bigger Civil Rights movement. So I'll mention some events and places that you probably associate with Civil Rights. Poem is called "Prologue to Milwaukee".

Prologue to Milwaukee

Before Milwaukee and south of Wisconsin,

People on the march
Boycotting buses,
No more pay up front to go to the back
No more sitting in the back
No more looking down, looking away,
No more. No more.

People on the march
Sitting in at lunch counters,
Greensboro, Nashville,
Denied service, beaten, jailed,

But their spirit resists arrest, advances.

People on the march
To the county courthouse
Washington, D.C., the Lincoln Monument,
The Jefferson Memorial,
All the way from Selma to Montgomery,
Chicago into Cicero. Cicero?
History remembers the Dream,
Forgets nightmares.
Those startled awake stay awake.
Remember, try again, march on, inspire
Individual photos, moving pictures.

People on the march
Moving north, Milwaukee.
Moving into the heart of a young African American woman,
A lawyer married to a lawyer,
But they live with negatives.
Block busting, restrictive covenants.

People on the march
Moving a young African American man,
A Marine returned from Viet Nam,
Seeking a home for his family,
Told by the owner,
“I can’t rent to you.
What would my neighbors think?”

People on the march
Moving the heart and soul of a white Roman Catholic priest
At St. Boniface Church.
He listened to the Viet Nam veteran.
He watched the young African American woman win election

To the City Council,
Vote for a Fair Housing bill,
All alone,
Time after time after time.

People on the march
Moving history into drama,
The setting: Milwaukee, St. Boniface Catholic Church,
The 16th Street Viaduct, the 15th Street Freedom House,
Kosciuszko Park, Wisconsin Avenue, City Hall,
The city jail.

The cast of characters: people, young and old,
Black and white, powerful and challenging power.
The plot: wind from the south, southeast, dreams, nightmares,
Closed doors, closed still.
The rising action, the turning point, the denouement,
Lights, camera, action.
200 nights of marching.

People on the march
Milwaukee, Milwaukee.
An epilogue maybe in your steps,
Maybe the other side of a long expanse of bridge
You think you can't cross.

That long expanse of bridge was the 16th Street Viaduct, now renamed the James E. Groppi Unity Bridge. And the most dramatic of those 200 nights of marching took place as marchers from the North side, largely African American, moved across that bridge onto the South side, at that time, largely white.

I grew up on the South side of Milwaukee. Unlike many of the other members of the NAACP Youth Council, I was not fearful of walking on the South side. I had been doing it all my life. But this was different. So here's my story of "Crossing the 16th Street Viaduct August 28, 1967".

Peggy: Crossing the 16th Street Viaduct - August 28, 1967

16th Street? No big deal.

In high school after football or basketball games we'd go to Pepi's.

They had great pizza and we'd always find friends there.

Yet I could not be sure now. This was not high school. And I had new friends.

We marched past Pepi's, and looked at the expanse of window,

And touched the glass; it was cool and smooth.

No one stood in this doorway. No one glared at us through their windows.

I thought, It's okay. I know this place. I'll be all right.

We'll be all right.

I didn't look at the Crazy Jim's crowd: Too scary.

Up ahead was a stretch with fewer people.

When we get there, I thought, we'll be okay.

But something changed.

I felt like I had been in a tunnel and was emerging into noise,

Like the noise of a crowd at a football game,

The noise of the home team's fans and you're the visitor.

No, no, listen. That's not really it. That's not even close.

It's something deeper.

It was a wave of hate, the sound of hate,

Blurring individual words in the counter demonstrators' chant.

We turned onto Lincoln Avenue, the crowds thickening again.

I couldn't ignore it anymore, the blunt force of hate

Finding a rhyme and a rhythm.

At Kosciuszko Park we huddled around picnic tables,

Keeping very close to be able to hear.

Some man, called himself District Park Supervisor,

Said we couldn't give speeches.

"A picnic permit?" he shouted. "A picnic permit does not allow speeches."

We prayed for peace, for justice, Father Groppi leading us.

Then back up Lincoln Avenue, sometimes almost running.

Police, night sticks angled across their chests, sometimes
Pushed back on people,
People trying to get at us.
The crowd noise was like a dome enclosing us,
The whole dome moving rapidly down the street.
My face was wet with sweat.
I was not crying.
But how had I walked these streets all those years
And never seen the ugly?

So the demonstrations went on - reinforcements, supporters came from around the country - 200
nights of them, into the cold of the winter of 1967. When the Packers played the Ice Bowl, we were
marching, at least some of us were. The crowds thinned, and we began to feel like losers: all this
time, all this effort, and not much in terms of results. So here's that poem.

We Felt Like Losers – March 19, 1968

The 200th march.
Where? Who? What? When?
For 200 nights the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council on the bridge,
In the jails, at the city limits, in Judge Seraphim's court.
What will it take?
How in our life?
After 200 nights the Milwaukee Youth Council,
Momentum gone, money gone.
What will it take?
How in our life?
How closed their minds.
How hard their hearts.
Momentum gone, money gone.
Wondering, what future?
What next month?
What closed the minds? What hardened their hearts?
What to say when it's not over, but it ends?
Wondering, what future? What tomorrow?

How to bridge such injustice? Counter such limits?
What to say to move the mayor? To up end denial?
What? Who? Where? When?

We could not have known in the middle of March that within a month Fair Housing would be the law of the land. But April 10, 1968, Congress, who had been considering the Civil Rights bill, finally passed it, moved to do so in large part because of the rioting that broke out after the assassination of Martin Luther King. I like to think of that when people talk about the way to get results is to be nonviolent. So the Fair Housing Law was passed then by Milwaukee, a stronger bill than the federal bill in terms of recourse for people who were discriminated against at the end of April after spring elections and new members of the Common Council were elected. Flash forward, we're still waiting for enforcement of affirmatively furthering Fair Housing provisions of the 1968 Civil Rights Act. And one of the current controversies is about whether to roll back even the desire to do so, the mandate to do so. Fortunately this time real estate companies and other corporations are saying, "No, don't roll it back. We need to have that law in place today".

And so what I'd like to do is read a couple of more recent Civil Rights poems. One of them was written after I accompanied a group of Milwaukee Public middle and high school students to Jackson, Mississippi for the 50th anniversary celebration of Mississippi's Freedom Summer. And then we did a tour – a Civil Rights tour – of the south, including stopping in Meridian, Mississippi where a member of Milwaukee's Youth Council from the 1960s now lives. And she took us – she escorted us – to visit the grave of James Chaney, one of the Civil Rights workers from Meridian who was killed in 1964 for working on voter registration.

At James Chaney's Grave 50 Years Later

Stone on stone, granite, my pebble.

They were buried together before

They could not be buried together.

A lone voice intones,

"My life is not my own."

Some live, though they have been killed.

The body turns to stone.

You cannot kill the spirit.

I've been to Mississippi many times.
I've been standing here since I came of age.
I do not know where Michael Schwerner is buried.
How to draw a stone like so many eyes,
So many small fish,
Like so many hearts, hands, secret stories
That lie on the ground, waiting to be told.

Here are the stones –
no flat, oval stone,
The kind to skip in the lake.
No photo in the oval,
Negative space.
A rock, a stone.
Three bodies and more fished out of the river,
Into the earth, into stone,
Into words, words again to be embodied
There are those who are dead
Yet live forever.

A word of explanation about the stone on stone. There is, of course, the gravestone. But the custom is for people who visit the grave to leave a pebble on the gravestone as a sign of their respect, and a sign of their having been there to honor the dead. So all of us who were on this trip had pebbles that we put on the grave of James Chaney. It's again one of the ironies of history that when James Chaney and his fellow Civil Rights workers, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were killed, the people who killed them buried them together. But Mississippi law was that Blacks and Whites could not be buried in the same place. Rita Schwerner, Michael Schwerner's widow, wanted her husband, who was White, buried where James Chaney is buried, but it was forbidden. And I don't know where Michael Schwerner ended up being buried. But the segregationists buried them together, and then said they couldn't be buried together.

For the 50th anniversary of Milwaukee's Open Housing marches we had a number of celebrations and events and activities. One that I was particularly involved in was creating a poetry chapbook anthology that would try to envision what it was we were working for; where was it that we wanted to

live; what kind of community was the kind of community that we wanted. And my poem in that chapbook is called “Cake and Lemonade for Neighbors”.

Cake and Lemonade for Neighbors

Where I want to live

Neighbors gather on front porches

Watch their children play across multiple front yards

Laugh in Spanish, Arabic, Burmese, English

Talk about back in the day

Serve sweet and savory snacks

Lend each other a cup of sugar or flour

Borrow hedge trimmers, a shovel or rake

Help with chores when need be

Apologize when need be

Offer a word of advice, (not more)

Drum, strum guitars, and pluck banjos

Make a little noise sometimes

Sometimes bring out a kitchen chair so everyone finds a comfortable place to sit

On the unscreened wide or narrow porch, or on the stoop

Sometimes just enjoy all black brown white golden quiet

Together

And let me include here a poem that was written this year. I rent an office at a non-profit in Milwaukee called Arts at Large. In the gallery space they have exhibits. The last exhibit before the space had to close for Shelter at Home was an exhibit of the work of artist Muneer Bahauddeen, who works mainly in clay, not exclusively but primarily. So I wrote a poem in response to his exhibit. A couple of things that are helpful to understand about the poem is that I also write a column for a local newspaper about someone and their favorite poem, so I wrote that column about Muneer. And among his favorite poems is one by Dylan Thomas called “And Death Shall Have No Dominion”.

So what this poem does is to take the title of Dylan Thomas’ poem that Muneer loves, and use a portion of it, gradually getting more of it at the end of each stanza, until you get the whole title near the end.

The other thing that it's helpful to know is that, according to the program notes for this exhibit, the first ship to bring African people to this country to be enslaved was called the Good Ship Jesus. So that's referenced here. The poem is called "No Room Here for Hate".

No Room Here for Hate

Where love takes shape

Where supple clay and capable hands

Where maker faces history

Strips the Good Ship Jesus of its sails

And death shall...

Where centered depth framed and unjailed

Where open invites

Where touch makes good

Where winter snows beauty

Where we turn to symbol, to story for warming

And death shall have...

Where slant a vertical

Where patient lines

Where detail, where saving

Where healing

Where square gentles its angles

Paves open a way for Nature's gleam

And Sage's inner light

And death shall have no...

Where beauty swift entangle a fish

Where play makes knowledge palpable

And children touch, hesitate, take, create

What courageous shapes they imagine

Death shall have no dominion...

Here angle, here intersections, here imprint

Paper, paint, clay

Here in flow from generation to generation

There is no room for hate

I'd like to read just one more poem. This is from my book *Justice Freedom Herbs*. It's the closing poem. It's called "Housewarming Prayer", and it was written for my friend, poet-writer, Andi Cumbo-Floyd, who lives in southwestern Virginia on a farm that had once been a plantation. And she has done research about the enslaved people who lived there and are buried there, and shares that information with people who are coming to look for information on their ancestors.

Housewarming Prayer for Andi Cumbo-Floyd

Let there be cinnamon and nutmeg to grace the flavor of pumpkin soup

And apple pie

In honor of Ruth

Let there be fragrant spaghetti sauce

In memory of Georgina,

Let it begin with garlic and parsley

Let all the named and nameless women who ever

Cooked in this kitchen

Return with their blessings

Let all the dear women who wanted to

Or who had to

Start over, start here, with me

Let us continue in each other's names

Let there be clean water, clean dishes, clean floors, clean windows, clean air
and inviting mountains that extend and anchor my view.

Let there be firm footing and open door

And friends

In honor of those who have been bruised

Let the words of the unheard

Be heard

Let there be plum trees

Let there be a porch swing and café chairs

And rocks at the side of water where I can dangle my feet
Let there be a strong and gentle dog
And a porch where she can nap
Let there be goats to tend and the skill to tend them
Let there be a horse to groom, train, and ride
Let there be books to hide in and emerge from
With renewed courage
Let there be writers and writing here at work and here in spirit
Let there be James Baldwin, Lopez Lamong, Aggie and Gruff
In memory of all who worked or who were denied the land
And who imagined what it could be,
Let there be mercy
Let justice flow like water, and integrity like an unfailing stream
Let there be local prophets like Amos
Let there be justice, freedom, and herbs.

That's my wish for us. That's the note on which I'll conclude. Thank you for being here.