

SAN MATEO COUNTY
POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*
San Mateo County Poet Laureate
Aileen Cassinetta
Tuesday, January 12, 2021

About the poet:

Aileen Cassinetta is the 3rd Poet Laureate of San Mateo County, the first Asian American and foreign-born poet to assume the post. Widely anthologized, she is the author of two poetry collections and three chapbooks. Appointed by the Board of Supervisors in October 2018, her term has been extended through 2021. As Poet Laureate, she has worked with various county and city commissions, the Peninsula Library System, and nonprofits, such as the Housing Leadership Council and Filoli Center, to amplify the role of poetry in public discourse. Aileen facilitates youth poetry workshops, advocates the creation of youth poet laureate programs in the county, co-organizes youth poetry competitions, and offers free one-on-one mentoring sessions with San Mateo County high school students.

About this poem:

In December 2020, Aileen facilitated workshops for over 100 high school students who exhibited an interest in submitting their work to the Academy of American Poets' 2021 Inaugural Poem Contest. One of the exercises they did was craft a poem, inspired by the words of Joseph R. Biden, John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Barack Obama & Martin Luther King, Jr. Aileen and local teacher, Mr. Jim Ward, later decided to compile the students' poems in an anthology titled, "I Have a Dream: Inaugural Poems for a New Generation." The book will be released soon, sponsored by the San Mateo County Arts Commission, in honor of MLK Day and Inauguration Day.



After Joseph R. Biden, John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Barack Obama & Martin Luther King, Jr.

Time to Heal in America: A Found Poem

United, there is little we cannot do: we are Americans, friends.
We are greater than the differences of faction.
Your kitchen table is like mine. You sit there at night.
And when the time comes
to reaffirm our enduring spirit, we can laugh
in the face of our common dangers.
Someone said we live among 300 billion stars.
Someone also said in space, we cannot cry
because there is no gravity to pull down
our tears. As the planets spin, so do our days.
But on earth, gravity holds up as much as it pulls down.
With the fierce urgency of now, we can build tomorrow
on the bedrock of science, mindful of the sacrifices
of our ancestors. What comes next is a choice we make—
look ahead, dare to dream, bind up the nation's wounds.
We are a nation of 300 million possibilities.
Count on me to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle.
At my kitchen table sits the doers and makers of things,
picking themselves up then marching ahead
as far as their dreams will take them.
Besides this, I have a dream today, that I, too, am free at last,
in this winter of hardship, unafraid and unashamed
to believe in the possibility of this country.
We are Americans, and the sky is full of stars, my friends.