

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

San Mateo County Poet Laureate Lisa Rosenberg

Tuesday, April 25, 2017

About this poem:

This quarter, in celebration of National Poetry Month, I've chosen to read a poem that acknowledges poets present and past who have been my teachers or mentors—most of them unwittingly, as their influence has reached across continents, or perhaps across centuries, to enter our lives.

This poem began when I read a poem by Ted Kooser* that so stunned me, I wished that I could tell him the impact his words had on me. That impulse quickly grew to encompass all of the poets whose work has deeply affected me as both reader and writer— especially the poets I have never met, or who lived and wrote long ago. All of them can be our teachers. In this case, Kooser's mastery of metaphor was my challenge and guide as I wrote. The metaphor that emerged—about a lake as the resource for the tools of poem-making—extended throughout the poem.

I'm grateful to the *Southwest Review* and judge Elizabeth Spires for selecting this poem as the second place winner of the Morton Marr Prize, published in 2015.

* "After Years" from *Delights & Shadows* by Ted Kooser, former U.S. Poet Laureate

To the Makers

I want to tell them, all of them, the living
and the dead. Not about gratitude. I want
them to know. To tell them that it happens,
years or ages after their labors. It happens
with their work in my hand, on a bowed page,
at or near the end of a phrase. A fissure
opens onto the deep lake of their making,
its slate skin and forested rim. Tools strewn
on the silty bottom: wavering shapes, soft
with life along grooves and shanks. Through this
water, through murk and sun-shaft and clear shoals,
the pressure building or falling off, they dove
and rose, time and again. Hauling, gleaning,
and leaving the lake, to make a portal from words.