

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

San Mateo County Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta

Tuesday, January 7, 2020

About the poet:

Aileen Cassinetta began her two-year term as Poet Laureate of San Mateo County on January 1, 2019. In her first year, she visited 14 communities in the county, launched her “Speak Poetry” campaign, gave over 50 readings around the Bay Area, and promoted her events on NBC Bay Area and PenTV, and publications such as *The Six Fifty*, *Half Moon Bay Review*, and New York-based *Cagibi Magazine*. She has collaborated with other poets to help raise awareness on issues such as women’s rights, environmental protection, prevention of cruelty to animals, gun control, rehabilitation of prisoners through poetry, and mental health and suicide prevention. She is currently working on several projects to highlight more local poets, make the literary arts more accessible to people in the county, and facilitate community-building through poetry.

Census for a New Decade

In North Fair Oaks,
hay un familiar que vinó
de la tierra de las mariposas,
there is a family
from the land of the butterflies,
beekeepers who speak
of twenty million monarchs
oranging a forest in mid-winter
as stingless bees cluster and flex
wings, overwintering, with
their stored, citrusy honey.

In the family's new home
in the Avenues, la abuela
prunes a young oak
once in late winter,
Tuesday nights, she walks
to the brightly colored torta
shop on Middlefield Road.
And Sundays after church,
she takes her family to the park.

On Census Day, there will be no
mention of her history
with the monarchs and the bees.
Or her love of torta.
Only that she is female,
age 54, and Hispanic
(originally from Michoacan),
la inquilina de una casa,
on 5,000 square feet of land,
legal guardian of her two
grandchildren, a girl, 10,
and a boy, 8.

On Census Day, she will be counted
with the dignity of the invisible.
Head of her household, caregiver,
breadwinner, grandmother.
*No eres lo que logras,
eres lo que superas,**
she says, and her voice carries.
When she calls out, someone hears.
In North Fair Oaks,
there is a park that is shaped
like a new decade.

**You are not what you achieve, you are what you overcome.*