

## **Long Ago and Far Away**

As we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PST-NE, I'm drawn to events from long ago (1976) and far away at Dakota Wesleyan College, Mitchell, South Dakota. Dr. Mary Weinkauff introduced me to South Dakota State Poetry Society (SDSPS), another member of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS). I joined the society and submitted poetry to SDSPS publications. I enjoyed my membership and found limited success.

## **Branches of a Tree**

When I retired from a DC career in 2005, I moved to Gray, TN. My search for writing organizations led me to PST, the official NFSPS society for TN. I joined in 2007 and attended their Fall Poetry Festival. I met Russell Strauss, Florence Bruce, Frances Cowden, and many others long-distance through Round Robins, contests, and committee work, on Constitution and Bylaw edits. It was through this work I learned they provide for branch chapters. PST supported the PST-NE idea. I liked the idea of a society closer to my home.

## **Five Members Make a Chapter**

In my quest for poets—five was the minimum requirement—Janice Hornburg and Marlene Simpson helped me advance a plan to invite friends. Our plan worked: five founding members—Janice, Marlene, Ben Dugger, Todd Bailey and I—formed PST-NE. Russell Strauss, then PST President and former NFSPS President, was ecstatic that Tennessee would have its first branch chapter—57 years after its original founding in 1953!

## **The More the Merrier**

By February 13, 2010—our official birthdate—Jim Collier and John Summers also joined. We continued to add charter members throughout 2010. By December, we had doubled membership to 14, welcoming Martha Culp, Gretchen McCroskey, Eileen Spears, John Jenkins, Sandra Kelley, Ethan McCasland and J. Michael Ramey. Membership has fluctuated over the years, but we've mostly grown. Today, we're 34 members strong. Each of our members is a wonderful, talented member of the poetry culture.

## **Park it in the Garage ... and Other Meeting Places**

PST-NE first met in a converted garage in Gray's Washington County Library. It provided library storage and a 6-foot table where we read poetry, critiqued each other's poems, and polished them for PST poetry contest entries.

Members have helped us secure other meeting spaces including Appalachian Christian Village (courtesy of Martha Culp), John Jenkins and Sharon Fox's homes, Basler Library (courtesy of Gretchen McCroskey and Todd Bailey), Sullivan County Library in Blountville, Perkins restaurant's meeting room, the Johnson City Public Library, and now Grandview Christian Church (courtesy of incoming President Calvin Ross).

## **Contests and Other Honors**

PST's 2010-2011 *Tennessee Voices Anthology* for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Mid-South Poetry Festival announced PST-NE's members' names for 23 poetry awards of monthly and annual contests! We also sponsored contests and learned to blind-judge. We continue to garner awards.

That year I was also honored to receive the 2010-2011 Poet Laureate plaque for starting a new branch chapter. This really is the chapter's award, because all of the members made birthing the chapter possible.

## **No Requirement to Enter Contests**

I'm aware not all members are interested in competing in contests or being otherwise involved with PST or NFSPS. So with PST's approval I allowed for local Associates to share in our love of poetry.

## **Spreading Poetry Across the Region**

Over the past decade we shared poems with each other and in public readings. We read from our first anthology, *Spiritual Reflections* in the Appalachian Christian Village chapel. It was home to Martha Culp and a temporary home for my husband and I during my cancer treatments.

Since then, we've compiled three more anthologies. Meeting programs, presented by members, by outside profession or master program students, help us hone our craft. We sponsor public poetry readings, poetry contests, and workshops.

### **Kindred Spirits**

We partner with area writers groups: Lost State Writer's Guild (LSWG) members and regional college faculty are kindred spirits who share our concern for the writing craft. Some of our members also attend LSWG. I audited Gretchen's Creative Writing class at Northeast State Community College. She encouraged her students to read poems at monthly poetry readings with us. Some students and faculty later joined PST-NE.

### **Our Amazing Members**

When I first came to Tennessee I knew no creative writers. I met poets and writers from all the Tri-Cities and many of the surrounding communities. Our members have been from Blountville, Bluff City, Bristol, Elizabethton, Erwin, Greeneville, Johnson City, Jonesborough, Kingsport, Piney Flats, Unicoi. And in Virginia: Abingdon, Big Stone Gap, Bristol, and North Tazewell.

Our poets range from their 20s to 90s and come from all walks of life. Sadly, over the past decade three members died—Martha Culp, Nancy Fisher, and Jean Snader. We remember their faces, their poetry, and their laughter.

PST-NE members are amazing. Many have published in journals and gleaned poetry awards.

I could go on and on. I'm so proud of all our members and wish each much success in their lives. I look forward to the achievements of PST-NE and our individual members throughout the next decade and beyond.

Happy 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Poetry Society of Tennessee-Northeast branch ... and many more!

Rose Klix

PST-NE Founder and Outgoing President, 2018-2020

Incoming PST Liaison and Contest Chair 2020-2021