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Carry a favorite poem close to your heart--it could be a life line

By JoANN BALINGIT

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The Academy of American Poets hosts a page called "Life Lines" at poets.org. Readers share lines of poetry that are vital to them and the situations that bring these lines to mind.

Poetry readers and poets often carry favorite poems in their heads and close to their hearts. Such "life lines" offer companionship-and words are more portable than purse-dogs.

The lines "Western wind, when will thou blow/ the small rain down can rain?" make me feel good.

The relationship? It's complicated. (Is it because I had a crush on the professor I first heard recite those lines?)

Do you carry a poem or lines from a poem around with you? I don't need to convince you, then, that the right words come in handy. One line of poetry can evoke laughter, give solace, rattle the memory or unearth beauty in a barren place.

Now and then a line of poetry reports for duty, called up or not.

Poems can be jazz singers, conversationalists, genealogists, biologists, word czars, wise politicians and comedians.

A favorite line might slumber like Rip Van Winkle for 100 years. But as soon as it awakes, it's on. Often the simplest lines stick with us for life.

When a line of poetry persists in the mind, it means the poem works. Its precise language has invented a chord that conveys some truth of human experience.

Even when poems weigh in on Big Questions like Why am I here? they do so best in simple terms.

Some poems adore a quiet morning at home. And many poems are written about poetry. This week's poem by Gail Cormorat does both, as we continue to look at Delaware poetry during National Poetry Month.

Cormorat, a recent winner for Delaware Beach Life's poetry writing contest, lives in Lewes with her husband, Joe. Her short stories and poems have been published in Delaware Poetry Review, Delmarva Review and The Broadkill Review.

I want to share this poem because I can't stop thinking about her line "I tell what's in my mother's purse."

State Poet Laureate JoAnn Balingit will write a column each Sunday April to celebrate National Poetry Month. After this month, she will write an occasional column looking at verse and First State poets.

Additional Facts

ON POETRY

Keillor says poetry is about our common life,
so I write the ordinary. Mimosa-tree summers,
bedtime songs, drunken love in 60's cars.
I tell what's in my mother's purse,
about making sandwiches for my father,
hint at his love for Sinatra and Chivas.
Speak the plain truth of my brother's suicide.
Poetry is my morning cup, sipped black and pure.
I sop up others' grief, read aloud to my Himalayan
who yawns, blue-eyes me with boredom.
Still, I take up the keys my poets provide, unlock
doors long closed behind me. They hum open
like yesterday. I get lost in what is found,
mourn the familiar, celebrate the frayed
simplicity of everything.

-- *Gail Comorat*
