THE TEANECK POETRY PARK

WINTER 2023/2024

POETRY PARK

poetry@teanecknj.gov
Poet Laureate
Township of Teaneck, NJ

TOWNSHIP OF TEANECK, NEW JERSEY
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WELCOME TO
THE TEANECK POETRY PARK

SHARE YOUR POETRY
SUBMISSIONS ARE OPEN
Email to: poetry@teanecknj.gov

ON THE COVER:
Poetry tends to find a branch to rest on within the changing seasons of life’s journey. Take a moment to sit while making space for others and enjoy.

COVER PHOTO: STEVE SAVITZ

THE TEANECK POETRY PARK

LISTEN TO A POET

When you want to see through the wall that is right in front of you
Listen to a poet

When you want to touch what is deep inside your heart
Listen to a poet

When you want to clearly hear those sounds in the distance
Listen to a poet

When you’re reaching for the sky and suddenly discovering your own path
I implore you to just
Listen to a poet

Scott Pleasants
Poet Laureate
Township of Teaneck, NJ

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About

The Teaneck Poetry Park is open and we are excited to welcome you inside. Founded in 2023 by Scott Pleasants, the first Poet Laureate for the Township of Teaneck, New Jersey. The Teaneck Poetry Park is a safe creative space that allows writers to simply share their words.

We are featuring many of our talented residents and some amazing visitors to our literary community. We encourage you to take a poetic stroll along our paths; gather a meaningful word on our sidewalks; share a story across our bridges and write a poem inside and outside the lines of your poetic experiences. Poetry has a universal allure that allows for important artistic uncompromised expression of thoughts, ideas and insights.

Teaneck has many cherished points of interest. With the addition of the Teaneck Poetry Park, we are continuing to highlight our initiatives in support of the arts. We value the creativity of all residents and visitors. We look forward to your continued support of this wonderful endeavor.

If you would like to share and feature your poetry, please send an email to, poetry@teanecknj.gov.

Michael Pagan

MAYOR, TOWNSHIP OF TEANECK, NEW JERSEY
POETRY & POETS

PAGE 4 - 5
PURPOSE
MY MAGNUM OPUS
Allison Alt, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 6
ALL MY DOLLS
Hannah Weisz, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 7
THE BLEACH FACTORY
John C. Massett, Jersey City, NJ

PAGE 8
AT FABIOLA’S
John J. Trause, Wood-Ridge, NJ

PAGE 9
SUNFLOWER’S LOVE
THE RED CARDINAL
A LOVING HOME
Melissa Rose Lawrence, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 10 - 11
UNENDING MOMENT
I AND I
David Highet, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 12 - 13
WAITING FOR SUMMER
ODE TO A DOG
Howard Rose, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 14
THE RUSSIAN BREADLINE
Zev Shanken, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 15
SEARING SILENCE
David Plotzker, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 16
A TRAIN
Millicent Ansah, Jersey City, NJ
PAGE 17 - 18
JOHNSON AVENUE
SEPTEMBER
Yael Herzog, New York, NY

PAGE 19
TIME CAPSULES
J. T. Trigonis, Jersey City, NJ

PAGE 20
OCTOBER, 5PM
Dan Sieg, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 21
SIMPLY SENSE-SATIONAL
Peggy Gerber, Teaneck, NJ

PAGE 22
DATING
Philip J. Curtis, Brooklyn, NY

PAGE 23
UPON THE DILEMMA OF CHANCE
Raul Garcia, Jersey City, NJ

PAGE 24
NAMELESS FACES
Marie Johnson-Ladson, Teaneck, NJ
Purpose

The thing that drives life,
That takes lives,
The thing that makes me wake up in the
morning
And puts me to bed on time.
The passion,
The pain,
The reason,
Purpose.
That bright light
That steers a person
In the depth of darkness,
That gives strength to the weary
And vindication to evil.
Purpose,
In essence, a thought,
A belief,
So easily lost
In the ins and outs
Of opening and closing doors.
So easily lost in despair,
In anger,
In days that don’t go your way.

But
If the purpose is true enough,
It will find its way back to you,
To rebuild,
To stand tall,
To be proud
Of your life.
It’s the North Star,
It’s your Holy Grail,
It’s uniquely yours,
It’s your purpose,
Your reason to be.

Allison Alt
My Magnum Opus

It’s times like these
I wish I had my Magnum Opus before me,
The perfect poetry entry
That would resolve each plea.

Isn’t that what I write for?
For all the lashes this body held before, For
all the drops to the floor,
For all the pain deeply rooted in my core.

My Magnum Opus would surround, My
Magnum Opus would ground,
My masterpiece would be bound
To be my ever resonating sound.

It would know what I cannot speak,
It would know what I wish to teach,
It would hug what others couldn’t reach,
It would be my poem, what I always seek.

What are you, where are you,
This evasive string of words,
That I desire to hear,
And yet already heard.
My Magnum Opus,
My glorious bird,
Fly me to peace,
Soothe me to sleep,
Be my eternal keep.

Allison Alt
All My Dolls

Become more self aware each
Cursed
Day.
Emily, the blonde with her head on backwards,
Feeds on toenails, spiders, and
Grape soda. She maintains a
Healthy appetite.
I never should have started this collection!
Joke’s on me, because now I’m
Keeping all sharp objects on the top shelf. They better not
Learn to climb, that would surely lead to
My demise.
Never again will we sleep. All my dolls and I remain
On guard, a cold war.
Please don’t strike! I request with pleading eyes. They’re
Quietly scheming when I go out for a
Run or to work or to the grocery
Store.
They will hopefully fight amongst themselves. Lord, if these sentient toys
Unionize, they will riot against me
Violently!
What did I do to deserve their hate? This is blatant
Xenophobia. Plastic bigots with plastic hearts!
Yesterday, Emily flung her hard little clogs at me. Dolls - 1. Human - 0.

Hannah Weisz
The Bleach Factory

People pour out of the bleach factory
It’s quitting time
Everyone is tired
They don’t dash out
Or run
Or sprint
They amble to their cars
They shuffle through the parking lot
No need to hurry
No place special to go

The bleach factory employs
A good deal of people
It’s a union shop
A steady paycheck
The families it feeds
Working there can be hazardous
But starving is fatal

They spend their days inside the factory
Most bring their lunch in ancient pails
Rookies take their car out and ride
Searching the area for food
Soon they get the gist of it
And pack a lunch to save dough

The factory is on the outskirts of town
Near the railroad tracks and the river
The poorest neighborhoods are splayed out
From the edges of the factory’s square block
A few houses
Some worker’s homes
Abandoned shacks and vacant lots
A tow truck lot is nearby
People tend to avoid the area

I think it has a certain majesty
It’s functional and even historic
Takes you back to when
This country made things
The industrial revolution and its effects on us
You can run around and sin all you want
But you cannot bleach your soul and
Expect to reach heaven’s gate

Now the factory is silent
Low lights burn in random windows
A night watchman makes his rounds
And then he sits
He dozes for a spell
Then repeats his rounds
Checks locked doors
A few revolutions around the sun
And your career is done
A life
Some kind of victory won
At the bleach factory

John C. Massett
At Fabiola’s

Ancient women being extracted
from Fabiola’s with canes and walkers
after getting their hair starched and tinted
are being helped into their waiting transportation
blocking the flow of traffic
every time I try to pass by.
Sunflower’s Love

Summer sunflower
I lose myself in your gaze
This eternal love

The Red Cardinal

Beautiful songbird
Your bright red amidst the snow
Cardinal’s Christmas gift

A Loving Home

Another new morn’
Your laughter in the kitchen
My heart is at peace

Melissa Rose Lawrence
Unending Moment

Wind on wave whispers
Softened pink light
Cloud ballet cover
Final sun sight

Nature calls through me
At peace, all is right
An end and beginning
Of this I will write

For beauty beholden
In every and each
Moment eternal
Flow never reach

David Highet
I and I

Offer yourself in time of need
... or just because

you'll be a seed

of solace
friendship
connection
peace

we are each other
all are we

bask in presence
heed our soul
awaken love
none alone
I do not like the cold I said
I'd rather be back in my bed
Nor do I like the blowing breeze
It makes me feel so ill at ease

I'd rather have it warm and sunny
On my porch with tea and honey
As a matter of fact, what may be best
Is to lie down flat and take a rest

Now don't you worry that I'm too old
Just because I feel the cold
What's behind it all is not complex
It's a new phenomena: a polar vortex

Howard Rose
ODE TO A DOG

Although at first it seemed like folly
To once again consider a pet
Dog food, shots, trips to the vet
But she had a look that was so jolly

Only for a moment did I hesitate
It seems my mind was already set
Leashes and toys I’d have to get
The reality was, I could not wait

Always so cute and warm to cuddle
Small and furry, the size of a toy
So much spirit, and so much joy
Made us forgive the occasional puddle

As time went by, more trips to the vet
Her health was a problem, we could tell
There was enough love, so what the hell
We’d make sure her time had not come yet

For quite a while each time she was sick
Often it was difficult but hope we did dare
We gave her medicine and very good care
She rallied so often, luck helped it click

It comes to pass, beyond our control
Push, tug, pull, do your best to resist
Despite all efforts only memory will persist
Up down and around, life takes it’s toll

She was more than a pet and by golly
I forgot to tell you, her name was Molly

Howard Rose
The Russian Breadline

A long bread line in Russia on a cold rainy night.
An official announces, “The delivery will be late
and contain only half the promised allocation.
All Jews must go home.” They do.

The rain persists.
Hours later, a second announcement:
“The delivery will be much later and
contain one quarter the promised allocation.
All non-veterans must go home.” They do.

The cold rain continues. The sun rises.
A third announcement: “The shipment
will not arrive this week. Everybody must go home.”

As the line disperses, one veteran says to another,
“Damn Jews have all the luck.”
Searing Silence

The vacuum is palpable.
European cities that teemed with Jewish throngs, 20%-50%+ Jewish, Now have not a single Jew.
Pressburg/Bratislava, one of the most noble Jewish metropolises for two hundred years, Can not even scrape together a minyan (prayer quorum) on a Monday.
Look, a synagogue!
No, that is a café, with proselytizing pamphlets in the bookcases.
Wait, another!
No, an art gallery.
And so it goes: museum, cultural center, concert hall, nightclub, apartments for rent... Anything but for the divine.
Every time we visit one,
I close my eyes and hear the disembodied Jews shrieking through the walls: “Remember us; remember our names; remember our lives and our deeds.
I beg of you, do not let us be forgotten.”
It’s the same with the cemeteries.

Neglected, forlorn, or deliberately destroyed.
The wind blows through the graves, silently, for there are no visitors.
Tombstones piled higgledy-piggledy,
In random sequence and zigzagging at otherworldly angles.
It would be comical if it weren’t so pathetic.
Was the road paved along the bank of the Danube River in Bratislava
Worth disposing of all those hundreds of graves??
The saintly people that now do not even have a memorial, a place to be remembered? Tombstones ground into roads and walls, first by the Nazis and then by the Communists. When will the world learn? Who will open their eyes and hearts??
Ida, you have been equipped with the knowledge.
G-d gave you the feeling and the emotion,

The pathos and the heart wrench,
The anguish and the pain.
You can inject light into this darkness and help heal the world,
One soul at a time.
Though you will not make any more sense of it, for it is senseless,
You will at least help others understand that which we have lost,
The searing silence that now spreads across Europe, in so many dimensions,
And has for almost eighty years and counting.
The silence of the Jewish cemetery.

David Plotzker
The Glimpses of you through the train's car window will always remain the best way to start my day

I could run like Florence just to make it to the train in time
And be on our train

On the A train
The train car before the last one in the back
You would sit in the middle seat right by the Subway map
I would stand, back turned to you and holding the pole
Face as flushed as chocolate skin can get
Beads of sweat making pools below my chin
Trying to remember to breathe as your face caused lumps to form in my throat

This is where I fell in love with you five days a week at 7:45 am

This was our locomotion of love

Through the commotion

I could count every white stripe on your button down shirt
You were a sight to behold
You wore the same 3 cufflinks
The power puff girls one was my favorite
You are my buttercup

Me your blossom
I could blow bubbles at your feet
To help shine your Stacy Adams

I was in awe
You oblivious
As you furrowed your bro in your laptop
Tapping away the way my heart tap danced
As I named our 2.5 kids and bought us a house in a good neighborhood
You made me creative

I just knew that as Hoyt and Schermerhorn
Approached our entanglement would end
My drunken gaze of wonder at your reflection
Would soon disappear
The regeneration of my imagination
Caught in temptation for your touch
Would subside
I had to abide by principle and move aside
For you to pass and take my daydream with you
I watched you walk and run up the stairs and transfer to the G train
Without knowledge of the fire that raged in my heart
Me, left heartbroken but optimistic of tomorrow's unsuspecting date
Where I fall in love with you again on the A train

Millicent Ansah
Johnson Avenue

We had been walking home from the bus stop at the corner of Johnson and Mildred St. and we couldn’t find where the tree was where the nest would have been home to the mother who had had this grey, unbearable thing. My own mother was the one to name it—chick—and I stared as she lifted and carried it home in her naked palm. Standing in the corner of her bedroom, I watched as she placed it on a ceramic plate—our dinner plate—and gave it light from the nightstand lamp, listened as she washed her hands from the gels and the smells in the bedroom bathroom and left me there alone with it—its skin translucent, a purple that made me think of Sundays on the porch out back with a bowl of moist grapes and how I’d peel them meticulously with my two front teeth until they were the color of the jelly thing right then still and washed in the heavy light and I could not believe that this is how it had begun, a sticky skinless grape cradled in a mother’s palm.

Though the next day the lamp was off, the bowl gone, and my mother, finding me by the empty nightstand, told me what I did not know then, what I only learned to know— that she could not save the thing, that she had so badly wanted to with white light and paper towels, and that she could not and did not know why.

Yael Herzog
September

Yesterday the corn can wouldn’t open.
It should have opened with the
metal flap which tore. The opener let soft
into the edges, didn’t
break. This is the love for me.
Tender when supposed to be hard. Give
way when supposed to break. Too late
on a Saturday night to eat, anyway.
Instead, we hold each other to a song we both don’t know.
The kitchen is dark and the windows let in a wet breeze.
We sway. If love is this soft, what was I so afraid of anyway?

Yael Herzog
Time Capsules

It’s the way warm crystals drop from your mouth mistaking themselves as gentle storms along my back, the sleepless nights we sift through in secret that we might dig up the memory boxes we buried together as children (then) with thousands of miles between us somehow seeming a thousand and one times closer.

It’s the way you shift your eyes in my direction, how only you can ever know these dimples as intimately as falling stars know the ground on which they humbly land, unseen except by those pure of spirit.

How fortunate am I then, to recollect it all, dimples blossoming by the light of your shooting stars, splitting skies like moons eclipsed, eyes opened to receive the storms,

In the sleeplessness between us, we bury time capsules to one day unearth a thousand times and a thousand and one miles from here, more than children (now) yet nothing less brilliant than dust tailing fallen stars across a universe ever so needful of its light.

It’s how that once in a lifetime happens once during every lifetime though it’s only in this one we remember its happening.

J. T. Trigonis
October, 5pm

Deferring cocktails, I'm again this hour

staring through venetians at what

weird and wonderful things ebbing

light does to our dogwood. Muted rusty red

and browning leaves, backdropped by all-green neighbors,

remain gently luminous against grey southern sky.

They contain constrained colors eager to burst forth

when sun breaks through cloud cover,

but are also content to tease anticipation,

engaging us with a quiet riot of their subtle palette

(they have all month to really show off).

Inches from back bedroom windows the tree towers above our eaves.

I recall our son 30 years ago bringing the seedling home from Kindergarten

graped in a 4 oz. crumpled Dixie cup.

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Dan Sieg
When melancholia strikes,
and I’m feeling dull as a plastic butter knife,
I hop on a bus to New York City
where my senses come alive
in a spectacular symphony of life.

I wander busy streets
surrounded by skyscrapers piercing the clouds,
gaping at millennial moms
in their electric pink designer yoga pants,
wheeling babies in thousand-dollar strollers,
like mini–Rolls Royces,
as homeless people
huddle together in cardboard boxes,
wearing hopelessness and despair
on their faces like worn out shoes.

My heart beats to the rhythm of street
performers
pounding the pavement,
feet crashing down like thunder,
cabbies blaring their horns
as the buzz of fifty different languages meld
together in a melting pot of soup.

I breathe in the fragrance of garlicky hot dogs
charring on the grill,
chestnuts roasting to perfection,
salty hot pretzels steaming bakery fresh,
as I get high on the heady aroma of
weed permeating the air

When hunger strikes,
I buy a slice of the world’s best pizza,
expertly folding it in half like a native New Yorker,
savoring the thick chewy crust as strings of
gooey mozzarella drip down my chin.
For dessert, swirls of chocolatey ice cream,
piled high on a sugar cone,
the decadent sweetness exploding
in my mouth,
melting away my troubles.

Underneath my feet the subways rumble,
the sidewalks crumble and
I feel the thrum of the city that never sleeps,
like the steady boom chicka boom of a
dance club,
enveloping me, energizing me, invigorating me,
bringing to life all of my senses.

New York City is not just a place,
it is a living, breathing entity.

Peggy Gerber
Dating

Dating, it sometimes feels like you’re shopping on a clearance rack

Sorting through colors

White, brown, or black

Finding something that kinda looks good but that’s no longer you

Varying clothes capture our attention

But very few would wear a sweater in June

Those glaring blemishes from material already donated

Outfits that you held onto long after fabric is outdated

Similes of dating short and sweet

Ending with haiku to make this poem complete

Fashions come and go
Our love, only a short film
We will just be friends
UPON THE DILEMMA OF CHANCE

we meet again
at the sidewalk plateau
of unrequited travels

another witness
to the fallacy of names
spoken like artifacts coveted from a fabled memory
entombed to the tundra of the hourglass

their fragile silence seeps through the windowpane dawn

where you watch the ocean reveling
between a dying star
and the indented reflections
    of your gaze

I sip the horizon marooned on the edge
of a wine glass
    unearthed by light’s celibate erosion

we meet again
before the ritual doorframe
    to stranded hours

another bookmark
to the book of possibilities that inscribed
the line in the sand
with words that ingrain the amnesia of the wind
Nameless Faces

When I open old picture books that my family owned I see mostly
Nameless Faces

I wonder what was your name and what was your life like

Most seemed to show expressions of happiness when their pictures were taken but
some showed sadness, fear, anger, surprise and/or disgust

It made me feel good to see gone souls from long ago

But sad because I didn't know their names, who they were or their stories

I know you were family or a friend of the family

There is an old saying that says "only if these walls could talk"

Well I feel the same way about these old pictures "only if these pictures could talk"

I know these Nameless Faces could tell some extraordinary stories that happened
during their lifetime

But now I can only fantasize on who you were

Nameless Faces who were you?

Marie Johnson-Ladson
Welcome to the Teaneck Poetry Park.
Send us your poems to be featured.

poetry@teanecknj.gov

Thank you for your support:

Dean Kazinci, Teaneck Township Manager
Doug Ruccione, Teaneck Township Clerk
Teaneck Public Library
Friends of the Teaneck Public Library
“WHEREAS, poetry is a powerful form of literature that honors self-expression and promotes understanding within communities;”

----- Township Council Resolution 206-2023

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