Magnolia Muse

Newsletter of Mississippi Poetry Society

**The Magnolia Muse**

**First Quarter 2026 Edition**

This has been a crazy time, hasn't it? The horrible weather has left its mark on all of us and some of you have been impacted dramatically. My prayers go out for everyone attacked by it.

We begin with a moment to remember North Branch member Ruth Richmond who passed away December 23, 2025 at the age of 100. I had the privilege of several telephone conversations with her since becoming president and she was always a delight. Rest in Peace, Miss Ruth.

Many thanks to contest coordinator Jason Ervin for the idea of extending the contest entry deadline to February 15 because of the weather emergency.

## ∞ ∞ ∞ Spring Fest information:

Spring Fest fast approaches! South Branch invites you to join us for a fun weekend in a lovely setting. Save the dates: April 25-26 at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center in Ocean Springs, MS. Help us spread the word through your social media. You'll find information on the Mississippi Poetry Society Facebook page.

Our guest speaker Ann Fisher-Wirth is the current Mississippi Poet Laureate among her many other accomplishments. Her appearance is partially underwritten by a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission.

MISSISSIPPI ARTS COMMISSION

Our ***Friday night fun event*** on April 24 will take place at the Holiday Inn (see below for details) and the competition will center around our nation's 250th anniversary. Dress as your favorite character from American history and share a poem you've written relating to that person. Finger food will be available for your enjoyment.

**Hotel arrangements:**

Rooms have been blocked off and reserved at Holiday Inn & Suites Ocean Springs, 7301 Washington Ave., Ocean Springs. Please be sure to reserve your room ASAP, if you have not done so already.

**CALL-IN RESERVATIONS:**
228-872-7255
Mention the "Mississippi Poetry Society" in order to receive the specialized group rates and room types.
**ONLINE RESERVATIONS:**
***Guests can click the link below, select the date rate and the Group Code will already be entered into the reservation screen. Mobile apps may not provide all information when booking.

https://www.ihg.com/redirect?path=rates&brandCode=EX&localeCode=en&regionCode=1&hotelCode=ospms&checkInDate=24&checkInMonthYear=032026&checkOutDate=26&checkOutMonthYear=032026&_PMID=99801505&GPC=MPS&cn=no&adjustMonth=false&showApp=true&monthIndex=00

Lunch Saturday will be on your own. South Branch will provide information on local venues to assist with your selection. Arrangements for the Saturday banquet are in development.

# ∞ ∞ ∞ MPS Members Only Quarterly Contest

Our last Quarterly Contest didn't produce enough entries in any category to judge. Let's try again!

(1) All entries must be your own work, previously unpublished. No AI generated entries. No simultaneous submissions are allowed. Any winning entry found to have won some other contest will be disqualified.
(2) You may submit **only one verse** per category.
(3) Submission guidelines:
    **Poems and all information should be typed on 8 ½ x11 white paper in Times New Roman 12 point. No illustrations, images, etc., should be included unless the poem is ekphrastic.
    **Submit two copies of each poem. On both copies, type the contest month and the category identification in the upper left corner. On the second copy, type:
        a. your name,
        b. MPS Branch affiliation,
        c. address,
        d. phone number, and
        e. email address in the upper right corner, and
        f. your **signature** to affirm the verse is your original work.

**Maximum length per poem is **40 lines**; only lines of poetry will be counted. The limit of characters per line is 55. If a poem runs to a second page, please staple the two pages together.

(4) The submission fee is $3 per poem except for students in grades 9-12 (MPS student members), who may enter for free. Checks should be made out to **MPS, Inc**. Entry fees are to be mailed with the entries to:

MPS Spring Contest c/o Mary Beth Magee
676-B DuPont-Harts Chapel Road
Poplarville, MS, 39470.

(5) The postmark deadline for each contest will be the first Saturday of the contest month: March 7. Poems won't be returned. When I receive your entry, I will notify you by email. We have no responsibility for mail delays.

(6) Prizes for the top three poems per category will be $15, $10, and $5 and a certificate. Judges are not obligated to choose three winners. Also, no Honorable Mentions will be awarded.

(7) Judging of a category will not take place unless there are at least ten entries. Entry fees from unjudged categories will be returned or shredded, with entrants' approval. Send cash at your own risk.

(8) Poems which place will be published in the 2027 contest journal.

(9) Fifty percent of any profits will go to the Society Treasury; the other 50%, to the coordinating branch. After each contest is finalized, Patty Butkovich, the South Branch Treasurer, will send Daniel Pickett, MPS Treasurer, a check in the amount of half of the contest profits. Careful records will be kept and shared upon request. Trudy Olive will judge this contest. Deadline for postmark is Saturday, March 7.

Categories:

I. Traditional (**identify form/type**), any topic

NOTE: When identifying the form/type, please be more specific than "Rhyming." "Rhyming" just means it's not free verse or blank verse. Not all rhyming forms have a name, but MANY do. Failure to identify the form may result in disqualification.

II. Free Verse, any topic

III. Quarterly Topic, The Spring 2026 contest topic is Second Chances. Your approach to the topic may be general or specific. Any poetic form/type is acceptable. Please don't use the topic as your title.

## ∞ ∞ ∞ Another Contest Opportunity (with a short window!)

If you write haiku, you may find this challenge interesting. Hurry, though: The entry deadline is February 15. https://www.frontierpoetry.com/2026-not-in-love-haiku-challenge/

## ∞ ∞ ∞ National Poetry Month

April is National Poetry Month. You can help spread awareness by contacting your local government and requesting a proclamation celebrating it. The earlier, the better. Many jurisdictions have timeline requirements. If you would like a template which you can customize for your community, let me know and I'll forward what I use to you.

## ∞ ∞ ∞ National Federation of State Poetry Societies contest

The entry deadline for the NFSPS 2026 contest is **March 15, 2026**. If you haven't already checked out the details, you will find them here: https://nfsps.net/2026-annual-contests. There is a link to a .pdf brochure there as well.

## ∞ ∞ ∞ MPS anthology for 250th USA celebration

Work progresses on the proposed anthology. So far, two of our members have offered artwork for the cover. If you would like to be considered, please let me know. We'd like to have the book available for sale at the Spring Fest.

## ∞ ∞ ∞ And now, on to our members!

**North Branch:**

North Branch last met at the Iuka Public Library on November 22. Those present were Dr. Emory Jones, Glenda Jones, Jake Lankford, Kersten Tuthill, Dr. Ruby Jones, Tabitha Pace (visitor), Sharlee Shumpert, and Janice Canerdy. Bill Hill realized, after he started driving in that direction, that he was too sick to attend. We enjoyed a tasty lunch of sandwiches, chips, sweets, and drinks. The only matter of business was to decide how many meetings to have in 2026 and where to meet. We voted to have four meetings instead of six. Our February meeting will be at the Lee County Library in Tupelo. Three members did presentations on poetry-related topics. First, Emory spoke on the Pennsylvania State Poetry Society's digital journal, *Pennsylvania's Poetic Voices*.

He shared a hard copy of several poems the Society produced for him. Using some of his fall-themed poems, he spoke on poetic rhyme schemes and forms~~for example, Etheree and

acrostic. Next, Sharlee, a college undergraduate, spoke about her favorite poet, Mary Oliver. She shared some of Oliver's free-verse poetry and emphasized its quality and spirituality. She also read her own free-verse poem written in honor/memory of Mary Oliver. The last presenter was Jake, who writes for *The Desoto Times Tribune*. He spoke on prose poetry, the style he most enjoys writing and reading. He praised the prose poetry of Andre Breton, Arthur Rimbaud, and Charles Baudelaire. Then came our poetry read-around, during which we shared poems on various topics and themes, including societal issues impacting African Americans, pirates, Thanksgiving and Christmas, Southern life, the ancient world, a madman, and bad drivers. We collected a donation for the library and adjourned.

Janice Canerdy

***Janice Canerdy***

* "Girl with a Black Eye" (painting by Norman Rockwell), FSPA (Florida) annual contest, ekphrastic category, 3rd HM

* "Angel in the Storm," ISPS (Illinois) Fall Contest, Stormy Weather category, 1st place

* "Life—the Roles We Play," ISPS Fall Contest, Constanza category, 3rd place

* "No More Empty Boxes," PRA (Arkansas) Dec '25 contest, 2nd place

***Sharlee Shumpert***

I published my second poetry book "To a Future Reader" back in November. It's available on Amazon (the author name is listed as Sharlee Cheyenne Shumpert)! Our very own Ms. Pamela Hatch did a wonderful job with it.

I am gearing up to enter several contests and submit to the third Writer's Camp anthology, another project Pamela Hatch is involved with. For this year's MPS Spring Fest, I entered 28 out of 30 categories (the two I didn't enter were the first time submitters category and the video interview category, because I'm judging that one). My goal was to enter more than I did last year, so I got that done!

I continually publish poems on my Facebook page as regularly as possible. So far this year, I've published the following:

"The Ice Storm Sermon"
"Making Peace"
"Dawn, Like Ice"
"Entreaty for Knowledge and Growth"
"To the Seas of Life, and Onward"
"Free Like a Girl: A Champion's Eulogy"

"Mid-Winter Hymn"
"House of Years"

Also, I have now written over 1,600 poems; I share this not to boast and I really hope it doesn't come across that way, but my goal is to reach Emily Dickinson's total of 1,789 poems! Y'all are my poetry community and have motivated me greatly, so I wanted to thank you and include you in the quest for 1,789 poems. I have enjoyed being a member of this society so very much, and I can't wait to see you all in April!

Until the 2026 Spring Fest,
***Sharlee Shumpert***

**South Branch**

I (secretary Brenda Finnegan), along with other South Branch members, are busy soliciting items for our Spring Festival; already received some from Singing River Heath Services. We're also looking at a flag for MPS to use at our many events. Our local member/artist, Carol Hutcherson has designed it and we will, hopefully, have it in hand before our Festival! I entered 13 poems in the MPS 2026 Spring Contest, just under the wire so to speak!.

We're all covered in ice, snow or cold temperatures right now, even down here on the Coast! Keep warm, everyone! I'm attaching a poem I wrote after our January snowfall last year, if space allows...

Next South Branch meeting is February 14 at the Gautier Public Library (2100 Library Lane, Gautier) at 2 p.m.

# Poetry Shared by Our MPS Poets

## Remembering Dr. King (James Brown)

On this timeless day, we will remember,
A roaring fire, that began as an ember.
A hope that began as a singular mission,
And a dream to elevate our human condition.

A man who stood for an immutable conviction,
That all men are created equal, without contradiction.
An unyielding belief that truth will ultimately overcome,
A vision of unity, brotherhood, and what this nation can become.

So, remember the man, the mission, the vision, the dream,
And pray that the journey will finally, and completely redeem.

## Seasons Will Pass (James Brown)

With another new year, the earth transforms in flawless unison,
As the sun's journey on its destined path, has once again begun.
Time occupies its present space, uniquely adorned by our Creator,
And seasons arrive the way they're meant to, not one lesser, not one greater.
They will leave us their singular gifts, as they finish their planned flight,
Only treasured memories remain, as they pass through each day and night.

## My Husband Lies Beneath the Snow (Brenda Finnegan)

My husband lies beneath the snow
A bed of white he lies beneath
And like my heart, he's still and cold
A widow's weeds I do not don
Nor veil of black to hide my grief
My husband lies beneath the snow
He comes unbidden in my dreams
Quietly, just like a thief
And like my heart he's still and cold
I pray beside the cold gray stone
and quietly I lay a wreath
My husband lies beneath the snow
While gazing at the other tombs
My feet grow cold; I gently weep
And like my heart, he's still and cold
My husband lies beneath the snow
And like my heart, he's still and cold.

## Choices (Mary Beth Magee)

(Inspired by "The Laughing River" - textile art by Jackson artist Diane Williams)

We all face choices every day,
Like people standing on either side of a river
Trying to decide whether we will cross or stay put.
We may choose our garments, our schedule, our route.
We also choose our attitude toward the world.
The choice faces us with every action, every encounter.
Will we fight and argue,
Charging ill intent to another's actions?
Or will we choose to sing and dance in the sunshine

And enjoy the company of each other?
Will we clasp hands and share the music?
If only we could find The Laughing River
And bathe in its waters.
If only we could turn our anger to happiness
With a simple dunk in a stream of joy.
The drums of our heartbeats
Could provide the tempo for our triumphant shindig
And our laughter would be the words to the song.
Will you choose to cross from anger and hate
To contentment and love?
Will you dance with me
On the shores of happiness?
Will you laugh and sing with me?
I offer the invitation…
The choice awaits you.