Magnolia Muse

Newsletter of Mississippi Poetry Society

Summer 2026

News:

The annual Mississippi State Poetry Society Spring Fest was held April 24-26 at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Arts Center in Ocean Springs, hosted this year by South Branch.

New officers elected were:
President: Philip Levin
Vice President: Pete Massey
Treasurer: Daniel Pickett
Secretary: Janice Canerdy

Our Spring Fest speaker was Mississippi Poet Laureate Ann Fisher-Wirth, partially paid with a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission. Pamela Hatch is the new Spring Contest Coordinator.

Here are the other Branch officers (copied from MissPoetry.net):

North Branch:
Janice Canerdy, President - jlcanerdy@yahoo.com
Bill Hill, Vice President - hillw@bellsouth.net
Jake Lankford, Secretary - lankfordmorgan1@gmail.com
Emory Jones, Treasurer - pianot@bellsouth.net
Kersten Tuthill, Student Outreach Coordinator - kerstentuthill@gmail.com

Central Branch:
Pete Massey, President - jgpetemass52@gmail.com
Jeanne Kelly, Vice President - Jskelly04@gmail.com
Peggy Shumaker, Secretary - shupeg@comcast.net
Jason Ervin, Treasurer - ervinjn@gmail.com

South Branch:
René Penrose, President - Reneepenrose2@gmail.com
Vivian Danielle Wyatt , Vice President - Dwyatt617@gmail.com
Brenda Finnegan, Secretary - brendafinnegan@ymail.com
Patty Butkovich, Treasurer - pattyb8319@gmail.com

Here are photos from the event.

Central Branch Attendees

South Branch attendees

North Branch attendees

Some of the Student Winners with Janice Canerdy

President's Letter
Philip Levin

"Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!'" – Robin Williams

Springtime is the season for poetry. Nature has come alive and our souls feel refreshed. Greenery on trees, gentle breezes full of flowers' fragrances, and hearts going pitter-patter with new love. I find that I'm goal oriented. Unlike famous poets whose poems were only published posthumously, such as Emily Dickinson, John Keats, and Franz Kafka, I write best for guidelines and deadlines. I point out that I didn't note for money, because I've found that poetry is for enjoyment rather than profit. Which, in its way, makes poetry even more special. To read or listen to a poem is to spend time and concentration with no expectation of gaining wisdom. Rather, the experience is for the enjoyment of the sounds, the images, and the emotions.

Recently, a friend sent me a poem written by artificial intelligence (AI). He had given the prompt a group of rhyming words and a subject, love, and the poem was quite catchy. AI is everywhere, replacing lawyers, accountants, artists, and certainly writers. As a writer of novels, I use a bit of AI in my proofreading, eschewing its offers to rewrite the whole book. For poetry, should we be tempted to let the computer do our work? While perhaps cleaner stylistically, can it bring human emotion to our poems? It makes one wonder.

This is my first quarterly Muse I'm writing as President, elected at the Spring Fest in April. I apologize that it's a bit late, I'm still accumulating information on my duties. One of those is to attend the National Federation of Poetry Society meeting this July in Kansas City. I'm proud to represent Mississippi, the birthplace of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Natasha Trethewey, and Richard Wright. Not that I compare myself to them, but Mississippi's voice deserves to be heard. As such, I've published a collection of my poetry to take with me for show and sell. It's 48 poems, a third Love poems, and the rest poems about my family. Every poem is illustrated with a picture I created with AI. It's a lovely book.

As a physician, I've influenced many lives, giving medicine, presceibing medicine, and even at times saving them. This has been wonderful, and many have been grateful. But is it a legacy? When I'm gone, who will remember my medical career? Hardly any. But my writing, my novels, stories, articles, and poems, they will live on. My bookshelf contains a dozen books written by my mother, and collections of poetry composed by my father. While we have photos, there's something special about having the words, the emotions of our ancestors.

Spring is for poetry. I hope you'll be inspired to keep writing!

Branch Reports:

North Branch Report

North Branch met at the Lee County library in Tupelo on February 28. Attendees were Jake Lankford, Emory and Glenda Jones, Bill Hill, Sharlee Shumpert, and Dorothy Wiman. Following the opening prayer and devotional on humility (based on Romans) by Bill, the group took care of the usual business and moved on poetry. Led by Dr. Jones, the group completed a fun activity—adding to haiku to create tanka. Then poetry sharing continued. Writing styles and topics of North Branch members vary widely.

Our most recent meeting was held at the Magnolia Smokehouse Grill in Grenada on May 9. Attendees were Dorothy Wiman, Bill Hill, Kersten Tuthill, Ruby Jones, Sharlee Shumpert, and Janice Canerdy. While our meals were being prepared, Dorothy opened our meeting with prayer and devotional based on I Peter 5: 6-7. Some key points were that the Lord loves us, others suffer just as we do, the Devil wants to devour us, and we could never be GOOD enough to earn salvation. Our poetry sharing/discussion was, as always, lively, entertaining, and thought-provoking. We enjoyed prose poetry, limericks, iambic tetrameter, and free verse

We discussed the possibility of planning something special for the MPS student members. We have twenty-five, nearly all of whom are in North Branch. We tabled the issue but will revisit it at some point. In-depth planning will be required. Our next meeting will be at the Desoto County Museum in Hernando on August 1.

Janice Canerdy, North Branch President

North Branch in Grenada: Sharlee, Kersten, Ruby, Dorothy, Bill, and Janice

Central Branch Report:

The Central Branch of MPS has had a very good Spring. We held our monthly meeting on April 18th with 13 in attendance including one visitor. The following weekend was the annual MPS Spring Festival and many of our members attended. We had ten Central Branch members who had winning poems and a total of 29 poems that were published in the 2026 Mississippi Poetry Journal. The monthly meeting held on May 16th had 10 people in attendance, including 3 visitors. On June 5th we partnered with Pacesetters Art Gallery for our bi-monthly Poetry Open Mic Night at the gallery. There was wonderful attendance from the public to share their poetry or just to listen, including a good number of Central Branch poets. The theme was to write an ekphrastic poem inspired by one of the paintings from Mississippi artist, Cliff Speaks. Mr. Speaks is the artist who provided one of his works that was used for the cover of the 2026 Mississippi Poetry Journal. Finally, our branch will meet this month on Saturday, June 20 at 2:00 PM at the Flowood Public Library. All are welcome to attend if you are interested.

Pete Massey, Central Branch President

South Branch Report
Kathleen McIlwain Public Library of Gautier Library
May 16, 2026

President Rene' Penrose opened the Mississippi Poetry Society South Branch meeting at the Gautier Library at 2:00 p.m. on May 16, 2026. In attendance were members, Rene', Vivian Danielle Wyatt, Patty Butkovich, Mary Beth Magee, Brenda Finnegan, Trudy Olive, Philip Levin, and Veto Roley. Patty brought a guest, Shirley Hertz, from Illinois. Mary Beth Magee gave the devotional from "Our Daily Bread."

The April minutes, emailed to members previously by secretary Brenda Finnegan, were approved on a motion by Mary Beth and seconded by Danielle Wyatt.

The treasurer's report was presented by Patty Butkovich. Previous balance was $2273.25; expenses were $1799,75, including $500 to the Poet Laureate, Ann Fisher-Wirth. Net income was $2135, with a new balance of $2608.50. Prize money paid totaled $1303.00. Patty said we made a small profit from the Spring Festival of $235.33. When we receive the MAC Grant of approximately $350, our profit will increase. The treasurer's report, with a complete Spring Festival Financial Report attached, was approved on a motion by Brenda Finnegan and seconded by Mary Beth.

Publication and awards since last meeting were submitted by Mary Beth, Danielle and Philip Levin.
Mary Beth 's publications include: "Compass Rose" Local Gems Dawn Horizons anthology; "Ripples" Local Gems Remember When anthology; "Wine, Women and Wisdom" Illinois Poetry Society Highland Park Poets US250 Persona Poet anthology; "Celebration - an American Cinquain," "Friendship 7" and "Finding Freedom" MPS American Hearts 250th anniversary anthology; "Small Start" Picayune Writes Groups Tall Tales Anthology; MPS Spring Contest: "One Less Nurse" 1st place; "Abandoning Ashland" 3rd place and three honorable mentions. Also a prose award; "Remembering the Edgewater Gulf Hotel," and "College Days," Southern Senior Magazine.

Philip: received one first, one second and one third place in the MPS Spring Festival Contest; 7 honorable mentions, and a "100% participation award"; "What Makes America Great" Poem in Ms. Writers Guild; "Prologue" in MS Writers Guild.

Danielle: "Queen Sheba of Coast Collision" - First Place
"Mount Olive, Mississippi & Mount Olive Alabama "- First Place
"Beneath the Scrubs"- Third Place
"Back Home "- Third Place
"The Sun in the Window" - Honorable Mention
"Written in Mud" - Honorable Mention
"Kites" - Honorable Mention
"100% Award" for entering all the categories

Other old business included a report of the MPS Spring Festival that we hosted at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center April 24-26 in Ocean Springs. We enjoyed a poetry reading (in costumes) and snacks at the Holiday Inn Express on Friday evening, and Danielle won first place (and $25) with her "Rosie the Riveter" poem; Brenda Finnegan won second place with her "I Am the Spirit of Sacajawea" poem. (Our poems were based on famous people from the 250th Anniversary of the USA.) Others included poems about Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Jimmy Buffet.

Rene' proposed we might consider setting up a manual to assist in planning future Spring Festivals, which should include eliminating readings of honorable mention winners if those poets are not present (to save time); to better prepare for a large student and family attendance and to request that all students remain until the end of the presentations for photos. Brenda said there were only 3 high school students present at the end. (She took their photo with the student coordinator, Janice Canerdy for the MPS FB page). Also suggested was that we take group photos of three branches at the beginning of the festival event, as some members left early.

Brenda reported she sent thank you letters to the seven major donors of our goody bag items, and included a "Lure of Poetry" bookmark made by Mary Beth Magee in each. Someone suggested we also send a thank you to the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center. Brenda said she would take care of it, and remarked at how accommodating all of the employees were to us on that weekend, and with the use of the pretty bar up front for our coffee and sweet rolls, and the use of the kitchen, and also prepared coffee. Janice Canerdy provided lots of snacks (from a donation) for the student winners and families in the hallway outside the Duckett Gallery, which held "What's Left Behind" -artwork featuring trash and trash containers. The number of those attending the student awards overflowed both rooms in the gallery and some stood in the hallway.

Rene' said it was confusing in that we were told in the beginning there would be NO FOOD or WATER allowed in the gallery, however, the employees approved it that day. (We were extra careful around the "garbage" artwork.) He thanked all of those who helped with the unloading and reloading of the tables and chairs. He said there were several filled and partially filled goody bags left which he wanted to share with members. (He did so after the meeting.) Brenda brought the leftover colorful tablecloths which featured water, fish and lures, from the festival to share with the members.

Mike Turner, the Alabama State Poet, who attended the festival, has offered to come speak to us in the future for the cost of a free lunch, Rene' said.

Mary Beth discussed the process of obtaining the Mississippi Arts Commission grant of $350 and passed the report to new MPS State President Philip Levin. Mary Beth said we should have made more recognition of the MAC grant, which helped pay for the speaker, Mississippi's Poet Laureate, Ann Fisher-Wirth. We all enjoyed Ann's workshop and her talk on Saturday evening at our dinner at Aunt Jenny's. Patty Butkovich donated a decorated cake for dessert. We overfilled the private room at the dinner. Mary Beth also suggested we try to branch out into other areas to seek new members, including Poplarville, which hosts several events we might attend. She gave several examples of events.

New Business included the planning of the June 13 "Picnic on the Porch" (celebrating Flag Day and the 250th birthday of our country) at Brenda Finnegan's home: 5713 Belle Fontaine Drive at at a later time 4:00 p.m.!!
Members listed what they planned to bring for the pot-luck picnic. So far, we have BBQ Chicken Wings (Mary Beth); Hawaiian Meat Balls (Brenda Finnegan); Deviled Eggs and Summer Berry Trifle (Danielle Wyatt); Watermelon (Veto Roley) and Dessert and Chips (Rene Penrose). We could still use some potato, or other salad, raw veggies, and maybe some small sandwiches or other picnic food. (See attached sheet.) Brenda will provide iced tea and lemonade. (Don't forget to bring a poem to read, and we'll try to remember to take pictures!)

We also discussed recruiting new members, and branching out into the community. Several venues were suggested including the Mary C. by Rene' which was very accommodating to us last year during the Poe celebration, which included our group's presentation of a Poe poem, plus a one-act play by a local group, and refreshments in the Viking kitchen, featuring Poe's writings. Philip said the Mississippi Writers Guild meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month at the library in Gulfport, which includes some poets, and also the Ocean Springs Arts Association, to which our member Carol Hutcherson belongs. The Pacesetter Gallery in Flowood, Mississippi, was mentioned, which co-sponsors many of the Central Branch poetry activities. Perhaps we could team up with a local gallery on the coast.

Philip also announced that he plans to attend the National Federation of Poetry Societies annual convention in Overland Park, Kansas, July 21-27, 2026.

Brenda reported that Carol Hutcherson, who has shingles, prepared refreshments last Saturday (the second Saturday being our usual meeting date, except for May), and left them at the library (since she was ill) thinking it was our meeting date. (Not sure what happened to them.)

After breaking for refreshments at a table loaded with snacks provided by Rene', we read our poems:

Patty Butkovich	"Grief"
Shirley Hertz (guest)	"Mom"
Rene' Penrose	"My Mother"
Brenda Finnegan	"It's Spring Again" (on a challenge by former member, Deirdre Payne)
Mary Beth Magee	"The Pecan Tree"
Trudy Olive	(did not read)
Vivian Danielle Wyatt	"Even in the Sunlight" and "The Hardest Release"
Veto Roley	"Offshore Wind"
Philip Levin	"The Cottonwood Tree"

(his poem was read by Brenda Finnegan- as he left early)

Rene' distributed the remaining items in the goody bags, and shared the leftover snacks.
We adjourned at approximately 3:20 p.m. and wished Patty Butkovich a safe trip and fun summer in Illinois. Her friend, Shirley, her guest today, is driving her there tomorrow.
Respectfully submitted, Brenda Finnegan Secretary

Publications by our members

Sharlee Cheyenne Shumpert recently had five poems published in the third Writer's Camp anthology, project of MPS member Pamela Hatch. The poems published were:

"On Mint Condition"
"I Play No Games"
"The Puzzled Acquaintance"
"The Poet Sits for Chess"
"Mind Game"

Back in the spring, Sharlee won first place in the poetry and short story categories and second in the creative nonfiction category in ICC's writing contest, and she won second place in both the short story and poetry category of the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association's yearly writing contest.

2026 Honors and Publications by Emory Jones

"Winter Sunshine" was published in the winter 2025-2026 edition of *The Avocet*.
"Dancing Autumn—An Etheree was published in *SAGEBRUSH AND SILVER,NEVADAPOETRY SOCIETY ANTHOLOGY 2026.*
"Playful Spring—A Kyrielle" was published in *SAGEBRUSH AND SILVER, NEVADA POETRY SOCIETY ANTHOLOGY 202.6*
"Verse Virus" was published in *SAEBRUSH AND SILVER, NEVADA POETRY SOCIETY ANTHOLOGY 2026,*
"Light and Dark Haiku" was published in the Connecticut Poetry Society's Haiku Group for January 2026.
"Daffodils…." Haiku was published in the *Connecticut Poetry Society's Haiku Group April 2026.*
"Trick or Treat" was published in the *Mississippi Poetry Journal 2026 Contest Edition.*
"Haunted House" was published in the *Mississippi Poetry Journal 2026 Contest Edition*
"Guardians" won 2nd Honorable Mention in Category 2 (MPS North Branch Award) of the MPS 2026 Contest
"Haunted House" won 2nd Place in the 2026 MPS Past Presidents Award of the MPS 2026 Contest.
"Trick or Treat" won 1stPlacce in Category #7 (North Star Award) of the MPS 2026 Contest.
"A Playful Soring in the South" won 3rd Honorable Mention in Category #13 (Southern Living Award) of the MPS 2026 Contest.
"Tour of Duty" won 2nd Honorable Mention in Category #27 (Vietnam Memories Award) of the MPS 2026 Contest.
"Eagle Snow" was published in *Ink to Paper #10 2026* of the poetry society of Indiana.
"Naming Cats" was published in *Ink to Paper #10 2026* of the poetry society of Indiana.
"Yellow butterflies…." Won 3rd Place in Category $3 (Formal Haiku Award) of 2025 Oklahoma Poetry Society. "Attempting to Put an Anthology of Poetry in the Community College Bookstore" won 3rd Honorable Mention
of the 2025 of the Oklahoma Poetry.
"Yellow butterflies…." Was published in the *Connecticut poetry Haiku Group in May 2026*.

“Eagle Snow” was published in *Ink to Paper* volume 10 of the Poetry Society of Indiana 2026.
“The Naming of Cats” was published Ain *Ink to Paper* volume 10 of the Poetry Society of Indiana 2026.

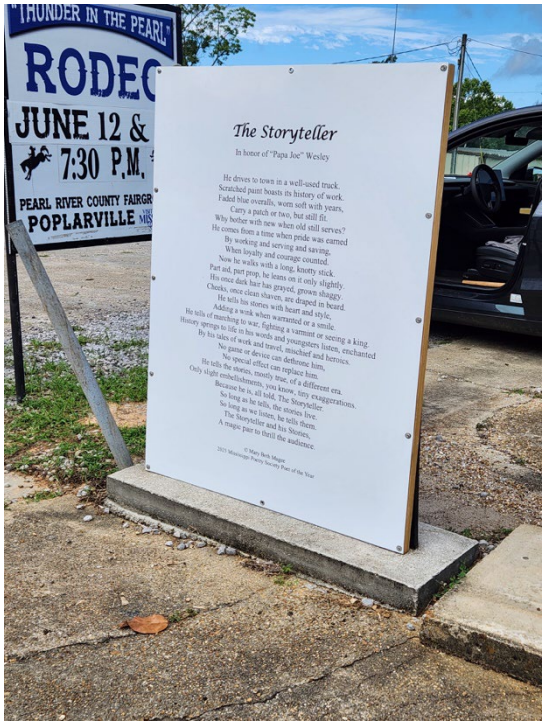
Publications by Michelle McMillian-Holifield – Central Branch
Publications January 2026-May2026
"How a House Burns," *Rust & Moth,* Feb 2026, https://rustandmoth.com/work/how-a-house-burns/, Online
Camerawoman, Poetry Manuscript, Finalist for the 2026 Wheelbarrow Books Poetry Prize, Announced Feb 2026
"Monet Dragon," *Quibble Lit*, March 2026, Print and Online, https://www.quibblelit.com/monet-dragon-by-michelle-mcmillan-holifield
Interview with *Bold Journey Magazine*: https://boldjourney.com/meet-michelle-mcmillan-holifield/
"A Million Tender Somethings," *Gyroscope Review,* April 2026,
Reprint, https://www.gyroscopereview.com/2026/04/poet-pick-michelle-mcmillan-holifield/
"While the Forest Burns," *Mississippi Poetry Society 2026 Contest Edition,* April 2026, Print
"Camerawoman: New Guinea Rainforest," and "Camerawoman: Laundry", *Valley Voices*, Spring 2026, Print
"Metallica in the Background," *Shadowplay*, Print, May 2026
"How to Speak About Eggs" and "The Year We Wore Masks," *Barely South Review*, Spring 2026, Online
https://barelysouthreview.com/the-year-we-wore-masks/
https://barelysouthreview.com/how-to-speak-about-eggs-michelle-mcmillan-holifield-16-4/

Publications 4Q2025
"Long Road Home," "Dry Bones," and "Prayer: For Joy, Even Its Brevity" - *Heart of Flesh Lit*, November 2025, Online and Print
"You Hope He Crawled Away From Her" - *Bear Review,* November 2025, Online
"Quiver of Offness" - *Permafrost*, December 2025, Online
"January 1924" - Southword, published by The Munster Literature Centre (Ireland), Winter 2025, Print
"Letters to McCandless" and "Out of the Ground" - *Willows Wept Review,* Winter 2025, Online and Print
"Teaching Emma to Make Bone Broth" - nominated for Pushcart Prize by *Gyroscope Review,* November 2025

Janice Canerdy~~Credits
“Why I Love Spring” and “There’s Much to Be Said for Swings” *Westward Quarterly: The Magazine of Family Reading* spring, print
“Girl with a Black Eye” Poetry Round Table of Arkansas, March contest, 3rd place
“Trip of a Lifetime,” PSI (Indiana) Spring Contest, category 5, Travel, HM
“Mesmerized,” *First Light Journal* (a Starboard Press print publication), Spring issue
‘Waiting for the Perfect Man” (humor) Society of Classical Poets website, April 21
“On a Forest Trail” and “Seas Transport Safely” (two haiku), *Rue Scribe* (an Underwood Press Publication) online May 1

‘Autumn Majesty,” PRA (Arkansas) Spring Contest, Dr. Peter Lily Memorial Award, 2nd place
Three HM’s, MPS Spring Contest
“Mississippi River Cruise--a Bucket-list Item,” PRA May members-only contest, 3rd placed
“The Matter of Trust,” Arizona State Poetry Society, March members-only contest, 3rd place
“Besties,” Arizona State Poetry Society, May members-only contest, 3rd place

Publications second quarter 20267 for Mary Beth Magee South Chapter
MPS Spring Fest – one first place, one third place, three honorable mentions
“One Man” – Local Gems *E Pluribus Unum* anthology
“Amid the Stones” – Sunflowers Rising 2 anthology by Poets for Peace
“Wine, Women, and Wisdom” – Reading at Picayune Writers Group
“The Storyteller” – displayed on Main Street, Poplarville, MS



Poetry by our members:

"Summer Night - Old Friend's Invitation"
Sharlee Cheyenne Shumpert

Come chase fireflies with me!
Through the meadow sleeping sound,
Over clods of shadowed ground,
Chase the gold of life with me.

Come and hug the willow tree,
And she'll hug back with dainty arms,
Point our way back to the farm,
So lost we'll never chance to be.

Come and swim the starry sea
Of constellations overhead;
You cannot see them from your bed—
Come and tour the galaxy.

Come and turn your spirit free!
Summer nights were made for more
Than staying locked outside your door;
Restore your youth's vitality.

Come and spend your time with me!
I miss you, friend I used to know.
The night is bright and passing slow;
Let's go recall what friends should be.

Dog Days of summer
Mark Hudson

All the people have packed their bags and gone,
bored and lonely, I suppress a yawn.
Summer is a time to sit around and be lazy;
but all this free-time is driving me crazy.

Things are going good, but they could be better,
in wintertime, I'll be wearing a sweater.
But here in summer, I'm in shorts and t-shirt,
I'm getting much older, my body aches and hurts.

Friends can't hang out; they're busy with work;
on the streets of my hometown I sneak and I lurk.
I see people, who are worse off than I am,
they ask for money but I think it's a scam.

All the money in the world couldn't cure;
the summertime blues; nothing seems sure.
To feel serenity you must avoid the news;
that's not where I'm going to find my muse.

If I could just take an awesome vacation,
maybe I'd feel some total elation.
But since I'm right here, I can no longer hide,
I must get out of bed, and step right outside.

Canopy
Mary Beth Magee – South Branch

When I was a child, I used to dream
Of a canopy bed of my own,
Arched o'er my pillow, flowered and laced.
As I've grown up, those old dreams have flown.
These days I camp out in the forest
Midst nature in glory organic.
A canopy green of limbs and leaves
Stretches sweetly above my hammock.
Scents of sweet pine and humus rich
Fill the air 'round my summer bed.
My dream came true a different way.
I love where my canopy led.

Seize the Summer, Kids!
Janice Canerdy

Sing “School’s out. School’s out!” Time to wade in creeks.
Bring Kool-Aid and hotdogs outside for a picnic.
Swing high in the tire Dad tied to the big oak tree.
Fling Frisbees, bounce balls, play tag; be quick!

Time will fly right into fall, so cherish summer fun.
Sublime are the hours you play each day, but save some
prime time for reading and learning. They enhance summer as
rhyme may spice up poems. Branch out, kids! Summer won’t be glum.

Summer Days
James Brown – North Branch

Languid days that call for shade, and fans, are quickly arriving,
Daily trips to the ocean or pool for swimming, sun, and diving.
Barefoot walks along the shore, as a tranquil evening draws near,
Bonfires on the beach, gazing at stars, under skies that are clear.

Walks through the woods watching, and listening, for nature’s gifts,
Following a secluded trail, that leads us to an experience that lifts.
Picnics in the park, followed by conversations till late in the afternoon,
Fun games in the evening, and chasing fireflies underneath the moon.