Magnolia Muse

Newsletter of Mississippi Poetry Society

President's Quarterly Letter: - August 2026

The National Foundation of State Poetry Societies met in Overland Park, Kansas, from July 23 through July 26. Representing 30 states, the attendance was noted at 120. However, that included about 70 participants in the Poetry Slam competition, so only about 50 poetry members representing the states. I estimate there were about twenty states represented, with the largest components from Colorado and Kansas. I was present as Mississippi's representative. I had a grand time, associating with "my people," those who find joy in turning a phrase, expressing a view, and of creating the magic of imagery through poetry.

This was my first time to attend, and I was told that in the past there would be upwards of 200 poets present. This dropoff in attendance permeates our entire culture. All genres of writing conferences have seen diminishing participants, with a mild substitute with online viewers. This disinterest has spread beyond the arts. As a physician, I've witnessed an incredible decrease in physicians joining medical organizations and going to meetings. Twenty years ago, the charity money-raising events held at casinos would draw hundreds of participants. Now they hardly exist, as so many ended up losing money. Only niche meetings, such as comic.com and software exhibitions draw large crowds.

COVID served as a precipitating factor, causing many gatherings to postpone, with difficulty revving up interest again. My group, the Gulf Coast Writers Association, went from 150 members pre-COVID to 60 when I started it back a year later. Economic factors come into play, as our economy weakens under the current administration's missteps. Though I believe there is a more pervasive influence, a loss of focus. There are so many distractions these days, from computer games, to streaming movies, to home issues that people don't recognize the gains that come from socializing with one's peers.

I asked Emory Jones, a long time MPS member, what he might suggest as a goal for my presidency, and he responded “Try to increase membership.” I love writing poetry, and I know there are scores, probably hundreds of our fellow Mississippians who love it, too. How can we reach them, make them aware that we have a gathering of “our people”? Actually, it’s not that difficult, and can be profitable. We need to contact places where aspiring poets might reside: college writing courses, retirement communities, library gatherings, Rotary clubs, and book clubs. Call or send emails and set up an appointment to recite some of your favorite poems. Bring along membership forms to distribute. And maybe you’ll get to sell some books if you have them.

Every year NFSPS has an annual poetry contest with about 50 categories. At the NFSPS conference the winners are announced and can read their poems. This happens each morning through the four days, interspersed between workshop/lectures and the Poetry Slam contest. This latter I wasn’t familiar with. In the Poetry Slam, there are two rounds of 10 poets each having three minutes to give an oration. These tend to be delivered at a very rapid speaking rate, generally politically oriented topics or private history of their lives, such as having cancer, black discrimination, or sexual abuse. These poets were REALLY GOOD, although I was a bit disappointed that there wasn’t that much poetic rhythm or rhyme. Five judges ranked them on a scale of 1-10, with almost all the scores from all judges being between 9 and 10 (in decimals). I’d like to try it next year, although I can see its going to take a lot of preparation. Check out this video as an example: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/NdKYhivqTE8

In April I published a poetry book, “Reflections.” It’s a lovely book with full color photos associated with each poem. I brought a dozen copies to the conference and sold none. There must have been a hundred poetry books there for sale by the participants. This should serve as inspiration to all members of MPS. Put a book together of your poetry. It’s part of your legacy.

One of the poetry books I bought is an anthology of poems, the Sunflower book. This book, with poems from both Ukrainians and Americans, is a fund raiser for orphans in Ukraine. It’s a major project of NFSPS, created in cooperation with people they know in Ukraine. Plus, it’s an opportunity to get published. I plan to submit a poem or two. Here is a link for information. https://nfsps.net/poets-for-peace

Spring Contest Topic:
For our 2027 Spring contest, the first topic is selected by MPS members and sponsored by our society, with prizes of $100, $75, and $50 for the poetry contest (not for the suggestions). These are the topics chosen from previous years:

Mississippi Characters,
MS food,
MS Happenings,
This Is Home, and
Made in MS

These are topics suggested by our members so far. Please provide feedback on these, or offer your own.

Jason Ervin: Mississippi Farming
Mike Wahl: Mississippi History in line with our nation's 250th anniversary
Mary Beth Ashley: Mississippi in the Moonlight,
Mississippi: Departures & Returns (or, The Long Way Home)
How to Survive August Heat
Notes from the Mississippi Margins
Brenda Finnegan: What Makes Mississippi Unique?
Pete Massey: Why I love Mississippi
Janice Canerdy: Beautiful Mississippi
Mississippi Museums
Veto Roley: Mississippi Rivers

Chapter Reports

North Branch met at the Desoto County Museum in Hernando on August 1. Attendees were Ann Carolyn Cates, her adorable seven-year-old granddaughter Annalisa, who amazed us with her lovely, descriptive acrostic poem about helping her dad with the spring garden; Bill Hill, Charlie Cain and her father, Jeff Cain, Kurt Young, Jake Lankford, Patsy McCrory, Ruby Jones, and Janice Canerdy. Jake was late due to a job-related assignment. Janice was late because she got lost—in Hernando. If you have trouble finding places, knowing that should make you feel better.

Patsy provided lunch. Ann Carolyn's family brought sweets.

Patsy's skillfully-prepared devotional included examples of literary devices from the Bible; examples are antithesis, simile, and parallelism. She made the point that poetry appears throughout the Bible. She quoted poetic verses that speak of how our words can "hurt or heal, build up or tear down." Her humble prayer expressed gratitude for our blessings. There was little business to discuss. Janice mentioned the upcoming student contests. She and Emory Jones, Student Contest co-chairs, have produced guidelines for two contests--for school students and for college undergraduates. She also mentioned the file of information she sent North Branch members about choosing a POY Nominee. Poetry sharing was, as always, enjoyable. We shared free verse, prose poetry, and rhymed, metered pieces. A few of the topics were a coffee-flooded kitchen, an autopsy (a deep piece narrated by the deceased), peace, old homeplaces, farm life, and life in general.

We will meet again on November 21 at the public library in Iuka. Business will include planning
our 2027 meetings.

Janice Canerdy, North Branch President

South Branch had its annual June picnic hosted this year by Brenda Finnegan. 8 members in attendance. Here are the photos. The Theme was America patriotism.

News from our Members

South Branch

Vivian Wyatt placed 2nd in Nationals with her poem "Evening Dews and Damps," so she will be published in the 2026 version of "Encore" for the NFSPS anthology. She will also be published in the "Monsoon Musing" Anthology for Wingless Dreamer.

Mary Beth Magee had these remarkable successes with these publishing credits.
Wine, Women and Wisdom - Illinois State Poetry Society Poets "Poets Respond the the American Revolution - The US250 Persona Poem Project"
Compass Rose - Local Gems "Dawn Horizons" anthology
Ripples - Local Gems "Remember When" anthology
Emergency! - HM - MPS Spring Fest Category 3
One Less Nurse - 1st place - MPS Spring Fest Category 14
Canine Kisses - HM - MPS Spring Fest Category 17
Abandoning Ashland - 2nd Place - MPS Spring Fest Category 20
Values - HM - MPS Spring Fest Category 28
Small Start - Picayune Writers Group "Tall Tales" Anthology
One Man - Local Gems "E Pluribus Unum" anthology
Amid the Stones - Sunflowers Rising2, Poets for Peace anthology
The Storyteller - Poster displayed on Main Street, Poplarville, MS long term
The Broadcast - RedRoseThornsJournal.com
Tell Me You Love Me - RedRoseThornsJournal.com
Amazing Gracious - Half and One Volume Five

Philip Levin published his second poetry book, “Reflections.” It includes 16 love poems and 32 family poems. He also published his memoir, “I Saved Lives,” which includes several of his poems.

Central Branch

Jerry Palmer will be attending the first Mississippi Gulf Coast Book Festival August 8th in Gulfport and the Mississippi Book Festival in Jackson on September 26th. He will have *Stoned Words & Electric Flowers Vol. 1-3* along with Poems in his original handwriting. His historical narrative *Buttons, Bolt Cutters and Barricades* will also be available.

Michelle Holifield
The Fox Hunt,” “Death of the Clementine,” “Lunging for Apples,” and “The Art of Being Consumed," *Cabbage Patch Magazine*, Summer 2026, Online
https://heyzine.com/flip-book/af2bd35a67.html

North Branch

Sharlee Shumpert: One of my poems, "Children Should Know the Sound," was accepted into the second Poets for Peace anthology. Also, my poem "When I Say Nothing" received an honorable mention in category fifteen of the 2026 NFSPS Annual Contest.

Janice Canerdy, one credit: NFSPS Contest, one HM

At Large

Mark Hudson, member at large, had a second-place winner, Dali, in the NFSPFS annual poetry contest. In all the years of participation in this contest, this is the best award he has ever received. He is truly honored and grateful for this achievement, and wants to say to all poets, writers, and artists of all kinds, don't give up!

Gail Denham (Oregon) Submitted this photo:

(Gail Denham continued): A few kudos - Sunflower Rising Peace Anthology Using "Celebration of Peace"; 3rd prize Massachusetts contest with "Finally"; "Boys And Their Critters" in Mississippi Anthol. and H.M.; Oklahoma PSO 1st prize with "Cynthia" and 2nd with "Gospel Music"; Ethos won first in theme - 100 word story: "Chicken Feud"; "Carousel Horse" and several photos in Highland Park theme antho. ; Pennsylvania a 1st with "His Poetry and My Eclair: and a 3rd. That's it for last few months.

Mike Wahl has been chosen to serve as the Alabama State Poetry Society 2026 Poet of the Year. He has three poems appearing in the newly published Highland Park's USA250 persona poem anthology, including one as a top award winner. He also has had “Unsolicited” accepted for inclusion in the 2026-2027 edition *East on Central*, Highland Park’s journal of literature and art. Additionally, poems "Superstitions" and "Contemplating the Past" are being published in the soon to be released North Alabama anthology project, and two poems have been selected to appear in the fall 2026 issue of Flowers of the Field, with the theme of 'joy'.

Poems by our members

Members are welcome to send me one poem to publish in each quarterly Muse.

Grandchildren
By James Brown

They're like we're capturing the pure joy in our midst,
Or touching gleeful laughter, before it's presently missed.
Like embracing the wind, until it wistfully slips away,
Or the warmth of the sun, on a snowy winter's day.

They're like a smile, that draws you to a happy place,
Or kind words that elevate you, and are so full of grace.
Like holding a wisp of wonder, before it flees our sight,
Or savoring a moment, overflowing with utter delight.

They're like an elusive memory, that for an instant shines bright,
Or the passing of time from brilliant sunrise, to serenity of night.
Like a carefree journey, that lovingly welcomes us to come along,
Or being transported by the music, as we hear our favorite song

FIRE TOWERS
Jerry Palmer – Central Branch

Do they still keep watch in the towers?
Or have the rangers left never to return?
Now the fires are close and the winds are strong.
Blowing in all directions, no place to run, no place to hide.
Burning the fields increases the yield.
Dragging chains and mufflers can make the sparks.
Just as cigarettes tossed into the grass.
This ain't your ashtray...what more to say?
Tossed out the windrows forming wind rows at stop lights
and mounds fire ants didn't build, nicotine butts and filters
lasting two days past forever...
Bugs and bees come and go.
Fire towers are removed as oaks fall and are replaced by pine.
Wonder about the cough and the cost as fires grow hotter...
and a good shade tree is harder to find.

Stacks
Mary Beth Magee – Central Branch

Within the stacks of books, I find my way
To other worlds and other lives. Inside
Each hallowed volume dawns another day.
The pages open doors so very wide.

The thoughts of mighty thinkers, for my use,
Are mingled with the jokesters of all of time.
Science, math and hist'ry I peruse
Or lose myself within the poet's rhyme.

I might seek out a recipe to cook,
Or plan a mad escape through novel bold.
The art books always earn a second look-
The masters' works remain fresh, never old.

Within the stacks, I love and sing and live.
I want to feast on all they have to give.

Gail Denham (At large)

Why I Write In Café and Other Public Places

In the diner, people drop away.
Music blares, then fades
pianissimo into antique saws,
old-fashioned tricycles, and cobalt jars
hung on walls. My pen leaps forward,
with only notebook, pen, coffee,
the faint buzz of lights.

Somewhere a grill sizzles fuel
for this body that now wings
to another world, light years
from this small eatery on this tiny

street in this minuscule town
on this green and blue globe,
which spins quietly away.

(previously published in Byline Magazine, 2005; also in my limited edition poetry chapbook HOLD THAT MOMENT, 2008, out of print. Rights owned by writer.)

Sharlee Shumpert – North Branch
The Start of the End of Summer:

The start of the end of summer
Has stolen upon me! I know
That I shall be asking this question:
Where did the summer days go?
And yet I know just where they're going,
And I certainly know where they went.
These summer months weren't wasted,
And each summer day was well-spent.
There's only a month left of summer,
But I can't say I'm caught by surprise.
I lived in the sunshine of June;
I thrived in the sun of July.
I'll spend this last month of August
With joy in this heart of mine,
For, though autumn came in a hurry,
It came not before its time.
I shall not resist what is coming,
For I've loved what is going so truly.
I've lived it, so I can release it
To embrace what's soon coming to me.
Seasons and years are like rivers,
But as long as I cherish the flow,
Farewell robs no peace from my heart,
And there's joy in every hello!

Janice Canerdy – North Branch
Blithesome Fall

Blithesome autumn comes on cue
Each year to chase the heat away.
As summer starts to fade from view,
Unique fall will seize the day.
Turning leaves to brown and gold
Is one of autumn's specialties.
Feel the air grow crisp and bold!
Utmost seasonal traits please
Lovers of how flannel feels,
Frost that glistens, "Trick or Treat,"
And families' Thanksgiving meals.
Late autumn brings December's beat.
Listen! It's carols. Fall is complete!

Veto Roley – South Branch
Unpacking books…

New books
taken from boxes,
carefully placed on library shelves,
dutifully cataloged,
remembered digitally
and forgotten.

Fresh books
longing for human touch
against their spines,
eyes drawn to written wisdom
closed, laying there
forgotten on library shelves,
knowledge lost
like it was never written.

Old books,
gathering dust,
recalled in time,
collected in boxes,
sold in book fairs,
given to charity,
still unread,
still waiting.