**Poetry from Daily Life: A poem a day is good practice — and proof of life**

By Jane Yolen

*This week’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Jane Yolen, who divides her time between Hatfield, Massachusetts; Mystic, Connecticut; and Scotland. Jane began writing in 2nd grade and published her first poetry in Smith College’s magazine. She sold her first book on her 22nd birthday. She writes in numerous genres but likes poetry and children’s picture books best. Among her hundreds of books, Jane especially loved writing "Owl Moon" (a picture book) and the collection of poems in "Kaddish." A unique fact about Jane is that she has written at least one poem a day for the past 19 years.*

**Daily observations**

I write a poem a day (sometimes more) for three reasons.

First for finger exercises that wake up both fingers and brain.

Second, I use it observationally, and by that, I mean to sharpen my observations of the world around me. To make connections. At 84, I could just rest on my laurels, or give up being engaged in the world, or watch TV, or sleep a lot. But living on a 14-acre un-farmed farm in Massachusetts for the last fifty years, I have found watching the wild keeps me sharp.

And third, I might just get a new book out of it!  I may be 84, I may have 457 books already out there with about 30 more sold, but I am not ready to do a sleeping beauty.

**A Convocation of Vultures**

Sit upon my barn roof,

contemplating eternity

as if they control it.

And in a way they do,

They measure the size of mortality

with their large beaks,

and notarize the deaths

of every squirrel and skunk

on the block, leaving nothing

but a death mask behind.

◆◆◆

I, too, contemplate mortality. My father lived the last seven years of his life with my family when my children (all grownups now) were teens. My father began every day by reading the New York Times obituary columns. "Why?" I asked him. And he replied, "To remind myself that I am still alive."

And while I find myself occasionally reading the local obituaries as well, I know every morning when I get up and write a poem that I am still alive, too.

**A Resolution of Vultures**

Seven sit daily on my barn roof,

in silent convocation,

staring in all directions,

till one lifts its head, its wings,

flies aloft, a silent signal

that lunch is spread,

and then all follow

to the dead.

◆◆◆

All poets use observation when writing poetry. Some turn inward, some outward, but the poems do both things at the same time. You can see in my vulture poems that I have looked at the birds for some time. But you can also hear in my words that I have made connections far beyond the vulture's world, even connecting the elder gods.

**Return of the Vultures**

By one — through seven —

the convocation of vultures,

never looking less hungry,

return.

They sit on the barn roof,

surveying the farmland,

the road into town

where many a squirrel

has limped to its death.

Then one by one, the seven

lift off and fly north.

Possibly for dinner,

or another rooftop.

I never ask.

They never explain.

◆◆◆

**Where Have The Seven Vultures Gone?**

Have they moved south,

started a commune,

opened a store of dead animals,

created bone jewelry,

hired a top chef?

Or did they just get tired

of the same company,

bored with the same outlook,

ready for something more exotic.

White squirrel, anybody?

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**How To Talk To A Vulture**

We have not met

Yet.

I hope it is not soon.

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*Among Jane Yolen’s long list of awards are a Caldecott, two Christopher Medals, and six honorary doctorates. For more information, see* [*https://www.janeyolen.com/*](https://www.janeyolen.com/).