**Poetry from Daily Life: Everyone understands a kitchen drawer**

By Bob Stephens

*This week’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Bob Stephens, who lives in Springfield. He is a man of many talents and writing poetry is one of them. In the past two years Bob has combined his passion for poetry with his organizational skills to form The Bards of Queen City, a group of local poets, and book them to give poetry readings all over town, in April (National Poetry Month) and any other time an audience gathers. ~ David L. Harrison*

**Starting with the mundane, poems can bring insight**

When David L. Harrison asked a number of us to write a column about “Poetry from Daily Life,” I thought of Harry Bliss’ New Yorker cartoon: He draws a lady introducing her son as a poet. The folks meeting him have thought bubbles, but no words: “A poet? What do I say? I got nothing.” Another is thinking “Thank God he’s not our son,” while a third is thinking, “Should I tell him Ben and Jerry’s is hiring?”

Sadly, that’s the reaction many of us have to the word poetry. Our experiences with poetry in our high schools have been almost universally negative — to the point where we actively try to avoid it. We gag and cover our ears as we run from it.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Last week, a friend sent a note saying, “I love it that every time I have taken people who were pretty hesitant to attend a ‘poetry reading’ and they then walk away wanting to know when the next one is.”

While a lot of classical poetry is drawn from the major, over-arching themes of religion, love, war, god, and the end of the world, some of the most effective poems are about common, everyday topics. A poem I wrote that gets the most nods and smiles of recognition is entitled simply, “The Kitchen Drawer.” It is about a very mundane topic that almost everyone can identify with.

My favorite poem by a colleague is entitled “I Once Wrote the Word *Apocalypse* On a Railroad Tunnel.” She was immediately outed as the graffiti artist because she was the only person in the school who could spell the word "apocalypse." The poem was ultimately about two kids who had lost their dog — a not uncommon sort of apocalypse.

In today’s modern, fast-paced society, the classical forms of poetry we had to read in school (I’m looking at you, *iambic pentameter*!) have given way to poetry that uses natural rhythms of language as well as common, everyday topics. A friend wrote a poem about finding a dead gnat in her water glass. I wrote one about a bird flying into the windshield of my car. Another friend wrote about a wasp getting into a school bus. Common, everyday occurrences become appropriate and fascinating topics for poetry.

Yes, poets write about love, about loss, about death, but poetry from daily life begins with some common occurrence and then morphs into the deeper discussions that make us human, that lead us to some type of insight, and, yes, even can cause us to question our own humanity.

*Bob Stephens is a former mayor who has previously authored two books of essays, published a poetry chapbook, co-authored a book of poetry with Lora Knight, and edited a poetry anthology by the Bards of Queen City – Springfield, Missouri. He’s at work on a second anthology by the Bards of Queen City.*