**Poetry from Daily Life: One poet's journey, from library to typewriter to a trolley bench**

By Eileen Spinelli

*This week's guest on "Poetry from Daily Life" is Eileen Spinelli, who lives in Media, Pennsylvania. She tries to write most mornings. When Eileen isn't writing you might find her watching old movies with her husband, Jerry, hanging out with the grandkids, browsing thrift shops, knitting scarves or watching hummingbirds at the feeders in the back yard. Two books she especially had fun writing are "Birdie" and "Another Day As Emily" — both novels in verse. One unique fact about Eileen is that she and Jerry have 40 grand- and great-grandchildren, including four adopted from Ukraine. ~ David L. Harrison*

**One poet's journey**

I fell in love with poetry when I was five years old. It was a summer Saturday afternoon. My mother took me to the public library. We walked. It felt far and adventurous.

The children's section was on the second floor. I climbed the steps and into a wonderland. Books everywhere! Books about bears and bees and bunnies. Books about trees and trucks and triangles.

Books with pictures. Books with poems. I didn't know which book to grab first. It made no difference to me that I couldn't read. The librarian suggested Robert Louis Stevenson's book: "A Child's Garden of Verses." That night my mother read the poem "Bed in Summer." It begins:

In winter I get up at night

And dress by yellow candle-light.

In summer quite the other way,

I have to go to bed by day.

And oh — the joy. That year I visited the library every Saturday with my mother.

The following year I was allowed to go with my older friend, Gladys. By then I had learned to read. And I had learned something else: what I wanted most of all was to become a writer. Specifically, a poet.

My father gave me his old manual typewriter. The Z key stuck. Fine. I would not write about zebras or zippers.  He made me a desk from an orange crate. My mother filled a box with paper. And that's how I began. Two-fingered typing. Letters into words. Words into poems.

In high school I nearly failed geometry. But I won first prize for my poetry — a check for $50. I bought myself a better typewriter. I also bought myself a pair of red high heels. I won a dance contest wearing those shoes — but it was writing poems, not dancing, that stole my heart.

After graduation I got a job. Several jobs. Server. Receptionist. Secretary. I wrote poetry on my lunch breaks. And at the laundromat. And on the trolley that zipped me to and from work. I carried a loose-leaf binder filled with my poems. Ever the optimist, I wanted to be ready in case I met an editor in my day-to-day travels.

And I did.

I met Jerry Spinelli — an editor of a business magazine at Chilton Company, where we both happened to work. We were sitting on the same bench. Waiting for the same trolley. We had spoken a few times before. This time he asked what was in my binder. "My poems," I told him.

Of course the business magazine didn't publish poetry.

But I was eager for an audience. Even an audience of one. I plopped the binder of poems on Jerry's lap. And as he likes to say — they stole his heart.

Eventually we married.

Jerry went on to write and publish novels — like "Maniac Magee" and "Stargirl."

I went on to write and publish picture books (which I consider 32-page poems with illustrations) "Silly Tilly"; "When You Are Happy"; "Thankful"; many others.

Also novels in verse: "Another Day As Emily"; "The Dancing Pancake"; "Birdie."

And now ...

In winter WE get up at night

and dress by yellow candle-light ...

*Learn more about author Eileen Spinelli at her website,* [*www.eileenspinelli.com*](http://www.eileenspinelli.com/index.html)*.*