**Poetry from Daily Life: Stumped for ideas? Start your poem with a single word**

By David L. Harrison

*This week I’m contributing another column to Poetry from Daily Life. Once again, I thank Amos Bridges, editor-in-chief for the Springfield News-Leader, for hosting the column and to the other papers who also carry us. I’m deeply grateful to all those who have already added their voices to this ongoing conversation about poetry, and to the dozens of others yet to come. ~David L. Harrison*

**Starting with one word**

Those who want to write something but are struggling with how to get started often ask, “How do I find ideas?” My response is to redirect the focus. Ideas are everywhere. The trick isn’t in finding ideas, it’s in recognizing ideas that are all around us. Here’s one way to go about it. Since 2009, I’ve posted a new word on my blog on the first day of each month. My challenge to all who join me in the monthly exercise is to write a poem inspired by that one word.

There are no rules to this game, which I call Word of the Month Poetry Challenge. The idea is to examine the word of the month, probe for its secrets, its stories, choose one, and write about it. Your poem can be in verse (with rhyme and meter) or free verse. It can be long or short, light or serious. This is merely an exercise, like taking your imagination out for a walk. Sometimes it’s all it takes to start finding those ideas. Examples:

The Word of the Month for April was "gone." Watching geese grazing on fresh grass on my lawn inspired this poem.

Gone now, those colorless days,

slick, wet salads

served head-down in cold water.

Gone, the assassin tongues of nights

that slipped down tunnels

to taste last breaths.

The toad serenades opportunity.

His announcement is final.

Winter is gone.

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The Word of the Month for March was "wish." A picture in a magazine of an ornate wishing well somewhere in Europe inspired this poem.

**The Cost of Miracles**

Below the trio of marble cherubs,

pouring water from bottomless pitchers,

coins cover the blue-tile floor,

each a wish, flung eyes-closed,

to guarantee success.

Wishing for love? A miracle cure?

Throw in a dime.

Need a dog? A baby brother?

A sunny day? Dig in your pocket.

Maybe this is your lucky day.

Sometimes even a penny will do it.

Maybe you’ve prayed,

sought advice, tried therapy.

The sign says,

“Do not throw coins into the fountain,”

yet people do.

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The Word of the Month for February was "spark." A brilliant sunrise mirrored on the lake behind our house inspired this poem.

**A Higher Calling**

It’s not so much what they are

as what they do.

True, some sparks can send a steak

grilling on its way to your fork,

but others ignite without fire,

smell like coffee, squeeze like a hug,

strike a smile with flakes of snow,

jump-start a day

with multi-colored promises.

The best serve a higher calling —

inspire dreams,

set a compass,

guide a life.

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If this monthly exercise appeals to you, I hope you’ll join me. Over the years I’ve welcomed any number of well-published poets as well as many who are trying their poetic wings for the first time. You can be assured of receiving warm and supporting comments from others who visit and contribute to the challenge.

Go to <http://davidlharrison.wordpress.com> and click on the box along the top of the page marked "Adult W.O.M. Poems." Scroll to the bottom, drop your poem into the box, and hit “comment.” There’s also a box for kids, marked "Young Poets W.O.M. Poems," for our younger poets. Is this the month when I’ll see you there? I hope so.

*David L. Harrison is Missouri’s 7th poet laureate. He has three new titles due out this fall: "Wild Brunch, Poems About How Animals Eat"; "A Tree is a Community"; and "The fluency development lesson: Closing the reading gap." For more information, visit his website at* [*http://davidlharrison.com*](http://davidlharrison.com).