**Poetry from Daily Life: When we suffer, when we fail, a few words can elevate our pain**

By Kalli Dakos

*Today’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Kalli Dakos, who lives in Ottawa, Canada. She was named after her Greek grandmother. Kalli (rhymes with Sally) derives from the Greek muse of poetry. Kalli fell in love with writing in the 5th grade and her first book was published in 1990. Special areas of her interest include poetry, picture books, magazine articles, and teacher materials. Two of her favorite books to work on were "Recess in the Dark, Poems from the Far North" and "If You’re Not Here, Please Raise Your Hand, Poems About School." A unique fact about Kalli is that she taught in a town called Inuvik in the far north of Canada, sixty miles above the Arctic Circle. ~ David L. Harrison*

**Empowering words of poetry**

Poetry can help us to both celebrate life and to face the challenges of this world.

When I was 12, my father died of cancer. In those days, people did not talk to children about death like they do today.

I found simple poems of grief and loss in the obituary section of our local paper, and I read them every day for years. They were poems like:

If you love someone,

cherish him with care.

You'll never know the heartache,

till you see his vacant chair.

I learned at a young age that poetry can give us the words to face sadness and loss, and to help us become resilient in a challenging world.

I love to celebrate poetry with children in our elementary schools, and I know there are children, in every audience, suffering with some form of grief. I was working with a large group of third and fourth graders when a child came forward to tell her story.

“My mother died last year, and I want to be a songwriter,” she said. “I wrote a song about her.”

“Would you share it with us?” I asked her.

As she sang about the greatest loss in her life, I was in awe of the beauty of this child’s voice, the depth of the lyrics, and the feelings expressed.

I think it was Robert Frost who wrote, “Art doesn’t end pain. It elevates it.” The poetry of her words captured our hearts that day. Even the youngest children in the audience knew we were in the presence of one of life’s greatest sorrows and their hearts were expanding with compassion for the grief of their playmate.

I have written over three thousand poems about life in our elementary schools, and I have learned that a short poem can have a huge impact on a child.

Failure has always been a topic that intrigued me. In a world where we fail more often than we succeed, I could never understand the focus on success in our schools. I write many poems on failure.

**Don’t Tell Me**

Don’t tell me I won’t fail,

for it might not be true.

Just tell me you’ll still love me,

even if I do.

In twenty-three words, this poem tells us that life is not so much about success and failure as it is about love. Our children need the strength to go into the world and risk failure, and they can do this best if they know they are loved.

As a writer, I’ve always believed in words and their power to make a difference. I taught above the Arctic Circle and met an elderly Inuit woman who told me, “I have never learned to read, and I feel like I am blind.”

We want our children to travel in the light of literacy in a world that can be very dark and challenging at times. I’ve seen this light flicker and then grow in the lives of so many children through the empowering and beautiful words of poetry.

*Kalli Dakos has written many books of poetry. She was a 2022 recipient of the Excellence in Poetry for Children Award from the National Council of Teachers of English for "They Only See the Outside." Five of her titles have been Children’s Choice Selections. She’s a former reading specialist and elementary school teacher. Her website is:* [*www.k*](http://www.kallidakos.com/)