How I Know Poetry

Libby Falk Jones
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Around 1957 I kept a diary, the kind you lock with a small gold key. I recorded everything Butch or Johnny or George said to me. On the cover was a picture of a girl in a swimsuit.

Around 1999 I let my husband read the poems I wrote after my father died.

Around 2015, the folder on my laptop titled "Poems – Lib" contained 1.74 GB.

Around 1984 the university where I was teaching first-year writing developed a new sophomore course in creative writing: fiction and poetry. I desperately wanted to teach the class, but I'd not written poetry, so I signed up for a class with a poet friend. My first poem, which began "Today at the plumbing store counter / I put on my lipstick," made the class worksheet.

Around 2009, after returning from the Arizona desert with my first Contemplative Writing class, I put 26 of my poems together as a chapbook with the working title, "Abundance."

Around 1960, my English teacher made us memorize some speeches from Shakespeare's plays. I still say these to myself.

Around 1996, I taught my first poetry-writing class at Berea College.


Around 2003, when I sat at a card table on the top floor of a mountain cabin supposedly working on a book on women's teaching and scholarship, I stared out the window at the bright, still leaves and wrote poems.

Around 1997 my father died. I spent his last four days sitting in his hospital room reading books about hope and sleeping on the couch next to his bed where I could reach over and touch his arm in the near-dark. Two days before he died, I read him a poem I'd written about my mother, but I'm not sure he heard it.

Around 2011 and 2013, some Berea student poets and I wrote poems for people in the community. We loved watching their faces as they read our poems.

Around 2003, when my husband and I were riding bicycles near Kingston, Ontario, Canada, my friend Steve phoned to invite me to give a poetry reading in Berea the next month.

Around 2004, in a University of Michigan class on kinetic poetry led by Thylas Moss, I wrote a two-page poem on the phrase "ho-hum."

Around 1956, when you unintentionally spoke a rhyme, someone was sure to say, "You're a poet and didn't know it!" To which you replied, "I can make a rhyme any old time!" and everyone laughed.

Around 2015, though I know that poetry saved my life, literally, six years ago, I'm still not ready to write that poem.

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--Libby Falk Jones 9/5/15