

The Verse in My Life

My earliest recollection of poetry is of my mother reading to me at bedtime when I was perhaps five or six years old, and I especially remember *A Child's Garden of Verses* by Stevenson. Some of those wonderful lines have stayed with me all through the years. Then from seventh grade all the way through two years of college, our English classes usually included a section on poetry, with a textbook of what were considered the classics. I remember many of those too, especially the ones we were required to memorize, but none of them left much of a real impression on me.

The one class I remember well and that did leave its mark was freshman college English with professor Markus, especially because of his departure from the usual approach to teaching and appreciating poetry. If I remember this right (and it has been a long time) his idea was that appreciation of poetry is a personal thing, and what appeals to one person may not to another. Even more to the point, one need not necessarily resort to what scholars consider the classics. Poetic lines are scattered about all around us, if only we are tuned in enough to recognize them, perhaps even in a popular song, game, or ad. The one example he gave has stuck with me hauntingly to this day, and that was the lyrics to the then popular song *Deep Purple*. I have memorized them and loved them ever since. When Mitchell Parish came as an infant with his family to this country from Lithuania around 1900, they probably spoke barely a word of English. Yet he went on to become a very successful song writer, with *Deep Purple* and many other popular songs to his credit.

How does one judge poetry? I think the answer given in most of my English classes would have been that it is what scholars judge most worthy and that which has thus survived down through the years. I have different ideas about that, and I like to think Professor Markus may have played a part in it. If I read some lines of verse and then want to read them a second or third time, that is certainly a plus, but even better if I make the effort to memorize them and perhaps share with friends. Better still if they bring a smile or even make us laugh. The works of Robert Service come to mind. On yet another level are poems that move me deeply. Maud Muller by Whittier would be a good example. Some might even bring a tear or two.

In English classes as far back as I can remember, our lessons including writing poems. Perhaps not very inspired ones, but probably still a useful exercise. Then around 2009 I came up with a new idea. At that time I was gradually making the transition away from crafting wooden puzzles and more into publishing and sharing my designs with others. Each one usually came with brief instructions, and I thought why not put them into verse? Over the next few years I came up with about 30 of them. They are not included in my website because I really consider them more amusements than poetry, and furthermore they would be meaningless without the accompanying puzzle.

Perhaps inspired by the puzzle verse, around 2007 I decided to try amusing myself in my semi-retirement by writing poems, adding to a few from the past. So far there are about 40, the most recent being in 2018. They are all found here in my website. Most of them

might perhaps be called amusing light verse rather than poetry, but not all. Judge for yourself. I conclude this section with the story about one of them, *The Honeybee*.

Around 2010 I found myself involved in caring for my partner suffering from dementia, and I attended several workshops for caregivers. One that I especially remember was at a retirement home in North Andover. Part of the plan was sharing our experiences with each other. I will never forget one woman describing her anguish at caring for her husband in his final stages and not wanting to even *touch him!* I think we could all sense the pain and loneliness in her voice, and it left a deep and lasting impression on me. My last workshop was at the Andover Senior Center, and it was called Powerful Tools for Caregivers. It covered many aspects in detail, and yet it did not address the vexing situation that so many caregivers find themselves in, such as of that poor woman in North Andover.

At the final session in this workshop we were all invited to comment on the workshop, what we had gained from it and also perhaps what we hadn't. I noticed that of all the topics covered, missing was the plight of that poor woman trapped in her situation of loneliness. I thought it best not to address this concern of mine directly, so instead my contribution to the discussion was to compose a poem, *The Honeybee*, which can now be found among the many others in my website. I was not sure that I would be able to read it aloud without my voice breaking, but I managed to just barely. As we were leaving, one of my classmates approached and asked if she could have a copy of that poem. I will always wonder if it was helpful to her.