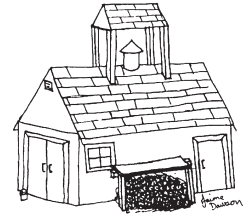


THE GUILFORD GAZETTE



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In Search of Poetry in Our Own Backyard

BY VERANDAH PORCHE

On a raw October Sunday afternoon at the Broad Brook Grange, Guilford Middle School students gave a dramatic reading of *Seed-folks* by Paul Fleischman, a celebration of common humanity and renewal. Thirteen rural kids dressed in [redacted] tee shirts took turns portraying the characters they'd met in print: immigrants, elderly residents, the young and challenged, strangers who came together to transform a blighted vacant lot in Cleveland, Ohio into a community garden, a piece of paradise. Each student rose slowly from a semi-circle of chairs on the Grange's historic stage to give voice to eloquent stories of loneliness, dislocation and healing. A Vietnamese girl plants lima beans in memory of the father who never met her, lima beans a housebound neighbor imagines are drugs. Amid and beyond the trash, trust grows like a hill of beans, a delicate, durable, universal process. Guilford kids transmitted the dignity in each speaker's story and its value to the whole. The grateful audience of family and community members felt the heat of their commitment and artistry.

Guilford, Vermont is a far cry from alienated, post-industrial Cleveland, Ohio. Yet even in a small, valued community we may live side by side as strangers. We do have opportunities to gather and hammer out problems. At Town Meeting those who attend consider key issues, orate and occasionally berate one another.

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Guilford Poets Afield

BY LAYNE [redacted]

Are you a poet? Does the thought of poetry free you? Guilford has its own poets; Verandah Porche is one of them. Our school was intrigued and wanted to work with Verandah Porche again. In order for this to happen, Mr. G, Mr. Strothman and Ms. Hessey got together and wrote a proposal to the Vermont Arts Council. They received a grant and got matching funds from the WSESU district office. They wanted to have Verandah come during the months December through April and spend time helping the students learn to use poetry to explore life experiences. You may ask, why? This whole experience would be a great way to increase the capability of Guilford residents to communicate with each other in new ways. The project is not just students and staff members but will reach out to elders and anyone else in the community who wants to take part.

On Labor Day, Marjorie Evans and I chatted at the Guilford Fair. I asked her to tell me something that stayed with her from girlhood. Later, she told me this story as I typed.



Marjorie Evans and Verandah Porche

Woman in the Woods

BY MARJORIE EVANS (Scribed by Veranda Porche)

It was the middle of the night, o yeah,
a dark cold night in the fall of the year.
Way up in back of where Blairs used to live,
up Carpenter Hill, we heard screaming.
I couldn't have been more than eight or nine.
This was a human shrieking that woke us.
It wasn't like an owl or a bear. Telephone
was ringing all over the country. Everybody
in the area came. Those families were pretty close
back then. They got a bunch together to see
what they could find. They spread out and went
all over the mountain. The nearer they got
the more they were sure. They found a woman
crawling on her hands and knees. She was pretty well
scratched and torn. I don't think she had a coat.
She'd lost her way and kept walking and crying
all over. She must have been relieved to see them
and she quieted. They took her back down
to the Brattleboro Retreat. How she got away and why
they didn't know and look for her, I never heard.
This was long ago. We were all stirred up.
Us kids were all looking out the window.
Couldn't wait till somebody told us. The fact was
you could hear her clear across the county.
It carried right through the valley!

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The Planning Commission invites residents to weigh in on the future. The Friends of Algiers Village envision a revitalized town center. The Guilford Historical Society dedicates itself to preserving our past and its relics. Guilford Cares reaches out to elders offering help and companionship. What chance do we have, however, to hear each others' stories and cultivate our common ground?

As a traveling poet based in Guilford, I've often wondered how to draw out and broadcast the eloquent voices of the town that nurtured me. In 1968 a dozen back-to-the-landers put a down payment on the place we nick-named "Total Loss Farm," at Packer Corners. Over time neighbors took us under their wings and taught us survival skills. We stacked their hay and hauled sap buckets. I loved listening to old timers at their kitchen tables. Ultimately information mattered less to me than the music of their voices, the way their thoughts landed in language, and the trust we came to share.

Over the years I wrote poems for people I admired, Harvey Cutting, the road commissioner (Judith Nero's father), and Emery Evans, our then-mail carrier. I taught poetry at the Guilford Central School; at the Guilford Summer Institutes, I helped participants write collaborative poems. For the last fifteen years, however, I have worked far from Guilford, writing with diverse communities around New England, eliciting what I like to call "the poetry of local life." This poetry does not rhyme or have other formal structures, but it takes the pulse of a place.

This year, with support from the Vermont Arts Council, the Guilford Central School and I will host a project called *Poets Afield* to celebrate our unique experiences in Guilford. I like to picture a huge map of the town where we can trace, keep, and share memories and images. During this school year, students, staff and community members will visit, talk and write. We invite all Guilford Gazette readers to share strong memories of places and events. We will collect, edit and preserve them in an anthology.



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