

Poetry is where you find it

It's that month again

By **EVE MARX**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

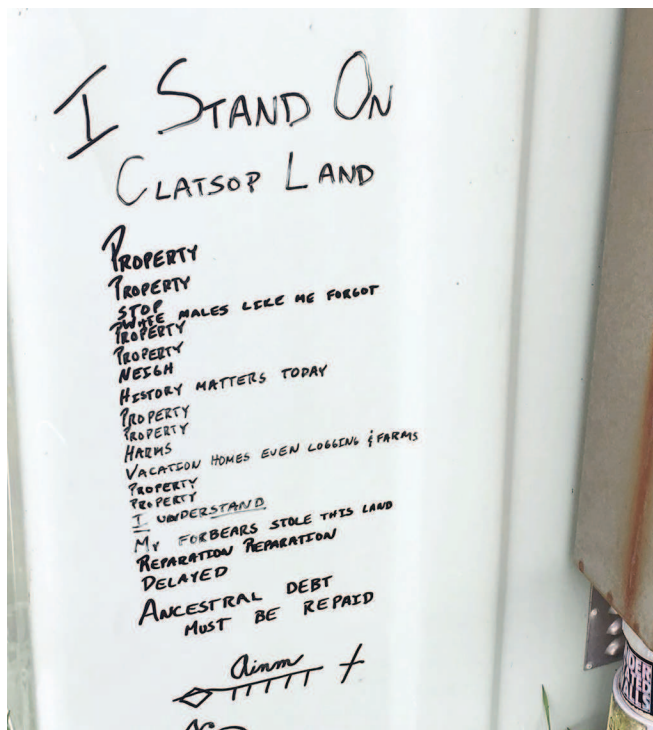
One of my favorite quotes about poetry is by James Tate who said, "Poetry is everywhere; it just needs editing."

April is National Poetry Month, a celebration introduced in 1996 and organized by the Academy of American Poets.

Poetry has long gotten a bad rap (though rap is a form of poetry).

The first poem I tasked myself to learn was "The Village Blacksmith" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

I remember memorizing it and reciting it in front of my fourth-grade class. The teacher seemed alarmed by my recitation. She had no idea I'd chosen it because it



Eve Marx

You can find poetry everywhere, even on public utility boxes

was a poem about a blacksmith and therefore related to my obsession with

horses, which was already out of hand.

Under a spreading chestnut tree

*The village smithy stand;
The smith, a mighty man
is he,*

With large and sinewy hands;

And the muscles of his brawny arms

Are strong as iron bands.
By high school I had moved on to the poetry of Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni. I read Sylvia Plath. In college I discovered James Dickey and Raymond Carver, although I always admired Carver's short stories more than his poetry.

My English major friends introduced me to the poetry of Denise Levertov and LeRoi Jones. I had a friend who exclusively read William Carlos Williams. In a structured college setting I read Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot.

After college and grad school I forgot about poetry. By then I was employed 40 hours a week in a nonfiction publishing house and, after that, editing magazines. I had no time or interest to read anything that wasn't on my desk. Any free time I had was spent in art museums where I could stand in front of an original Picasso, or Pollock, or Rothko that spoke to me more directly at the time than poetry.

Poetry didn't re-enter my life until years later when I started cleaning horse stalls. This was during a period when I was profoundly unhappy. The barn manager, a moody if undeniably attractive man 15 years my junior, was a poetry major in college. He was a big fan of the Irish poet Seamus Heaney.

Since the barn manager was not just reading, but also attempting to write poetry, I accompanied him a few times to an open mike poetry slam at a local café.

My intention was to give him moral support, but he even though he wrote his name on the sign-up sheet to read, he never did.

These days, if I feel like reading a poem, I turn to the work of Charles Bukowski. He gave readings on college campuses where he stood at the podium with a couple of six packs of beer close at hand. He steadily drank while he read, and if anyone in the audience ticked him off, he hurled empty cans at them.

My favorite Bukowski poem is "Slim Killers." Copyright laws prohibit



Wikimedia.org

Charles Bukowski.

me from posting it in its entirety, but it begins:

"There are 4 guys at the door

All 6 feet four
And checking in at
Around 210 pounds,
Slim killers.
Come in, I say,
And they walk in with
their drinks

And circle the old man

—
So you're Bukowski,
eh?"

In the poem, they proceed to get drunk and pass out on the floor. Bukowski gives each of them a pillow and a blanket.

He observes in the morning they are just big kids, heaving in the bathroom. Then they're gone. Bukowski ends it with the lines,

*Readers of my poems
I can't say that
I disliked them.*

Read a poem this month, why don't you?

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