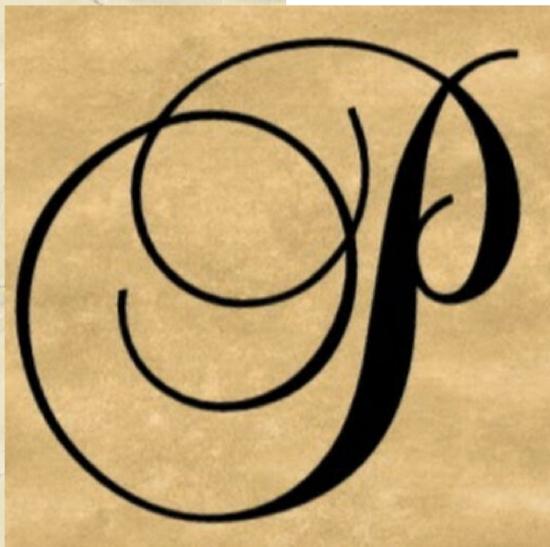


Poems by
Any Name



Mary Kay
Upchurch
Knowles
Sullivan
Boren

The following pages contain a sampling of poems written by the author over a period of 30 years, along with her own photos or those purported to be in the public domain.



1993-2023 Mary Boren

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Po Co Publications
passionate about words

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The most current collection of Mary's poetry may be viewed at poetscollective.org/maryboren or allpoetry.com/Meter_Maid

Introduction

My interest in writing original poetry may ebb and flow, but I never tire of seeking, studying, sharing, and discussing the subject, considering myself extremely fortunate in finding circles of online friends and family-by-choice to keep that appetite fed since 1995. Despite an occasional personal creative surge, I am usually more inspired to showcase the talents of others through my multi-site web domain, poetscollective.org, or anthologies from PoCo Publications.

To Jean Walton, one of my few living dear ones who has known, loved, and encouraged me by all my names, I hereby dedicate this nostalgic little friends-and-family chapbook recounting moments real and imagined, because she asked for it.

-Mary

January, 2023

A Baby Boomer's Beat



I'm thankful for the freedom
and the wherewithal to do
some things that bring me pleasure,
such as being here with you.
The simplest way that I can find
to make my story clear
is offering examples
of the memories held dear:

The thrill of catching polliwogs
and lightnin' bugs, the sound
of crickets on the riverbank
beside our camping ground,
my daddy on vacation when
he'd let his whiskers grow,
the shadows on the faces
in the fire, the afterglow.

My mama's laugh, her stylish bangs
(like Mamie Eisenhower's),
the way I learned to cook and sew
by watching her, the flowers
I counted on the bedroom wall,
the smell of line-dried sheets,
the poodle skirts, the hula hoops,
and soda fountain treats.

The 1950s musicals
where folks burst out in song
and dance right in the middle
of a dialogue, the strong
and rugged, square-jawed heroes
of The West whose sense of right
was always unmistakable
because their hats were white.

As simple things contributed
to who I would become,
a gentle rhythm underscored
each breath. (ta-DUM ta-DUM)
If everyone conversed in
metered rhyme, like me, I'd think
I'd died and gone to heaven.
Here, I'm resting on the brink.

Three-Wheeling



Fantasmic, unsurpassable machine,
a marvel of assorted nuts and bolts:
you've always carried me in style between
the places I must go. Some jumps and jolts
along the way have left me shaken, stirred
and stupefied, but never pushed beyond
endurance, and where boundaries are blurred,
you somehow find a bridge across the pond.
Simplicity in motion, balance, sense;
you're poetry from frame to handlebars.
A bike equipped for training won't evince
the same aplomb or point me to the stars.

Still holding on, I trust my Big Wheel guide,
and pedal hard to give my butt a ride.

Family Labor of Love

With hammer, saw, and simple plans,
our daddy brought the skillful hands
to build a cabin in her pride
plus all the furniture inside.

Our mama had a role to fill
in hauling lumber up the hill
as she and Uncle Buddy rode
on back to anchor down the load.

Once, perched atop the pickup bed
while Daddy drove full-speed ahead,
the boards slid off and so did they —
haphazard surfing all the way.

With many hands, all work is light.
When time arrived to clear the site
of lumber scraps and small debris,
they all pitched in; not so with me.

For Daddy said that none of us
must help unwillingly, and thus
I once invoked the right to shirk
my contribution to the work.

But seated on a log I squirmed
as, soon thereafter, conscience burned.
I heaved a sigh and pursed my lips,
then joined the crew to pick up chips.

Preacher's Pay



The year was Nineteen-Fifty-Three.
No matter how they fought it,
the serfs were at the mercy of
a revenuer's audit.

With pinch-nose glasses, black bow tie,
and humorless demeanor,
he sorted through two shoeboxfuls
of records: Lean Years/Leaner
"Aha! Looks like I've gotcha now!
the tax man squealed (excited).
"I don't see any income claimed
for weddings. Where'd ya hide it?"

The preacher said, "Let me explain.
I've made it a tradition,
when payment's offered by the groom,
to hold my hand out, fishin'
as if I'm gonna keep it — then
as speedy as a rocket
I hand it over to the bride.
It never hits my pocket."

"Tradition, humph — the bottom line:
You earned it, preacher. Pay the fine."

~ ~ ~

It was a new millennium.
A couple celebrated
their golden anniversary.
A trip was due; they made it.

Rejoicing in the fellowship,
like beans with macaroni,
they thanked the man who'd joined the two
in holy matrimony.
The erstwhile groom, a preacher too,
proposed a toast. (He'd planned it
for fifty years.) "Now listen up,"
he winked. "you'll understand it."

"I offered money once," he said,
"for services well rendered —
ten dollars, half of what we had.
You turned around and tendered
it back to her." (The woman's eyes
were misty.) "We still owe it
with compound interest due, so here's
a hundred bucks. Don't blow it."

A proud tradition needn't stop.
You've earned it, preacher. Reap your crop.

The Preacher's in the Parlor



I'm hidin' in the barn. They're droppin' in
at suppertime and Papa's lookin' green.
Ol' Skeeter's broke his leash and fled the scene.
Deliver us from bible-thumpin' kin!

Aunt Smerka Lott's a vision: beehive hair
and buttoned up plumb shut from chin to sole
'cep one long finger waggin' through a hole
waist-high. (I wouldn' guess what's under there.)

Now Mama comes and drags me by the neck
into the parlor. Uncle Filler Buster
is warmin' up to toss his well-worn cluster
of pearls before us pigs. Oh Holy Heck!

I pray, "Dear Lord, please hurry. They deserve
to be called home." God's workin' up the nerve.

Second Grade School Play



In the purchase of Louisiana
Davy Crockett played second banana
to Lewis & Clark
but his fame lit a spark
in American history's arcana.

I was cast in the pivotal role
because I had the cap. Then some mole
came and rifled my desk
when we went to recess
and the theft left a wound on my soul.

Paul



He had curly brown hair
and a wooden leg.
I was tall and straight,
untouched by adversity.
We were seven.

Children called him Paulio
without a whiff of malice,
lining up for the novelty
of knocking wood —
playing knick-knack on one small knee.

I called him Paul
and carried his books,
always setting my pace to his.

We mapped music together
after school,
priming piano keys
with chocolate crowns
raided from Mama's secret stash.
Chip for note, one for each.

Gobble - plink - giggle,
giggle - gobble - plink ...

In the half-dappled shade of time,
instrumental memories
blink and fade like fireflies,
as moments relived
run the full scale of emotion.

Unflappable Paul —
boundless blue eyes, crooked grin.
Every feature lingers
in clear focus —
each scene replays
to the tune of tenderness.

One muddy afternoon
I saw him fall in the ditch.
and ran to him ... crying.
The woman driving by saw only
that he was down and I was up.
She screeched to the curb,
blasting, lambasting me
through an open window
with her closed mind.

Push him?
I would have carried Paul
through flying bullets
on bloody feet.

My shoulders drooped all the way home,
but not from the weight of his books.

Passing Through

"We're all just walking each other home." -Ram Dass

We are fashioned of stardust and moonbeams,
with each particle numbered and weighed
in the heart of Creation's unwavering flow
where the substance of everything's made.

Then we're hurtled unborn through the cosmos
to be nurtured and challenged and taught,
with our origin mostly forgotten except
when ethereal whispers are caught.

We experience natural beauty
tinged with sorrow and pain as we burn
with unquenchable passion for clues to explain
our existence. We long to return.

But that glorious lightness of being
in the lap of eternity's source,
is reserved for escape from the passage of time
with a watchful, benevolent force.

If a tiger jumps out of the jungle,
or a bear charges out of the blue,
or a mugger gives chase down a dark city street,
they're just doing what animals do.

I will not live in fear for my safety
or let cruelty alter my pace.
There's a balance in nature that cradles us all
on this rock in the vastness of space.

Whether fluttering, tethered in tandem,
or with feet planted firm in the loam,
I am here with my brothers and sisters for now,
and we're walking each other back home.



Caveat Emptor

I remember the moment a package was brought
and the words the delivery man said.

Though he carried the treasure I'd eagerly sought,
his advice went way over my head.

"Sorry lady," he said, "but I'm only consigned
to deliver it into your care.

Now it's fit for the purpose for which it's designed
and, with maintenance, won't need repair."

"But as for the way it will work, don't ask me,
for that isn't my job to explain.

You received what you ordered, but no guarantee
that it won't give you cause to complain."

So of course I accepted the package "as is"
for I wouldn't have thought to do other,
not knowing that only experience gives
true claim to the title of Mother.

I would wager no woman who's ever been blessed
with a heart full of love for a child
was completely prepared for the ultimate test
of going beyond the last mile.

But I also suspect almost anyone could
successfully hurdle obstructions
and rise to the challenge of good parenthood . . .
if children just came with instructions.

Exempt



That gold embossed certificate
entitles you to perks
exclusively for VIPs,
and this is how it works:
It's issued on conception
and expires in Never-Ten,
irrevocably binding on
your matriarchal kin.

The terms are clearly written on
its face in tiny print.
You won't be held accountable
for time and effort spent
on unrelenting nurture from
your cradle to their graves,
for love is not contingent on
the way a child behaves.

I used my own exemption as
my parents saw me through
the best and worst and points between.
It now extends to you.

Nostalgic in Advance

Examining a single shoe
(as packrats are inclined to do)
I acted somewhat surreptitiously
and stuffed it in a dresser drawer
lest anyone should ask, "What for?"
and chortle at my eccentricity.

I contemplate my daughter's son
whose foot had filled the other one;
he's snuggled in my lap as if immune
to loss. Perhaps in future days
some stories of his toddler phase
will entertain him for an afternoon.

Eclectic treasures — things to wear,
a tiny tooth, a lock of hair —
are stored in preparation to ignite
these ever-changing memories
from "Yee-ha horsie!" on my knees
to "Look, GranMary, did I do it right?"

Too soon he'll learn to tie his own
shoelaces; pathways unbeknown
to former generations will be braved.
But should it ever cross his mind,
"Do you remember me?" he'll find
an answer in the little things I've saved.

Invisible

I had my fifteen minutes when
my skin was smooth and creamy
and once or twice when I walked in
heads turned around to see me.

The dimples flashing on my cheek
are thigh-bound now. My tresses
are grey and thin, my waist is thick,
my features unimpressive.

Invisible though I may be
to those who prize the surface,
my worth resides inside of me
beyond the realm where earth is.

Forgiven

Self-forgiveness is a must
in your private sanctuary.
"Authenticity or bust!"
Giving up the load you carry,
free the shutters, air the room,
bare your soul and clean the windows.
Wave like dandelions in bloom.
Choose, above the innuendos,
self-forgiveness.

One



I am your wife, unwavering
mate
mirror
witness
and welcome home.

This door is not the destination;
it is the journey
that begins anew
with each re-entry
from rock-strewn paths
and ecstatic escapades
that bring us mindfully
into the Gift of Presence.

You are the air I breathe
in the unrelenting
Realm of Reason
where metaphor melds
with matter
for I can be neither
better half nor weake

Beyond the Veil



Beyond the mist, a veil adorned a bride
whose brimming eyes were mirrors of her pride
in him. Reflection from a golden band
could not outshine the future that was planned
together; they were wholly unified.

Because he was an anchor, rock, and guide
who cherished her, she'd happily abide
within his shadow on a sunlit strand
beyond the misty vale.

Their bond was never tested or denied
for sixty-seven years, and when he died,
her life was over too, its spark unfanned.
In language age-old lovers understand,
he whispers to her from the other side,
beyond the mystic veil.

The Horn Tooter

To each and every person
at the moment we are born,
God gives a special present.
For my mom it was a horn.

He knew what He was doing
when He placed it in her hand
and chose her as the leader
of the Upchurch Booster Band.

And when she wasn't blowing,
she'd be polishing the brass
to keep it poised and ready
for the team to make a pass.

While marching to the melody
as Mama's trumpet blared,
we never had to wonder
whether anybody cared.

My precious gifted mother
now announces each new morn
from heaven as the heartiest
Horn-Tooter ever born.

So when I hear the summons
and I follow her up there,
I'll know just where to find her...
in the orchestra — First Chair!

On Quarks and Quirks



"There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." - Albert Einstein

When stardust, quarks, and mystery combine
to make a human, nothing can compare
to possibilities. Some say beware
of ultimate betrayal to confine
the breath of life where tangled roots entwine
with evolution. I can only stare
in utter wonder, blinded by the glare
of dazzling supernatural design.

For wedged between the elemental ash
and sentient entity, surprises lurk
in hidden crevices of every hue
across the spectral plane, and in a flash
all heaven is exposed. It's but a quirk
the miracle of promise can renew.

The Way My Daddy Said My Name

"Mary"

The way my daddy said my name
with an eloquent timbre roll
and eyes reflecting love that came
from the depths of his gentle soul
is lodged forever in my cache
of ineffable memories
that turn the years to golden ash
and deliver me to my knees.

I'll never hear another sound
that will swaddle me in protection
where peace and warmth and light abound
in a cradle of sweet inflection
until it's time to fold my tent
for a ride to a distant shore.
I'll follow where my daddy went
and he'll whisper my name once more.



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