



Marla Sterling





Dear Poets and Appreciators of Poetry,

I had been thinking about which local poet to feature in our next ***The Poetry Page*** when a couple of notes that Marla had written to the library arrived in my mailbox. I remembered her from our ***Art & Text*** exhibit, and looked up her bio in our files:

Marla Sterling is a poet, a third passion in her life following careers as actor and teacher, with degrees from NYU in Education and from Manhattanville College in Creative Writing. She lives in Connecticut, gardening and walking her dog, where contact with the garden, woods, and beach invigorate and inspire her daily.

During these times of isolation, I have been taking woodland walks daily. I connected with Marla's statement about the garden and woods and how they inspire her. So I wrote and inquired whether she would be interested in being featured on ***The Poetry Page***. I was charmed by her modesty: "It would be a pleasure to talk about poetry with you, though I'm hardly any kind of expert on the subject!"

I hope you enjoy my conversation with Marla, and also her poems. I am excited to feature her at a time in her life when poetry is coming into clearer focus for her, and when she is just beginning the journey of trying to get her work into print.

Please continue to visit the [POEMS TO A LISTENER](#) website! A wonderful resource for poets, and appreciators of poetry!

All my best, and take good care,

Sally

Sally Nacker

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Conversation With Poet Marla Sterling



Sally: Tell us a little about how contact with nature inspires and helps you, in both life and work. Does nature enter your poetry?

Marla: The processes of nature, their constant flux, is what often sparks the moment for me. I like to return to the same walks many times because it's not just the things I am seeing at that moment that matter; it's a question of where they came from, how they changed, and what will become of their future. These reflections work well boiled down into poetic form; I try to get to the very essence of what part of life exists at each special moment.

There's also a child-like feeling of release that emerges when I'm outside. Could it be related to the pleasure, as a youngster, of being let out of class at the end of a school day? When I'm in nature, nobody's telling me what to look at or what to do. That tranquility allows thoughts to bubble up that I'm usually too busy to pay attention to. The older I get, the more slowly I walk. Not because I'm aging or infirm, but because I'm so engaged by all I see. That goes for walking in cities, too.

Sally: Marla, I so agree! I love how you talk about the child-like feeling of walking in nature. I find that especially true during these times when time itself seems to me as it did when I was a child. Time seemed endless in childhood; there weren't deadlines, or things I had to hurry through. I could simply "be" in nature, exploring and absorbing. And yes—slowness. So important in a "...world that is too much with us."

Speaking of childhood, did you write poetry as a child, or did it come to you later in life?

Marla: I never dreamed of writing poetry. It was a revelation to me. It was during my master's degree coursework with the wonderful poet Kevin Pilkington that I realized how much I enjoyed it. The act of stripping ideas down to their vital parts finally made sense to me. It's funny, because I'm working on some flash fiction now, and I find it very hard to keep narrative writing to a compressed thousand words. But in poetry, I'm really happy to spin out very short poems.

Sally: Who are your earliest influences as poet? Is there one poet that you are most drawn to now?

Marla: Not many people talk about him any more, but when I was young I loved Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology. It's a collection of free verse, first person poems of people speaking from their graves. It sucks the reader in with great storytelling, but with the heightened syntax of great poetry. Robert Frost also captivates me; a brilliant storyteller and manipulator of classic meter. I still thrill to Emily Dickinson's brevity and sense of wonder, and I could read Mary Oliver all day every day. What I would have given to go for a walk in the woods with her!

Sally: I love how you say you "still thrill to Emily Dickinson's brevity and sense of wonder!" So well put!

When I first asked you if you would consider being featured on *The Poetry Page*, you replied: "It would be a pleasure to talk about poetry with you, though I'm hardly any kind of expert on the subject!" I was intrigued and joyed by your genuine modesty. Could you elaborate on your statement?

The more poetry I read, the more I see how huge a space it requires in the human mind to encompass it, both in terms of quantity and diversity. One of my joys is getting *Poem a Day* in my email inbox. I am overwhelmed by the variety of brilliance: each poem unique, but all part of a different continuum of what we commonly refer to as poetry. So many choices of structure, so many experiments with or without rhyme, allusions to classics versus the latest rap styles. What I am able to write takes up such a small corner of the writing universe, what right do I have to say I know anything about Poetry (with that capital P!)

Sally: Marla, your modesty is refreshing! Have you published a poetry collection, or poems in journals?

Marla: For the reasons explained above, I've been really slow to submit. There are a number of excellent local groups where I've been reading my work since retiring from teaching in June, and I'm just beginning to try to get my work in print. I have some ideas for some chapbooks. The library's wonderful Art and Text project was the first time I saw my poems on paper other than what I printed out myself! By the way, writing is much more fun than submitting. But I am looking forward to speaking to a larger audience, and really grateful to the Norwalk Public Library for its role in making poetry an active part of life in our community.

Sally: Thank you, Marla! And yes, I know what you mean when you say “writing is much more fun than submitting!” I wish you the best of luck on your journey into print! Thank you for sharing your thoughts and poetry with us today.

Marla’s Poems



Its not the thing,
it's the idea
of the crust left behind in the loaf pan
after you have decanted the cake

last week I made the cake without sugar
and called it bread but
it's the idea of food, not the name of it
that feeds us

the cake slid easily out
and with sugar it was
Sweet

Marla Sterling
April 29, 2020



Ice Storm Sequel

Something had to give, so it was the earth
that yielded, rising
while unmoved rocks shifted, but hardly,
to crystalline pressure.

For water in the wooded path
summertime is soft, mud or pool,
not structured, not insistent,
not girded for competition and marked to win.

Today ground, humbled, marks the winterfield.
The way is speckled with hollow hills.
They enclose sunken stones lifting minutely more skyward,
and await compaction by invading paw or footfalls.

How do I go forward?
Tread or skirt? My walk becomes a quandary.
Am I water or ice?

Marla Sterling
December 27, 2019



Worms

Left of the garage, the unsunned side
was where the worms wriggled best.
Last year's leaves from nearby vines communed in layers,
and if you excavated carefully the worms
let you see them all at home.
You could count how many snuggled together
admire their juicy skin
follow concentric circles the length of a body
to where it bulged and thinned again.
You giggled not to know front from back.
When you raised one, gently, from the earth
it tickled in your pudgy palm.
Was it giggling too?
You asked Grandpa, crouching at your side.
He advised not kissing it,
but the aroma of earth did flow up
to the smudge on your nose.
The blanket of leaves delicately re-laid,
you could tiptoe back into dry daylight,
holding Grandpa's calloused hand while
friends waited there for the future.

Marla Sterling
August 19, 2019
rev September 2, 2019

Thank you, Marla!

