



The Magnolia Muse

Newsletter of the Mississippi Poetry Society

February 2020

Dr. Benjamin Morris to present:

“From the Delta to the Coast:

**The Poets, Poetry, and Poetics of
Mississippi” at Spring Fest 2020**

From the Mississippi Humanities Council website:
With household names like Faulkner, Welty and Wright, Mississippi literature is not just nationally but internationally known and respected. Combined with a rich musical heritage, the state’s literature is one of the many facets that afford it a high cultural rating. A survey of genres, however, reveals that many of the writers for whom the state is recognized have tended to work in the more immediately visible genres of fiction (both novels and short stories) and nonfiction, often leaving their sister (and some would say first) art form—poetry—less acknowledged. This presentation aims to right the imbalance, introducing audiences to a solid representative sampling of the state’s better and lesser known poets. Covering primarily the 20th and 21st centuries, the audience is led on a geographic tour of the state. Featuring poets such as Etheridge Knight, who wrote powerful poems while incarcerated, or adoptee/transplant poets such as Frank Stanford, author of one of the greatest Southern long poems in history.

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***Welcome to
SPRING FEST 2020!
APRIL 3-4***

**Lake Tiak O’Khata
Family Resort**
213 Smith Lake Road
Louisville, MS 39339
Reservations:
662-773-7853
*Mention MPS for Group
Rates*

Photo: David G. Spielman

Cont. from page 1

Dr. Morris explores how their Mississippi roots and experiences informed their work. He brings contemporary (including living) poets into the discussion, such as Beth Henley, Beth Ann Fennelly and Natasha Tretheway. The presentation concludes with a brief discussion of where the art may yet go, and points to universities and writing programs that today nurture the majority of the state's poets. Dr. Benjamin Morris is a full-time writer and poet and a member of the Mississippi Arts Commission Artist Roster.

A native of Mississippi, Benjamin Morris is a poet, writer, and researcher whose work appears in the United States and Europe.



He is the author of *Coronary* (Fitzgerald Letterpress, 2011), sonnets inspired by his father's health crisis, *Hattiesburg, Mississippi: A History of the Hub City* (History Press, 2014), and *Ecotone* (Antenna/Press Street Press, 2017), and the editor or co-editor of four volumes of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. His writing appears in such venues as *The Oxford American*, *The Southern Review*, *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Guardian*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Scottish Review of Books*, and on BBC Radio.

Among other honors, he has received a Pushcart nomination, the Academy of American Poets Prize from Duke University, and the Chancellor's Medal for Poetry from the University of Cambridge, where he earned his Ph.D. His work has received two Literary Arts Fellowships from the Mississippi Arts Commission, academic and creative fellowships from Tulane University, and a residency from 'A Studio in the Woods' in New Orleans. Previously a researcher in cultural geography at the Open University and the University of Edinburgh, he is a member of the Mississippi Artists Roster.

***Congratulations go out to South Branch member Brenda Finnegan upon being selected for the Mississippi Poetry Society's Poet of the Year Award!
The title of Brenda's forthcoming book is Horn Island Vista.***



Brenda Brown Finnegan

Poet of the Year 2020

Mississippi Poetry Society

Brenda Brown Finnegan was born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi to Rita Mordica Brown and W. W. "Bill" Brown, the second oldest of eight children. She attended Sacred Heart School in Hattiesburg from first through twelfth grade, graduating in 1960. She briefly attended night school at Mississippi Southern College (later the University of Southern Mississippi) while working for Interstate Electric in Hattiesburg.

Her marriage to her high school sweetheart, Martin Finnegan, newly discharged from the Air Force, resulted in a move to Starkville, where her husband attended Mississippi State University and she worked in the AG Economics department transcribing field notes from farmers for publications. In 1964, they relocated with their infant son to Jackson County, where they have lived since. They reared their three children, Kenneth, Natalie and Darren in Pascagoula, where they lived for 25 years. While in Pascagoula, she worked as a school crossing guard with the Pascagoula Police Department and was a stringer (reporter) at The Daily Herald, now The Sun Herald. She also worked as an elementary school secretary for over 15 years. Besides their three children, they fostered two children (ages 4 & 6) for two years in the 1980's, with whom they still keep in touch.

She began attending college classes again in 1976 when her youngest son started kindergarten, often arriving in her patrol uniform straight from school crossing duties. In 1984, she graduated from the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

and in 1987, she completed her studies at the University of Southern Mississippi, graduating with her oldest son, Kenneth in Hattiesburg. They accepted their diplomas from Dr. Aubrey Lucas, her mother's former boss at USM. Her mother was delighted to attend that ceremony!

She became interested in writing poetry in the early 1980s and encouraged by her friend, Sue Wright Entrekin of Gautier, joined the Mississippi Poetry Society as well as Writers Unlimited, a group for writers of all genres in Jackson County.

She and her husband, Martin, a Permanent (ordained) Deacon in the Catholic church, moved to Belle Fontaine Beach in Ocean Springs in 1991, when he became director of religious education and associate pastor at St. Elizabeth Seton Church, until his retirement.

A writer of poetry, fiction and nonfiction, she is a charter member of the MPS South Branch and she has served as president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary, as well as president of MPS. Her poetry collection, ***Missing Persons***, was published by the state society in 2001 when she won the first MPS Poet of the Year award. She also received a Lifetime Achievement award from MPS.

She has been published in several journals, including MPS awards journals and anthologies, and in *Mississippi Magazine*, *The Magnolia Quarterly*, *Coastlines*, *Back Porch*, *The Texas Review*, *Boyne Berries* 5 in County Meath, Ireland, in *Encore*, the contest journal of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, and her poetry has been recognized in *Writers Digest* magazine's contests. She has also been published in several Gulf Coast Writers Association's non-fiction anthologies and contests and met the late Willie Morris who spoke at the first GCWA contest awards ceremony.

Although their home on Belle Fontaine Beach in Jackson County washed away in Hurricane Katrina in 2005, in 2013, the year they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, they rebuilt on their lot on Belle Fontaine Beach, and named their new home, ***The Last Resort***.

Cont.

Contest News!



**Just in!! The “Mississippi Roads” poet of prose himself,
Mr. Walt Grayson,
has graciously accepted the invitation to judge
Category 1: The Mississippi Poetry Society Award!
Thank you, Walt!**

- *The Mississippi Student Rising Stars Contest Postmark Deadline is now extended to February 10!
- *The original Adult MPS Contest ‘Received By’ Deadline is still February 7.
- *The National Federation of State Poetry Societies Contest Postmark Deadline is the Ides of March! ...March 15.

Poet of the Year cont.

Brenda and her husband love to travel and have taken five of their six grandchildren on individual vacations to many places including the Grand Canyon, Colorado, Idaho, Niagara Falls, Mackinaw Island on Lake Michigan, a diamond mine in Arkansas, Okefenokee Swamp and Jekyll Island in Georgia. They hope to take their youngest granddaughter on her trip after Martin’s cancer treatment is complete. They have also traveled to Italy, Ireland, and Canada, as well as several trips to Mexico on mission trips with their church.

Congratulations!

...to **Janice Canerdy** on being named among the winners in
The Society of Classical Poets'
Best Poems of 2019 International Competition

...to **Tommy Little** on the publishing of his article *All Higher Forms are Comprised of Basic Elements* in the current issue of *Strophes*

...to **Dr. Emory Jones** for his recent contest credits including awards in the *Missouri, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Texas, Georgia, Massachusetts, Arizona, and Illinois* state contests, and publishing credits including the autumn issues of *Calliope* and the *California Quarterly, Tennessee Voices Anthology 2018-2019*, and poems published by the South Dakota SPS.

Branch Happenings

North Branch News

*North Branch has been busily preparing for Spring Fest 2020 at Lake Tiak O'Khata, April 3-4, and issues a warm and hearty 'Welcome!' to all MPS members and friends for the event! Each year the Mississippi Poetry Society's Spring Fest is a wonderful time of poets getting together to celebrate the beauty and power of poetry and the joy of friendships, new or renewed. This year the lakeside retreat of Lake Tiak O'Khata will be the fun and relaxing location of our celebration. We won't be complete, though, without you! ;-)
We hope you are making plans to attend!

*The next North Branch meeting will be at the Lee County Library in Tupelo on February 29 at 11:00 am.

Central Branch News

*Central Branch welcomes two new and talented members, Hazel Lonie and Briana Brown to our MPS roundtable! Hazel came to us by the invitation of her friend and fellow writer Terry Woosley. Hazel shared the inspiring poetry prompt, “15-Sentence Portrait Poem Guidelines” with us and she and Terry read their own moving poems based on the prompt. Thank you to Terry, and welcome, Hazel! Briana first found MPS through our Facebook page. So glad you did, Briana! Briana tells us that by finding MPS there, she “got three active writing groups and tons of new friends!” Briana’s lyrics are a treat for us all.

*Jason Ervin passed around a recent poem that puzzled us all until he revealed his inspiration—a study of the poet E.E. Cummings. Jason’s new year project is studying one influential poet a month and writing in that style as a way of stretching as a poet himself. Great idea, Jason! We all were intrigued by your poems!

*Doris Jones shared with us a set of questions entitled “Artistic Check-up.” These questions encourage the artist of any genre to think through the influences upon our intentional writing. Doris shares them with you here:

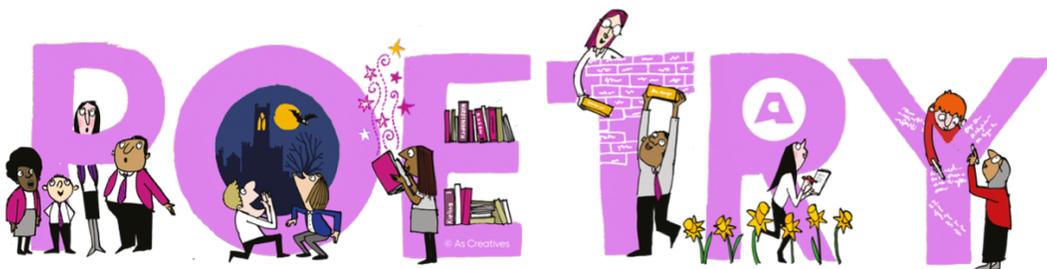
1. What activities have given your writing a boost this year?
2. What environments have nurtured your creative growth? How Have they nourished you?
3. What spaces or activities have been hindrances?
4. Did you achieve any personal bests in the last year or have any moments that you thought were extra special as a writer?
5. What one change, that if implemented on a regular basis, would make a tremendous positive difference in your writing?

*Central Branch’s next meeting is February 15 at Belhaven University.

South Branch News

***Mary Anderson Pickard**, daughter of well-known local artist Walter Anderson, will address the Mississippi Poetry Society, South Branch, on Saturday, February 8, at the Gautier Library at 2 p.m. She will speak about her father, read some of her father's poetry, and possibly some of her own. As one of many talented Anderson family members from the Ocean Springs community, she also is an artist, as well. The public is welcome to attend the meeting. The library is located just off Hwy. 90 at 2100 Library Lane, near the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College.

*Five members of the MPS South Branch braved the stormy weather on Saturday, January 9, to meet at the Gautier Library. They enjoyed reading poetry, discussing the upcoming deadlines of both the state and national contests, and tasting some of the refreshments provided by Faith Garbin, including a king cake on a Mardi Gras themed table. A list of the December Christmas contest winners was read, as well as the prizes given. Members were encouraged by president Patty Butkovich to attend the MPS Spring Festival in April. Plans are being made to apply for a grant for the 2021 Spring Festival, to be held, hopefully at Gulf Hills Hotel and Convention Center in Ocean Springs. Though the scheduled speaker, Mary Anderson Pickard, daughter of the late local Ocean Springs artist Walter Anderson, was rescheduled for February, the group enjoyed the fellowship and poetry, and the sun was out by the end of the meeting. Our next meeting will be February 8 at the Gautier Library.



Invite a friend to MPS!



Mississippi Poetry Society 2019 Officers

State President: Linda W. Owen State Vice President: Grace Fletcher

State Secretary: Janice Canerdy State Treasurer: Patty Butkovich

State Adult Contest Chairs: Stephen Curry and Daniel Pickett

State Student Contest Chair: Emory Jones

State Historian: Emory Jones

Central Branch President: Jeanne Kelly

North Branch President: Janice Canerdy South Branch President: Patty Butkovich