

Word Feathers  
By Patricia Niemann

I release all of my poems as though they were doves. Deep-seated thoughts and emotions I bring to the surface and offer them up, wanting to share them with others. In the fledgling stage, finding the right words to express an idea is always a struggle. But when a poem finally emerges, I feel complete, even ecstatic. I want my message to be lifted up on wings. A dove is meant to fly. It does so in this stanza from my poem, "A Dove Released."

An offering is poised for flight...  
Released into the open sky.  
A soaring, swooping, gliding dove  
With scripture on its pure-white wings.

As a writer I willingly unwrap my soul and give it to the world. While writing is a creative and spiritual way for me to connect with humanity, every poem is also a sacrifice.

Writing takes time away from other activities, such as sleeping. Sometimes I wake up at 3:00 am with a thought that must be written down before it escapes from me. Inspiration takes hold as I scrawl more thoughts on white paper. I lose track of the night. In these dark, quiet hours "deep

calls to deep” (Psalm 42:7, NIV). I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit working through me, moving my pencil. Feelings, insights, revelations- these are the “waves and breakers” that sweep over me.

In the clarity of day, writing always needs revision. In addition to time, this requires deep thinking and mental focus. Excessive verbiage can weigh a poem down. No matter how much I love an image, if it obscures the meaning it has to be trimmed and tossed aside, discarded. A poem demands linguistic precision within the constraints of meter, rhyme, intonation and line breaks. Every word must have an impact. As the poet Sylvia Plath said, “You’ve got to go so far so fast in such a small space; you’ve got to burn away all the peripherals.”

Clichés also have a way of creeping in. They can be so subtle, I don’t always notice them at first. But they are weeds in a garden that must be pulled. These overused expressions get in the way of originality. They may cause a reader to question my authenticity. I need to find a new, compelling way to express an idea in order to engage my audience. According to writer Natalie Ann Holborow, a poem “...must split open the ordinary and let something emerge, fresh and alive.” Guarding against clichés requires constant vigilance.

Writing takes time, mental focus and grappling with doubts and fears. Creativity is not for the timid. To write is to take risks. Emotional vulnerability means giving up control. I've exposed my private emotions and made them public. I might offend friends or family members with my honesty and openness. My work may be misunderstood, rejected or ridiculed. It may fail to resonate with others and go nowhere, like a rock that sinks to the bottom of a lake. Maybe what I've written isn't good enough. Along comes self-doubt, another invasive weed in the writer's garden. But in order to connect with others I have to share my writing. As writer Audre Lorde states, "I have come to believe...that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."

The support of my spouse and a few trusted friends helps to replace fear with confidence. Feedback and honest opinions guard me from public embarrassment and make me a better writer. Brené Brown, PhD, is a researcher at the University of Houston who studies vulnerability. According to her, "If we shield ourselves from all feedback, we stop growing."

I value feedback from Greg, my husband of 36 years. He listens as I read a poem out loud. Sometimes it sounds choppy or too sing-songy, like

a nursery rhyme. If he gives me a blank look, I know my meaning did not come across. In either case I go back and revise. My next step is to share the poem with friends, but only after the poem has been revised with vivid imagery and clear meaning. This is my euphoric moment, when friends tell me they feel my emotions. We have a connection.

Several of these close friends I've known since our children were little. It wasn't until after our son and daughter had grown up and left home that I started writing poetry. It helped me cope with change and gave me a way to channel creativity. I'd raised a family, moved my parents into assisted living and my career as a secondary Spanish teacher was winding down. With seasons ending and new ones beginning, I sometimes felt lost in the flurry of transitions. To quote Robert Frost, "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life; it goes on." Writing, with its solitude and slow pace, gives me inward peace and a way to sort out emotions.

One night, shortly after my daughter left home, I was up until 4:00 am writing a poem titled, "The Dogwood Tree Outside Your Window." I was excited for her and the journey she was about to begin. Every parent wants to see a child fulfil her dreams. At the same time I felt abandoned. In every corner of her room was a reminder of the childhood she'd left behind - her books, her dolls, and me, her mother. Outside her window was the

everpresent dogwood tree. When it was ready, I sent the poem to my daughter. We both cried. These are the final lines:

But blossom time is not for long.  
Before I knew it, you were gone.  
The dogwood with its branches high  
Reminds me birds are meant to fly.  
As now my eyes look through the pane,  
Blossoms depart but leaves remain.  
Love to receive and love to give.  
'Tis in the moment that I live.

Writing keeps me in the moment. It also gives me a purpose and a legacy. In his poem, "A Psalm of Life," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow urges readers to leave the past undisturbed and not go chasing after the future. We are to live joyfully in the present, to pursue, achieve and hopefully, leave something behind that is long-lasting.

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time;

I have published two small books of poetry, *A Dove Released* and *Anthem of the Leaves* (WestBow Press, 2023 and 2025 respectively).

Copies of both books are in the hands of family members, friends and a few book buyers. I hope my poems continue to be read and enjoyed long after I am gone. But there is something more I want to share than poetry.

I've written on a wide range of topics, including childhood, old age, joy, sorrow, nature, art, moments in history and reflections on great literary works. They have one thing in common. All are introduced by a relevant quote from scripture. Beneath the title, before the poem begins, I include a short Biblical text that relates to my message. It gives my work credibility. I have seen for myself that nothing exists outside the Word of God. This is what I want to convey to my readers. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:17)

I introduce my poem, "A Dove Released," with a quote from Isaiah 55:11.

So is my word that goes forth from my mouth.  
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish  
what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Every poem I share with readers is a "dove" with scripture on its wings. God speaks first and then I follow. I write from the heart. I willingly make the sacrifices needed to connect with humanity through poetry paired with scripture.