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Poetic Magnetism- The Magnetic Poetry® Special Feature



Image by Dave Kapell; <http://magneticpoetry.com/>

Welcome to the Magnetic Poetry feature! We are pleased to showcase this creative tool that can jumpstart creativity in a number of mediums; whether composing the first sentence of a short story, formulating a unique direction for a poem or using the foreign language editions for learning purposes, the kits are versatile and introduce the element of

serendipity that we love. Robert Hass, Former US Poet Laureate, described Magnetic Poetry as a “one-man Scrabble and the prize is insight.” Magnetic Poetry has graced the silver screen in films such as Conspiracy Theory, television via Seinfeld's refrigerator door and has appeared as interactive artistic installations at National Poetry Month events in major cities. In book form, it emphasized “[t]aking poetry out of the academy and into the homes and neighborhoods of America,” containing what are described as “...fresh, poignant, vivid, and lyrical poems from first-graders and grandmothers, housewives and ex-hippies, stockbrokers, teenagers, and punk rockers.” The Magnetic Poetry Book of Poetry: An Anthology of Magnetic Poems from the Refrigerator Doors of America by founder Dave Kapell and Sally Steenland with a foreword by Robert Pinsky, included a primer that discusses sound, form, rhythm, aesthetic and writing exercises.

Here we have unique poems from poets who utilized the tool of Magnetic Poetry, some of whom answered the optional questions about their process with the words, and an interview with founder Dave Kapell. Used for added inspiration to 'beat the block', for play and shedding writing inhibition, for serious composition infused with serendipity, for retaining a language or even the unexpected healing uses shared in the interview, the tool is a fun one full of possibilities. We hope you enjoy the feature!

Sailing Under the Waning Harvest Moon

by Diane McDonough

When the spirit of the Autumn wind hovers

wearing a crown of cranberries
and faded cinnamon fern—

every stone, every mossy bough
ages.

Even the soft, moist edges of our past ages
as the darkening river flows,

vermillion and gold leaves in our wake
like a tossed bridal bouquet.

We steer our boat of aging dreams into the wind,
promise

forever

and brace for the unknown.

I took your magnetic poetry challenge, and enjoyed it! I'd purchased a kit years ago for my Library students to play with, but never got a chance to use it myself. This time, I played—playing being the operative word!

1) How did using the random words affect your creative process (did chance/serendipity play a role)?

Using the random words just as they appeared, helped me to utilize nouns as verbs, for example, and that stretched my need to be less literal and more metaphoric.

2) Did you have a particular way/strategy of working with them (for example, if you have the kit, did you scatter them on the table and just choose which you had to work with, did you seek out words you liked best, did you use a mathematical pattern, etc...)

I used no strategy, just selected a word from the bunch, then without thinking, used a kind of word association when selecting another word. I think my moving the words from one side of the computer screen to the other made a kinesthetic connection to the creative side of my brain, and that process was intriguing, stimulating.

Bio- Diane McDonough, a writer, is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, the Cape Cod Writers Center and the Steeple Street Poets. Her poetry has been published in the *Aurorean*, *Avocet*, and other journals, and recently three of her ekphrastic poems have been exhibited in area galleries, including the Art and Poetry Show, Wickford Art Association in RI. She lives with her husband on Cape Cod.

Sandy and The Broken Machine

by Frank J. Hopkins

Were it that your body was a vessel I would not linger
here...with the rhythm that grows...cold water running
along salted lacerations...

The blush of dying suns celebrate the soft
wake of where you once were.
Were it that a boat could sail along the sand and

words in a void held sound I would not regret
that I no longer hear your voice—
velvet steel of a woman's soul written across brail

in halting fits; the red poetry of spent eyes found
almost always amongst the broken sex of ferocious

angels whose youth has past.
If it were that my body could bear yours I would
find the way to a hard peace brokered in silence

across sweltering deserts it's fever mine own too
fly at half mast when there is no wind and wave with
Jubilation when naked in moonlight.

Ignore if you can widows at windows, ill with the
alien morning...sacred remembrances left as orphaned

laughter for mongrels and beggars as vassals aspire
to be majesties heads crowned with flowers and ice...
Were your body a vessel I would sail it and linger no

more upon this shore; would decline its secret embrace
with my fatherless heart no longer it's prisoner.

Bio- Frank J. Hopkins is an NYC writer and poet born and bred. He writes a column for *BrooWaha- An Edge In My Voice* and is currently working on the final draft of *Lies...Damnation and Other Tales Of Love*.

be away

by Kate LaDew

and all ache soars
shadows beneath skin,
rusts up ugly,
stilling blood and
whispering a blue symphony

Bio- Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art.

Space Travel

by Cheryl Sommese

Grandpa's skin was porcelain
pale
almost translucent.
Naked in his ability to control
outer forces
his cloudy eyes hovered as if air angels
and his untamed lips swelled
wild
like vapor in the heavens.

Mom got his lips
then she gave them
to me.
Sometimes I lay awake
a perplexed woman,
thinking nothing can make
sense except my scruffy dog
Bella.
But Grandpa's lips exhume
an updated reflection of a five year old
face:
one still uncertain how
to process transience.

You & I
occasionally come to that place,
shiftless--confused

while holes of doubt
swallow eternity.
Then hope locates a wishful star
and
darkness becomes light,
aimlessness meets direction.

But is this it,
is that what this is all about?

Are we merely here to
ponder a cache
of arbitrary moments?

1) How did using the random words affect your creative process (did chance/serendipity play a role)?

Without the random words, "Space Travel" would never have been born. Once I saw the collection, a medley of unique thoughts traveled through me.

2) Did you have a particular way/strategy of working with them (for example, if you have the kit, did you scatter them on the table and just choose which you had to work with, did you seek out words you liked best, did you use a mathematical pattern, etc...)

At first I tried to use many of the words in a sequential manner. I left the Magnetic Poetry site after a shell of a poem emerged. When I revisited the Magnetic Poetry page the following day, a new set of words was there. Nonetheless, I had copied enough of the original set to achieve what I had hoped. Undeniably, serendipity played a role in the final product. Actually, I loved this writing exercise!

Bio- Cheryl Sommese is a freelance writer specializing in ghost blogs, newsletter pieces, and multi-topic articles. Her creative endeavors include short stories, essays, and poetry. Several of her literary works have been included in print periodicals and online publications. She considers poetry to be a particular passion and opened for the emerging poet, Muad Saleh, in two spoken word events in Manchester, NH, and New York City. She has a BA in Communications and an MA in Liberal Studies with a focus on political studies and writing from the University of New Hampshire. Ms. Sommese lives in Londonderry, NH, with her husband and two dogs.

Voice: Warm & Slow
an incantation

by Neal Whitman

make strong
the stride
stepping stones
dot the lake
the stream is still
yet still moves

sacred as a cat
magic is the word
live vast as eternity
put on blue smoke
you could flower
may you heal

Bio- Neal Whitman lives in Pacific Grove, California, and, along with his wife, Elaine, is a hospice volunteer. They use poetry and her music (Native American flute) to help hospice patients and family members identify and sort out their feelings at a time when these people might be overwhelmed with feelings. Both are published poets. Neal's 2013 awards include the 2013 Blaze Memorial Prize, 1st place in the summer 2013 contest sponsored by *Diogen* magazine in Serbia/Bosnia-Herzegovina, and 3rd place in the 2013 Dancing Poetry International Contest.

Oberon (*poem featured in the summer 2012 issue*)

by Denise Bouchard

Worship me as a goddess always
though I may take your power and leave you raw and weak

Still, come into my garden

Leave me drunk of you and languid in the forest of our bed,
beneath the moon...unable to speak

My petal gown ripped

While I cradle you and rock you softly like a ship
Sending your storms out to sea

1.) How did using the random words affect your creative process? Did chance/serendipity play a role?

I think the act of choosing and manipulating the random words in the Magnetic Poetry tool kit adds tangible, tactile and visual aspects to the creative process that allow one to transform abstract thoughts and ideas into concrete word pictures that become windows into the mind of the writer. As it began to form, I put it up on the refrigerator and there was amazing serendipity in it because the words of our life just sort of jumped out at me. Even in randomness can our personal truth be found.

2.) Did you have a particular way/strategy of working with them (for example, if you have the kit, did you scatter them on the table and just choose what you had to work with, did you seek out words you liked best; did you use a mathematical pattern)?

Having the words up in front of you on a refrigerator is a great way to "see" what you're creating; you can choose the appropriate words, move them around, change their meter. If you like what you've created, you can leave it up and it then becomes a piece of art and in my scenario, a love poem to greet my husband upon his coming home from a business trip.

See Bio for Denise Bouchard on our About Us page

Q&A with Creator, Dave Kapell



~ It all started with the Big Bang... The advent of Magnetic Poetry came about the way many great creations do- unexpectedly. Your site explains the story of how you were in the process of composing song lyrics and to 'beat the block', you wrote down intriguing words on small pieces of paper so that you could freely arrange them. Allergies induced a large sneeze and the papers were scattered. In an effort to preserve your work, allergies notwithstanding, you glued the papers to magnets. Hunger led them to the refrigerator door and there, friends enjoyed the spontaneity of making poems with them. From being a hit at a regional craft fair to the millions of sets sold to date, Magnetic Poetry has found its way into workshops, offices, classrooms and most importantly, imaginations. They can be used for a

multitude of written mediums, for creative play or for jump-starting a project in stagnation. The kits in foreign languages can be used as learning tools utilizing word recognition and phrase-building skills.

Sometimes when we release an artistic creation, it becomes imbued with the purposes and interpretations of its audience, going beyond the scope of our initial imaginings/hopes/dreams for it. Of all the uses, of all the ways in which Magnetic Poetry grew from the initial concept, tell us what has surprised you the most and if possible, share an inspiring anecdote about a way in which the kit was used that you hadn't foreseen.

Well, there was the 80-year-old great-grandmother who called to thank us for "helping me find a creative part of myself that I never knew existed." And the mother of a 17-year-old severely autistic son who said that her boy made his first ever verbal communication using Magnetic Poetry (this happened on Thanksgiving Day, when family members were playing with a kit in the kitchen and he made his way to the fridge to join in the fun; when he made a sentence everyone burst into tears). Several psychologists have told us of their successful use of Magnetic Poetry in helping patients "talk about" abuse without having to say it out loud or write it down, which is sometimes too painful. I feel like my baby has gone out into the world and done good, and I'm proud of her, though I can't take much credit for it—she was just born that way!

~ Austin, Poe, Shakespeare and da Vinci all make appearances in the themed kits. The Original, the Poet and the Artist kits as well as those that speak to nature, food, book and music lovers, cover a range of interests. Speak to us about what and who inspire you and the creative process of coming up with the sets of "spark" words.

Our Primary Kits, which include The Original, The Poet, and all of our various foreign language kits are all made up of words that I personally like (or their foreign translations). I tried to include words that have multiple meanings; for instance, the word "rose" is a noun (the flower) a verb (the past tense of "rise") and an adjective (the color, "rose"). It's also a word that is rich in connotation and symbolism. Other words, like "sizzle" or "throat" or "corduroy" or "sausage" are very specific but are

just fun words to say, in my opinion. I'm the benevolent word dictator, and I get to pick the words I like!

As far as subjects for our Voices (or themed) kits, we often try to tap into the cultural zeitgeist and go with popular memes. Same with the authors we've chosen, like Poe and Austin. Both very popular. We try and cover a range of popular interests and keep it tongue-in-cheek, while still choosing words that allow the user to express him or herself creatively once they get the thing up on their fridge.

~ Although traditionally thought of as an isolated medium, the magnets make poetry conducive to gatherings and community events such as the Magnetic Poetry walls that were featured in cities during National Poetry Month. In this way, discuss poetry's ability to foster meaningful connections.

Magnetic Poetry as a communal form of expression was a happy accident, and it delights me to no end! I love when someone changes a line I've written (if it makes it better), and the fact that I seldom know who did it only adds to the intrigue. People have met for the first time while playing with Magnetic Poetry together, and I know of at least one couple that later got married. Again, that's my baby doing good despite me.

~ Within the process of composing a poem, lyric or sentence using Magnetic Poetry, be it scientific or spiritual, discuss the creative act of being drawn to certain words and patterns to create something unplanned, going off the map, so to speak, to head in a different direction led simply by gut feeling. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines serendipity as "the . . . phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for." What role do you feel serendipity plays in art (be it in the form of writing, art, music, etc...)?

I've often said that playing with Magnetic Poetry is like reading your own mind. It's true, we are drawn (hey, there's a good multiple-meaning word!) to certain words at certain times. And there's a certain serendipity in where words are placed when they are installed on their steel surface, sort of like shuffling cards or rolling dice, that also guides the user. Also, most people's vocabulary is in the 30,000 word range, and Magnetic

Poetry Kits only contain 100-200 separate words, so you are forced to make choices within tight constraints; those choices are revealing. There is little chance that you are going to be able to make the preconceived poem you have in your head, so you are forced into alternative tacks that often take you to more interesting and unexpected places.

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