



## **Our Interview with Poet Lynn Byrnes**



**Imagery in poetry is like harmony in music;  
lush imagery equals lush harmonies.  
Syllables and line breaks in poetry are like musical phrasing,  
be it legato or staccato. An exclamation point—  
or a word that stands out—in a poetry line  
is like an accent over a musical note.**

**Sally from the Norwalk Public Library:** Thanks for joining us on the **Poetry Page**, Lynn! You were one of the Norwalk Public Library's 2019 **ART & TEXT** exhibited poets. Your poem, "Winter's Alchemy," is so beautiful, and imagistic:

### **Winter's Alchemy**

When you catch yourself  
Drinking and dodging  
December's dark days,  
Break the glass.  
Gather air and song,  
Imagine Ribbon fog sifting  
Through a chorus of peepers  
Sliding ice dams off the roof.

Lynn Byrnes

The speaker here is suggesting that we imagine the joy in the coming birth of spring should we find ourselves unhappy in the cold days of winter. Is that right?

And here we are in December!



This poem is so lovely in its brevity, and clarity. Please tell us a little about your experience in writing the poem, and how it came into being.

**Lynn:** Thank you Sally. Yes, your interpretation is spot on. It was deep winter in New York. All my friends and I had gone dormant inside our homes, what I called "hibernation mode." So, I started imagining what it would feel like being released from this tight, dark corner of winter into the light— and sounds— of Spring. It was uplifting to think about, and to write the poem; hence, the title.

**Sally:** Do you generally create smaller pieces that are rather imagistic in style?

**Lynn:** Yes, it seems to be my style so far. I learned, when studying poetry, about speaking through imagery. I took it to heart. I also read somewhere that the younger generation doesn't read poetry anymore because they don't have time. I can relate to that, so I try to keep my poems short.

**Sally:** Please share with us your revision process.

**Lynn:** The two things I look at most critically are any unnecessary words I might need to remove, and making sure that my poem stays true to itself.

Reading my poem out loud helps me concentrate on the ideas in my head. I sometimes sleep on it, and pick it up the next day. One can overwork a poem, as you've probably experienced when creating anything. This is why I have a first reader, an informal editor. She often says, "I liked the original," which tells me that I've overworked it!

**Sally:** In your 2019 **ART & TEXT** bio, you state that you are poet, music composer, and songwriter. Please share with us your life in music and song. What sort of music and song do you create?



**Lynn:** Composing music has been my passion since I was four years old! I composed piano pieces, and wrote songs while growing up.

In music college in Denver, I composed for orchestral instruments. The Pueblo, Colorado Symphony played one of my pieces, which was a thrill! I also wrote and produced pop songs, and composed and arranged music for jazz bands. It was a great learning experience.

When I'm composing music, hours go by and it seems like no time has passed. I love that.

After college, I waited tables, and worked as a keyboardist in various rock bands.



Eventually, I moved to LA where there were more opportunities. I wrote a funny poem about this part of my life:

### **Firsts**

I

“Cowboys don’t take their hats off,”  
says my friend, an expert in Western movies,  
“Except in bed.” She proclaims.  
We watch a buckaroo bust his first Bronco  
in this big city cow town called Denver.  
A poetry writing, music composer,  
Sucking sawdust at my first rodeo,  
I imagine I’m a cowgirl in the Old West  
Riding the range with my first cowboy crush.

II

My first car, a Dodge Aspen station wagon  
Heading cross-country to California,  
A soul sculpting Harpy on my shoulder,  
My first Fender Rhodes piano  
Laid out like a vampire in the back.  
My first gig at the Elks Lodge, Waverly, Kansas.  
Bolo ties swing from dancing pig farmer necks.  
My first Fist-Fight Over Not-Enough Women,  
A dust bowl blooming in my rear view mirror.  
My first solo at The Venice Beach Café, chairs  
Thrown across the bar to “Killing Me Softly.”  
My first sacking, “You’re too mellow for the place.”

Lynn Byrnes

**Sally:** You came to poetry later, I believe, in 2010? What brought you to poetry? I know that songwriting is certainly a little like poetry. Would you say that writing poems is a natural extension of your music and songwriting?

**Lynn:** Good question.

I started seriously studying poetry in 2010 because I wanted to learn the art form. Maybe because I had written poetry as a kid, and later wrote songs, I felt comfortable with the

idea of poetry writing. Song lyric and poetry writing are related, but different. Song lyrics must be easily understood, identifiable to the listener, have a repetitive rhythm, and usually rhyme. You can rarely use a large vocabulary in song lyrics or you'll lose your audience.

Poetry writing, however, is free from these constraints.

To me, composing music is more closely related to the writing of poetry. Imagery in poetry is like harmony in music; lush imagery equals lush harmonies. Syllables and line breaks in poetry are like musical phrasing, be it legato or staccato. An exclamation point— or a word that stands out—in a poetry line is like an accent over a musical note. I think there are many similarities between music and poetry, as your voice is a musical instrument.

**Sally:** You also state that you are retired from corporate America. When you held a corporate position, did you create music, and song, and poetry during your free time? How did you balance that? It reminds me a little of poet Wallace Stevens. He was an insurance executive all throughout his life, while at the same time a poet.

**Lynn:** I'd had some successes in Los Angeles, but it was very difficult making a living as a composer. Eventually, I took a "real job"—to pay the bills—with a Fortune 50 company in New York. Thankfully, it turned into a rewarding career!

However, I had scant time to create music from that point on. I did manage to create a rap song for work that marketed an online app that my team had developed. That was fun! I also wrote and arranged hymns for a young persons' chamber group in church.

When I turned to poetry writing in 2010, I soon discovered that I could fit it into my schedule, and the creative release it offered was a gift!

**Sally:** You have moved since to Florida, but when you lived in New York you attended the poetry workshop at **Somers Library**. I have interviewed a few poets who have attended that workshop, and it seems marvelous. Please share with us your experience in that workshop, your workshop leaders, and what you learned or came away with.



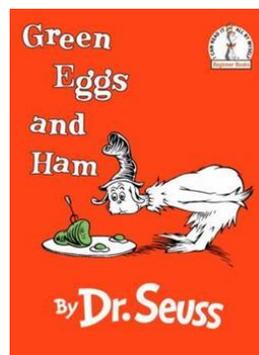
[Somers Library, Somers, NY](http://www.somerslibrary.org)

**Lynn:** Yes, I really enjoyed reading former workshop members—Davina Santos’s and Thea Schiller’s— Poetry Pages!

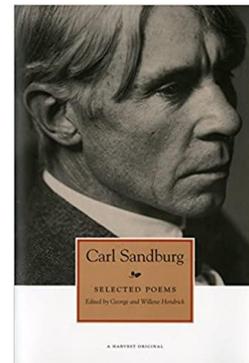
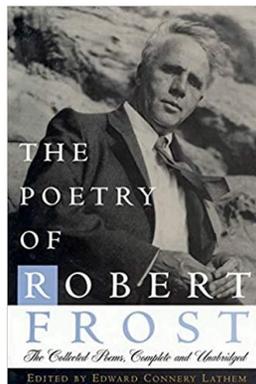
I got so much out of that Somers Library workshop. One of the few rules of the workshop was that members were not allowed to critique a poem, unless the poet expressly asked them to. That made the workshop a safe place to share poetry. We had a range from new to very accomplished poets in that group, and I learned from them all. It was so great to have all those eyes— and ears— on your poetry each week! You found out what resonated with people, and how your poems were being interpreted. Tremendously useful and rewarding — I highly recommend that workshop, and miss them all greatly!

**Sally:** Though you began writing poetry in 2010, did you read poetry as a child?

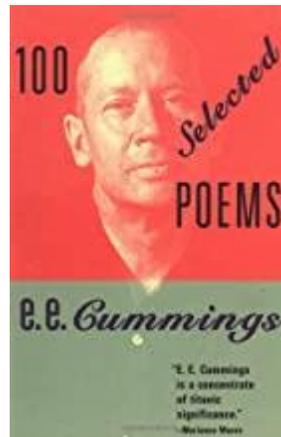
**Lynn:** The first poet that comes to mind is Dr. Seuss, who told stories in rhyme. I loved all of his books, and rhymes, and read them over and over again.



My mother had poetry books in our library which I often read: Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and Carl Sandburg were poets I remember liking most.



And, in high school, I was a big fan of e.e. Cummings.



**Sally:** Do you recall any teachers who were instrumental in fostering a love of music and language in you?

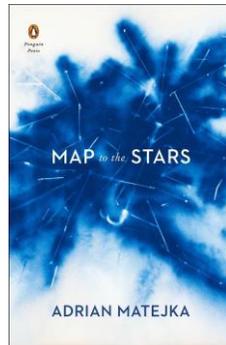
**Lynn:** I think the seeds for music and language were planted by my parents. My mother was a copywriter, self-published author, and wrote rhyming poetry. She created the sweetest photography album for my father while he was a Lieutenant in WWII. It was a *Day in Our Lives* rhyming story, printed under pictures of us three toddlers. My Mom was a great storyteller, too, and my brothers and I could listen to her stories for hours. There were always records playing in our house, and we often spent evenings dancing and singing to them. My father was a musician in college, as well, and had a beautiful singing voice.



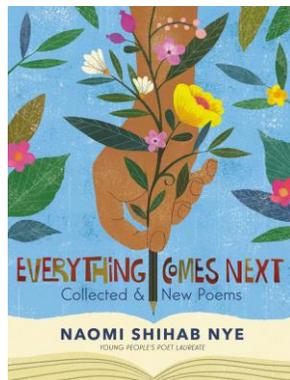
Outside of family influences, my biggest teachers of language and music came from the records that I listened to as an adolescent. Early Simon and Garfunkel and Joni Mitchell inspired me to begin writing poetry, and songs. I think singing in a choir my whole life also helped me assimilate language and music.

**Sally:** Please share with us a few of your favorite poets, and a few of your favorite poems.

**Lynn:** I stumbled upon the poem, [“Soave Sia Il Vento,”](#) by **Adrian Matejka** while browsing Poetry.org, and absolutely adore it. It grabs you in the first line, and never lets go. A delight to the senses.



I also like **Naomi Shihab Nye**'s poetry a lot. I like the different cultural perspectives she brings to her poetry. There is grace and humility in her poems, too, which resonate with me. And her original and unique descriptions are amazing. Her poem ["Famous"](#) is a favorite of mine, along with, ["Different Ways to Pray."](#)



**Sally:** Do you publish your poetry in journals, or have a collection, or dream of one?

**Lynn:** I have an unpublished collection of poems, but I am my own worst critic, and need someone else to read it. I've submitted poems here and there for publication, but nothing has been published yet. I hope to publish someday, but am not really focused on that right now. I feel I need to hone my craft more.

**Sally:** You live in a completely different climate from the Northeast now. Do you think this will have an effect on your creative work? Your poem, “Winter’s Alchemy,” is so filled with weather, and the changing of seasons. Will the Florida landscape— and soundscape— enter your work, do you think? Does the change fill you with a new sense of wonder?

**Lynn:** Moving from New York to Florida in the middle of a pandemic was frightening, and a major life disruptor—as you can imagine. My poetry at the time was pretty dark, and I’ve never been more relieved than when my husband and I walked through the door of our new home in good health!

When we finally get settled here in Florida, I plan on sitting at the beach all day and writing sunnier poetry. The beach has always filled me with awe and wonder. We live on a lake with the most amazing aquatic birds (such as wood storks), hunting ospreys, turtles, and a small alligator who showed up yesterday. I imagine they’ll all be in future poems.



[Wood Stork](#)

The weather here is wild, too. I've never seen rain like this in my life, and the skies during a storm are practically prehistoric. I look forward to seeing how it all influences, and enters, my writing.



**Sally:** Please share with us what you enjoy in life outside of poetry. Nature? Family?

**Lynn:** I miss singing in choirs! I miss socializing with friends! I was active in a small theater group in Somers, New York, and miss that, too! All of my favorite things are on hold right now, so I'm finding new favorites.

My husband and I are looking into bicycles to buy so that we can ride together, and talk to new neighbors we meet outside. We're also planning on renting jet skis, and riding them on the intercoastal highway to watch manatee, dolphins, and tropical birds!



We miss our family in New Jersey, but plan to visit often. And now they have a warm place to visit in the wintertime!



**Sally:** Please talk about anything else that inspires you these days. I am so happy you are joining us on the Poetry Page!

**Lynn:** Thank you so much for the opportunity to share my poetry life with you! Thanks to all of your readers for their time! I'm honored.

I think I'm most happy and inspired in the community of others, and look forward to the day when we can all safely assemble again. I pray, especially, for those in hospital and nursing homes who can't have visitors. Their plights pain me greatly.

The trials of 2020 have been enormous, and beyond comprehension. On the positive side, the new challenges have created a spiritual revival in me. I've never done more praying in my life. And now, praying has become a new habit which helps me stay hopeful. And with that, may God bless you all greatly!



**Now, three of Lynn's poems...**

## **A Splendid Union**

We walk the perfect white cottage amid sand dune sentries  
Shielding towers of hot pink bougainvillea from yielding sea spray.  
In the garden, pollen-laden Bumblebees roll in orange stamens,  
Comatose at labor's end. Red tongued Orchids dance to  
Tidal brushes beating sambas on sand-tight drums.  
Every atom in this ecosystem vibrates like the single sand dollar  
Pulsing with sunlight, your hand in mine fortifying tired legs,  
A solitary sand crab peering at our presence together.

Lynn Byrnes

## **After the Shutdown**

I left dirty breakfast dishes to pray —  
Christine's in hospital again. Husband Ron  
Soldiering her oxygen levels. God is silent.  
I kiss my essential working husband goodbye,  
Cocoon myself in the living room.  
No phones, no friendly good mornings,  
No constant clacking computer keys.  
Just a ticking Grandfather clock  
Timing my mid-winter lethargy,  
Furnace groaning against inertia.  
Sparrows and Chickadees alight the windowsill,  
Taking turns harvesting sunflower seeds.  
Against a Hickory limb, a Woodpecker remains  
Motionless for the Cooper's Hawk is nearby,  
Camouflaged in Beech bark, watching and waiting.  
I wish I had my old laptop  
Surrendered on my last day at work.  
It had a delete key.

Lynn Byrnes

On our way to Sunday brunch, we stop to buy fresh tomatoes at a farm stand.

The lady or man behind the counter greets us, “Good to see locals, if I was still in Brooklyn,

I could’a made’a livin’ at this.” Knobby jointed fingers palm softball sized peaches.

“I make zucchini nut bread too, coyote almost et it off the window sill this mornin!”

My traditional husband looks past her. “Poof.” He makes h/er disappear behind selfsame curtain #3. S/he knows this trick, seen it a thousand times before. Wizedened hands that coaxed a dirty seed to life wipe he/r brow clean. “Thank you, come again,” s/he says.

He/r brilliant smile fades in our rear view mirror, tires quickening the distance between us.

Lynn Byrnes

