



# The Ladies POETRY SOCIETY

BY ELIZABETH HUMPHRIES, RN, MSN, CNM

Vicki Teigen has been a CNA in homecare and hospice for years. As a writer and poet, she carries her craft with her as she works to create comfort, ease, and companionship with her senior clients. This interview explores the wonder of a shared legacy that comes from lovingly caring for elders and listening to their life stories.

## How did writing poetry with your senior clients come about?

"When we started sharing our literary history and they discovered I am a writer as well, I was quickly encouraged to start writing poetry at my visits ... and last fall we

ended up with a shared collection of poems inspired by my visits. My one client now calls it 'The Ladies Poetry Society,' and she was also the editor and publisher."

## What kinds of things are you writing about together?

"In our everyday conversations about life, their adventures, relationships, their travels around the world ... and my life, which was so much different than theirs ... just sharing our stories."

## How do you see the writing working in their lives as something not only enjoyable,

## but as possibly therapeutic for them?

"It's definitely therapeutic for them because it surrounds them with creativity, which they love. They enjoy poetry, art—so many works of art that are beautiful keep them feeling alive and enjoying life."

## Do you see any benefits while doing the writing with them in terms of memory and cognitive benefits for the brain? Do you think it could be beneficial in cases of memory loss and dementia care?

"The writing is important because it helps one of my own clients to

## Drive-by Smooch

by Vicki Teigen

This dance they have...

Daily,

Suzy and Sam.

Witty banter...

Sharing favorite jabs

At "number 45."

They are connected

Deeply, to each other,

One never far from

The other...

In thought, in mind,

In heart.

They dance, apart, their spirits

Embrace.

As she glides near...

"Love you darling,"

He leans near, hoping

For a tender kiss...

"Suzy, my love..."

She forms an almost-kiss,

As she wheels past his lips,

Coyly, turning her head.

Denying.

He receives only

A drive-by smooch.

retrieve older memories and access feelings and process their journey. In the short year that I've known him, his ability to write has become more challenging. But it has been a way for him to dictate his memories and stories with me, and he often adds his own lines in the poetry itself. It's a joint effort and joy. I can see a progression of memory loss; however, the loss is lessened by the joint effort and wonderful warmth

and friendship that we share in this joint activity we do together."

## How do you see this activity being used in caregiving for others, with other seniors, or even in a group setting?

"Oh, yes, it can be used with most every senior in almost any setting, writing not only poetry together, but in writing life stories, legacies, their own personal story recorded. It gives a feeling of accomplishment and a sense that things in their life are complete, whole, and recorded for future generations."

## How would you help other caregivers learn this as a skill to use with their clients and family members?

"I would encourage other caregivers to just sit down with their client friends or senior family members and just record some thoughts using a simple recording app on a smartphone or a recording device, and transcribe it into a poem, a story, or a journal piece. Share it with the client and form it into a piece of writing together, and start from there."

## Do you see this as potentially a growing movement—a tool for people to use with aging folks that serves not only to help with life review and legacy building, but helps to stimulate the mind and memory recovery?

"The process brings the memories alive again by sharing them and creating beautiful writing together. As we know, music sparks places in the brain that help to awaken the mind, and can be the only way people with advanced dementia can connect and communicate. Writing is similar, the creative process. This can be another important tool that people share to awaken the mind and improve quality of life."

## What do you say to people who complain about "those same old stories, again and again, I've heard them a thousand times."

"I would say this: those stories are enriching our lives. That is history and their life in story, and if we don't hear them and get them recorded how would we ever pass them down and share them for future generations? It's important for everyone to feel they have a voice in history."

*Poems published with permission of author.*

*Elizabeth Humphries, RN, MSN, CNM, and owner of Seasons of Life, LLC, a senior homecare service in Madison. Vicki Reigen is a CNA, author and poet.*



## Poems Penny Each

by DH

Who could tell

If needs came to be

What joys had vanished

What pain subsisted

What it meant to be

When on awakening

Why singing shook no trees

Shaken trees released

No swell of singing wings

What voicelessness we

could not hear

What joylessness filled what air

Cloudless on the clouded day

Warm wind whispered words

To waiting ears.