

Poetry in Plain Sight
A History

Venus

I have tracked your path across the sky
Holding you in my mind's eye even after
Your disappearance.
But glad,
On the eve of your rebirth across my horizon,
To savor the approaching shadow,
The steps, the breaths, the rustlings
At my threshold.
And at last you call.
I am always in plain sight for you.

—Rodney Holman
from *The Universal Solvent*



**Poetry in
Plain Sight™**



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WINSTON-SALEM
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For Poetry in Plain Sight information, visit www.wswriters.org

Vision Meets Reality, 2012

Poetry in Plain Sight has a unique start-up history that speaks to one person's vision, that of the late Rodney Holman, of making poetry accessible to people in unexpected

places. A select few dedicated writers, initially, gathered around this idea and have helped make it become a reality, perhaps exceeding Holman's expectations.

In 2012, then Winston-Salem Writers President Carol Roan became aware of Holman's desire to link with people who might not otherwise believe they could appreciate poetry. She realized how Winston-Salem Writers might be the connective tissue to help launch this initiative, and she reached out to Holman to form an alliance to make his vision come to life. In short order, a small, but determined band of poetry advocates, including Holman, Roan, and WSW member Sam Barbee, and Kevin Watson, Publisher of Press 53, worked tirelessly to make the effort come to reality. From Holman's original concept, to Roan's broad, overarching ability to connect sponsors with the mission of the initiative, to Watson's practical, editorial guidance, and to Barbee's logistical ties to seek support from the city of Winston-Salem, Poetry in Plain Sight was born. The first artistic posters went up in select locations in downtown Winston-Salem in January of 2013. Holman passed away due to complications from diabetes just weeks before the program launched and before the first reading event at Barnhill's Books. The reading events, at that time called 4 Poems and a Party, were intended to showcase the monthly poets whose poems were selected, and to serve as a gathering place for poets and their audience in an intimate, yet interactive setting.



Family of Rodney Holman attends 4 Poems and a Party.

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak

Poetry in Plain Sight continues to honor Holman's vision and spirit every year, with the telling of this story, the display of one of his poems annually in the Poetry in Plain Sight monthly poetry initiative, and the desire to maintain his original objectives of making poetry accessible to all. Yet, overall, the evolution of the project itself, is a

testament to his vision and the life-giving spirit of poetry in service to the community.

Program Development, 2013

A chance meeting at a community breakfast connected Carol Roan and Julie Kolischak. This meeting launched the underpinnings of the program that exists today. Kolischak, an experienced Project Manager in the Communications field signed on to develop the project. She lent her professional expertise to promote an idea that fed her own passion for poetry. In June of 2013, Kolischak became the Program Director of Poetry in Plain Sight— coordinating logistical tasks, connecting poets to the initiative, securing locations of display, scheduling and organizing Live events, and seeking sponsor opportunities, in conjunction with key support members of Winston-Salem Writers and Press 53. These four pillars of the program: Location Hosts, Live Events, Poet Support, and Sponsorship have remained an interconnected web that have fueled the development and growth of the program.



Click for Press Link

Photo Courtesy Julie Kolischak

http://www.journalnow.com/relishnow/the_arts/books_and_literature/businesses-writing-organizations-collaborate-on-public-poetry/article_8b977678-783f-5542-817f-caf5d2e1e94e.html

Program Evolution and Impact

Location, Location, Location!

Of the connecting facets of the beginning program, perhaps the location hosts were most critical in the early launch. One issue became evident, and this was the need to seek out and build relationships with business owners. There was a realization early on, of the need to present the program as a literary art, and an extension of the visual arts in the downtown Arts District. Obstacles that presented themselves were counteracting the notion that a Poetry in Plain Sight poster was not the usual advertisement or flyer. It was an arts program, and needed to be maintained in the windows as such. That meant: if it was taken down for any reason, it was not discarded, but held for a Winston-Salem Writers representative to reclaim for later use; understanding that this was not an advertising flyer, enhancing its placement in art galleries that did not allow extraneous ads or flyers, and eventually the connection of place and poet. (An example of tasks within this maintenance request included stopping the downtown window washer from removing the poster and allowing it to disappear). Locations were given a grace period for demonstrating maintenance, but those not understanding the program goals were given up and a new location host was sought.



The Chop Shop Barber Shop has faithfully maintained a poster since 2013. This poem, placed in the aftermath of the shootings at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston reminds us of the power of poetry to connect community in the face of tragedy.

Photo Courtesy Julie Kolischak .

Observation of a Location, recounted by Julie Kolischak

After years of trekking the streets and hanging posters, along with our team, I received affirmation that our location-relationship efforts had paid off and the program had been accepted art-wise. One Friday, Will Knot, gallery owner of

North Trade Street Arts saw me walking down Trade Street, the posters visible by the clear glassine envelope I carried them in. As I was making my rounds to hang the monthly selections, I passed his shop. He ran out and asked me, "Can you please tell me how I can get one of these in my gallery window?" The ensuing conversation led to not only a poster in a new location, but the beginnings of a conversation that led to simultaneous poetry readings by Poetry in Plain Sight Poets in multiple locations during a First Friday Gallery Hop.

Events:

4 Poems and a Party, Barnhill's Books: 2013 - 2015

Barnhill's Books provided the effort, time and space on the first Saturday of each month for readings with the monthly poets. In this small but intimate space, poets and audience connected. Poets traveled, at their own expense, from all across the state, to attend this reading in Winston-Salem. Students reconnected with teachers, colleagues reunited, and audience members realized the power of poetry. The gratitude of the poets expressed to Winston-Salem Writers for their effort in giving poetry a public platform became a continuing thread as the program evolved.



*L to R: Carol Roan, Kevin Watson, Dara Silver, Pamela Taylor, Dannye Romine Powell, Sam Barbee.
Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak*

Observation of an Audience, recounted by Julie Kolischak

Kevin Watson of Press 53, who introduced our poets at every event, reacted in surprise when he arrived at Barnhill's and I informed him that the poet Anne Deagon had requested to be moved to the end of the program of 4 Poems and a Party.

"Do you mean she's HERE?" Kevin asked, wide-eyed, surprised that Deagon, well into her eighties, had made the trip from out of town to attend the Live reading.

Our group had sought out a poem to fill a spot for the month. Not only did Deagon lend her words, but also her presence, responding to my invitation to attend 4 Poems and A Party. She traveled with an aide from Greensboro to attend. Few who came there that day will forget, or remain unchanged, by Deagon's poetry song, and that she felt the need to end the reading with it. Her assertion was that poetry came to her now in song. She did not question it, but embraced it, and held the audience in reverence with a faltering, yet lilting voice, singing her lyrical words that painted a picture of the trials of those, reaching skyward from rooftops as they sought to be rescued from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina.



Click for Press Link

Photo courtesy Winston-Salem Journal

http://www.journalnow.com/relishnow/the_arts/performing_arts/program-gives-poets-more-visibility/article_b728a736-f0bd-11e2-b147-0019bb30f31a.html

Poetry in Plain Sight, Live! 2015-2017

The monthly reading event "4 Poems and a Party" at Barnhill's books did not fail to provide a space for intimate but sometimes small gatherings of poetry lovers.

Attendance would vary, but regardless of audience size the result was always a community gathering around poetry. Traveling poets always expressed thanks and gratitude to Winston-Salem Writers for holding the event.

With practical resources waning to keep up the monthly event, and the closing of Barnhill's Books, a decision was made to move to a quarterly event, while still honoring the monthly selection of four new poems to hang in downtown Winston-Salem. The change in format created a dramatic shift in audience attendance, energy, and . . . *anticipation*. Twelve poets, whose poems appeared on three months of posters, as well as viewing the line-up of potential colleagues attending, fueled this event into the likes of "a mini-poetry festival." Sponsors, poets and audience attended. The first ***Poetry in Plain Sight, Live!*** event, held at the Milton Rhodes Center for the Arts, was in Fall of 2015 and attended by over fifty people, eleven poets statewide, and sponsors for the season.

Continued ***Poetry in Plain Sight, Live!*** events, approximately four times a year, gained momentum, drawing poets from the mountains to the coast, including, N.C. Poet Laureate, Shelby Stephenson.



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Photo courtesy Winston-Salem Journal

http://www.journalnow.com/community/scene_and_heard/scene-heard-community-events-feed-body-and-soul/article_c7117f0c-9409-5e3b-a5f9-5e90c4732dbf.html

Observation of a Poet, recounted by Julie Kolischak

Jenny Bates is an artist and poet, but perhaps foremost, a gentle-spirited animal advocate. Always appreciative of the program, she had timidly, sometimes tearfully, read at the monthly events when her work reflected her love of an animal. It was and remains very personal for her.

In January of 2016 , Jenny became a four time Poetry in Plain Sight Poet, and with the new event format, found herself in a larger venue than Barnhill's Books, a larger audience and in the larger company of established, prestigious poets: Jenny found herself reading on the same stage as N.C. Poet Laureate Shelby Stephenson.

She asked me if she "could look at me" to be steady, if she needed to, while reading. During the reading, I took the seat beside Shelby, whom I saw take in her words, close his eyes and nod affirmation as she read. Affirmation, by osmosis, happened for this gentle poet. Shelby, ever gracious, unknowingly provided this grace to her as she took the stage, because, when she looked my way, she saw the Poet Laureate.

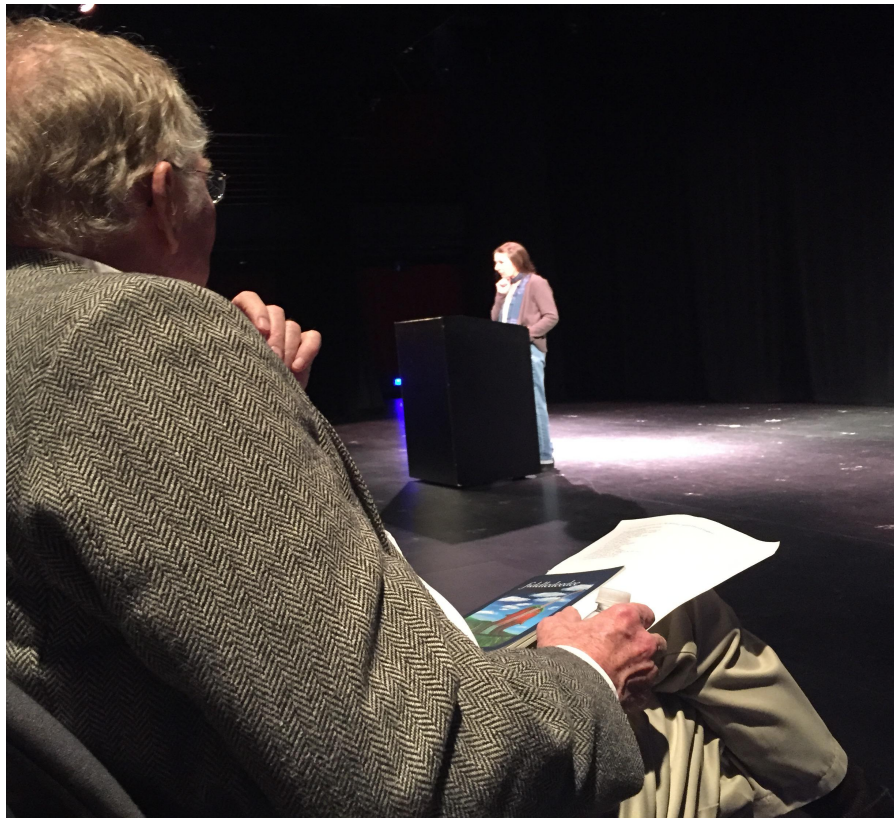


Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak



L to R: N.C Poet Laureate Shelby Stephenson, Joan Leotta, John Haugh, Bonnie Korta, Danyne Powell, Lynne Santy Tanner, Jeanne Julian,, Jenny Bates.
Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak



Photo courtesy Jeanne Julian

Sponsors

Winston-Salem Writers sought sponsors locally and statewide to help fund the cost of the printing of the posters and the expenses of the Live event. In return for sponsoring Poetry in Plain Sight, sponsors received a copy of the printed posters, table space, and audience interaction at the Live event, as well as acknowledgement in press materials.

Sponsors are listed below, including additional support Winston-Salem Writers added based on specific sponsor events.

Press 53

In year one, the selected posters were framed for display at the monthly events. Collaborator and Sponsor, Kevin Watson agreed to the display of framed copies of the first four months of the program at Press 53's annual event, The Press 53 Gathering of Poets. It made for a spectacular display in the Community Arts Café, and 53 poets saw the visual impact as well as receiving program information in their information packets. N.C Poet Laureate Joseph Bathanti was on faculty and in attendance. Display of the posters continued over the years.



The Press 53 Gathering of Poets.

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak

North Carolina Governor's School Foundation, in memory of Rodney Holman

In addition to the sponsor benefits above, Winston-Salem Writers, at the request of the North Carolina Governor's School Foundation, provided collected used posters from the monthly program. These were repurposed and gifted to Salem College and Meredith College during the Governor's School sessions in June. Creative use of the posters by the attendees included hanging posters outside to make a poetry tree, making the program visible to all who passed by the tree.

Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center

A four-time sponsor, the medical center always displayed our entire set of framed posters in the hospital during their sponsorship and structured this around other arts and health efforts by the staff.

Forsyth County Public Library

A four-time sponsor, the Library always chose April, (National Poetry Month) for their sponsorship, and during their annual poetry event "On the Same Poem," displayed our entire set of framed posters, further drawing attention to the program.

Other Sponsors

The North Carolina Writers Network
The North Carolina Poetry Society
Arts Council Forsyth County Winston-Salem
New Winston Museum
Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina
Bookmarks
GreeNest
Competitive Edge Promotions, Inc
WSNC 90.5 FM
Press 53
Hispanic League of Forsyth County
Freedom Creative Solutions
Community Arts Cafe
Delta Arts Center
Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center
Barnhill's Books
Wolfies Frozen Custard
Art For Arts Sake
Women Writers of the Triad

Extensions of Poetry in Plain Sight

If Poetry in Plain Sight has a life of its own, as has been noted by current Winston-Salem Writers' President Donna Wallace, it can be demonstrated by the examples of organic extensions of the program that go beyond the original format.

The Bookmarks Festival

In year two of the program, Winston-Salem Writers Poetry in Plain Sight was given a stage at Bookmarks. Poets attending included past Poet Laureate Kathryn Stripling Byer, John Thomas York, Gabrielle Brant Freeman, and Sam Barbee.



Sam Barbee and Gabrielle Freeman.

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak



John Thomas York on the way to reading venue.

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak



Kathryn Stripling Byer reads for Poetry in Plain Sight

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak

The Poetry in Plain Sight Bus Project

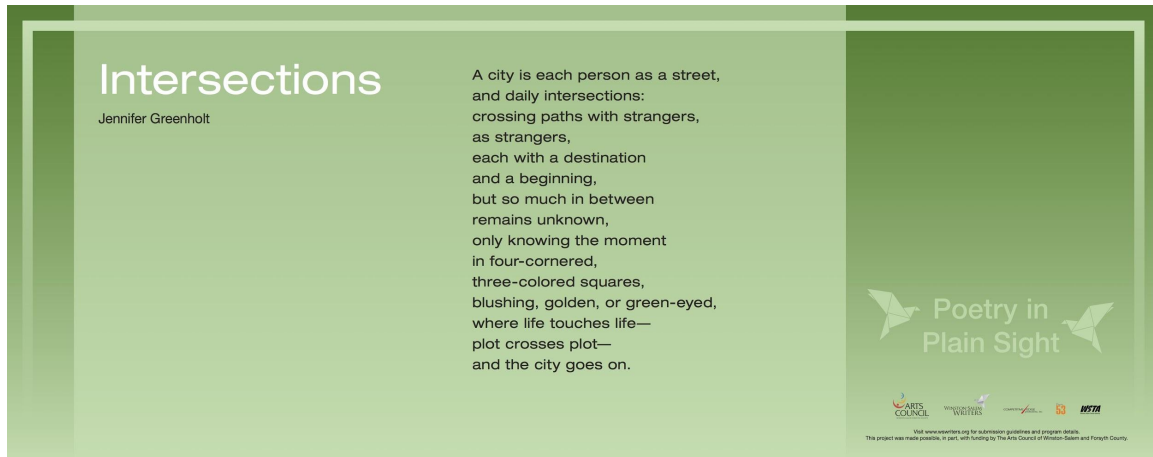
In year two of the program, Winston-Salem Writers received an Innovative Projects Grant from the Arts Council Winston-Salem Forsyth County. These funds were used to design and print specially formatted posters to be installed in every city bus operated by the Winston-Salem Transit Authority. This project further connected the project to the community and to the monthly poster initiative. Also, it received enthusiastic support from poets statewide, some traveling to Winston-Salem to take a ride on the WSTA bus. The project not only put poetry on busses, but poets themselves.

Then Winston Salem Writers' President Sam Barbee, working in conjunction with the city, secured a video documenting the effects of the project.

Video: Poetry in Plain Sight, produced by the City of Winston-Salem, can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJJ1pnQR0X4&feature=youtube_gdata_player

The Bus Project was funded by the Arts Council Winston-Salem Forsyth County for two years.



Bus Format for Posters developed by Competitive Edge.

Image courtesy Competitive Edge



Poet Jennifer Greenholt excited to see her poem go on the busses of WSTS

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak



Barbee and Kolischak on hand for first installation of Bus Posters

Photo courtesy Fox 8 News

Storefronts Winston-Salem

In Spring of 2014, Winston-Salem Writers was approached by Associated Artists of Winston-Salem seeking a collaboration in the downtown area. The Associated Artists project involved visual artists creating full-scale art installations in empty, unused storefronts in downtown Winston-Salem. Timed to open in conjunction with the Bookmarks Festival that year, the project's coordinator, Cynthia Marvin, sought to have the artists' installations reflect a literary theme. Poetry in Plain Sight poems provided the perfect vehicle, and a pool was created of past poems around the storybook theme that Marvin provided. Permission was sought from the poets and a stipend was offered by Associated Artists for use of the poems. Once the call went out for artists, they were free to choose from the pool of final poems selected to create their visual installation.

When the project unveiled in September, poetry came to life in visual form. Poets and artists gathered, and the installation remained in downtown for 6 weeks. Several poets read their poem at the opening, with some traveling from out of town to participate.

Artists chose poems by Poetry in Plain Sight poets Teri Hairston, Hilda Downer, Tara Lynne Groth, Jaki Shelton Green, and Kathryn Stripling Byer.



Artist Installation of the poem 'Night Fishing,' by Kathryn Stripling Byer. Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak
Click for Press Link

http://www.journalnow.com/relishnow/the_arts/storefronts-bring-art-out-of-galleries-into-public-eye/article_3172b6b8-33ba-11e4-9701-001a4bcf6878.html



Artist Installation of the poem 'Night Fishing,' by Kathryn Stripling Byer. Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak



Artist Installation of the poem 'A Love Song' by Teri Hairston. .

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak

Wake Forest Baptist Health Permanent Installation

Eventually, this Sponsor requested a permanent installation for poems to hang in their nursing mothers' rooms. Poems reflecting birth, parenting, and children's experiences were selected. Permission for use was secured from the poets and the sponsor paid for the additional printing costs of this permanent installation

The Bus Posters, Repurposed (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools)

Once the Bus Posters were retired, team members batted about possible reuses for these sturdy, striking posters. Donna Wallace reached out to Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools and secured the best method to get these to teachers who may want to use them in the classroom. They were placed in the facility where teachers can browse teaching material and could choose them for use. Feedback was that the Bus Posters "flew off the shelves" and were enthusiastically picked by teachers for display in their classrooms.

Poetry in Plain Sight at the Gallery Hop

As noted earlier, the importance of maintaining the relationship with Locations Hosts and the presentation of the program as a literary arts effort that enhanced the downtown arts district, led to a coordinated reading event to area Poetry in Plain Sight poets who might like to read during DADA's First

Friday Gallery Hop. This first effort was designed to test scheduling, crowd flow, and enthusiasm for future events. The goal was for poetry to be read simultaneously in multiple Trade Street locations. Organizers placed 4-5 poets in three different galleries with a staggered start times during the peak hours of the Gallery Hop. After the first group read a defined amount of time, they migrated, with their audience, to the second location to support the next group of poets, and finally, landing at the third gallery, where the audience and the readings were a culmination of energy and enthusiasm for the entire evening.



Joseph Mills reads in the final Gallery Hop destination.

Photo courtesy Julie Kolischak

Future Development

Over time, Poetry In Plain Sight became recognizable by name and reputation. To provide Winston Salem Writers the legal rights and privileges to position the program for growth and governance, Winston Salem Writers President Donna Wallace sought legal counsel to assist with trademarking. Jacob Wharton, of Womble Carlyle's intellectual property division, provided legal aid pro bono. During the initial phone consultation, Wharton said, "I know about the poetry posters. When I walk around downtown, I stop to read them. I would be glad to help you obtain a Trademark." On July 14, 2017, the Secretary of State of North Carolina, Elaine Marshall, granted the trademark for "Poetry In Plain Sight."

Rodney Holman's poem "Venus" accompanied the application.

Summary

There is ample evidence to suggest that, indeed, Holman's original vision was achieved, and accessible poetry was available, understood and appreciated by those strolling down the sidewalks of Winston-Salem and riding city busses. But the evolution of the project revealed that it not only put poetry in plain sight of those who might not otherwise connect with it, but also it put **poets** in plain sight and together in community. What remains a standout is the poets coming forward to support this initiative because they themselves felt elevated in community support. Poetry is so often a labor of love toiled in solitude, sometimes with little recognition. Poetry in Plain Sight created a community, recognized statewide, where poets came together, received affirmation, and in turn played a great part in giving the effort a life of its own. It also gave new and emerging poets a supportive space to step out in front of an audience. The accessibility of the program to emerging poets, which in turn, gave them support from established poets, was another ripple effect, among many, of the program.

As Kolischak has reflected on several occasions, after she received enthusiastic suggestions on how Poetry in Plain Sight might be utilized in new ways and places, "Poetry in Plain Sight is only limited by resources and the time of our volunteers—but where it *could* go is unlimited."

