

Why I Prefer to Come in Second in Poetry Contests

By Larry Lefkowitz

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WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... *Larry Lefkowitz is priceless, 'Why I Prefer to Come in Second in Poetry Contests' "If you come in first, people will compare your poem / With those which came in second or third (or worse)." Such subversive one-upmanship, "The person / Whose poem won will gaze enviously at the verbal and physical / Pats on the back you receive, the plaudits directed at your poem, / And the commiseration you will be steeped in." You'll just love his last twisted postulate, if you don't want them knocked off, you just might want to remove your socks...*

Why I Prefer to Come in Second in Poetry Contests

If you come in first, people will compare your poem
With those which came in second or third (or worse).
They will say, "The poem that came in second or third,
(Or worse) was better." They will go on to speculate
Why your inferior poem came in first. A Pandora's Box
Of evil speculation: He/she is a friend of the contest judge;
He/she is romantically involved with the same; somebody well-placed
Owes him/her a favor. You will begin to show signs of paranoia,
Suspecting that people are whispering behind your back,
That insidious and invidious plots are being hatched against you.
You will recall that some Nobel |prize winners (literary category)
Committed suicide or went insane because other literary figures –
And even the winners' friends! – told them they didn't deserve the prize.

Compare this mournful state with your situation if your poem
Comes in second. People will compare your poem to the one
That came in first and will say, “-----‘s poem [yours]
Was superior and deserved to come in first.” The person
Whose poem won will gaze enviously at the verbal and physical
Pats on the back you receive, the plaudits directed at your poem,
And the commiseration you will be steeped in. People will begin
To accuse the winner of all kinds of knavery (see list above)
While you will soon have a circle of admirers and your fame
Will go before you. But you have to be on your poetic guard!
A canny winner of first place may demand a recount,
Claiming that *your* poem should have won and his/hers to
Come in Second. You must squelch this movement
Before it can get under way or you are lost.

THE POET SPEAKS: *My poem “Why I Prefer to Come in Second in Poetry Contests” was likely inspired by sour grapes on my part for placing, not among the winners in poetry contests synergized to the fact that I write a lot of humor, which, for better or worse, influences my poem writing. I also wrote a number of famous poem parodies which did not garner me any prizes, again perhaps from sour grapes or obvious gripes that the originals were better than anything I could write as serious poetry. My stylistic influences were probably a number of light verse and prose humorists, such as Ogden Nash, Peter de Vries, S.J. Perelman, though each would surely defer to the others. Poetry, both humorous and serious is important to me since it allows for shorter work periods to finish them as opposed to stories, not to speak of novels. (I don’t speak of them, as I have failed to get mine published). Serious poetry allows for revealing the heart, but so does humorous poetry, and the latter allows for more direct arrows. The late comer to the poetry scene, the prosepoem also allows you to try to make the best of both worlds.*

AUTHOR BIO: Larry Lefkowitz's prose, poetry, and humor have been widely published in journals, anthologies, and online. His Jewish story collection "Enigmatic tales" is published by Fomite Press.