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Inspiration through laughter

I told my daughter Erin to kiss the plush toy llama I held. She replied, “I don’t want to kiss a llama!” Thus was born a poem and book that has brought laughter to thousands of families. I am always amazed at the inspiration that comes my way from people, animals, dreams and nature. We need to learn to laugh again after this year of pandemic. I hope to help!

How I became a poet and storyteller

Words have always been fun for me! I remember making people groan when I made puns as a boy. In 2002 when I began writing poems on a regular basis, I found that a punch line is much more fun when paired with rhyme. The outcome is often surprising to me, and that surprise translates to others as well. And when the poems are of a more serious nature, I find that rhythm and rhyme combined can put words together that lead to an element of truth that might otherwise have been missed. Most of the time I present my poems orally, so talks and book signings have been a regular part of my schedule. If there’s anything I enjoy as much as writing a poem, it is watching the wonder on the faces of children and adults when I get to tell it to them. I began going to Branson in 2003 and the St. Louis Zoo in 2004. Then, in 2006, I started book signing at Grant’s Farm. There I became a weekend regular for storytelling and absolutely loved it! I have been a part of the daily program at the farm since 2016 when I retired from full-time employment elsewhere.

. . . and then an illustrator!

Someone had to illustrate my children’s book *I Don’t Want to Kiss a Llama!* and, being a poet, I couldn’t afford anyone else but me! I love matching drawings or photographs with poems because it helps me reach the audience in a whole new way. With the pandemic and the lack of a live

audience, I have posted some of the pictures and photographs to my website, to my Facebook account, and to other social media sites.

Not just children’s books!

I first knew I had discovered something special when the teenage boys in my Scout troop laughed at and looked forward to my original “Scoutmaster Minutes”, i.e., my poems, in 2002. After all, how many teenage boys like poetry? I also remember reciting “Chubby Dinosaur” poems to two brothers, a high school and a college student, at the Storybook Sweets store at Grant’s Farm. We talked so long that they were late to meet their parents elsewhere in the park! And I have shared my stories with civic groups, retirees, and with schools in urban, rural and suburban areas. It’s fun to make people laugh!

Books are a big family!

I am author of 19 children’s and poetry books with a circulation somewhere upwards of 60,000. (I stopped counting after 40,000.) About a dozen of those are currently available at [www.idontwanttokissallama.com/shop](http://www.idontwanttokissallama.com/shop). I am the copyright owner of all my writings and write almost every day, pretty much whenever the words want to come and play. I’ve performed some of my poems so many times that my muscles remember what to do, what to say, and when to turn pages! I am a better person because of the power of poetry. With it, I hope to help others find their own unique voices.

Recognition

For me, the biggest recognition has always been the light in the eyes of children and their loved ones as they hear and laugh with a story. There was the legally blind boy who put his face to the pages of *Dale the Uniclyde*

as I recited it by memory and as his mother watched and cried with happiness. And there was the nine-year-old shy and reluctant reader who laughed and learned with her teacher as they read *I Don’t Want to Kiss a Llama!* over and over again. She recited it with me to one class, then by herself in front of another one! Life changed that day for her, and also for me. I often use puppets with the books to connect with the children. It sometimes helps with the adults, too!

Grant’s Farm has invited me back for storytelling and book signings every year since I started in 2006 although the season was cancelled last year due to the pandemic. I have greeted thousands of guests and sent my books all around Missouri, the United States, and the world. I consider it a great recognition that Grant’s Farm thinks enough of me to find me a place there every year!

It was experiences like these that caught the attention of the mayor of Byrnes Mill here in Jefferson County. In 2011, I was awarded the title of *poet laureate* of Byrnes Mill, Missouri. I wrote a poem for the new playground and it was inscribed on a plaque that stands there to this day.

It is a small thing in a big world and yet through this I learned that such recognition helps people see their own good qualities.

For example, in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion is brave long before he receives his medal. But the recognition he receives causes HIM to realize that he is brave. He literally becomes bigger as he puffs up his chest! I hope I would grow in similar fashion as Missouri’s *poet laureate* and give our children and their families reason to smile and laugh again! Actually, I know I would. I just don’t know the exact manifestations of that growth. But I’d love to find out!

Previous Work Experience

As a community organizer, sales representative and territory manager for the Boy Scouts of America for 32 years, I consistently helped the program grow wherever I was called to serve. Accomplishments that still make me smile include the acquisition of land for a camp in Laredo, TX and funding of minority outreach programs for councils in both Corpus Christi and Wichita Falls. TX. Those made a positive difference that continues to this very day. We moved to Byrnes Mill in 2000 and I retired here in 2016.

Formal Education

Valedictorian\*, Isidore Newman High School, New Orleans, LA in 1975

B.S. in Chemical Engineering, University of Tulsa in 1979 with 4.0 GPA\*

M.S. in Human Services, Murray State University in 1996 with 4.0 GPA\*

\*I followed well the path laid out for me until I found my own.