

Newbury poet laureate releases 6th poetry book



Italian Lessons will be released on April 15 but you can pre-order a copy at <https://thepoetrybox.com/bookstore/italian-lesson>

Newbury Poet Laureate Dianalee Velie is picking olives in one of her favorite places - Italy. She has collected a number of her poems she's written over the years about the country into a new book which will be released on April 15. (Courtesy photo)

BY LUCY PIVONKA
FEATURE STORY
Stone Bridge Post

Newbury's Poet Laureate has just published her sixth book, a reflection on time she's spent exploring and teaching in Italy. The book has been called "playful both in imagery and in form" by the State Poet Laureate.

Containing 39 poems, Italian Lessons was written over the course of vacations as well as two teaching stints in Italy when long-time resident Dianalee Velie took in not only the food and wine but the culture and history of the ancient country. She was fascinated by the sights, sounds, and smells, both of the past and the present, of the land where gladiators once fought and ancient gods were honored with enormous temples.

"Along the way, we share with humor the inevitable snafus of being a tourist, such as her near disaster with a saint's relics," says NH Poet Laureate Alexandria Peary. "Throughout Italian Lessons, imagery transcends the gastronomic to the historic and sacred. In one poem, the spear points of marching Roman soldiers transmogrify into olive tree leaves; in "Wizened," we encounter a persona poem from an olive's point of view... This poet is singing to the rafters about the glory of life."

Velie says she's been writing since she was very young and followed her passion to Sarah Lawrence College where she was taught "you write, you write, you write!" She earned a Master of Arts in Writing from Manhattanville College.

Velie has taught at universities and colleges in New York, Connecticut and New Hampshire and in private workshops throughout the United States,



Paradisio

Coffee paradise encompasses all of Italy.
The aroma of caffe, rich dark espresso
With perfect freshly pressed froth on top,
It not sipped but chugged from shot glasses
While standing at a bar. Divine words
Are not sufficient to describe this pleasure
Unless you are ordering a doppio or double.
Then beatific and miraculous reign
appropriately.

Poet Dianalee Velie, of Newbury, soaking in the scents and sounds of Italy, which inspired her latest book, Italian Lessons. (Courtesy photo)

Canada and Europe, but doesn't refer to herself as a professor.

"I consider myself more of a poetry midwife," she explains, what she does is to help her students deliver their best work by helping them find their own voice in a non-judgmental setting.

Velie emphatically says, "No!" when asked if poems need to rhyme. "Great writers develop their own internal rhythm."

"It means I get to share my love of poetry with the whole town," she says when asked to share what she views as the Poet Laureate's duties.

One of those jobs is the creation of a "Poetry Path" from the Library to the playground. The route is lined with ten signs paying tribute to the State's Poet Laureates from the very first, Paul Scott Mowrer in 1967 up through the present time. Half have already been installed and the other half will be put up shortly. Velie, with help from Lea McBain of the Library and Nancy Marashio, the town's former Moderator, she applied for grants and solicited

donations to fund the project. The three were nicknamed "The Poetry Posse."

Another way Velie shares her love of the meter and rhythm of poetry is through a group she founded 20 years ago, the John Hay Poetry Society, which holds their monthly meeting online at the moment. At each session, the group is given a writing prompt for the next meeting, and poems from the previous meeting's prompt are shared and discussed.

"It's open to everybody," Velie says, you don't even need to be a resident. Email Velie to get the Zoom information; DianaleeVelie@aol.com.

She is also excited to be working with the Center for the Arts and the Mt. Kearsarge Indian Museum to oversee an anthology of stories for publication.

She has some good advice for those getting started: "Just write from your heart and write the truth." She says she writes almost daily and seems to be more creative in the morning, saving her afternoons for the business aspects of her career, like seeking out and sending submissions to magazines.

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