

The poetic and personal journey that has led me to the threshold of my recent collection, *This Far* (Paraclete, 2019), braids a long professional life in community organizing with poetry – both writing and teaching. My creativity was nurtured in a family of actors in Wilmington Delaware. After earning a BA in French at Catholic University in DC, and a year of graduate Divinity studies, I poured most of my energy into my public vocation for decades. But poetry and the pull of more contemplative pursuits remained strong. In 1991, I received an MA in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University, and subsequently taught writing at Hopkins and at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

I've always found ways to combine an active public life in faith-based social change with writing and publishing poetry. After "County Antrim Archeology" appeared in *Poetry* in 1992, I made a commitment to devote more time to writing, to retreat often from the urgent demands of community organizing in low-income communities or national leadership training work, to participate in *The Community of Writers at Squaw Valley* (5 times!), and various residencies: *Blue Mountain Center*, *Virginia Center for the Creative Arts* (in both VA and Auvillar France), *Anam Cara Writer's and Artists Retreat*, and *Martha's Vineyard Writers' Residency*.

Dana Gioia's provocative essay *Can Poetry Matter?* appeared in the *Atlantic* the month I received my MA in Creative Writing in 1991. I have reflected on that question from various vantage points in the decades since. I've come to see that first and foremost my work embodies the sacramental potential of poetry, especially as antidote and essential spiritual practice at a stage of life marked by the deaths of loved ones, and the multiple crises facing the earth and our human community.



And poetry does matter –to me, and my poetry to others– when it interrogates faith in the face of failed and fractured human relationships, celebrates beauty and grace in tension with the questions of injustice that were framed for me in years of work in poor and vulnerable communities. I have learned that my poems matter *not only* to other poets, but within my family of origin. Also in the diverse communities in which I have worked and prayed, the poems speak powerfully to all who are drawn to the power of language to name what we value or mourn. Moreover, at a time in which public language and imagery are so often cheapened in our commercial and political discourse, words, carefully crafted, matter. Stories matter, and the kind of truth, rooted in our shared humanity, that poetry can convey, matters to our common life.

My poems have appeared widely in magazines and journals including: *America*, *Antiphon*, *Atlanta Review*, *Christian Century*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Passager*, *Poetry East*, *Potomac Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Presence*, *Smartish Pace and Spiritus*. My chapbook *Practice* was published in 2005, and a first full-length collection, *Meanwhile*, in 2011. In 2017, the longevity and some of the fruits of our writing circle were rewarded with the publication of *In the Margins: a conversation in poetry*, by Christine Higgins, Ann Lolordo, Madeleine Mysko and myself. In December 2017, the Franciscan University of Steubenville, OH published my chapbook, *Waking Hours*, inspired by Benedictine prayer practices.

In the last five years, individual poems have received the *Northern VA Poetry Prize* (2013), *Beulah Rose Poetry Prize* (2nd prize, 2014, Honorable Mention 2019), and been recognized by *Hunger Mountain*, *Atlanta Review* and *Comstock Review*. "Starlings" was runner up for the Ruth Stone Poetry Prize in 2017, and my poem "At the mariner's chapel, Auvillar" was selected by Christian Wiman for 3rd prize in the *Image/New York Encounter Poetry Contest, 2017* (photo above). My poems have been included in anthologies including: *DC Poets Against the War* (2003), *Adrienne Rich: A Tribute Anthology* (2007), and *Nothing in the Window* The 2012 Red Moon Anthology of English-language Haiku.

Since leaving my last full time job at Catholic Relief Services in 2018, I have embraced the life of a working poet and writer, and am honored to be the current [Poet Laureate of Takoma Park MD](#). I continue to delight — and write — sailing the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries with my husband (and best publicist) John Ruthrauff.