



Dear Fellow Citizens of Branford,

It is a great honor to have been selected to be the inaugural Poet Laureate of Branford. For that opportunity, I would like to express my gratitude to the Town and to Jamie Cosgrove for his innovative leadership, to the Blackstone Library director Katy McNicol and the staff - all of whom have stepped up in the most helpful ways, to the Director of the Willoughby Wallace Library Alice Pentz for her creative input into planning events, and to the Ct. Council of Poets Laureate for their warm welcome.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain to you what I hope to accomplish as Branford's first Poet Laureate and why I think it is so important that this position exist.

I believe the human heart is meant to sing. I believe we are born ready to express our deepest joys and worst terrors in words and rhythm, and that we are born able to react with empathy to the poetic songs of others. Small infants, not yet able to sit up by themselves, spend endless hours in playful experimentation with the sounds they are able to produce. Toddlers become enchanted with nursery rhymes, and the picture books of pre-schoolers are filled with metaphors that speak to their fears of loss and abandonment, and to their yearning to be loved both profoundly and dependably.

As we grow up we seem to lose this direct connection to the emotional power of language. We are taught in school to organize our thoughts, to be logical and to present our argument according to accepted form. We need to be able to do all this, of course, just as we need to be able to read analytically and critically. Science, the law, our democracy depends on it.

But we also need to learn how to turn off our literary super-ego. There are ways of perception that circumvent the judgmental and the logical, that allow us to react directly to images and the ambiguity of words, and to the music, sounds and rhythm that are the undercurrent of all language - but particularly of poetry. This intuitive access to deep meaning and to our own complex emotions is a vital part of our humanity, shared across the globe and for millennia. I am convinced that a wider access and enjoyment of poetry is vital to restoring to our society this all-important pathway to shared empathy and self-knowledge.

