

PenChant

To increase awareness and appreciation of the Literary Arts

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2005

MEET TED KOOSER

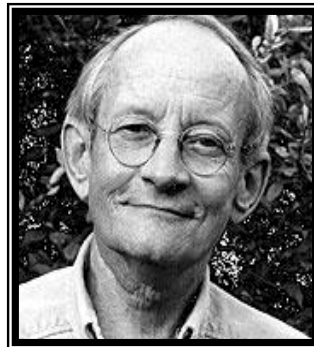
By: Corrine Frisch

When I first met my husband, Ethan Lewis, and we started to get to know one another's habits, I remember asking him how he usually celebrated New Year's Eve. In a response typical of the many reasons I fell in love with him, he said that he always chose a new poet, and spent the evening reading that poet's work.

Ok, so a party animal he may not be, but what a guy! I thought about this when I began this piece on Ted Kooser, the US's current Poet Laureate.

I believe that, even as poets and writers, we aren't necessarily familiar with the most well respected poets "out there" today. It might be a good New Year's resolution to acquaint ourselves with one or two, and why not start at the top?

In fact, Ethan and I drove over to



Champaign in early November to hear Mr. Kooser give a reading at the Champaign Public Library. His poetry is lyrical, narrative, and sounds chords which should be very familiar to us Midwestern folk. Consider this short poem, from *Delights and Shadows* published by Copper Canyon Press:

(Continued on page 7)

ASTONISH YOURSELF

By: Vicki Bamman

After I looked at some of the experiments in the book, *Astonish Yourself: 101 Experiments in the Philosophy of Everyday Life* by Roger-Pol Droit, I thought, "some people must be easily astonished." Then, remembering my own admonitions about knowing the meaning of the words you use, I looked up "astonish." It means "to surprise greatly; to amaze." So, like I said, some people are easily astonished; the rest of us may have read too much science fiction in our youth.

The experiments are described on two pages; there is a listing of the time needed,

props if any, and the effect you can expect. The introduction warns that each experiment must be carried out properly; you must really apply yourself "if you are to feel the unsettling of reality that they seek to produce."

The book describes itself as "an entertainment." It "attempts to indicate essential matters with the lightest of touches." The introduction says: "Futility can lead to thought, the laughable can become serious, and depth can succeed superficiality. Not all the time, and not necessarily, it goes without saying. Not every idiocy contains a phi-

losophical pearl. But there exist ordinary situations, everyday gestures, actions we carry out continuously, which can each become the starting point for that astonishment that gives rise to philosophy."

Some of the experiments don't appeal to me at all ... such as visualizing a pile of human organs. Some take a long time: one of them has a duration of 30 or 40 years. Others require things I don't have, or rely on chance events like coming across a childhood toy. Some of them, like "prowl at night" and "watch a woman at her window" could

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Astonish	2
Announcements	2
About Me	2
Kudos	2
Fiction Contest	3
Fiction Entry Form	4
Calendar Page	5-6
Kooser	7
A Word or Two	7
Special Announcement	7
Astonish	8
Calendar	8

ASTONISH

get you in trouble. Nevertheless, I've carried out some of the experiments. I haven't decided whether to summarize the experiments or to tell you my reactions.

Here's one that I thought wouldn't surprise me: Browse at a bookseller's. The time needed is two or three hours; props are bookstores, and the effect is "distracting." Your time at the bookstore is supposed to be "unpremeditated," perhaps because if you decide to go to the bookstore, you usually go for a reason, to look for some particular book or type of book, and that narrows your focus. So when you have time on your hands and a bookstore, or several bookstores at hand, you drop in and browse. "And you feel solicited by titles, authors, characters. As if each book were calling you, trying to attract your attention." The competition "is intense."

I expect to be distracted when I enter a bookstore. I wasn't surprised when it happened. I dropped into the Oxfam Book and Record Shop on Marylebone Road in London. A smallish bookstore, it nevertheless had hundreds of books that called to me. What could be cooler than buying a book about London in London? Or a book by a well-known Londoner? Or a book by an American who lived in London, like Henry James or T.S. Eliot? Or what about the books that I would love anyway, wherever I bought them, but that would have a special fillip because of where I got them? Or what about something that I knew would be interesting enough to pass the time on the plane home. Or what about.... There were many books that I could have bought and enjoyed. I expected to be distracted

(Continued on page 8)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following is a list of several things we would like the membership to be aware of as we enter the new year. Please take a moment to read through the list and identify those things in which you would be interested in participating:

► Watch and listen for information about the 2005 anthology being put together by PWLF. This year we'll be looking for poetry about wine. Liz Huck is spearheading this publication.

► We anticipate having a solid date for the PWLF and Advocates for Academics joint Trivia night soon – look for more details coming soon in your newsletter and email.

► In conjunction with the Prairie Art Alliance, PWLF will be putting together a book of poetry focused on two themes that align with two of the PAA themes for this year – "Summer Vacation" and "Route 66." A full article about this endeavor will appear in the February 2005 issue of PenChant.

► Navigating the Maze (NTM) is fast approaching. One of our biggest and most important publications, NTM is now in its 7th year. This chapbook of poetry from high school students living in Springfield, Illinois and the surrounding area is produced by Poets and Writers Literary Forum and edited by member Anita Stienstra. If you have connections with any of the area high school English departments, please contact Anita Stienstra or one of the PWLF Board Members.

► And finally – it is time, once again, to convene an election committee. All those interested in serving on the committee should contact Siobhan Pitchford at siobhan@pwlf.com on or before the 17th of January 2005.

ABOUT ME...

Just thought it would be nice to introduce Rhonda – however briefly – to the readers of PenChant.

In her own words, here is a little about the future editor of PenChant:

"I graduated from Purdue in 1989 with BA in nursing science and worked as a registered nurse in cardiac intensive care and emergency room for about 13 years. I followed that by graduating in 2002 from Purdue University with Bachelors in English and Professional Writing. I worked in the Writing Lab at Purdue as coordinator and business writing tutor. Presently I am working at the Center for Teaching and Learning at UIS.

I live in Indiana with my husband Tim. We have 3 kids, Josh, Ryan and Kali. I have a new granddaughter, Isabella – she is five months old. I love to spend my free time reading and enjoying my family.

I am really looking forward to assuming the editorship of PenChant and hope all of you will find some bit of writing to contribute in the coming year."

KUDOS

Announcing, on initiation from *Pushcart Press*, *Harp-Strings* Poetry Journal has been pleased to nominate the following poem from the Autumn 2004—Volume 16 #2 issue of their magazine, for possible inclusion in *The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses 2004*:

"Autumn Wind with Daisies" by Daniel Blackston.



Congratulations Dan and best of luck in the final selections.

2005 The Alchemist Review Prize for Short Fiction*
**formerly Writer's Repertory Short Fiction Literary Award*

Fiction Prizes:

1st Place: \$300

2nd Place: \$100

Deadline for entries is postmarked January 31, 2005.

A non-refundable \$5.00 entry must accompany *each* submission. Multiple submissions are acceptable, but a separate entry form and check must be included. **Checks payable to: UIS**

Applicants must submit:

- Completed application form
- 2 copies of a short story not to exceed 3000 words in length. (Do not send originals.)
- \$5.00 entry fee. (US currency)

Include SASE for notification of winners and, if you wish, a SAS postcard for acknowledgement of entry. No certified mail, please. Submission must be the original work of the author. No previously published work is eligible; if under consideration elsewhere, please notify. Entrants must be at least 18 years or older. The Applicant's name should not appear anywhere on the manuscript. Manuscript pages should be typed, double-spaced, single-sided pages. All entries must be in English. Entry fee must accompany the application. Entry fees are non-refundable. No manuscripts will be returned; all manuscripts will be recycled.

Submissions must be sent to:
University of Illinois at Springfield
English Program
One University Plaza
MS UH 3050
Springfield, IL 62703

Questions? Email: writersrepertory@hotmail.com

Awards

- ⇒ **1st Place Winner** receives \$300.00 plus publication in *The Alchemist Review*. The winner will also receive 2 copies of *The Alchemist Review*.
- ⇒ **2nd Place Winner** receives \$100.00 and a mention on the awards page of *The Alchemist Review*, as well as, a copy of *The Alchemist Review*.
- ⇒ **3rd Place Winner** will receive 1 copy of *The Alchemist Review*.

Note: An awards page announcing the top three winners and the titles of their stories will appear in the *2005 edition of The Alchemist Review*. **Winners will be announced by April 1, 2005!**

**2005 The Alchemist Review Prize
for Short Fiction
Entry Form**

(Entry form must accompany all submissions.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _(____)_____ Email: _____

Title of Submission: _____

Word count: _____ (3000 words max)

Author's bio: (50-75 words) _____

**Deadline for submission is postmarked
January 31, 2005**

A non-refundable \$5.00 entry must accompany *each* submission. Multiple submissions are acceptable, but a separate entry form and check must be included. **Checks payable to: UIS**

Applicants must submit:

- Completed application form
- 2 copies of a short story not to exceed 3000 words in length. (Do not send originals.)
- \$5.00 entry fee. (US currency)
- For more information contact: writersrepertory@hotmail.com

JANUARY 2005

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5 Open Mic at IMO's 7:p.m.	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 Board meeting IMO's 7:p.m.	18	19 Open Mic at IMO's 7:p.m.	20	21	22
23	24	25	26—Deadline for February Issue of the PenChant	27	28	29
30	31—Deadline for Alchemist Fiction Contest					

FEBRUARY 2005

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
			Open Mic at IMO's 7:p.m.			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
			Open Mic at IMO's 7:p.m.			
20—Deadline for Board Nominations	21	22	23	24	25—Deadline for March Issue of the PenChant	26
		Board meeting IMO's 7:p.m.				
27		28				

TED KOOSER

(Continued from page 1)
A Happy Birthday

This evening, I sat by an open window
and read till the light was gone and the book
was no more than a part of the darkness.
I could easily have switched on a lamp,
but I wanted to ride this day down into night,
to sit alone and smooth the unreadable page
with the pale gray ghost of my hand.

Haven't all poets sat at dusk with a book, thinking while the light fades about how other things are fading too? And yet, the way in which Kooser records the moment shows why he was awarded the honor of being our poet laureate. His poetry is deceptively simple. But look closer. Look at the last word of each line. Window, book, darkness, lamp, night, page, hand. Seven words distill the message. A poet sits at a window and what he "sees" ends with his hand, which then takes the pen and records it. The poetic experience of what we could read as a melancholy moment actually transforms the moment into one that IS an embodiment of happiness.

Ted Kooser was born in Ames, Iowa in 1939. He received his BA from Iowa State and his MA in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is the author of ten collections of poetry, including *Delights & Shadows* (Copper Canyon, 2004); *Winter Morning Walks: One Hundred Postcards to Jim Harrison* (2000), which won the 2001 Nebraska Book Award for poetry; *Weather Central* (1994); *One World at a Time* (1985); and *Sure Signs* (Pittsburgh, 1980). His fiction and non-fiction books include *Braided Creek: A Conversation in Poetry* (Copper Canyon, 2003) written with fellow poet and longtime friend, Jim Harrison; and *Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps* (2002), which won the Nebraska Book Award for Nonfiction in 2003. He is a visiting professor in the English department of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is a retired insurance executive. He lives on acreage near the village of Garland, NE, with his wife Kathleen Rutledge, the editor of the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

Like his poetry, in person Ted Kooser is soft spoken, proving only that the most important messages need not be conveyed by the loudest voices.

A WORD OR TWO FROM VICKI

This month's words: sopite and stupor.

I love dictionaries. I was looking up words for this article and found other words I didn't even know existed. Looking for something to do with "philo," as in philosophy, I found "philobiblist," another version of the familiar bibliophile. Looking for "sophy," I found "sopite," a transitive verb meaning to put to sleep or to dull, and also to put an end to or to settle. Would that we could sopite the conflicts in the Middle East!

A related word, and the one right below sopite, is "spoor," which is a deep, unnatural sleep. This may be the kind I experience when I take sleeping medication. Sopor reminded me of "stupor," which is what I feel the day after

taking sleeping pills. Stupor, as you know, is synonymous with lethargy, torpor, and apathy. It describes a dazed condition, the loss or lessening of the power to feel, and intellectual or moral numbness. I know first hand that stupor affects your ability to think (intellectual numbness), and you don't feel things, either physically or emotionally, the way you would otherwise. That got me thinking about whether a medicated stupor is better or worse than an insomniac (another new word!) lethargy.... and I never did finish looking up the words I was interested in.

Instead, I was *sopited* and had a nice nap.

A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Poets & Writers Literary Forum of Springfield, Illinois will be seeking nominations for the Board of Directors over the course of the coming month. Please think about your role in the success of our organization and consider this an opportunity for you to give of your time and energy toward contributing to this success.

Nominations must be submitted in writing—either through self-nomination or through submitting the name and qualifications of someone you believe would be a valuable asset to the Board. Please note that if you submit the name of someone other than yourself, you must first garner the agreement of that individual. All nominees must be willing to serve. Current Board members up for re-election, should they so choose, are: David Pitchford, Donna Ruyle, and Tim Sheehan.

Elections will be held in April. The deadline for nominations is February 20, 2005 for publication in PenChant.



Poets & Writers Literary Forum

P. O. Box 5666
Springfield, IL 62705

Email: submissions@pwlf.com

If you are interested in contributing to the PenChant, please contact any of the PWLF Board members.

It is through the contributions and energy of all that we are successful.

PWLF

To increase awareness and appreciation of Literary Arts



Poets & Writers Literary Forum of Springfield

Calendar of Events

Jan. 5th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Jan. 17th—7:00 p.m. PWLF Board Meeting at IMO's

Jan. 19th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Feb. 2nd—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Feb. 16th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Feb. 21st—7:00 p.m. PWLF Board Meeting (location TBA)

Every Thursday night at 7:00 p.m.—Open Mic at Sunsup Koffee Kafe
hosted by Jill Manning



ASTONISH

(Continued from page 2)

by all the books, and lured by them, with each calling my attention from the others. What I didn't expect was that I would leave with such regret! I couldn't afford them, even at used book prices. I couldn't take them all on the plane. I couldn't ship home hundreds of books. I couldn't decide what books to take, what books to leave, so I left them all. At home when I go to the bookstore, I am lured from book to book by engaging titles or covers or the names of the authors. I don't buy all of them, and I don't worry about it. Some of them will be available at the public library. Others will be at the bookstore the next time I go there. There's plenty of distraction in the bookstore but few regrets. There was astonishment, it turned out, but not at the predicted effect.

Another experiment is to invent headlines. You need about 15 minutes, and pencil and paper. The effect is supposed to be calming. When I did this particular experiment, I was returning home from a trip, and had not seen the Springfield paper for over a week, and on the national news, it was the usual doom, death, despair and disaster. I made up some head-

lines about local events, things that I thought were amusingly unlikely, and when we got home I was surprised by how close I came to predicting things that were actually in the papers we had waiting for us. *Astonish Yourself* says that this proves that there is "nothing less new than the news ... the flood of news never ceases to repeat itself. It shows neither progress nor novelty." That may be correct, but I was still surprised by my amazing prescience, and I was entertained but not calmed by the activity.

What all this "stuff" suggests is that we pay attention to details, to the "ordinary situations, everyday gestures, actions we carry out continuously" in life. When we do, we may be astonished. Even if we don't, we're better able as writers to convey to others the essence of our experiences. *Astonish Yourself* is not a book written for writers, but it is a book that writers can enjoy, and it can help us focus on the details of our experiences. It's available at the public library.