



## **Our Interview with Poet Dawn Spitz**



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**The only drawback is that poetry swims in my head after I turn out the light!**

**Sally from the Norwalk Public Library:** Thanks for joining us on the **Poetry Page**, Dawn! You have a wonderful sonnet—"Ode to Old Route 124"—in our 2019 **Art & Text** booklet. You were selected by our judges to be included in our exhibit, and I never got to meet you because you had since moved to Florida. I was so happy to see a sonnet selected!

### ODE TO OLD ROUTE 124

The old well-travelled Harwich-Brewster Road  
Winds from ocean's edge to Cape Cod Bay  
Past rustic houses, long-inhabited abodes  
With rough terrains and shingles weathered grey.  
Surrounding are those treasures nature makes  
Patches of dense woods from forests gone  
Their image mirrored in deep, sapphire lakes  
Known, though glacier-born, as "kettle ponds."  
Pink rugosa blooming by the shore  
A biking trail where railroad tracks once lay  
Ripe cranberry bogs and barn-red country store  
Ensnare the hearts of all who pass this way.  
Would that this place might always stay the same.  
But it will not and who will be to blame?

Dawn Spitz

This leads me to my first question: would you consider yourself a formalist?

**Dawn:** Yes, I enjoy the challenge of putting ideas into a particular framework.

**Sally:** Please share with us what you love about the sonnet form. Does it come organically to you? I have a friend who says she "thinks" in sonnets!

**Dawn:** I can understand that! I've even written sonnets without realizing it.

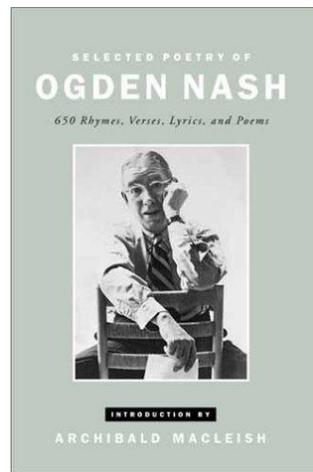
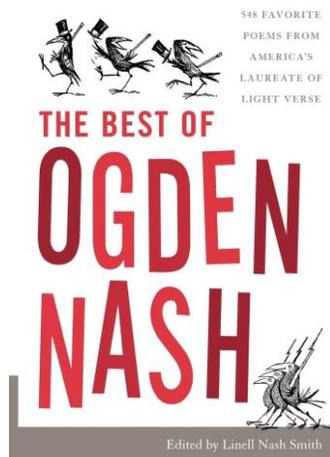
I studied the form in elementary school, and the rhythm (iambic pentameter) has always stayed with me. I'm also a musician, and five beats to the measure is unusual. But it is very natural in the spoken word.

**Sally:** Do you mostly write sonnets, or do you write in other forms?

**Dawn:** I write whatever comes to mind.

**Sally:** Since you studied the sonnet form in elementary school, you must have written poetry as a child!

**Dawn:** Yes, I did! I even won a prize or two in school contests. Of course, I also loved humorous verse. Ogden Nash was my hero.



**Sally:** At what age did you write your first poem?

**Dawn:** I wrote my first little verse when I was four. It was a takeoff on a commercial.

**Sally:** Is there a particular poem that struck you as a child, or later? A poem that drew you to poetry?

**Dawn:** My fifth grade teacher taught poetry to her class using a book called *A Magic World*. I was so entranced with it, I asked my mother to buy me a copy for me to keep.

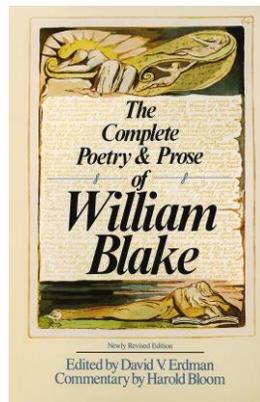
I remember being impressed with “The Highwayman,” as well as the works of Keats and Shelley.

**Sally:** That’s so impressive for the fifth grade, Dawn! What a marvelous teacher!

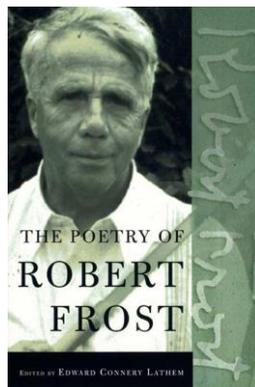
Do you have a favorite poet, or a favorite poem? Or several? What is it, or what are they?

**Dawn:** It's hard to pick out a favorite poet because there are so many that I enjoy.

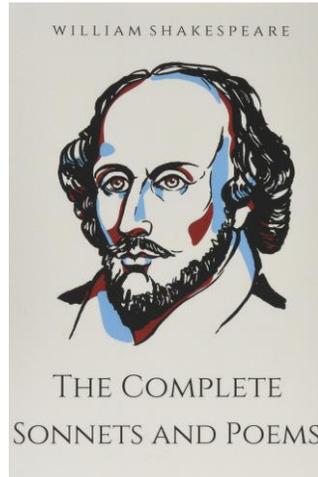
In my later years, I've come to admire the mystic poet, [William Blake](#).



And [Robert Frost](#) has always been a favorite. I've always loved his “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” and “The Road Not Taken.”

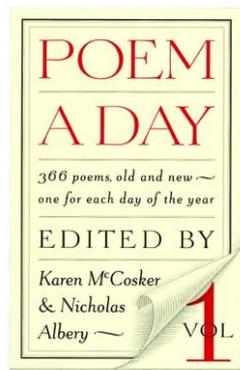


And, of course, there's [Shakespeare](#). How wonderful are his sonnets!



**Sally:** How important is poetry to you in your daily life? How do you carry it within you?

**Dawn:** I have three volumes of poetry, called *A Poem a Day*, edited by Karen McCosker and Nicholas Albery. I found them, one by one, in thrift shops. Each book has 366 poems, one for every day of the year. At the end of each poem is a brief bio of the poet. Every night, before we go to sleep, I read the poem of the day to my husband. It has become an important ritual at bedtime. The only drawback is that poetry swims in my head after I turn out the light!



**Sally:** That is such a wonderful ritual, Dawn. And so nice your husband enjoys listening to the poems!

Do you set aside time to write, or simply allow inspiration to catch you by surprise?

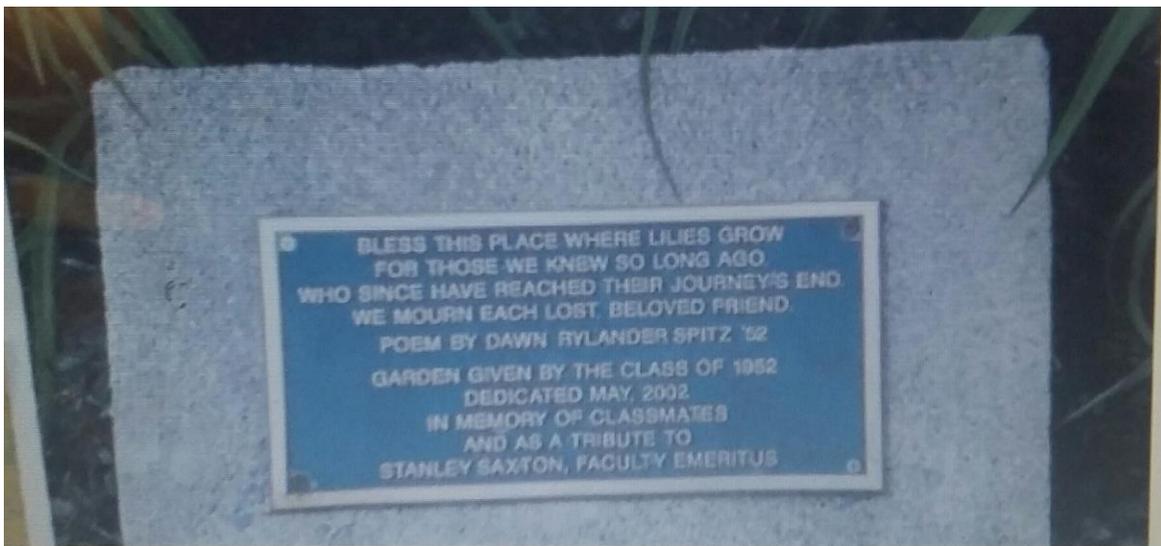
**Dawn:** I rarely just sit down with the intention to write unless I have an idea brewing.

**Sally:** I believe you have a poem—“Where Lilies Grow”—set in bronze in a memorial garden at your alma mater, Skidmore College. Please tell us all about that! How lovely to have a poem set in bronze! How did it get chosen? Who is the memorial garden for? That must be such an honor!

**Dawn:** A few years back when I was president of my class at [Skidmore College](#), we decided to dedicate a memorial garden to our deceased classmates as a gift to the college.

The plot chosen was in front of the Alumni Building. We planted lilies because they were the special hobby of one of our professors, [Stanley Saxton](#). I wrote and sang a song for the presentation, called “Where Lilies Grow.”

When I came back to my next reunion, I discovered the college had set the first verse in bronze and placed it on a stone in the garden. I was, of course, delighted. Imagine having my name and work set in bronze for all to see!



**Sally:** That is so lovely, Dawn.

I am especial intrigued by [Stanley Saxton](#). On looking him up, I see that he was known as the “Lily Man” in Saratoga Springs! He must have been wonderful. There is even a daylily named after him: [Gryphon Stanley Saxton](#).



*In retirement, Stanley’s love for cultivating and breeding daylilies evolved into a second distinguished career. With a quarter-million daylilies growing in Saxton Gardens (his large backyard in Saratoga), he was a major supplier of seeds to wholesalers and home gardeners alike. A charter member of the American Hemerocallis Society, he had more than 300 registered hybrids.*

—[Skidmore Retirees: Stanley Saxton](#)

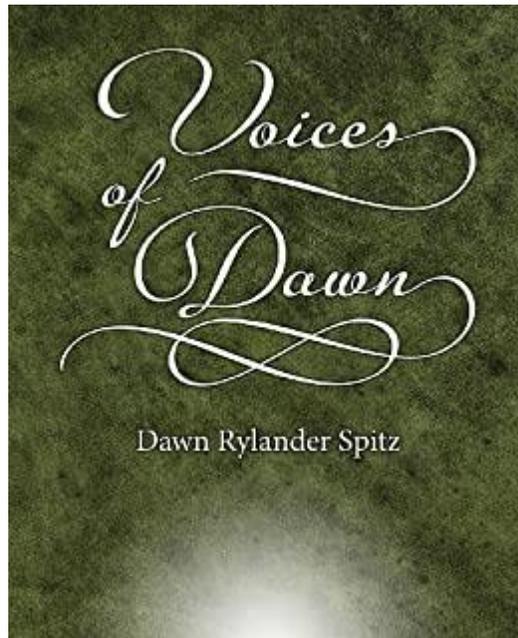
**Sally:** What did you study at Skidmore College?

**Dawn:** Music Education.

**Sally:** Have you had any formal training in writing?

**Dawn:** I studied for a short time with the **Famous Writers School**. Later I went to writing classes and workshops for several years when I lived in Rancho Mirage, California.

**Sally:** In your bio for our **Art & Text** exhibit, you state that you've published an e-book. Please share with us how you went about putting that together, and publishing it. I see it is available on Amazon, and it looks lovely. Why did you choose the e-book format only, and not also publish it as a printed book?



**Dawn:** Initially, it never occurred to me to try to publish it. I knew it was so difficult to find a publisher for poetry, and self-publishing costs a fortune.

But I had a friend who knew how to create an e-book, and so I decided to pay him to do one for me. I chose the name [\*Voices of Dawn in Various Verses\*](#) to refer to my being a singer as well.

**Sally:** You are a member of the [National League of American Pen Women](#). A few of our poets belong to that organization, and love it. Please tell us about the organization, and why you are a member.

**Dawn:** I learned about the [National League of American Pen Women](#) as a little girl because my mother was a member. I remember so well my mother pounding on an old

portable Royal typewriter day after day. It seemed only natural to join after I had met the requirements.

**Sally:** You were also president of the [Palm Springs Writers Guild](#)! Please tell us a little about that Guild, and what you did as president?

**Dawn:** I was the president of the [Palm Springs Writers Guild](#) when I lived in Rancho Mirage, California. Our purpose was to encourage writing by giving workshops, and to help our members get published.

**Sally:** What prizes have your sonnets won?

**Dawn:** I've won five first prizes from the [National League of American Pen Women](#), and two from the [Palm Springs Writers Guild](#).

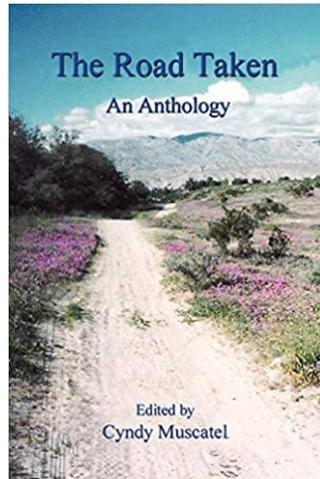
I have an interesting story about one of my winning sonnets, "Ode to Old Route 124." To enter a Pen Women sonnet contest, I chose to write about Old Route 124 because the town of Harwich on Cape Cod was planning to widen the old road. This caused an outburst of protest from the local residents because of the road's history and charm. So at the televised town meeting on this issue, I got up and read my poem aloud to the gathering. The chairman acknowledged that it was the first time that anyone had read a sonnet at a town meeting. The proposal was defeated much to the delight of the residents, some of whom credited my sonnet for having had a direct influence on the outcome!

**Sally:** I'm quite certain your sonnet was responsible for the positive outcome, Dawn! How wonderful!

Aside from your e-book, you state in your **Art & Text** bio that your work appears in two magazines, and an anthology. Please share with us what these magazines are.

**Dawn:** I wrote a poem called "The Colors of 1940," based on a personal experience, which was published in the Martin Luther King issue of the [University of Baltimore Magazine](#). Another verse, "No Lunar Tunes," was published in a journal of light verse.

**Sally:** I believe the name of the anthology is [The Road Taken](#). Please tell us about that anthology! I love the title!



**Dawn:** [The Road Taken](#) was the work of the members of the writing class in Palm Springs, under the leadership of Cyndy Muscatel. And, of course, the title was a take-off on Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken."

**Sally:** Do you send work out to other magazines, or is this not a pursuit that interests you? (I might suggest sending sonnets to [The Orchards Poetry Journal](#), and also [Mezzo Cammin: An Online Journal of Formalist Poetry by Women](#).)

**Dawn:** Thanks. I'll check them out.

**Sally:** Are you interested in continuing to be published? Please share with us your thoughts on publishing. How important—or unimportant—is it to you?

**Dawn:** Well, let's just say you are renewing my interest in submitting my work again!

**Sally:** Great, Dawn! We look forward to seeing more of your work then!

Please share with us what you enjoy outside of poetry. Gardening, reading, family?



**Dawn:** Yes, of course, I love to read.

I enjoy when I'm in New York. I am also an avid knitter. I belong to two knitting groups, in New York and Florida. At the moment, I've made garments for every member of the family, shawls for the elderly, and blankets and preemie hats for a children's hospital.

And I have a delightful family



**Sally:** So wonderful!

Are you enjoying your new environment?

**Dawn:** This has been a difficult year for everyone, but I am blessed to spend the winters in Venice, Florida and can keep in touch with some of my groups on Zoom.

Ordinarily, I'd be attending church weekly, (where I used to run a poetry workshop), attending fellowship group, going to meetings of the Pen Women, the knitters groups, the Venice Musicale, and putting on musical programs with my husband, Eric, a wonderful tenor.

**Sally:** Yes, it has been a challenging year. I hope you can return to your activities soon, Dawn. I am so happy to feature you on the **Poetry Page**!! Thanks so much for joining us!

**Dawn:** It is my pleasure and honor! Thank you.



**Now, three of Dawn's poems...**

## LEGEND OF THE TREES

A Sonnet

"I am the king of Autumn," vaunts the oak,  
And flaunts his ruby leaves on lofty arms.  
Nearby, the queenly maple spreads her cloak  
Of golden lace to best display her charms.  
The regal sycamore and stately elm  
Dance before the wind without a care.  
Pleased to be the jewels of nature's realm  
Forgetting that their limbs will soon be bare.  
Unfazed, the modest evergreens all wait  
'Til winter comes to stand its frigid ground.  
'Tis then the fir and balsam celebrate  
As pearls of white adorn their needled gowns.  
Humility thus wears a crown of light  
While pride does shiver naked in the night.

Dawn Spitz

## MUSIC

A song can soothe a sorrowing soul  
Can help a heart to heal  
Can make a broken spirit whole  
Awaken us to feel.  
A song is like an angel's wings  
It touches us with grace  
And all the joy that music brings  
Can fill an empty place.  
Music is a warming thing  
To cheer the darkest night  
So come and bring your pipes and sing  
And dance into the night.

Dawn Spitz



## WHERE LILIES GROW

Lord, bless this place where lilies grow  
For those we knew so long ago  
Who since have reached their journey's end  
We mourn each lost, beloved friend.

Bless this place where lilies grow  
Each lovely flower with grace bestow  
That those who pass this way may share  
The beauty that is blooming there.

Within our memories lie  
The dreams of days gone by  
Of the Skidmore that we knew  
Where minds and friendships grew.

Within our hearts will always dwell  
Those friends to whom we say farewell.  
Now as we face our sunset's glow,  
Lord, bless this place where lilies grow.

Dawn Spitz

