

## “Poetry Is the Best Medicine” by Renee Shea



The other day at lunch, my mother sat with her usual group of fellow-residents and shared with them a treasure from her childhood: “Lullaby-Land”, a collection of poems by one of her favorite poets, a native St. Louisan, Eugene Field.

As she passed the book around the table, the other ladies began reciting, from memory, or reading aloud some of Field’s more popular works; such as “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod,” and “Little Boy Blue”. The book brought back fond memories of them reading to their children and grandchildren, or of being read to by their own parents. The group had a great time discussing poetry.

Back when her husband was in The White House, Jacqueline Kennedy had her children, Caroline and John, memorize and recite dozens of poems for President Kennedy. In turn, Caroline passed that love of poetry onto her own children and has written a few books about her family’s favorite poems.

Likewise, my grandparents read poetry to my mother, who in turn passed the love of words down to the next two generations. In fact, I grew up often hearing my mother and father reciting lines from their favorites. As a senior in high school, my mother was required to memorize lines from 100 poems and recite them back to her teacher. She can still recite many today, such as lines from one of her favorite poems, *When Earth's Last Picture Is Painted* by Rudyard Kipling.

*“And only The Master shall praise us, and only The Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame,  
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They are!”*

April happens to be National Poetry Month. This celebration began a decade ago and was designed to keep Americans interested in poetry simply for the sake of our own enjoyment. But it turns out, poetry does much more for us than keep us entertained. It’s actually good for our brains and overall health.

Several professional studies have shown that even when Alzheimer’s patients can no longer form sentences, they can still recall verses from poems. Further, older adults who participate in creative activities including reading, writing and reciting poetry, tend to be less depressed, less lonely, and even experience fewer falls!

Why not gather together some friends today and recall some of your favorite lines from your favorite poems? You will likely find it to be a very engaging conversation, and it may even improve your health and well-being.

And of course, if that group of friends isn’t yet living at The Villa, invite them to do so. You’ll be \$1,000.00 richer when they move in and you receive your referral bonus. Now that’s poetry to anyone’s ears!