

CREATIVE AGING PROGRAM POETRY PROMPT 2022

POETRY BY BOSTON -
AREA OLDER ADULTS

CITY of BOSTON

AGE+

Age Strong



Arts and Culture



CREATIVE AGING PROGRAM: POETRY PROMPT

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Thanks to the CAP Poetry Prompt teaching artists:
Eleanor Elektra • Pampi • Mattia Maurée

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Jamaica Plain Branch • Mattapan Branch

About the Age Strong Commission

Our mission is to enhance older adults' lives with meaningful programs, resources, and connections so we can live and age strong in Boston together. For more than 50 years Age Strong has provided programs and services to Boston's older adults, including information and referrals, help with housing, nutrition, health insurance, transportation, volunteering opportunities, events/activities, and more. Age Strong publishes Boston Seniority Magazine, a free monthly publication. Learn more at boston.gov/agestrong.

About the Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture

The Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture is a City agency that enhances the quality of life, the economy, and the design of the City through the arts. The role of the arts in all aspects of life in Boston is reinforced through equitable access to arts and culture in every community, its public institutions, and public places. Key areas of work include support to the cultural sector through grants and programs, support of cultural facilities and artist workspace, as well as the commissioning, review, and care of art in public places. Learn more at boston.gov/arts.

About Goddard House

Goddard House embraces the aging experience for seniors living in the Boston area by operating a high-quality assisted living community and by creating innovative programs which support our need for purpose, engagement, autonomy, and choice as we age. Learn more at goddardhouse.org.

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COCO

My Best Friend

Everywhere I go,
My best friend follows me.
Like a shadow black
She's never far, you see.

Swift of foot
And jumping high
Ten feet tall
To nearest sky!

Slender body, strong and lean,
Fastest dog; A racing Queen

Whippet beauty, Whippet grace,
Always running,
Wins the race!

Coco, Coco
Gift from God
I love you so,
My little dog!!!

- **Jeanine E. Browne, 72**
South End

BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS

Today is my second assignment to the Boulevard of Broken Dreams,
it's a place where you see a sad & lonely scene,
as I approached the area, I noticed a disabled vet sleeping on the bench
in the pouring rain,
when I see this, I can really feel the pain,
when I poked him on the shoulder his eyes opened wide,
he gave me a big smile & that's no lie,
I immediately bent down & put a pair of socks on his feet,
he immediately grabbed my hand & kissed it with joy,
he really acted like a little boy,
I then handed him
a container of food,
wow, that sure put him in a good mood,
and, then I handed him a cigarette,
he, then jumped up & broke down & cried,
when it was
time to go,
I told him I will always be back
not to worry,
I will always watch your back!

- **Florence Clarke, 89**
West End



AS TIME GOES BY

How can I have
been here 50 years?
Lost track of time
during various jobs,
numerous moves,
travels,
marriage and divorce,
injury and surgery
publishing a memoir,
family concerns.
Like some of your stories,
in part.

Along the way
I set clear boundaries,
got re-housed
to my "forever home,"
joined a group of
like minded people.
Grown up at last...

- **Sunny Davidson, 72**
North End

ESSENCE OF HOPE

H= Happiness and Helping
O= Optimistic; Oh yes
P= Propels and Power to the Peeps
E= Encourages and Esteems Everyone

HOPE is the color of endless possibilities
When you feel tired, listen to your heart's abilities
Hope speaks to each of us, at different times, in different spaces
Never give up, feel your power in all your places

Hope is good
Hope is understood
Hope keeps us free
It's so good for you and me

Now go ahead and get some HOPE
You got it because you're so dope
Let's bring it out, let's write it out
I know you got it so leap and SHOUT

You got it, you got it, sound like it,
Can you feel it, can you grab it,
Round and round HOPE go
Don't stop it, share it, let it show

HOPE is here to stay, filled with joy every day

Say it LOUD, I got HOPE and I am PROUD

Sing it with me 1. 2. 3., 1. 2. 3.

I HOPE you're singing along with me
Keep on singing it with each other just be you, yourself

HOPE lives, HOPE gives, HOPE laughs, rarely cries

HOPE got wings like birds, see how it flies

HOPE is here, there, and everywhere
HOPE is staying right here I do declare
HOPE got it, HOPE got it, HOPE got it.

- **Mattie Deed**, 71
Roxbury

GRANDMA'S HANDS

Grandma's hands, when young and strong,
plucked wispy clouds of cotton without
complaint
They cared for many children, and to them,
she was a saint

Grandma's delicate hands guided breached
babies out of a frightened young mother's
womb
Several were saved and she saw them, like
lilies, begin to bloom

Her hands gently diapered and fed a half-
dozen kids that she did not birth
And into her hands appeared six more that
she introduced to this earth

These skilled hands labored late into the
night from early in the day
They gracefully folded in prayer and kept
the enemy of souls at bay

These hands belonged to one who always
said a kind word
On Sabbath they worshipped and were
folded when prayer was heard

Grandma's hands floated and glided over
burns like the player of a lyre
Their synergy provided the anesthesia
before talking out the fire

These hands made teas, salves, and
concoctions from the ground
Her hands provided the best source of
healing that could be found

Grandma's hands cooked, canned, and
wrung the necks of chickens
Her hands fought off starvation, and even
scrubbed putrid chitlins

With a fifth-grade education, these hands
made the most of school
As a lifetime learner, they gave no audience
to any self-proclaimed fool

As grandma's hands aged, they became
gnarly and slender
They left their mark on many, without
respect to gender

Her skeletal tendrils had matured by nature
and from above
There's no dispute that that they were
guided by The Master's love
I wept and cradled those mahogany hands
while she took her last breath
But the aura and loveliness of Grandma's
hands linger, even in the throes of death

- **Barbara Defoe**, 78
Dorchester

SERIES OF HAIKUS ABOUT BOSTON

Summer in Boston.
We study relaxation.
Less academic.

History buffs arrive.
They seek events and places.
Wide eyed, they find them.

Franklin Park is green.
There's golf, animals, good times.
Winter may be white.

Harvest is in spring.
Graduations abound here.
Optimism blooms.

Main Street in Boston
is Boylston Street with strollers.
They walk, browse and chill.

Bicyclists roll here.
Summer they cruise Beacon Street.
Inhaling linden scents.

Sports and study here.
All seasons pretty much.
Sound mind in sound body.

A long race ends here.
In spring when daffodils bloom.
Do racers see them?

Baseball and running.
Spring thaws with a cool sea breeze.
Boston seeks a winner.

Boston has the ocean tides.
They bring in the fog sometimes.
But not too often.

- **Richard Dornan, 76**

HARRY'S HUG

I sat myself down
On a green wooden bench
Next to a noisy playground
A small boy came bouncing towards me

With arms stretched,
And a face so full of hope
He said, "Is that you, Nana?"

Wispy white hair and masks
Disguise an army of Nanas
He said his name was Harry
And he hugged me anyhow

The clock ticks
the refrigerator hums
We sleep and we eat
and we stare at the telly

We are trapped
in a scary sci-fi movie
Trying to outrun
An invisible enemy

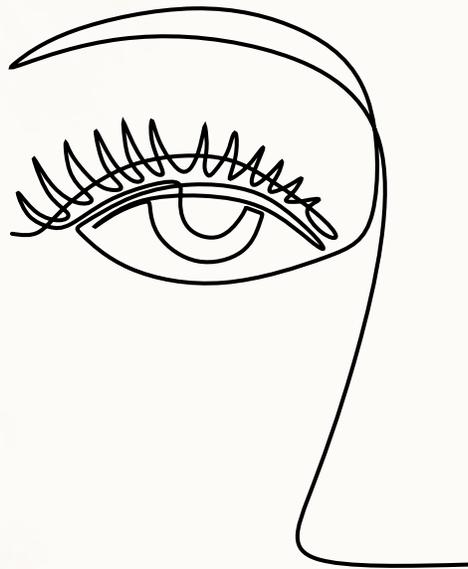
But when I think of Harry's hug
And I am hopeful once again

- **Ann Whitaker Doyle, 73**
South Boston

THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH YOU

To be poor anywhere is a shame
most people don't know your name
nameless and faceless
Open up the eyes of your heart
see me - see me - touch me
For I am you, and you are me!
In Boston I am a beggar
At the table, homeless, hungry and hurting
Yes this is me!

- **John Egan**, 82
Charlestown



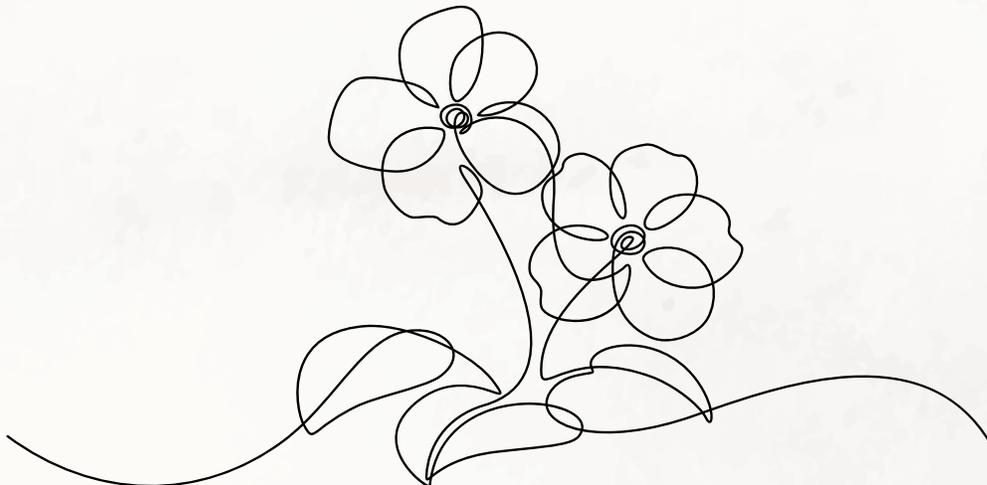
THE GARDEN SONNET

Like babes in woods, a seed in garden grows
With constant tending and undying love
Yet lack of rain, strong winds and other woes
A threat present; help needed from above!
For one to thrive, a garden has its needs:
Some time, much care, some patience, sun or shade

A constant eye to keep away the weeds
While flowers bloom; grass greener blade by blade
But all good things in life do run their course
Just like the seasons – one by one must pass;
A grateful heart, devoid of all remorse
To sleep the winters 'low a mound of grass

And, just like gardens always taking turn
So with our lives – one day in gorgeous urn!

- **Mary Hirsch, 76**
Beacon Hill



STEPHEN AND MARY

The house rang silent
A thunder of a sound.
As the door slowly opened,
In the entrance stood two people
Who have ebbed gently with time.
He the husband,
She the wife,
For so long,
Yet not so long.
Lack of tears were a sign.
Tears were not needed.
Love carried the answers.
It was just a day,
Like any other day.
But it wasn't just a day,
Like any other day.
For Steven and Mary,
It was the beginning
Of an ending,
Started long ago.
A kiss on the cheek was enough
For people withered by time,
Which they for so long shared,
Know loves
Real meaning.
Goodbye my dear,
The taxis waiting.

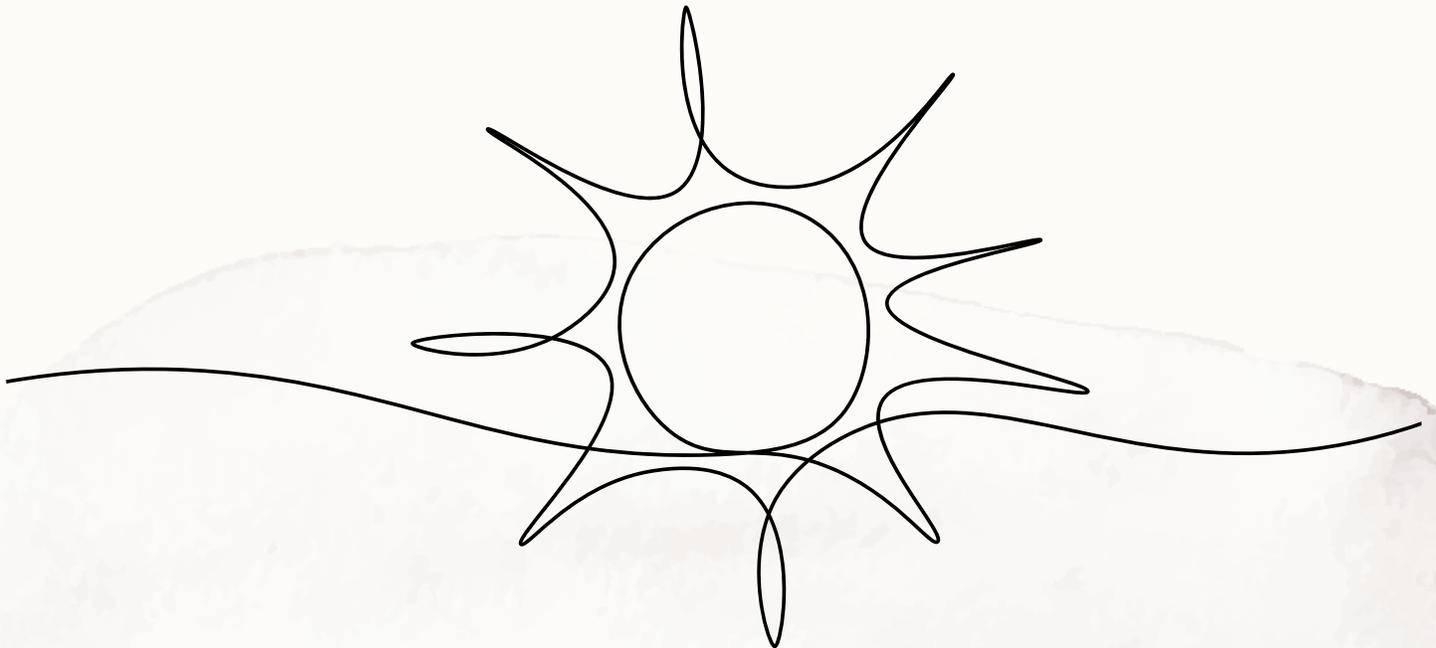
Button up your coat, Stephen,
And put your hat on.
It's a cold day outside.
Slowly, in measured steps
Stephen descended.
The walk from the second landing
To the first seemed
Sad and long this day.
At the bottom he turned
And looked up.
The taxi beeped
And he was gone.
That night the wind's whisper
Told Mary
Stephen had died.

- **John F. Mahoney**, 76
Charlestown

A SPRING BEGINNING

We've met Frost's summer birches swinging
After wet winter branches froze -- ice clinging.
These visions set my spirit singing.
What other joys will poet Ruth be bringing?
I greet this April thaw:
Warmed. Found! In awe.

- Cecily Merrell, 90



A BLESSING FOR THE TABLE

Consider the pickers.
Those who stand in line in the Salinas
Valley sun
Hoping to hop on a truck headed
Out to the rows of beans and cauliflower
Across roots and shuffling under the top
leaves
Learning the rhythm of removal.

Consider the packers.
Those that shake their heads when the
foreman tells them to throw out
Fruit fine enough to eat with irregular
shapes and a few bruises
That offend fancy shoppers.
Consider the packers' irregular shapes
from the bending and stretching
And their bruises from a crate coming
down the chute
Before the last one is full.

Consider the shippers and truckers.
Those who memorize the highway signs
across the Great Plains.
Hoping to someday see the sand cranes in
western Nebraska
But knowing it will never come to pass.
Knowing their irregular migrations will
never match.

Consider the warehouse workers.
Those who unpack, repack, ready the
produce for each store in their region.
Working irregular shifts that preclude
coaching soccer.
Branding edibles and marking prices,
Wondering what made celery go up or
down,
Wondering who actually pays the
premium for apples branded and wrapped
in cellophane.

Sometimes they may consider you or
someone like you
Enjoying the meal they have brought you.
At the table with the family, making
jokes, telling stories, eating well.
Eat as if they are there with you, passing
beans and cauliflower,
Biting an apple with a smile.

- **Connie Nelson**, 72
Jamaica Plain

GRANDMOTHERS CAN

I took out a pencil and paper and started writing ...

What can grandmothers not do?

I thought and thought took out a pen and paper to make a list ...

got a cup of coffee and began ...

Wrote down "open a jar" - crossed out ...

If she wanted what was in the jar she would bang it ...

Grab a towel with something ...

up and down stairs?

Why not ...

Something on the top shelf - did they want or need it?

Was it out of her reach?

She thought for a moment ... she didn't have a ladder -

Something to stand on ... Yes ... would she fall off?

She had been doing this for years ...

Go to the store?

Why not her age ... has that never stopped her before ...

There nothing stopping her from a good challenge - she couldn't handle ...

People think because of one's age or a grandma they can't do things ...

Do they underestimate us?

That they can't maneuver ... figure things out ... work around things.

They must think we hadn't planned this before ...

Think they can out maneuver us ... think ... been there ... done that ...

We have all the answers!

Wrong when we were young

We planned them on our grandmas or they planned them on us ...

You ask me what is it a grandma not do?

I tell you never underestimate them

That's when they are at their best!

I pick up my coffee ...

Drank it up ... wash out the cup ...

Pick up the pen and paper put it away ...

Laugh ... as I said to myself

"What can grandmothers not do?"

- **Lillian O'Neal**, 82

Jamaica Plain

SONNET OF MY SON

I wonder if he thinks of me
And all the things I did
I wonder if with eyes of glee
He remembers being a kid

If he thinks of all the fun he had
Trips to play an arcade game
And every time that he was sad
We'd pray "In Jesus' Name"

Now a dad himself, a child to grow
I wonder if he took my lead
And buys cool toys just to show
That learning is a special need

I wonder; with emotions tossed to and fro
Because perhaps I may never know.

- **Rita Pagliuca, 75**
North End



GRANDAD

You are altogether beautiful

You, as an older man, have done noble things with faithful instruction

You never speak with idleness, letting your soul come through, showing your heart
and mind are pretty

You are altogether beautiful

Your gentle quiet spirit is an external imperishable beauty you generously share

Age makes you wonderfully complex with the dignity and strength of the pyramids

Grandad don't be afraid

- **Jacquiline Perry, 64**

Roxbury



BOSTON SUBWAY

(Spanish Version)

Entre rieles, ruido, tubos y cemento
entre soledad, silencio, tedio y cansancio

Entre angustia,
bulla y aburrimiento

Entre ilusiones,
sexo y esperanza

Entre gente
sombras y murallas

Aqui en el subway espero
rumiando estas frescas letras
que quisiera ofrendarte
ésta mañana a ti.

- **Juan Rodriguez**, 84
Jamaica Plain

(English Version)

Between the rails, noise, tunnels, and cement
between loneliness, silence, tedium, and fatigue

Between anguish
noise and boredom

Between illusions
sex and hope

Between people
shadows and barriers

I wait here in the subway
ruminating on the new lyrics
which I would like to offer
on this morning to you.

TAKING A DIP BACK INTO TIME

Excerpt:

Sadly, my father passed away when I was at the tender age of three.
So, my mother is the parent who continued to raise me.
My father and mother were blessed with nine children from God.
We were well taken care of, they loved us with all of their heart.

We were taught to trust God at an early age.
When times were tough, we just turned the page.
Growing up in that era could get pretty rough,
But I thank God that we always had enough.

Back then we had no indoor plumbing, which today sounds extreme.
We used indoor chamber pots for toileting and “out houses,” if you know what I mean.
We walked for a long distance to get water from a spring,
But eventually had a well dug beside our house, then a water pump, this made our hearts sing!

In my younger years, we often walked to church and we walked to school.
We learned to obey the “Golden Rule.”
Most of our transportation was our own two feet.
So, to get a ride into town was more than a treat!

Back then neighbors were like your own family.
We did more things together with genuine sincerity.
We were taught to always treat others with respect,
And to use good manners, never to neglect.

From North Carolina to Boston, Massachusetts I relocated in my late teen years.
Moving from the country to a big city came with both excitement and fear.
I quickly secured employment, few years later got married and enjoyed my own family.
My husband and I raised four children, while we also both earned a college degree.

I am an aged widow now, with grown children and a few grands,
And like my parents, I've taken others into my home, until they were able to stand.
Like my parents, I taught my children to always trust God,
And to always respect others, no matter how hard.

Indeed, those days are looked back on for some as "The Good Old Days,"
Yet things remain unchanged today in so many ways.
With troubled and heavy heart, I painfully find it hard to see,
That today we are continuously struggling with equality.

Back then we were called "colored people," today, "people of color."
Where is the change in this my dear sister and brother?
We all bleed the same,
So, what's up with the name?

In today's world I think that we can make things better,
By taking a good look at the heart of the matter.
We can continue to hate or we can choose to love,
Why not choose the latter?

"Now is now" and "then was then,"
In this world a new chapter must begin.
Strife and hatred must come to an end,
So, let's let the love of Jesus Christ bring us together my friend.

- **Naomi Robertson**, 73
Hyde Park

PLANT CARE

Plants we are
Green-tipped and growing
When we are sun-blessed

Plants we are
Green-tipped and reaching
When we are water-blessed

Creating our own plant selves – by our
own choices
New growth
Spring growth

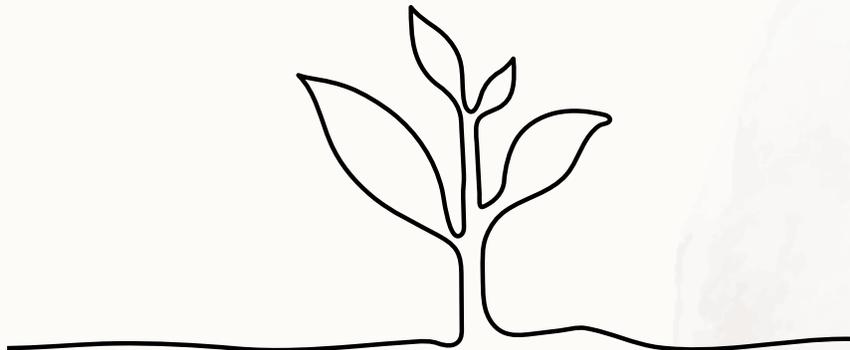
Spring new growth
Fall – statis – balance
Wintering quietly

Spring new growth
Sun – water – positivity
Sometimes, though, we feel our plant
selves wilting
Downward limping
At last, falling

Then we live
Hoping for water from other sources – not
just from our own inner fortitude
Hope that others will rescue wilting
leaves – not too late
We hope for human sunlight from
interpersonal sources
Failing this, we wither – ever so slightly
Sometimes with alarming browning that
cannot be revived

Then, our hoping, reaching branching
Tells us once again
To fall solely on our own resources
Watering ourselves

- **Cynthia Stillinger**, 81
Roslindale



MY GRANDMOTHER'S HANDS

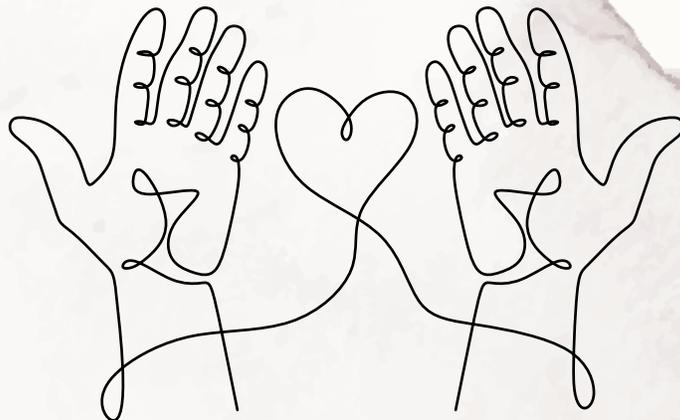
She taught me to tell time.
Watching the hands form a
Circle to create half a day.

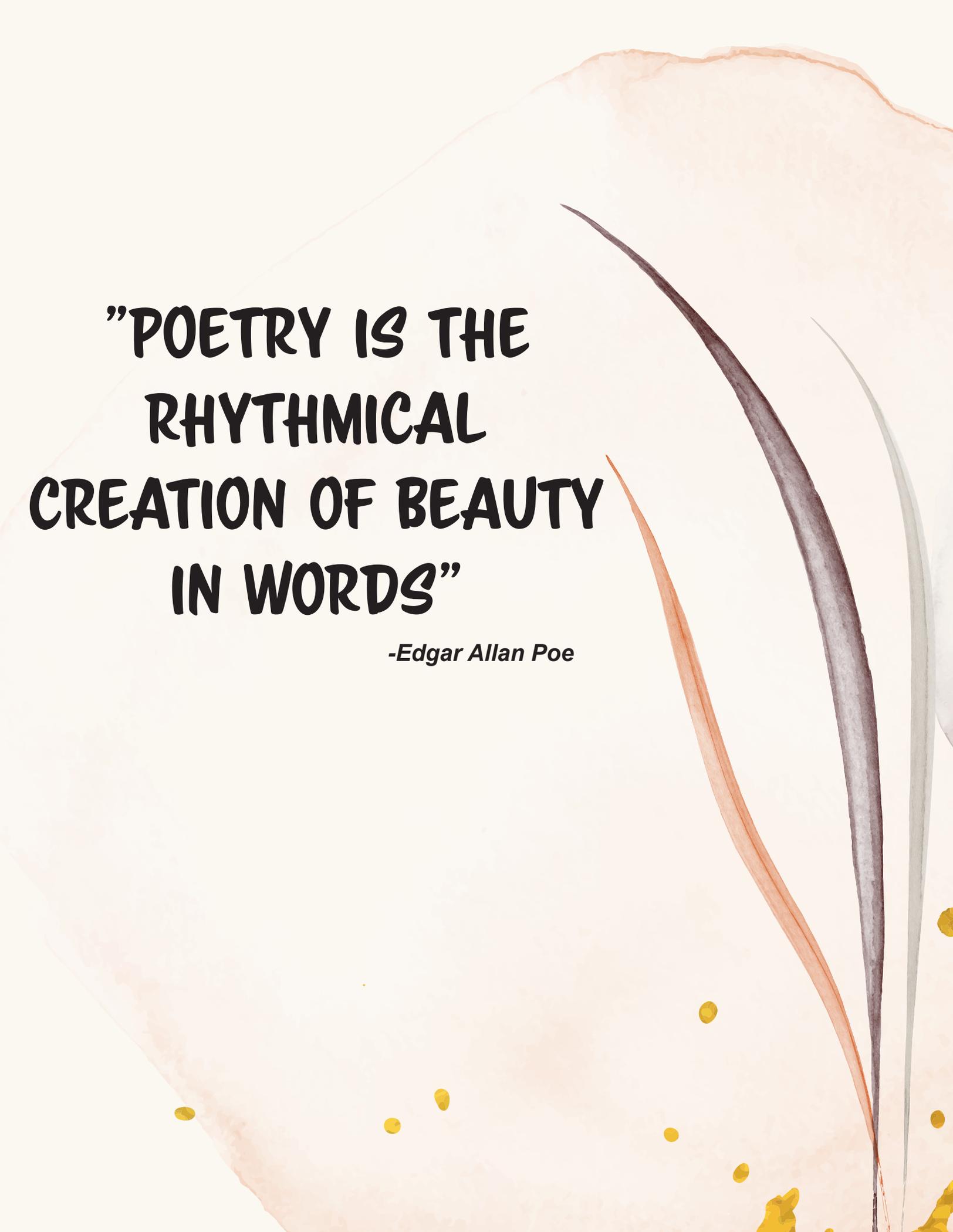
Her hands taught untold youths
The language of time,
Before taking on her own,

The oldest who bore me.
Into what became my family
Which then created my two and two more

Her teaching spanning three generations
All contributing to the
Half day of time.

- **Margaret D. Warner**, 84
North End





**"POETRY IS THE
RHYTHMICAL
CREATION OF BEAUTY
IN WORDS"**

-Edgar Allan Poe