An Invitation to Poetry: A New Favorite Poem Project Anthology

A multimedia collection of poems introduced by American readers, featuring a DVD including a video introduction by Robert Pinsky. For a reader unaccustomed to reading poetry, or who has fallen away from the custom, this collection offers an inviting way into the art, or back into it. For readers devoted to poetry, it offers illuminating examples of the infinitely various ways a poem reaches a reader. In both the book and the videos on the accompanying DVD, poems by Sappho, Shakespeare, Keats, Whitman, and Dickinson as well as contemporary poets are introduced by people from across the United States—a construction worker, a Supreme Court justice, a glassblower, a marine—each of whom speaks about his or her connection to the poem. Their comments are variously poignant, funny, heartening, tart, penetrating, and eccentric, showing some of the ways poetry is alive for American readers. An Invitation to Poetry will inspire a fresh experience of poetry's pleasure and insight.

My Personal Review:
Robert Pinsky, the 39th Poet Laureate of the United States, founded the Favorite Poem Project shortly after the Library of Congress appointed him to the post in 1997. Since its inception, the Project has been dedicated to celebrating, documenting and promoting poetry's role in Americans' lives.

"An Invitation to Poetry: A New Favorite Poem Project Anthology" is the third volume of Pinsky's publicly and critically acclaimed series in which Americans, from ages 5 to 97, from many states, of diverse occupations and education, are asked to submit their favorite poems and to explain why the poem is important to them. Some of the readers' comments are as moving as the poetry itself.

The work included in this volume represents poets from all over the world throughout the centuries. The enclosed documentary DVD, which is a companion piece to this compilation, features twenty-eight contributors reading their own selections along with an introduction by Pinsky. The
readers range in age and background from two 11-year-olds to 97-year-old former Poet Laureate Stanley Kunitz to a Supreme Court justice. One of the segments that really moved and inspired me is by a Vietnam War Veteran who cries in front of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., while reading "Facing It" by Yusef Komunyakaa: "I go down the 58,022 names / half-expecting to find / my own in letters like smoke."

I found many of my own favorites in this extraordinary collection. I was also introduced to several wonderful new poems I might never have read otherwise. Included here are works by: Sappho, Shakespeare, Goethe, Keats, Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, as well as more contemporary poems like those by Yehuda Amichai, and Saadi Youssef. The book emphasizes the pure joy of reading poetry. And, it appears, that poetry appreciation is alive and well in America!

I highly recommend this anthology to poetry lovers everywhere, and also the first two publications from The Favorite Poem Project: "America's Favorite Poems," and, "Poems To Read." These extraordinary volumes are all edited by Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz. And if you do not particularly care for poetry, this collection may change your mind.

JANA

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