

Preface to the Comstock Review

Over a quarter of a century ago, a small group of poets gathered at Jenny MacPherson's home on Comstock Avenue across the street from Syracuse University. We met weekly to workshop our poems and to enjoy camaraderie with other writers. We quickly realized that there was a real need for a poetry journal that reflected our beliefs about the nature of poetry and poets. There was a core group and a steady stream of new people, most of whom could be delicately described as individuals reluctant to work toward our similar goals. We sent scores of them on their way. The core group stayed together and were, for the most part, high functioning individuals capable of working in some semblance of unity. In fact, we have considered ourselves family and lived our lives in being the kind of friends for each other that most people dream of having in their lives.

The journal that we envisioned was not under the imprimatur of a university press or governed by grants ... a journal that we could control and make accessible to myriad writers. We determined that the poem and not the poet would govern our selection for publication. We elected to seek poetry that is understandable, coherent and cohesive. We agreed that the journal would reflect our vision of poetry as accessible, eloquent and enjoyable. We chose Karen Fausnaugh to be the editor and called it *Poetpourri*. Within a couple of years, we went from being a Central New York 40 page journal to a 100+page national journal. Karen and husband Rusty moved west and I took the reins for many years. When I moved to Buffalo, Peg Flanders took over as Managing Editor followed by John Bellinger and our current Editor, Georgia Popoff. Each of those individuals added to the quality of our journal without losing its purpose.

We did our first issues with money earned selling cupcakes and holding turkey raffles. We were independent. We were committed. And, we had the prescription for a journal that would reflect what each of us believed was what poets both wanted and needed. Right from the jump, we did blind readings. We did not care if the poem was the first one composed by a fourteen year old or one created by the poet laureate. We knew that other journals survived by getting well-known poets and by a kind of cross-pollination of poets. Editors traded poems from popular writers to fill the pages, to appear elite. The **Comstock Writers Group** took what came and relied on the quality of the poem and not the name of the poet. It has been a great formula for success. We are both trusted and respected for having the guts to fly against the prevailing winds. It is not until a poem is selected for or a chapbook has been chosen that we know the name of the poet.

It took a few years for us to realize that our cutesy *Poetpourri* no longer reflected the true nature of the journal. The **Comstock Review** was born without fanfare. It just made sense. Our goal has always been to serve the poet as we would like to be served. We have never wavered from total honesty and fairness in our dealings with our poets. We love them and seek nothing in return ... although subscriptions and gifts are most welcome. We

are definitely out of the cupcake and turkey business! Some years ago, I created a gift for you. It is the ***Handbook for Poets***. It can be downloaded for use in classrooms and workshops or simply read online at <http://www.comstockreview.org>. Our core group is getting a bit long in the tooth these days but we continue to seek and find those rare individuals willing to give up time and energy to perpetuate a unique and poet-centered life ... to work for poets they will never meet but whose beauty and wisdom with words are worth every minute of selflessness. As we begin the march toward fifty years we salute our poets, our friends, and thank you for the joy you have brought to us and the family that is the Comstock Writers Group.

Kathleen Bryce Niles, Editor Emerita