

On Pop-Up Poetry, Old-School Typewriters, and Feeling Valued

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ABSTRACT

This piece is a creative reflection on my experience with pop-up poetry at the 2022 Mokakiiks SoTL Symposium in Banff.

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I recently attended the Mokakiiks Symposium for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Banff, Alberta. My team chose to submit to this conference because it checked some important boxes for us. It was in-person and SoTL-focused, with a creative bent and intentional focus on building connection. As life would have it, I ended up being the solo representative of our US-based group and entered the conference with some trepidation. I was one of the few US scholars in a mostly Canadian context, new to SoTL, and didn't know any other attendees. I had some gaffs with my conference arrangements (my fault), which topped off a pattern present throughout the semester. My mother passed away on the first weekend of the fall term, and my personal bandwidth had been limited, which for me took the form of dropping details. But who can turn down Banff? And hanging out with a bunch of Canadian teacher scholars didn't seem like such a bad thing.

When I heard about the Pop-Up Poetry option at the symposium, it sounded fun. I was starting to feel connected with others at the conference, and I expected it to be sort of like getting a caricature drawing at the county fair—amusing and silly. I was completely wrong.

Two poets with manual typewriters sat at a table while those of us waiting for our poems funneled through individually. The instructions were to come up with a word or two that described something about you, and a poem would be generated. I'm on the cusp of some personal changes so my initial word was *direction*, which I associated with changing direction, seeking direction, looking for clarity, etc. I didn't realize that the word was just a starting point for a conversation that would be the seed of my poem. My poet asked me to say more about this word, and without intending to I unrolled my story of being my mother's primary caregiver for 13 years, a complex relationship, and her passing at the beginning of fall semester, which was also my return from a one-year sabbatical. She asked more about these topics, my mother's personality, specific memories, and lifted some of my phrases into the poem. All of this conversation was then integrated into a beautiful word picture of a balloon ride with my mother, her bright floral dresses, and the complexity of emotions in that—and this—moment. I felt heard. I felt connected. I felt human and valued.

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