

An Interview with Grace Freeman

Grace Freeman, former Poet Laureate of South Carolina, performed at Writer's Forum on the 25th of March. She read a variety of her poetry from her earliest to more recent work. Audience members requested most of these selections beforehand.

Grace Freeman was appointed Poet Laureate of South Carolina in 1985 by then-governor Richard Riley, who is currently the Secretary of Education. Although she did not campaign for the role, she did vote for Riley, and remained Poet Laureate until his term ended.

The title of Poet Laureate pays the recipient two thousand dollars a year, but when asked if being a former poet laureate could help her to meet men (if she wasn't married) Grace replied, "No, I think it would frighten them off." As for whom she would nominate as the country's Poet Laureate, she answered either current United States Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, because "He's what a Poet Laureate should be," or Ronnie Newman, because she has always wanted to meet him.

Grace says, "I love getting a poem out of people who say that they hate poetry." Also, she enjoys being able to persuade dyed-in-the-wool "if it rhymes it's not poetry" people that it is the words, message and feeling that make a poem, not the form. The ability to influence others through poetry is one of Grace's great joys. Comparing the power of dead poets to those still alive, she said, "It's fun being a living poet because I can get people to think."

She credits her fellow poets with helping her to expand her poetic range. "It was good to know you could write about anything as long as it was a human experience." With that knowledge, Grace's style has changed dramatically from her earlier days. "I think it's easier to write little rhyming poems, but I'll never write them again."

Grace was emphatic that St. Andrews is special for its creative atmosphere. She believes the students are fortunate to have professors like Ronald Bayes.

Grace's favorite word is "Love."