

Diane Mahon, Chair  
Board of Selectmen  
Town of Arlington  
730 Massachusetts Avenue  
Arlington, MA 02476

July 29, 2019

Dear Ms. Mahon:

The Town of Arlington Poet Laureate Committee wishes to recommend Steven Ratiner as the next Poet Laureate of Arlington. As Cathie Desjardins concludes her service to the town, we strongly recommend that Steven Ratiner be appointed as the third Poet Laureate for the Town. Mr. Ratiner stood out against the other applicants; he brings an entire career's worth of experience, really creative ideas for outreach, publicity and grant writing savvy and he is excited to lead workshops in the library and all over town, to work with our local media sources to bring poetry to a wider audience and to reach out to the schools to work with them on poetry projects. We are all thrilled by his application and interview and we hope you will be as excited as we are.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach me anytime at \_\_\_\_\_ or at \_\_\_\_\_

Please let me know that you received this and what the next steps are. We are hoping when Steven is appointed, the Select Board could take a moment to appreciate Cathie Desjardins for her two years of service. Thank you for keeping me informed about the Select Board's decision and timing.

Best,



Liza Halley, Chair  
Poet Laureate Committee

*With committee members John Burt, Jane Howard, Carol Band, & Pamela Powell*

Steven Ratiner  
Poet & Writing Consultant

Arlington, Massachusetts 02476

As a poet and educator, STEVEN RATINER's long-standing commitment has been to expand the ways audiences experience poetry and the arts. He was the founding director of 2000 Bridges, an artists' collaborative which created "Big Night in the Book House," the multi-disciplinary millennium celebration from First Night Boston 2000 and The Boston Public Library that brought together thirty-five poets, dancers, musicians, videographers and visual artists. As the literary coordinator of the All Souls Project, he created a series of free writing workshops, readings and performances in response to the 9/11 tragedy in partnership with the Boston Public Library and PEN-New England. He has worked with a variety of artists on multi-disciplinary projects, including poetry/dance pieces with White Wave, the Young Soon Kim Dance Company of New York City; Boston's Dance Collective; and the Ballet Dance Theater of Boston. He has also created multi-media performances with jazz artist Stan Strickland, poetry/sculpture installations with Marty Cain, and a book collaboration with photographer Alan Kupchick.

Steven has published three poetry collections; the most recent, *Button, Button* (OpenEye Press) was a collaborative chapbook with artist Marty Cain. His work has appeared in dozens of journals in America and abroad including *Parnassus*, *Agni*, *Blackbird*, *Hanging Loose*, *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *QRLS* (Singapore) and *Poetry Australia* – and will appear in the forthcoming anthology *Except for Love: New England Poets Inspired by Donald Hall* from Encircle Publications. He's written poetry essays for a number of publications and spent several years as the poetry book critic, first, for *The Christian Science Monitor*, and then *The Washington Post*. *Giving Their Word – Conversations with Contemporary Poets* was re-issued in a paperback edition (University of Massachusetts Press) and features interviews with many of poetry's most vital talents including Seamus Heaney, Mary Oliver, Charles Simic, Bei Dao, Maxine Kumin, and the last full-length interview with Bill Stafford before his death.

Since 1980, he has taught over 300 intensive poetry residencies in schools throughout New England as part of the Massachusetts Artists-in-Residence Program. He served as on-air poet-in-residence for *Words That Cook*, a nationally-syndicated public access program, created by The Reading Railroad, which focuses on children's literacy. For several years, he was on the adjunct faculty of Wheelock and Lesley College's Graduate Program and has given lectures on poetry and workshop techniques in many schools around New England including Boston University, Tufts University, Lesley University, Boston College and Long Island University -- and for such organizations as the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Youth Programs, The New England Schools Development Council and the New England Library Association.



One of his special focuses is the poetry and cultural heritage of East Asia and he has taught numerous workshops for Primary Source's China seminars and Bryant University's U.S.-China Institute. In the textbook, *The Enduring Legacy of Ancient China: Primary Source Lessons for Teachers and Students* (Cheng & Tsui), Mr. Ratiner authored the chapter on Chinese poetry. He was awarded one of the inaugural fellowships from The Massachusetts Cultural Council to encourage artists to develop new curricula. A Poet's Retreat, the program he created, explores the parallel experiences of poets in ancient Chinese and contemporary American cultures.

**A bit more information from his application:**

I've been honored with two fellowship selections from The Massachusetts Cultural Council – one for my poetry and one for my creation of a poetry curriculum for exploring ancient Chinese poems in a contemporary Western educational setting.

I was awarded grants to create site-specific poems for: the opening of Maudslay State Park which were, during their opening weekend, festooned liked leaves on bushes and trees all around the park; and for the Lynn Parks and Recreation as part of their seashore celebration.

In their review of my interview collection *GIVING THEIR WORD*, *The Library Journal* wrote: "Each conversation captivantly interweaves the life of the poet with the writing process and the creativity that his of her poetry represents" and called it "an absolute pleasure to read. Highly recommended for all libraries." Askold Melnyczuk, founding editor of *Agni Review*, wrote that: "'Reports from the Frontier' might be an alternative title to this stimulating and even exhilarating book. One returns from it in much the same state as one does after immersion in a work of art: energized, emboldened, and hungry for more. . . . I plan to assign it to my students as soon as it is published."

WBUR filmed me reading my poem about the bombing of the World Trade Center for their programming marking the tenth anniversary of the tragedy. Recently, they invited me to speak about and screen my video-poem of Mary Oliver reading "The Swan" at her Provincetown home for a celebration of the late poet's life and work.

Lastly, I was on the founding Literary Committee of The Arlington Center for the Arts and remained active ever since, helping them to create the yearly 'Heart of the Arts' programs, reading series in both the Center, the Robbins Library, and a variety of area sites.

## Some poems

### NOW

Near the end, she stopped  
eating altogether. One evening,  
when I brought chicken soup shoaled  
with wild rice, a quick shake of her head,  
whispering: 'what for?' And yet, in sleep,  
her mouth moved constantly, making a meal  
of departure. Watching her, I wondered:  
was the opposite of hunger 'grief?' 'Grace?'  
'Love' or 'need' – what feeds on our silence?  
Not that it would have made a difference,  
but I wish I'd proposed we take turns  
with the spoon, a mouthful, a mouthful,  
countering 'what for' with 'for now.'

I AM

MOMENTARILY

all the people you believe  
me to be: the other daughter,  
buried sister, childhood  
row house friend, and then  
the good-looking boy who  
fissured your mill town heart,  
the heart you held me to  
a hundred lifetimes ago.

I am guest at the beginning of a rant,  
then suspect stranger at the end where you  
introduce yourself again, and again,  
asking whether I work here.

I smell gardenias, onion, urine.

You rebuff my hand.

Another hallway castoff,

I'm at a loss for words.

This morning, we become mother  
and daughter again – if momentarily,  
and in someone's half-  
remembered story. Together, we are  
the prodigal and the welcome home.

We may even be the fatted calf  
ablaze on the spit, and the murmured  
gratitude to celebrate our  
very next forgetting.

(for Karen and Bernice Leibold)

## FATHERING

After the stroke, when language  
froze over in this throat, he had a hard time

with the snow — He couldn't say,  
and the sky wouldn't stop saying —

We went walking, and the tracks  
in our wake — And the cardinal-

red calligraphy scribbled between trees —  
And the ticking like Morse across hat brim —

And the time I was certain that hiss  
was about to coalesce into 'Steven' —

And the dream I kept having: moon-  
slick trail rising between birch ribs, breath

becoming smoke, ink becoming breath —  
Writing these words across the page —

And even before the sentence is complete,  
the footprints filling up with white —

## OFFICE OF THE SELECT BOARD

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TOWN OF ARLINGTON  
MASSACHUSETTS 02476-4908

August 1, 2019

Steven Ratiner

Arlington, MA 02476

Re: Appointment: Arlington Poet Laureate

Dear Mr. Ratiner:

As a matter of the standard appointment procedure, the Select Board requests that you attend a meeting of the Select Board at Town Hall, Select Board Chambers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 730 Massachusetts Avenue, on Monday, August 12th at 7:15 p.m.

It is a requirement of the Select Board that you be present at this meeting. Your presence will give the Board an opportunity to meet and discuss matters with you about the area of activity in which you will be involved.

Please contact this office to confirm the date and time with Fran, Ashley, or Lauren at the above number.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,  
SELECT BOARD

*Marie A. Krepelka*  
Marie A. Krepelka  
Board Administrator

MAK:ls