

A Medical School Professor Calls It A Day

Category: Poems

written by Neal Whitman | January 21, 2011

Neal Whitman

First Grade, long ago:
The bell was rung.
School's out.
The Last Day of School!
A lie, of course.
The end of summer proved it so.
But today truly is
My Last Day of School.
Today I retired:
took my last breath
as a professor.
But what had I professed?
First, that a preceptor without example is a vain thing.
True teachers dare to be exemplars.
Second, that inspiration is an active process.
A principle of respiratory physiology,
but also a precept of pedagogy.
Finally, a variation of the Shaker saying—
Every breath a prayer.
Every breath a lesson.

About the poet:

Neal Whitman is a University of Utah School of Medicine Professor Emeritus now living in Pacific Grove, California, where he tootles around the Monterey Peninsula in a white hatchback with the auto plate "PG POET" set in a frame inscribed "Poetic License." Since retiring from academic medicine in 2008, he has published over 300 Western-form and haiku poems. Neal and his wife, Elaine, collaborate on another Japanese art form, *haiga*, which combines imagery with haiku; Elaine's photography and Neal's haiku have been published in several journals and are featured in Pacific Grove's weekly newspaper [Cedar Street Times](#) to welcome each new season.

About the poem:

"In 1987, while conducting a faculty development workshop in Canterbury, New Hampshire, Elaine and I visited its historic Shaker village and met Eldress Bertha Lindsay, the last living Shaker eldress. She held my hand and whispered, 'Every breath a prayer.' This came to mind in 2008 when I taught my last class, a course for public health graduate students entitled 'The Arts and Public Health.' "

Poetry editors:

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