A Letter to Clark County's Poets

Writing is a lonely calling. Doubly so for those of us who chose poetry (or, some might argue, were chosen by poetry). We poets spend a lot of time in our own heads, obsessed with words and images, with sound and pattern, with ideas and objects that insist we shape them into verse. We agonize when the words don't fit together on the page the way we felt them in our heads. And we feel such private and intense ecstasy when somehow the random shards of image, description, and metaphor somehow fit together in the terrain of a completed draft.

And while this calling can feel so imperative and urgent to us, it's unlikely anyone else is clamoring and pleading for us to write. Of course, family, friends, and colleagues likely support this practice, as they'd support anything that seems to make us happy (the times that it even does that), but let's be real. They're not clamoring and pleading for our next poem the way they might for us to feed them or remember to take out the trash or answer that email first thing Monday morning. Which is to say, at best, the world around you is happy for you if you write a poem, but they may not even notice if you stopped writing altogether.

In my three years as Clark County poet laureate, I've facilitated over 50 generative writing workshops and met participants of all ages and backgrounds. People who have been writing longer than I've been alive and people who just started writing that day. And together, in those spaces, the normally isolated experience of writing became communal. We were writing and reading together. We were sharing the wonder and frustration of this calling and, by coming together, we were reinforcing for each other that this practice matters.

It has been such an honor serving as poet laureate for my community. We're fortunate to live in an area where we have a public position championing poetry at a local level. Through this service, I've grown more confident explaining why poetry (reading and writing it) is critical, especially so in a world that doesn't normally value it. This role has allowed me to re-center poetry in my own life and inspire me to keep writing and supporting others in this most ancient and wondrous of arts.

My time in this role ends in spring of 2024 and I encourage you to apply to serve as our next poet laureate. What you give in your service will come back to you in multiples. You will be changed by the experience.

—Armin Tolentino