

Fran Quinn continues to impact the poetry world and Worcester. He helped create the Worcester County Poetry Association.

Fran Quinn was born in Easthampton, Massachusetts on May 5, 1942. His family moved to Clinton when he was six and a half years old. He stayed with his family throughout Assumption College and then moved to Worcester afterwards. He grew up in a close family with two sisters, a mother and a father. His father, Edward, worked as a cutting and folding machine operator in several book binding shops and his mother, Marie, was a housewife who would get a job when the need arose. His mother never graduated from high school. Her father deserted the family again and again. She lost her mother when she was three. She would be placed in orphanages when her father deserted her. She worked as a maid and in mills at an early age. Quinn's mother would read to him and his two sisters which influenced his poetry reading later on. When Edward was 60 he was diagnosed with colon cancer. He was misdiagnosed for years and went into surgery to remove it. Two years later, it appeared again. Quinn was with his father when he died and "it changed his whole attitude towards death". Because of his belief in an afterlife, Quinn's father faced death with remarkably little fear. This is seen later in Fran Quinn's poetry such as "Delano's Bar and Restaurant, Amherst Mass., Good Friday, 1984, 1:25 p.m.", in The Goblet Crying for Wine and "The Anniversary of My Father's Death" in A Horse of Blue Ink.

His undergraduate and graduate education gave him a solid foundation in the classics. When he met Professor Michael True, one of the founding members of the Worcester County Poetry Association, this education expanded greatly. Professor True knew that his student liked poetry and asked him to join a group of people who had similar interest to start a reading series. This group included Dr. Samuel Bachrach, Christie White and Mary Lou O'Brien. None of the people in the group seriously considered writing, including Quinn at the time. In addition to that, Quinn was not showing any of his writing to anyone. The focus of the group at that time was to bring in poets to do readings rather than writing themselves. As the Association developed, it began to attract people who were interested in writing like Mary Fell, Christopher Gilbert, David Williams and John Hodgen.

Quinn cites three poets who strongly influenced his writing: Joe Langland, Robert Francis, and Robert Bly. Before the Association had been formed, Quinn did not know poets were accessible people. He was teaching at St. John's Preparatory School in Shrewsbury when something happened that would change his entire perspective on poetry. Professor True had tickets to Robert Bly's reading which was in the area, but True got ill and offered his tickets to Quinn so he could attend the reading and take some students along with him. Bly gave an incredible reading, taking time as well to explain the poems he read. After meeting Quinn and talking to him, Bly offered to visit St. John's Preparatory School the next time he would be in the Worcester area. Staying true to his word, Bly visited St. John's Preparatory School and spent an entire afternoon reading and talking about poetry to the enchanted crowd. The experience was so fantastic that even though the school day ended at about two-thirty in the afternoon,

everyone stayed until about five o'clock that evening. Quinn was fascinated by the amount of response the poets and their poetry were receiving.

Keeping that in mind, when Quinn taught briefly at Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, one of the major things he did was institute a poetry program. After Rivier College, Quinn taught at St. Peter-Marian Junior-Senior High school where he convinced the students to interview poets. He would have the students read all kinds of poetry and guide the students in a sense of direction and provided support during the interview. During one of those interviews, the students interviewed Robert Francis. Francis asked Quinn about his poetry and predicted that Quinn himself would be a poet since Quinn did not ask questions like a scholar but instead like a poet.

After this time, the Worcester County Poetry Association was busily bringing in as many poets as it could afford to read in area schools and libraries. It was Professor True who knew how to get in touch with the poets, but Quinn and company did the exciting part and actually met them to arrange the readings. Quinn and company would do reading before the poets would arrive to create interest in the poets would read in the area. Although the Association was running all these readings, the organization was entirely volunteer work – no one was paid besides the poets. During a conversation at a Friendly's restaurant, Quinn was wrangled into becoming the Association's third president and realized that there was plenty of work to be done. Paying attention to the fact that the name of the group was the Worcester County Poetry Association, Quinn wanted to propagate poetry and poetry readings out to the rest of the county. He managed to spread readings from Athol, Gardner, and Fitchburg in north Worcester County to Southbridge and East Douglas in the south; it was a hectic schedule. Between September and June of Quinn's first year in office, they had 57 readings all over the county. This meant that they were sometimes doing more than one reading a week, and all of it was free.

While Quinn was teaching, he was introduced to the state arts councils of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. He was heavily involved with poetry in Massachusetts, and his involvement with both of the state arts councils created the chance for him to spread poetry across the state lines. During the time he was working for the states arts councils, he took odd jobs such as a janitor and bookmobile driver to make ends meet. During one of his workshops, Quinn worked with pre-school kids to start writing. He brought boxes from the furniture store and offered them crayons and magic markers to draw and create a story on the inside wall. After they were done, he would gather them and visited each box where the kids would each tell their stories. He recorded their story and typed them up to help them start writing. When the workshop ended, they had to get rid of the boxes, so he had the kids destroy them. Four or five kids stayed in the boxes refusing to let their boxes get destroyed and insisted that they'll take them home. "After realizing the destruction that had taken place, they started to cry. I realized how much their imaginations had created a world for them. I read them antiwar poetry and they began to understand something else. "

When the arts councils ran out of funds, the workshops were cut and Quinn continued as the bookmobile driver which did not last long after that. The bookmobile was quite old; the axel

snapped one day while Quinn was driving. Fortunately on the same day, the janitor had quit so when offered the job, Quinn accepted it. He worked a janitor for seven and a half years. To Quinn, it was one of the best jobs that he had ever had. Since he was on a salary, he was come in at his convenience before the next day started and cleaned the library which would make the rest of the day free to do whatever he wanted. During this free time, Quinn would often write.

In 1988 when Quinn was offered a job to come out for one semester to do teaching at Butler University, he did not jump at this chance. He loved the job as a librarian janitor so much; it took some convincing before he decided to take the job. Susan Neville, a fiction writer, got a grant to complete her novel so she called Fran Quinn up to substitute for a semester at Butler University which turned into a position that lasted for sixteen years. After talking to Carolyn Delude, she convinced him that even if he couldn't get the job of janitor back in the future, there were plenty of other janitor jobs out there. So in the end, he gave up the job of janitor and took up teaching. It was an area of work he preferred to be in, and there was nothing comparable to it in the Worcester area. . From 1988 to 1992, he would teach one semester up at Butler University and come back to Worcester for the other semester. In 1992 the Butler University job turned into a full time position which leads Quinn to move permanently to Indianapolis and work there full time.

Fran Quinn has published two volumes and one chapbook of his poetry: *The Goblet Crying for Wine*, edited by Robert Bly and published in 1995, and the chapbook, *Milk of the Lioness* in 1982 and *A Horse of Blue Ink* in 2005. He was featured with Mary Fell in the Spring/Summer 2001 edition of *Diner*, a poetry journal. The Worcester Review published a special issue for his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Included in this edition were writings and comments from famous poets and not-so-famous people about Quinn himself. Quinn's writing style is honest and direct, where he illustrates complex issues with the simplicity of the words. Many of his poems, especially in the *Goblet Crying for Wine*, are dedicated to friends and families, showing that time and experiences that he had in Worcester and the bonds that he made will not be forgotten.

"Fran Quinn is still living in Indianapolis, and teaches full time at Butler University."