

Author Spotlight

with

Rita Gray



Photograph by W. Jo Moser

What made you want to become an author/poet?

Certain things have remained with me since I was young. Mostly, I remember the way things felt through my senses; the scent of my yellow and pink roses in summer, the outside smell of my collie's fur, her plywood bed in the cool metal smell of the garage. I also remember loving color. My childhood drawings rarely represented anything—they were simply what I called designs, different shapes of color. Each color gave me a different sensation, almost as if I could taste it. The poem that made me fall in love with words was Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat*. I thought it was so passionate and exotic, and I loved the music in the words. It was only when I grew up that I read this was a nonsense poem. For me as a child, this was a serious poem, about an owl and a cat in love.

When I first saw the book *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown, the images were the most beautiful things I had ever seen, especially the colors. I loved the poetic exchange between the mother rabbit and her exploring bunny.



When you write, what do you hope readers will take away from your work?

I hope they will find a place that allows them to experience the everyday world in a heightened way. Things can get so loud and rushed that it becomes hard to hear the little sounds. I also hope the reader will feel some connection to the seasonal forces that affect our lives.

What do you like to do on rainy days?

I like to write something or read some poems until I grow tired. Then I like to sleep. My cats and dogs have the same idea.



What inspired you to compile the poems featured in *One Big Rain* into a collection? Why did you choose rain as the theme?

I love the rain, I always have. And I love it in every season. Everything changes in the rain. All the sounds grow quieter and slushier, the day becomes darker, and the colors get bold. When I'm in the city it's yellow lines on shiny black asphalt, and a sea of yellow taxis. It's the warm red of

the street lights, and the brake lights of the cars in traffic jams. And the umbrellas are mostly black. In the country, it's the green of the grass and the pale green lichen on the darkening tree trunks. And wherever I am, I love the time just before the rain falls; the hush that wraps everything and the coppery taste I get in my mouth. A friend of mine, after viewing *One Big Rain* said, "There's a lot of atmosphere in that little book!" And that was the best compliment. I want the reader to be able to feel the wet in these pages.

How do you think Ryan O'Rourke's illustrations complement the poems in *One Big Rain*?

His illustrations are very evocative, but also allow enough space for the viewer to use his own imagination. His work helped the poems to come alive on the page and in my mind.

ONE BIG RAIN

Poems for Rainy Days

Rita Gray has compiled twenty poems that celebrate rain, written by well-known poets such as Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Eve Merriam, and Lilian Moore. Divided into poems written about rain within each of the four seasons, this compilation offers the reader a chance to revel in the beauty of precipitation and the poetry it inspires. The variety of poems opens the door for discussion of poetic styles, while Ryan O'Rourke's playful, yet sophisticated illustrations will appeal to readers of all ages.



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