

Curriculum Vitae of a Lover of Poetry  
Mary Packard



It is my distinct honor to be among the scholar-practitioner-researchers at the ABI Summer Academy '2025. I humbly take responsibility for aesthetic representation of important dialog. I promise to listen deeply, go easy, be filled with light, and shine-with.

As a young child I remember my maternal grandfather, Peter Finnegan, reaching into his wallet for tattered pieces of paper, telling me in his thick Irish brogue, "I have something for you." His short poetry readings entered many conversations before Sunday dinner and of course caused many in the family circle to roll their eyes and others to raise their glasses. I have no recollection of studying or appreciating poetry until high school when I found myself drawn to ee cummings, "anyone lived in a

pretty how town." Several years later as a senior nursing student, my paternal grandfather died and I wrote my first poem, "The red vest," in his honor. Some 48 years later simply the mention of red vest stirs up in me vivid lived memories of Grandpa George Packard walking through his garden, reaching for a potato, cleaning the dirt off on his jeans and taking a bite, or crunching up Saltine crackers and pouring milk over for a little snack, or the bookcase of Reader's Digests in his living room. On the other hand, as I reflect on the tattered pieces of poetry from my Grandpa Finnegan's wallet, I hear his voice, his way of cursing that most could not understand and his rocking in the chair that still helps to compose my living room.

I have dabbled with words over the years. Poetry offers a keen sense of knowing deep in the fiber of my being, that oozes or pulses into the present without a filter. In just a few words, re-mem-bering joins imagining in a vivid present. I have since come to know a deepened sense of aesthetic way of knowing through hearing, listening, praying, and writing poetry. John, my spouse of 43 years and I shared poetry in our early love letters to each other. "I thank you god" by ee cummings shines through the most as one we both knew "by heart." We recited this in a to and 'fro manner at our wedding liturgy; we prayed this at births of our children and death of our parents. I invited the entire congregation to pray these words at John's funeral liturgy. "I thank you god for most this amazing day" is a hearkening back to my early connection with ee cummings, a re-awakening to an intense appreciation and call to write.

I turned to poetry in my desire to offer deep new understandings to undergraduate nursing students studying caring for persons with mental health problems. "The Open Kitchen Door" invites from the soul a glimpse into one with dementia. Grief is intimately explored in "Phenomenology and Chicken Pot Pie" as words intertwine around the extraordinary heart

of loss with the ordinariness of home. This poetry made its way into the classroom—pedagogical moments creating intimacy in the teacher-student relationship. “Between the Stepping Stones” joins death and birth along with celebrations of daily life that makes loss unbearable in the immediate writing. My dissertation research was wholly in itself a poetizing activity. Poetry was unleashed as I engaged chapter by chapter in the lived experiences and exploration of “being-with” in the teacher-student relationship. A life-receiving-giving journey of human be-coming. The phenomenon of “being-with” shows itself in the embrace of nature in “Dissertation Matins.” “Dancing in the Claddagh Circle” weaves the relationships among my cherished doctoral program friends and advisor that illustrates who we have come to be these 25 years later!

Poetry connects us in deep relationships, sacred pedagogical spaces, and the world—in love, gratitude, and at times, even with advice. Mary Oliver speaks for me and through me to my core in her instructive words from “Among the Trees.”

“...and you too, have come into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.”