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By:

Amalia Medina



Laura Apol's love for poetry began at a young age, when her father would bring home children's encyclopedias for her to read. Her father sold encyclopedias to put himself through college before becoming a professor. She soon became captivated by the nursery rhyme and poetry volumes, which she recited with her father.

Apol recalls writing a poem in third grade that her grandmother saved for years. Later, when Apol was a published poet, her grandmother would get out that poem and say, "Oh, look at this one?"

I knew it.?

Now, her lifetime filled with poetry has led her to be named the second Lansing Poet Laureate. Her job is to bring poetry into the tri-county region by planning and organizing events or projects that incorporate poetry.

Apol, a longtime Lansing resident and associate professor of literacy and curriculum at Michigan State University's College of Education, will serve for a two-year term. The Lansing Poet Laureate position is sponsored by the MSU Residential College for Arts and Humanities, Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), and the Lansing Poetry Club.

Workshops for all ages and abilities

Apol applied for the position because she has watched the interest in poetry grow in the Lansing area for the past 20 years, and she wanted to be a part of spreading the influence of poetry here.

?It felt to me like this role would allow me to participate and help move poetry into a more visible space into the community,? Apol said.

One way that she plans on doing this is by hosting workshops where people can write and share their poetry. Apol is determined to include all people, regardless of their background with poetry, in these activities.

?It's important to me that the poets I engage go all the way from elementary school students and their teachers up through folks at Michigan State, folks who consider themselves as poets in the community and people who want to experiment with poetry,? Apol said. ?So, [I want to work with] different age ranges and skill levels.?

Apol remembers losing her interest and love for poetry due to restrictions and expectations that were imposed in school. So, as poet laureate, she wants to make a creative and safe environment for kids to write poetry.

?It's my experience that when we're little kids we love poems and rhymes, and then very often in school we start to think that poetry doesn't have anything to do with us, and that poems are hard, they're secret, you're gonna get them wrong, someone's gonna give you a bad grade,? Apol said. ?The notion that poetry can be an expression in a whole lot of ways, for a whole lot of different people who have different purposes for it, is something I'm very committed to, and a poet laureate can actually make that space.?

Apol feels this need to bring poetry to youth because she believes that poetry is a medium that can make change and affect people.

?A way to advocate for change?

?I started seeing [poetry] as a way to do things in the world, so a way to grow my own voice, and a way to advocate for change,? Apol said. ?I had things that I wanted to help people understand, I wanted to talk about, I wanted to write about because I wanted to make change and raise awareness.?

For example, she worked with survivors of the Rwandan genocide, and wrote about them and their experiences, to try to raise awareness of the genocide.

Although Apol could use many forms of writing or art, she chooses poetry. She has always gravitated toward the style and energy of poems.

"I like the compressed nature of poetry," Apol said. "I like the ways that it has to make every word count. I also like the concentration that goes into a poem, the concentration of energy, the concentration of attention, the concentration of language. For me, poetry is a way to say a lot in a few words, and I like that as a format."

Whether it's reading poetry aloud in public, hosting workshops or working with teachers, Apol has many ideas on how to bring poetry to our community. She hopes to build a community that brings together both professional poets and people who don't normally think about poetry, and she wants to make a change in our community.

"In the future, I hope that it doesn't mean that once I'm no longer the poet laureate that I disappear," Apol said. "I hope that it means that the connections that I make and the projects that I start will continue, so it will have this sort of ripple effect, that's what I'm hoping for."

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