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### My Poetry Collection

A few years ago, in the middle of French class, my friend Sarah told me, “when you die, I want your poetry collection.” I, unfortunately, cannot remember the context of that morbid conversation. Still, I remember that it was the first time I realized that my interest in poetry books was an actual collection that I should be proud of. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that I had unknowingly started my collection at nine years old when I was given a poetry anthology for children. I realize as I write this essay at age 18, I have spent half of my life collecting poetry.

I credit my grandfather’s cousin, Robin, for introducing me to poetry. She came to stay with my family for a few weeks and gave me *The Tree that Time Built*, edited by Mary Anne Hoberman and Linda Winston, the day before she left. We poured over the pages together, and she drew a heart on the page of our favorite poem, “You & I.” At the time, I considered it sacrilegious to write in books because they were so precious to me, and I couldn’t believe she had drawn an enormous heart with bright red ink in the corner of a page! Nowadays, I lovingly mark up all of my favorite poems, although I still hesitate for a few seconds with my pen over the paper before I set it down and annotate. I should thank Robin for both the gift of poetry and for teaching me not to be afraid of loving poetry the way I want to.

I never let go of poetry in the years after Robin gifted me *The Tree That Time Built*, even as my life changed rapidly. I started writing [awful] poetry in 6th grade; a binder with sparkly stickers on the cover that spelled out “WORDS WITH WINGS” filled with my poems became

the next part of my collection (this anthology is currently enjoying retirement on a high shelf in my closet). Besides purchasing a collection of Pablo Neruda's poetry in 8th grade after reading *Our Chemical Hearts* by Krystal Sutherland, it was not until 9th grade that I started collecting poetry books.

I spent part of the Summer before 9th grade at my grandparents' house in Florida and discovered *The New Yorker* magazine. I spent peaceful hours combing through the pages and subscribed to the magazine when I got home to continue reading. High school forced me to give up this new joy-filled habit, but not before I noticed an advertisement for Rupi Kaur's *the sun and her flowers* on the interior cover of a random magazine issue. I do not remember my thought process as to why I bought the book, but I did, and I saw myself in poetry. Soon after, Rupi Kaur's first book of poetry, *milk and honey*, joined the ranks of my poetry collection, although, at the time, I still didn't call it a collection. I was 14 years old and lost in the midst of moving, switching from public school to a private all-girls school, losing touch with all my old friends, my parents getting divorced, starting to move back and forth between two houses, and my desire to have typical teenage experiences. In the chaos of my life, I looked to poetry to make sense of the world. I started following poets on Instagram and paying more attention to the books on the one bookshelf my local Barnes & Noble dedicated to poetry. Atticus' *Love Her Wild* made its way onto my shelf before I understood that there could be different types of poetry and that some men profit off writing poems for lonely women. I was lost and didn't know what I was looking for. Alison Malee's *the day is ready for you* made its way onto my shelf and into my heart after following her on Instagram. Through trial and error, and many trips to Barnes & Noble, my collection grew into something I am proud of.

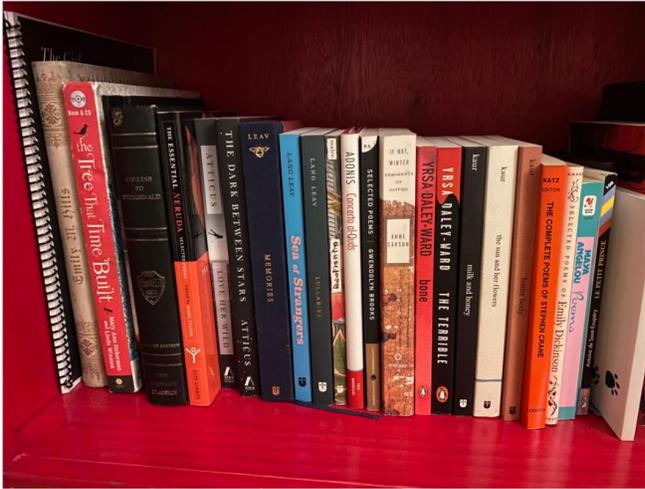
Over the years, my friends and family have given me books of poetry they've stumbled upon that they think I would like. In this way, *Sea of Strangers* by Lang Leav and *The Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson* joined my collection after my 16th and 17th birthdays. My friend (the same one who wants my poetry collection when I die) created a collection of her poetry for her independent project in Junior year and gave me a copy of *The Girl with the Gold Wings*. It has enjoyed a treasured spot in my collection ever since. *Selected Poems* by Gwendolyn Brooks joined my collection when my step-sibling gave me their copy from class. *The Complete Poems of Stephen Crane* and *Behind My Eyes* by Li Young-Lee joined my shelves after graduating from high school when one of my closest friends went thrift shopping and picked out a few books for me. I've learned that if you tell the world that you like to read poetry, the world finds a way to send poetry your way.

Reading has always been like breathing for me. After a while, reading became the inhale, and writing became the exhale. In 10th grade, I decided that I liked writing poetry and that I had a little talent for it, so I decided to write one poem every day to practice writing poetry and get comfortable calling myself a poet. I didn't know it then, but 10th grade would be a terrible year. I started wearing mascara to school that year as a commitment to not cry at school. It was BAD. Writing poetry became my outlet for everything going on in life. My desire to read as much poetry as I could to learn about poetry became a lifeline, a way for me to see myself reflected in others' works, and a way for me to learn how to express myself through writing better. I formed my poetry collection to make me a better writer by exposing myself to as many different types of poetry as possible, and in the process, I became a better reader. I predominantly read poetry written by women (especially queer women), queer people in general, and BIPOC authors. Diversifying my reading exposed me to different styles of writing and experiences different than

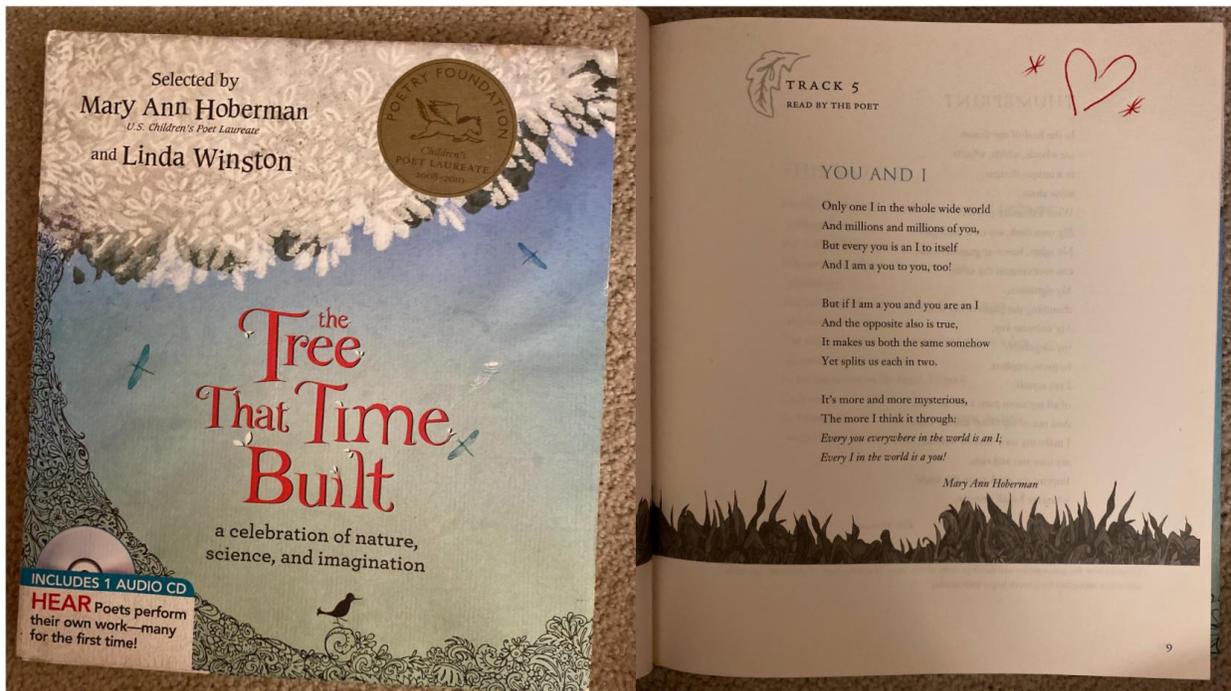
my own. Reading poetry made me a better writer, reader, and person who can empathize with others and understand experiences and writing styles different from my own.

Poetry is both my connection to my family and myself. My interest in poetry started because a family member introduced me to poetry, and writing poetry became a way for me to express my identity. Poetry is how I connect to and understand the world around me; it is how I am exposed to places I have never been and people I've never met. Poetry is my way of finding my way back to myself when I am lost. Because poetry is such a large part of my life and my identity, I believe that I will continue to read, write, and collect poetry for the rest of my life.

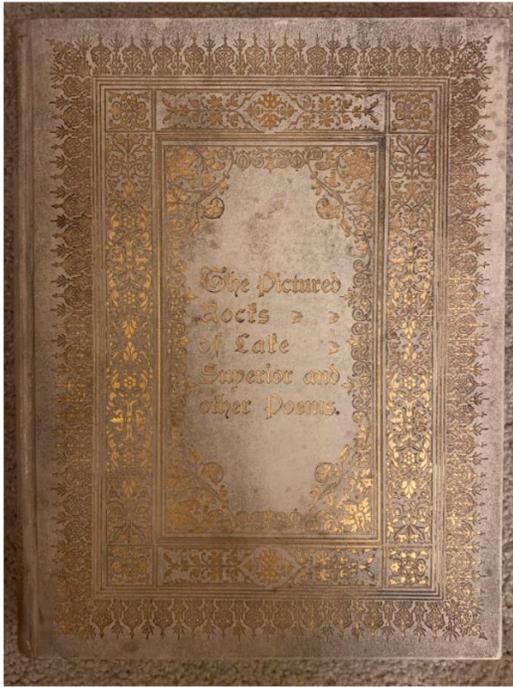
## Images of Collection



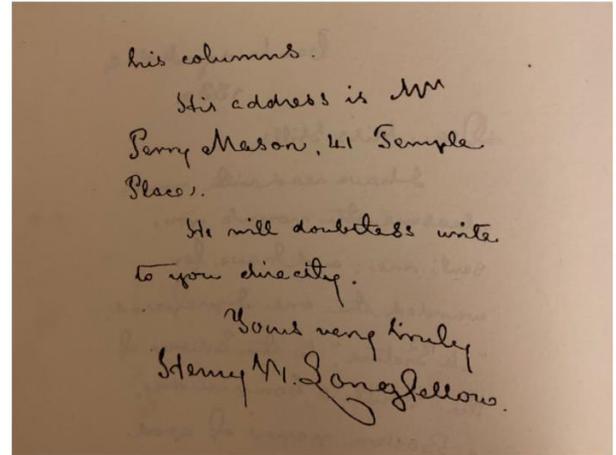
My collection in its entirety (minus Alison Malee's *the day is ready for you* because I've lent it out to a friend), including the two books I have with me in Tacoma. At the moment, the collection is organized by the height of the books, however, I do group books by the same author together.  
\*picture of my bookshelf courtesy of my sister



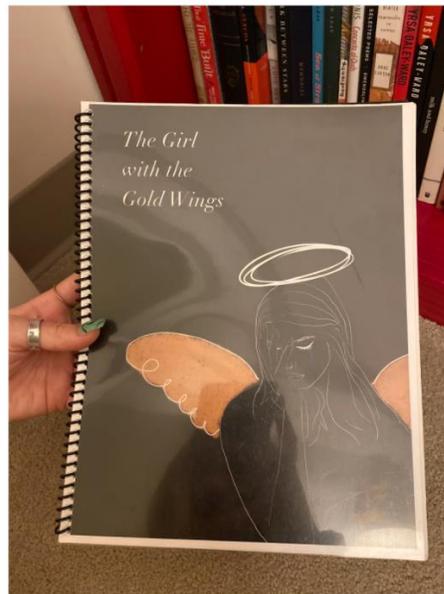
The book that started it all & the infamous red-heart marking our favorite poem! \*photos courtesy of my little sister at home



1st edition of *The Pictured Rocks of Lake Superior and other Poems* from 1904  
\*photo courtesy of my little sister at home



Excerpt of the letter from Henry W. Longfellow (a very famous 19th century American poet) to Emily M. Hills that was published in the beginning of the book



My friend's poetry collection.  
\*photo courtesy of my little sister at home

## Collection Works Cited

1. Adūnīs . *Concerto Al-Quds*. Yale University Press, 2018.
  - a. Adonis is a very famous Arabic poet, and this book is about Jerusalem (Al-Quds), and I bought it because I read an excerpt in *The New Yorker* and fell in love with a single line, “Look at her fenced with the eyelashes of angels” and wanted to know what came next. It was one of the first poetry books I bought of my own volition that was not written by a poet I followed on Instagram.
2. Angelou, Maya. *Poems/Maya Angelou*. Bantam, 1986.
  - a. A collection of Maya Angelou’s most famous poetry; many of the poems center around her identity as a black woman. I bought this collection of poems because I wanted to explore Maya Angelou’s poetry.
3. Atticus. *Love Her Wild: Poems*. Headline, 2017.
  - a. This book is a collection of little moments in life that bring happiness. It was one of the first books of poetry that I bought because I followed the poet on Instagram. I consider it one of the building blocks of my collection.
4. Atticus. *The Dark Between Stars: Poems*. Atria Books, 2018.
  - a. Atticus’s second book of poetry focuses on the poet’s experience living with a lover in Paris; I bought it sometime around my 16th birthday because I liked his first book.
5. Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Selected Poems*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010.
  - a. My step-sibling gave me their copy of this book that they bought for a college course because they thought I would enjoy it. This collection of poetry helped me

diversify my collection and branch out into reading poetry by award-winning authors.

6. Collins, William, editor. *English Poetry: From Collins to Fitzgerald*. Grolier Enterprises Corp., 1980.
  - a. I bought this collection at my favorite used bookstore (Talk Story Bookstore in Kauai) because the book was pretty, and I wanted to familiarise myself with older British poets.
7. Crane, Stephen. *The Complete Poems of Stephen Crane*. Edited by Joseph Katz, Large Print Book Co., 2004.
  - a. This book was a gift from a friend who thought I would enjoy it because I like reading poetry.
8. Daley-Ward, Yrsa. *Bone*. Penguin Books, 2017.
  - a. I bought this book of poetry because I loved *The Terrible* and started following the poet on Instagram. It's Yrsa Daley-Ward's first full-length collection of poetry, and the poems are centered around her identity as a woman, as a lesbian, and as a black person growing up in Britain. I bought this book at an independent bookstore while in Northern California.



- b. Showing my dad that my coat pockets are large enough to fit books (immediately after purchasing *bone*).
9. Daley-Ward, Yrsa. *The Terrible*. Penguin Books, 2018.
- a. I bought this book after reading the review of the book in *The New Yorker*. To this day, it is one of my favorite books. It's Yrsa Daley-Ward's memoir written as a mix of poetry and prose. I included my favorite quote from it on my Senior Yearbook page.
10. Dickinson, Emily. *The Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Modern Library, 2000.
- a. A friend gave me this collection of Emily Dickinson's poems for my birthday a few years ago because they know I like reading poetry, and they thought I would like Emily Dickinson. Reading Dickinson's poetry helped me branch out and start reading more books written by non-modern poets.
11. Francisco, Joe. *Nowhere Boy: Book One of the Nowhere Trilogies*. 2019.
- a. Mr. Francisco gave me a copy of his debut poetry book in exchange for an honest review. This book exposed me to poetry tinged with elements of science fiction.
12. Glück, Louise. *Faithful and Virtuous Night: Poems*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux, 2015.
- a. I honestly bought this book because it won an award, and I wanted to know what kind of poetry was worthy of being award-winning. Louise Glück's poetry

resonated with me and ended up being one of my biggest influences for writing poetry. I have since borrowed countless other books of her poetry from the library. She received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2020.

13. Haeflinger, Michael. *Low Static Rage*. Blue Cactus Press, 2019.

- a. I bought this book because my poetry professor wrote it, and I was curious about his work. I bought it from King's Books in Tacoma & through this experience was able to explore a new bookstore in my new city.

14. Hills, Emily Malvina. *The Pictured Rocks of Lake Superior and Other Poems*. Impressit in Charta Fabriani, 1904.

- a. I found this book in my apartment building's library exchange. I was drawn to it because it looked old and pretty, and I enjoyed reading poems about the natural world. I realized that the book was a first edition published in 1904 and have since taken special care of it to ensure that it doesn't get damaged. Adding this book to my collection extended the period of when the different books were written.

15. Hoberman, Mary Ann, and Linda Winston, editors. *The Tree That Time Built: a Celebration of Nature, Science, and Imagination*. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2009.

- a. An anthology of poetry for children that focuses on nature. The very first book of poetry I ever owned, the book that started my poetry collection and introduced me to poetry in the first place.

16. Holland, Sarah. *The Girl With the Gold Wings*.

- a. My friend's collection of poetry that she put together for her Independent Project in high school. I helped edit some of her poems, and she published two of my poems alongside her own.

17. Huang, Nancy. *Favorite Daughter*. Write Bloody Publishing, 2017.

- a. A book of poetry I bought from Barnes & Noble simply because the poems seemed interesting. It is now one of my favorite poetry books I own, probably the one I re-read the most often, and the only poetry book I brought with me to college. Huang's use of sensory details and imagery endlessly inspires me.

18. Kaur, Rupi. *Home Body*. Simon & Schuster Canada, 2020.

- a. Kaur's latest book of poetry that I bought on the day it was published. I was a little disappointed with some of the book's poems, but I still admire Kaur as a poet.

19. Kaur, Rupi. *Milk and Honey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2014.

- a. This is Kaur's first book of poetry, but the second book by her that I bought. I bought this book because I enjoyed *the sun and her flowers*.

20. Kaur, Rupi. *The Sun and Her Flowers*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2019.

- a. This is Kaur's second book of poetry and the first book of hers that I purchased. I saw an advertisement in *The New Yorker* for it and took a chance. After buying this book, I started earnestly reading and collecting books of poetry. The poems' topics range from experiencing sexual assault to being the child of immigrants to being Punjabi.

21. Leav, Lang. *Lullabies*. Andrews McMeel, 2014.

- a. This is Lang Leav's first book of poetry. After reading *Memories* and *Sea of Strangers*, I bought this book because I wanted to familiarize myself with her earlier works.

22. Leav, Lang. *Memories*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015.

- a. A friend had recommended Lang Leav's poetry to me, so I went to Barnes and Noble to pick up one of her books. Barnes & Noble had so many books by her that I decided an anthology of her poems would expose me to her best work. I fell in love with this anthology and Lang Leav as a poet after finishing it. She blends the mystical and the ordinary so well and writes about love and loneliness so well.
23. Leav, Lang. *Sea of Strangers: Poetry & Prose*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2018.
- a. My mom gave me this book for my 16th birthday, and it holds a special place in my heart because of it. It was Lang Leav's most recent book of poetry at the time my mom gave it to me.
24. Lee, Li-Young. *Behind My Eyes*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.
- a. One of my closest friends gave me this book after we graduated from high school. She knows how much I love poetry, so she thrifted this book for me because our English teacher told her that the poet was terrific. I love the way he writes about Chinese culture and growing up in America.
25. Malee, Alison. *The Day Is Ready for You*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2018.
- a. I bought this book when it was released because I follow the poet on Instagram. I like the way Malee experiments with punctuation and the way she weaves narratives into her poems. This book is one of my favorite books of poetry I've ever read.
26. Malee, Alison. *this is the journey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2019.
- a. I bought this book a few days after publication because I love Malee's first book so much. *this is the journey* specifically focuses on Malee's experiences being adopted and reconnecting with her birth family.

27. Neruda, Pablo. *The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems*. Edited by Mark Eisner, Bloodaxe Books, 2016.

- i. This book came into my collection before I started seriously reading poetry books. I read Krystal Sutherland's novel, *Our Chemical Hearts*, in 8th grade, and a line from Neruda's Sonnet XVII is repeated throughout the book. So after finishing the novel, I decided to buy a collection of Neruda's poetry to explore his other works.

28. Sappho. *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Edited by Anne Carson, The Folio Society, 2019.

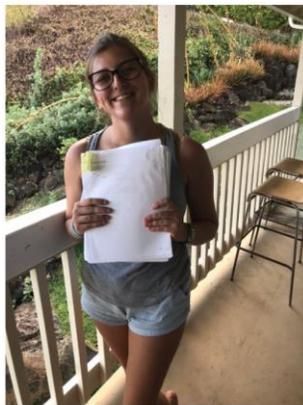
- a. A girl in my AP English class recommended this particular collection of Sappho's poetry, and her whole face softened while telling me about it. I wanted to understand what about Sappho's poetry could make a person's entire face soften just in remembrance. After obtaining a copy, I understood how delicate Sappho's poetry is and how it is capable of touching your heart over 2,000 years after it was written.

## Wishlist Works Cited

1. Chavez, Felicia Rose, et al., editors. *LatiNext*. Vol. 4, Haymarket Books, 2020.
  - a. My poetry professor recommended this book (part of the BreakBeat Poets series) as a way to explore more poetry by Latinx authors. I believe that it's important to diversify my bookshelf and my reading because it expands my worldview and exposes me to experiences different from my own. I can also learn about different poetry styles, as different people write differently, and different cultures have unique poetry styles.
2. Gatwood, Olivia. *Life of the Party*. Random House UK, 2019.
  - a. Olivia Gatwood is a poet famous for her spoken-word poetry, and this is her first collection of written poetry. In this collection, Gatwood writes about coming of age and womanhood within the context of the ways we've normalized violence against women. A poet I follow on Instagram, Amy Kay (@amykaypoetry), read the book and gave it such glowing reviews I knew I had to read it. I've been branching out into spoken word poetry, and I think there's a lot I can learn about writing poems that are made to be read aloud from an established spoken word poet.
3. Gill, Nikita. *Fierce Fairytales: Poems & Stories to Stir Your Soul*. Hachette Books, 2018.
  - a. Nikita Gill is an Indian Sikh writer, and this book is her collection of poetry and prose retellings of classic fairytales. I love reading feminist retellings, and I'm very interested to see how she takes classic tales and infuses them with new life.
4. Gorman, Amanda. *The Hill We Climb and Other Poems*. Penguin Random House, 2021.

- a. Amanda Gorman's first collection of poetry will be published in September 2021. While listening to her read her poem at Biden's inauguration, I realized that I was watching someone take their place in history. I want to add a book to my collection that will play a role in shaping history; it's like staking a claim for the kind of history I want to see in the world.
5. Vuong, Ocean. *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. Jonathan Cape, 2017.
- a. This is Ocean Vuong's first full-length collection of poetry. He is a queer Vietnamese-American poet who often writes about his identity, family, grief, and war. I think his use of metaphor and enjambment is masterful, and there is so much I can learn about writing poetry from the way he writes. I borrowed a copy from the library, and I LOVED it, so I would love to order my own copy to mark up and annotate his poems.

And, if it's not too bold to say, I hope that one day I'll be able to add my very own book of poetry to my collection.



Me holding the complete first draft of my book of poetry :)  
\*photo taken by my dad