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Teen poet helps spread craft

By [Julie Muhlstein](#), Herald Columnist

"you carried a skateboard like it was a nametag and i carried a jar filled to the brim with love

and every so often, i'd open it up and breathe it in if i needed a pick me up because you moved so fast on that skateboard and in the summertime sun we were infinite"

- from "and hearts," a poetry collection by Alexis Arrabito

Some are sweet, a girl's evocative memories. Some are tough, a friend's meditation on a schoolmate's cancer. Some are impatient, a teen's eagerness for the wide world.

When 16-year-old Alexis Arrabito dropped a copy of her self-published poetry booklet at The Herald, she put my name on the envelope.

Thank you, Alexis. Your poems made me smile, made me sad and made me remember.

Eons ago, I was a girl poet. The difference between Alexis and me is more than nearly 40 years separating us in age. The difference is courage. Alexis is brave. I never was.

I wrote in secret, in grubby little notebooks and, in time, destroyed it all. Alexis not only shares her work in print, she's a performance poet. That means what you think it means - she gets up in front of people, reciting her poetry and revealing some of herself.

"It's like a monologue," the Everett High School senior said about performance poetry. She first encountered the literary art a few years back at a Centrum summer class in Port Townsend.

This gutsy girl will give other kids the chance to explore at a "Day of Poetry," a free workshop starting at 2 p.m. Thursday in the Everett Public Library auditorium.

Alexis arranged the event as part of her senior project, or culminating exhibition, an Everett School District graduation requirement.

While the Everett teen orchestrated today's events, the workshop is being presented by Angela Dy and other poets associated with Youth Speaks Seattle. Part of a national movement, the organization puts on readings and open mic events in the Seattle area.

"Performance poetry has really come into being," said Dy, 24, a writer-in-residence at Seattle's Chief Sealth

High School. "Poetry slams are one branch of performance poetry."

A slam is a competitive poetry reading in which poets are limited to three minutes, and can't use props or music. Dy said performance poetry grew from the traditions of the Beat generation, poets Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and their compadres.

"People share personal stuff and their views on issues," Dy said. "It's an opportunity for an artist-to-audience connection. That's not going to happen on a page, and it's not going to happen online."

Alexis loves the spoken word. "The literary arts originated vocally," she said. "It brings poems to life, it's so electric."

Using her laptop computer and a local copy business, the teen recently published "and hearts," a chapbook filled with 32 poems and dedicated to her family. "Without them, I am without a self," she wrote.

Alexis started with short stories and has been writing for years - "seventh- and eighth-grade angsty teen stuff," she said.

Practical enough to know most poets can't pay the rent, Alexis hopes to earn a master's degree in library science. She's well on her way, having taken Everett Community College courses in English, history and psychology through the Running Start program.

Putting on poetry workshops and mingling with college students, she's anything but a shy kid scribbling poems in her room. And forget grubby notebooks. "That's not my process. I started through blogging," said Alexis, who writes on her laptop.

For Dy, who's seen reluctant young writers grow into accomplished poets, the mode of creation doesn't matter. Electronics or pencils, it's written expression.

"I teach poetry based on the idea that everyone has a story to tell," Dy said.

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