

Paterson's Poets

Voices from the Silk City

In his 1806 poem,
“The Falls of the Passaic,”
Washington Irving saw Paterson

*“In a wild, tranquil vale,
fringed with forests of green,
Where nature had fashioned
a soft, sylvan scene,”*

While the cityscape may have
changed immensely since he penned
this description, the art of words
has remained an ever present
feature of our city.

Since its founding in 1792, Paterson has been home to many poets. Still more have visited Paterson and been enthused by the beauty of the Great Falls or the ingenuity of the city's residents. From concrete poetry to the spoken word, the city of Paterson has and continues to inspire poets.

In this exhibition, we recognize the work and lives of several poets who live (or have lived), work (or have worked) and play (or have played) in Paterson and celebrate the ongoing role poetry plays in the culture of our city. All of the poets featured in this exhibit, living or passed, are a part of this larger poetry community within Paterson. Their words are a part of a legacy that continues to grow and inspire future generations.



All Mothers Do It!

Little girl, my pride and joy,
You make my life worth living.
It's filled with rattles, safety pins
And quarterly bottle giving!
As I wash your little clothes
And hang them on the line,
They tell the story how baby grows,
The constant flight of time!
Then I picture frills and bows,
Paper dolls and swings;
Come saddle shoes and dungarees
And many freakish things!
Now lipstick's here, you've turned to style
All other things outmoded.
The house is filled with magazines,
The closets are all loaded.
But wait this picture may be wrong—
Your mother must get hold! !
I'll have you married before long—
And you're only three months old! !

Doris Adler submitted many of her poems to the local papers for publication. "All Mothers Do It!" appeared in the *Paterson Morning Call* on July 22, 1955, on page 13.



Doris Mae Adler
1924 – 2021

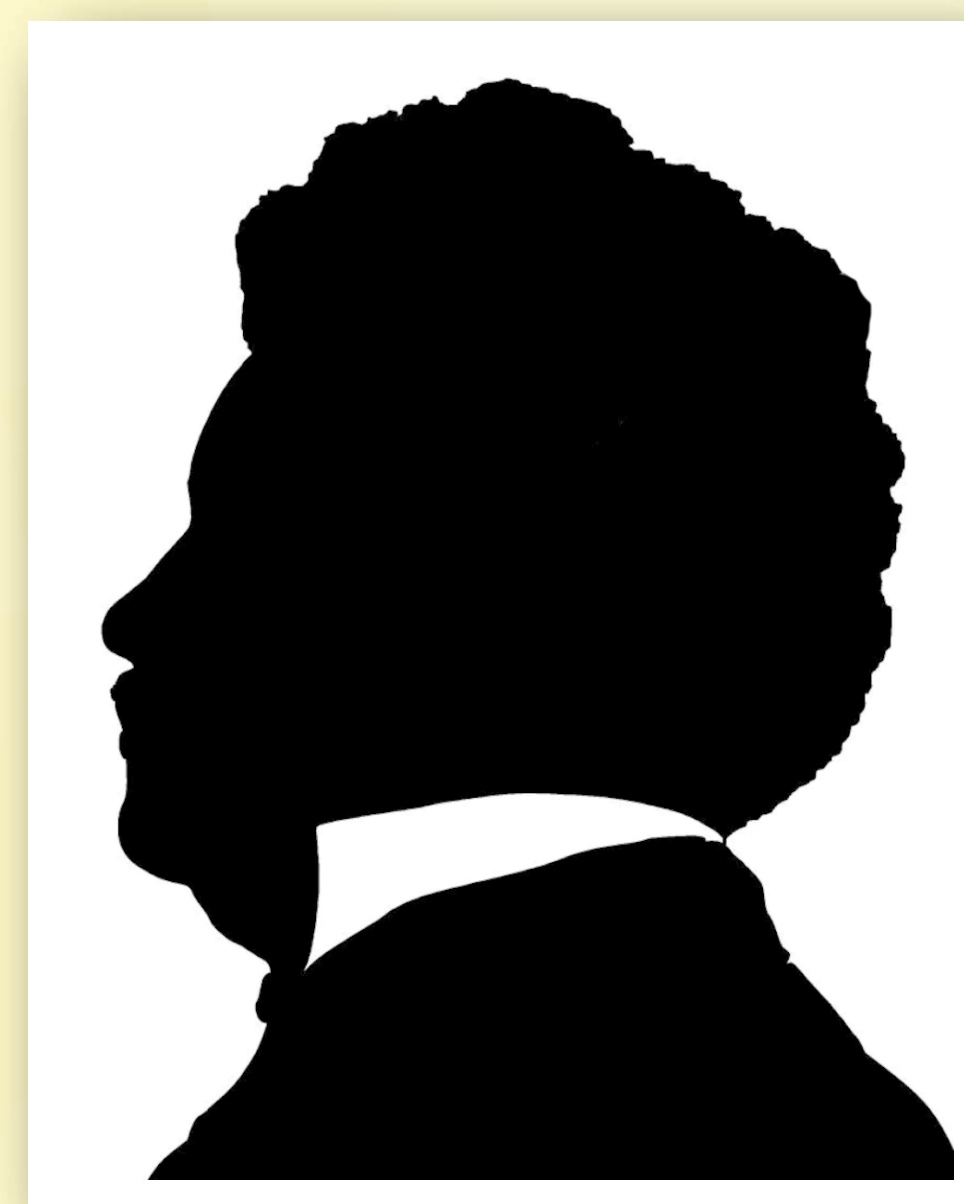
Doris Mae Vanderwiell was born in Paterson to Isaac and Alberta Vanderweil. Doris graduated from Eastside High School in 1941.

Adler submitted her poems to the Paterson newspapers, and had several of her pieces published. In 1953, Pageant Press published *Poems over a Tea Cup*. A collection of seventy poems written over the course of one year, this body of work reflects on everyday events. Adler's poetry is "light verse written about ordinary things which everyone encounters" (*The News*, Sept. 12, 1953). In addition to her poetry, Adler wrote the lyrics to several songs composed by her husband. Her lyrical style of writing can also be experienced in her poems.

Song of the Decanter

There was an old decanter,
and its mouth was gaping
wide; the rosy wine
had ebbed away
and left
its crys-
tal side;
and the wind
went humming,
humming—
up and
down the
sides it flew,
and through the
reed-like,
hollow neck
the wildest notes it
blew. I placed it in the
window, where the blast was
blowing free, and fancied that its
pale mouth sang the queerest strains
to me. “They tell me—puny con-
querors!—the Plague as slain his ten,
and War his hundred thousands of the
very best of men; but I” —’twas thus
the bottle spoke —” but I have con-
quered more than all your famous con-
querors, so feared and famed of yore.
Then come, ye youths and maidens,
come drink from out my cup, the
beverage that dulls the brain and
burns the spirit up; that puts to
shame the conquerors that slay
their scores below; for this has
deluged millions with the
lava tide of woe. Though,
in the path of battle, dark-
est waves of blood may
roll; yet while I killed
the body, I have dam-
ned the very soul.
The cholera, the
sword, such ruin
never wrought,
as I, in mirth
or malice, on
the inno-
cent have
brought.
And still I breathe upon
them, and they shrink before
my breath; and year by year my
thousands tread the dismal road to death!

Alfred Gibbs Campbell’s poem
“Song of the Decanter” is widely
believe to be the first example
of a concrete poem in America.
The poem appears to have first
been published in newspapers
in 1871.



Alfred Gibbs Campbell
1826 – 1884

Alfred Gibbs Campbell first came to Paterson to manage the Ivanhoe Paper Mill. He was a man with many interests, which included writing poetry. His poems reveal his personal sentiments regarding many causes he was involved in, including temperance, abolition and women’s suffrage.

His poems were published in a single volume entitled *Poems* in 1883. Today he is recognized as an important nineteenth century African American poet. He died in Newark in 1884 and is buried at the First Presbyterian Churchyard in Hamilton Square, New Jersey.

The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica

Presiding over a formica counter,
plastic Mother and Child magnetized
to the top of an ancient register,
the heady mix of smells from the open bins
of dried codfish, the green plantains
hanging in stalks like votive offerings,
she is the Patroness of Exiles,
a woman of no-age who was never pretty,
who spends her days selling canned memories
while listening to the Puerto Ricans complain
that it would be cheaper to fly to San Juan
than to buy a pound of Bustelo coffee here,
and to Cubans perfecting their speech
of a “glorious return” to Havana—where no one
has been allowed to die and nothing to change until then;
to Mexicans who pass through, talking lyrically
of *dólares* to be made in El Norte—

all wanting the comfort
of spoken Spanish, to gaze upon the family portrait
of her plain wide face, her ample bosom
resting on her plump arms, her look of maternal interest
as they speak to her and each other
of their dreams and their disillusions—
how she smiles understanding,
when they walk down the narrow aisles of her store
reading the labels of packages aloud, as if
they were the names of lost lovers; *Suspiros*,
Merengues, the stale candy of everyone’s childhood.

She spends her days
slicing *jamón y queso* and wrapping it in wax paper
tied with string: plain ham and cheese
that would cost less at the A&P, but it would not satisfy
the hunger of the fragile old man lost in the folds
of his winter coat, who brings her lists of items
that he reads to her like poetry, or the others,
whose needs she must divine, conjuring up products
from places that now exist only in their hearts—
closed ports she must trade with.

Published in 1993 in a book by
the same name, “The Latin Deli:
An Ars Poetica” draws on the
poet’s own childhood, growing
up as a Puerto Rican in
Paterson, New Jersey.



Judith Ortiz Cofer
1952 – 2016

Judith Ortiz was born in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico. Four years later, her family relocated to Paterson, New Jersey when her father was stationed at Brooklyn Navy Yard. She spent much of her childhood travelling between New Jersey and Puerto Rico, and attended school in both places. This movement between two places and cultures influenced much of her writing. She credited her gift of storytelling to her abuelita (grandmother) with whom she resided while in Puerto Rico.

Considered a prominent voice of the Puerto Rican experience in English, many of Cofer’s poems appear in anthologies. Many of her poems are bilingual and other works were translated into Spanish following initial publication in English.

Judith Ortiz Cofer received many honors and distinctions including Fanfare Best Book of the Year Award, and The American Library Association Reforma Pura Belpre Medal. She received grants from the Georgia Council for the Arts and the Witter Bynner Foundation, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the University of Georgia Humanities Center, and the Florida Fine Arts Council.

Grandma

Mischief made her lift her arms and turn
with such a look of wonder on her face
that I was not afraid to see the flames
licking along both sleeves of her flannel robe,
but stepped back, as one does from an act
of God, the better to take in her glittering
pale green eyes, her pirate's nose, the few
yellow teeth in her little open mouth,
as my mother, her own mouth open
in a scream, rushed up behind her to yank
off the blazing robe and dance on its burning,
and Grandma, naked, jubilant, winked at me
while the kettle shrieked its way to boiling dry,
and sent me from some far hilltop in her far world
a vision of what it was certain I'd become:
wild-eyed and crazy and blazing like a six-gun,
nothing at all to be met with shame or fear.
So this is for her, who now has long been ash,
a chronicle the last word of which is *oh*.

This poem is a portrait of Doty's adored Grandmother, a woman whose aphasia changed her way of communicating but left untouched her kindness, sweet nature, and love of spectacle. Says Doty, "I was never confused by her speech. Like many people with aphasia, she spoke in a personal, particular, and often charming language marked by elegant metaphor. She was always brave, and always entertaining."



Catherine Doty

1952 –

Catherine Doty is a poet, cartoonist, and educator from Paterson, New Jersey, and the author of *Wonderama* (winner of the 2022 Paterson Poetry Prize) and *Momentum*, volumes of poems from CavanKerry Press. Doty has received prizes and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the Academy of American Poets. An MFA graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, she has taught for the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Frost Place, the New York Public Library, and in many, many schools. Her poems have appeared widely in journals and anthologies.

Daughter in London

Suddenly she is beautiful
walking toward us at Gatwick,
emerald eyes flecked with purple,
silk pants ballooning out like dreams.

She's pleased with herself in her
ragged man's coat, circa 1920,
from Petticoat Lane.

*Your grandfather wore
the same herringbone tweed
when he came from Russia,*
I say, as we link arms.
Gussied up Ellis Island.

Her tendrils unfurl in this grey place.
Her walk is springier,
there's a new breeze in her smile.
Here, she looks like a virgin island.
Once she climbed the school bus,
too small to see out the window.
Now this leap across space, this separation.
She is dreaming of going to Russia,
of running away with a bassoonist from Paris.
She wears pointy suede shoes,
a crown of dark curls.
She is a room filled with green language.

“‘Daughter in London’ was one of our mother’s favorite poems. The daughter in the poem is both the past and the future, the grey of the poet’s immigrant grandfather and the bold bright colors of her daughter’s limitless possibility. The daughter wears vintage clothes but makes them over in her own lush image, now an almost-grownup with her own style. Our mother used vibrant colors in her poems and she was forever captivated by her family history, so this particular poem feels very representative of her work.”

~ The Poet’s daughters,
Amy and Lauren Gash



Sondra Gash
1934 – 2021

Sondra Gash was born in Paterson in 1934. She attended the University of Pennsylvania and returned to northern New Jersey to raise her family. A poet, writer and teacher, her poems and articles have appeared in many publications, including *Poets & Writers*, *The New York Times*, and *Paterson Literary Review*. Her parents and Paterson’s rich history provided inspiration for much of her writing.

Gash was the author of *Silk Elegy*, a collection of linked poems about a young girl from an immigrant family whose life is disrupted by her mother’s illness, and *Suit and Dress*, semi-autobiographical poems about the emotional spheres of work and home. *Silk Elegy* was a finalist for the 2003 Paterson Poetry Prize.

When the Stars Were Still Visible

In the photo, I am on the back steps
of the six-family tenement
on 5th Avenue in Paterson where I was born.
I am squinting into the sun,
my nose wrinkled, my eyes closed against the glare.
I am two years old, my hair a curly cap on my head.
It looks blonde, though I know it couldn't have been,
and wonder if I am remembering my daughter at two,
sitting in the little rocking chair on the front porch
on Oak street in Kansas City. Her hair was all blonde ringlets.

Strange how memory is like the fragments of a puzzle:
Remember the green blackout shades
in our apartment in Paterson in 1944.

Remember my father dressed as a devil for a costume party
at the Società Cilentana on Butler Street.

Remember the silver ball Zio Guillermo made
from the foil inside the Camels he smoked
that stained his fingers yellow.

So many memories swirl
like bits of color in a kaleidoscope,
and so impossible to explain.

Remember 17th Street with Mrs. Gianelli
who always fainted when she got upset
and the old man who ran the candy store
that was so filthy no one bought anything there,
and the big garage in the Gianelli's backyard
where we put on plays until something happened;
I don't know what, something to do with playing doctor
behind our improvised curtains
and then we weren't allowed to play there anymore.

Remember Zio Guillermo's garden
with tomatoes and zucchini and corn,
and the vacant lot next door that seemed so huge,
you'd think we had all of New Jersey to play in,
until I see it years later,
covered with asphalt and garages
and I realize that the entire block,
my world until I was eleven, wasn't that big
and certainly the lot, small, and now so ugly.

Remember Paterson when the stars were still visible in the sky
and I didn't know 17th Street was in a city.

Remember the sweet smell of marigolds and daisies in the vacant lot,
and our house full of food and laughter,
our family together under the kitchen light,
the company of honorary aunts and uncles.
Outside, our friends gathered to play stickball in the street,
hours to fill with games and books and dreaming.
How lucky I was, how lucky,
Paterson glowing and sparkling
like a silver ball in my hands.

Maria selected this poem because
it shows her deep connection to
Paterson and how much the city
means to her.



Maria Mazziotti Gillan
1940 –

Maria Mazziotti Gillan is a recipient of the 2014 George Garrett Award for Outstanding Community Service in Literature from AWP, the 2011 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award from Poets & Writers, and the 2008 American Book Award for her book, *All That Lies Between Us* (Guernica Editions).

She is the founder/executive director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, NJ, and editor of the *Paterson Literary Review*.

She is also a Bartle Professor and Professor Emerita of English and creative writing at Binghamton University-SUNY.

She has published 24 books. She is also co-editor of four anthologies with her daughter, Jennifer.

R.E.B.E.L. 4 LIFE

REACHING EVERYONE BY Expressing Life the (REBEL) I am.

Inspiring all mankind, yes I can.

From man, woman, and child to child, woman, and man.

The world is before us and this is where we stand.

We don't do this for the Oscars, Tonys, Emmys, or the Grammys.

We are expressing life for what it is and all that it can be.

Producing art that shows the beauty and truth of humanity.

We've been imprisoned to a status quo chained to its insanity.

This industry's infliction of constant repetition.

Projects driven by profit making addictions.

It can leave arts existence in an ALS condition.

But it's time for a new mission, an ethos, a new vision.

A new way of living. An art is life apparition.

The culture of the game has you addicted to the fame.

We should create things that matter from our hearts and our brains.

Now is the time for creativity is divine.

To express our true nature.

That of a Creator.

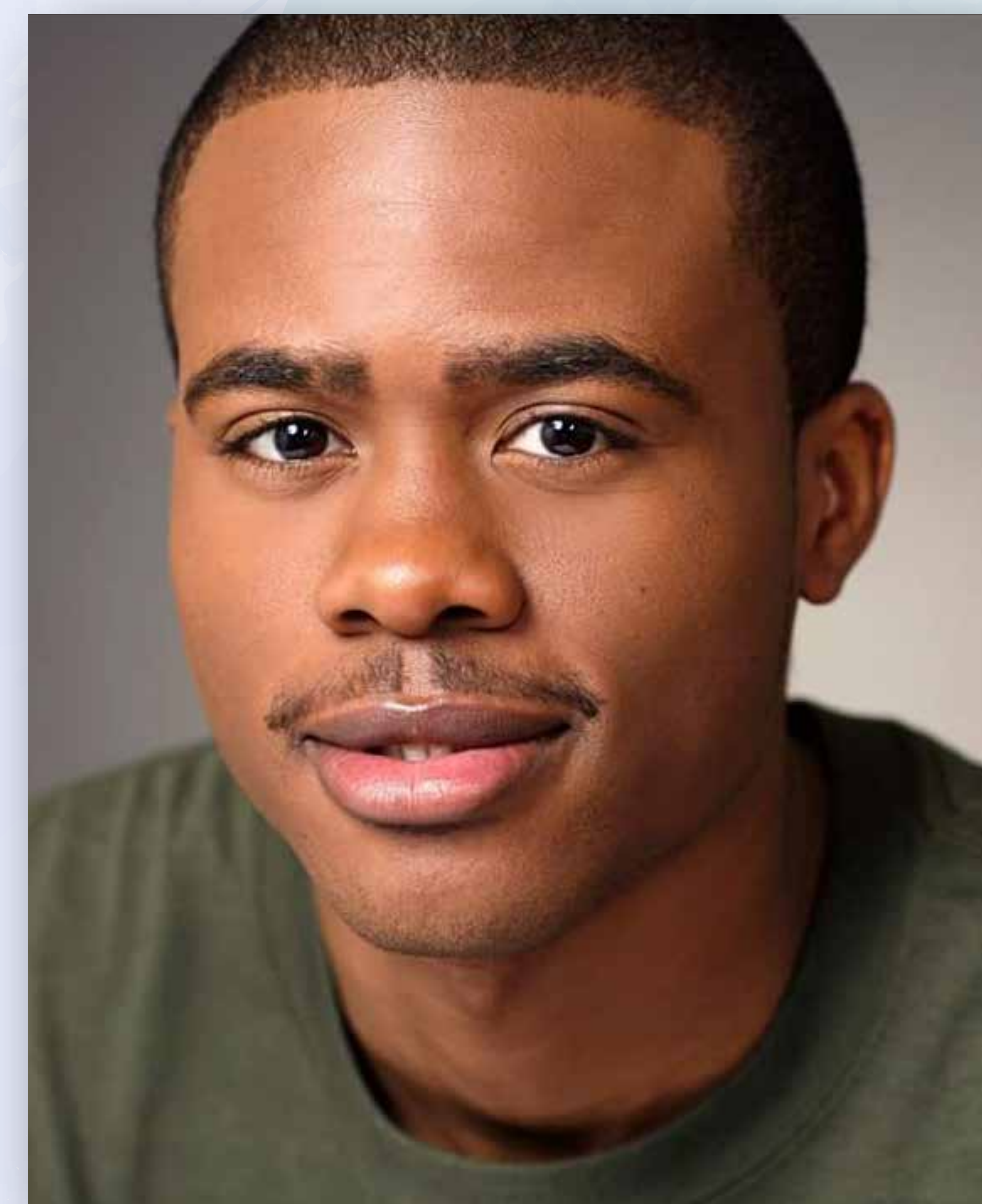
I'll live forever in that spirit until my last sunset and I pass in the night.

Because I am a REBEL for life.

"The death of the artist from the theft on the artist. Billionaires and Big Tech take what's left from the artist."

"'R.E.B.E.L. 4 Life' is the first poem I wrote after going through years of writer's block and depression. After digging deep down and re-imagining who I wanted to be and finding my old poetry book. I became inspired again and wrote this poem about the spirit that was in me and every artist of every discipline."

~ Jaquair Gillette



Jaquair Gillette
1985 -

Hailing from the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution and station stop on The Underground Railroad, Paterson NJ, Jaquair is an actor, poet, producer, and activist. He is a three-time featured poet at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Cafe in NYC. He is the annual open mic host of Paterson Poetry Festival and has performed in poetry cafes and venues across the U.S from New York City to Los Angeles. He recently released his highly reviewed debut spoken word poetry book entitled *Defiance & Desperation*.

The Sparrow

Once upon a window sill,
A sparrow hopped,—
But then stood still.
I asked him why he did the latter
He said to me, “It doesn’t matter.”
“My life may be in danger.
Why should you care?
I’m just a stranger.”
“Men’d kill a cow
To make mutton pie,
So why
Should I
Confide in you my woe?”
“Look, no weapon in my hand you
see,
Come rest your feet upon my knee,”
Said I,
“And best friends let us be.”
“I take no chances,” the sparrow
said
“I’d rather be cautious than be
dead!”
As away the sparrow fluttered,
I could have sworn he muttered,
“I’ll fly as fast as I can,—
I have no faith in man!”

While best known for his Beat poems, such as “Howl” (1956), Ginsberg was submitting poetry to the local newspaper while still in grade school. “The Sparrow” was printed in the *Paterson Morning Call*, February 3, 1938, when Ginsberg was eleven years old.



Allen Ginsberg
1926 – 1997

Irwin Allen Ginsberg was born in Newark, New Jersey June 3, 1926. He grew up in Paterson. Ginsberg’s first published works were printed in the *Paterson Morning Call*.

While attending Columbia University, Allen Ginsberg became a core member of the Beat Generation, a literary movement exploring American culture and politics following WWII. His poem “Howl” (1956) is a prime example of Beat literature. His poetry featured the themes of anti-materialism, anti-militarism, anti-war on drugs and anti-sexual repression within mainstream society.

Throughout his lifetime, Ginsberg received numerous honors and awards. In 1974, *The Fall of America* shared the National Book Award for Poetry. In 1979, he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In the same year, he also received the National Arts Club gold medal. In 1986, he received the Golden Wreath by the Struga Poetry Evenings International Festival in Macedonia. His *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 1995.

My Story

If I were to count each morning
by the things that didn't go

my way

I'd be weighed down
by the anchor of discontent.

Grateful, instead, for the ability
to cut loose chains of the past,
take those lessons
adjust my flight pattern of freedom.

The bliss of freedom is in each open breath
ability to release what was
embrace what is
prepare for what is to come

taste its pleasure with all of me

Open to endless adventure of new
exploring the unknown with all its jagged edges
admiring a fresh view
all on my own

There is pleasure in freedom
unlike any other feeling
spread beyond clouds
pushing past stars – sprinkled in dark corners

I live every bit of it

The echo of peace
sweet in its influence
new eyes permitted to see
shackles in the distance

The wickedness, the fear of freedom
sways delicately in time
treads where it was, once,
believed to stop the climb

Uninhibited
each deep inhaling of a new life
abundance of liberty within
released from strife

I can escape most of it
propaganda concealed within layers
ambiguous memories split
falling through myself ... away... away

I live knowing how poorly I fit that life
the one of shackles and restraint
charting expansion of ascension, wide open eyes
privileged moments with no pain

I live
between the spaces of things

I LIVE
my story

In freedom

"My Story is a testament to breaking free of the expectations of cow towing or surrendering myself and breaking the cycle of generational trauma that had been passed down from grandmother to mother and aunts, and then spread to the women in the family."

~ Susan Justinaino



Susan Justiniano
Rescue Poetix

1967 –

Born in Paterson, Susan Justiniano (Rescue Poetix), is a self-taught bilingual poet, with a deep love for knowledge, music, coffee, food, dogs, and the color red (not always in that order). She is twice honored Poet Laureate: The first Puerto Rican woman Poet Laureate of Jersey City, NJ (2022-2022) and State of New Jersey Beat Poet Laureate (2022-2024).

Words are embedded in her life. Her passion for them started at age 9 with a dictionary, notebook, and the latest paperback she could get her hands on.

Indivisible

this city has the same potential as a baby floating down the Nile,
she has a two hundred- twenty five year record of receiving children
from every land, culture and creed,
she builds— supremely
she is the land of peace
she is in constant search of the greatness that is Nirvana,
she sings music that moves you in tongues from far and wide,
ella toma pan y vino para la comunión
assalamu alaykum,
all of her citizens share the common goals in human life:
to be fully present in ethical duty,
to work toward prosperity,
to pursue God given passions,
to protect freedom, and
to be mindful of our karma —do onto others as we would have them
do onto us,
every citizen within her perimeter receives the same rain
at the same time,
let us also bow together,
let us also kneel together,
let us also chant together
let us also rock together,
let us also grow together
though we shall sometimes fall together,
let us also stand together as
One Paterson, under God, Indivisible
Indivisible
Indivisible

“Indivisible” was written for Mayor André Sayegh’s inauguration in 2018. The poem incorporates all cultures under one banner by representing and uniting the diverse faiths and ethnicities represented in Paterson.



Talena Lachelle Queen
1973 –

Talena Lachelle Queen in addition to being Poet Laureate of Paterson, New Jersey, since 2018, is founder and Executive Director of the Paterson Poetry Festival now in its sixth year. She is also founder and president of Word Seed, Inc. a team of literary artists who organize community outreach programs. Her publications include a forthcoming poetry collection *How Do I Tell Them* (Poets Wear Prada), *Soup Can Magazine*, the *LitFuse Anthology*, and *When Women Speak* (Edt. Ameerah Shabazz-Bilal). A sought after artist, Queen has performed at many places including the NJ Governor’s Mansion, Hoboken Historical Museum and NYCMT presents Hip Hop Cypher.

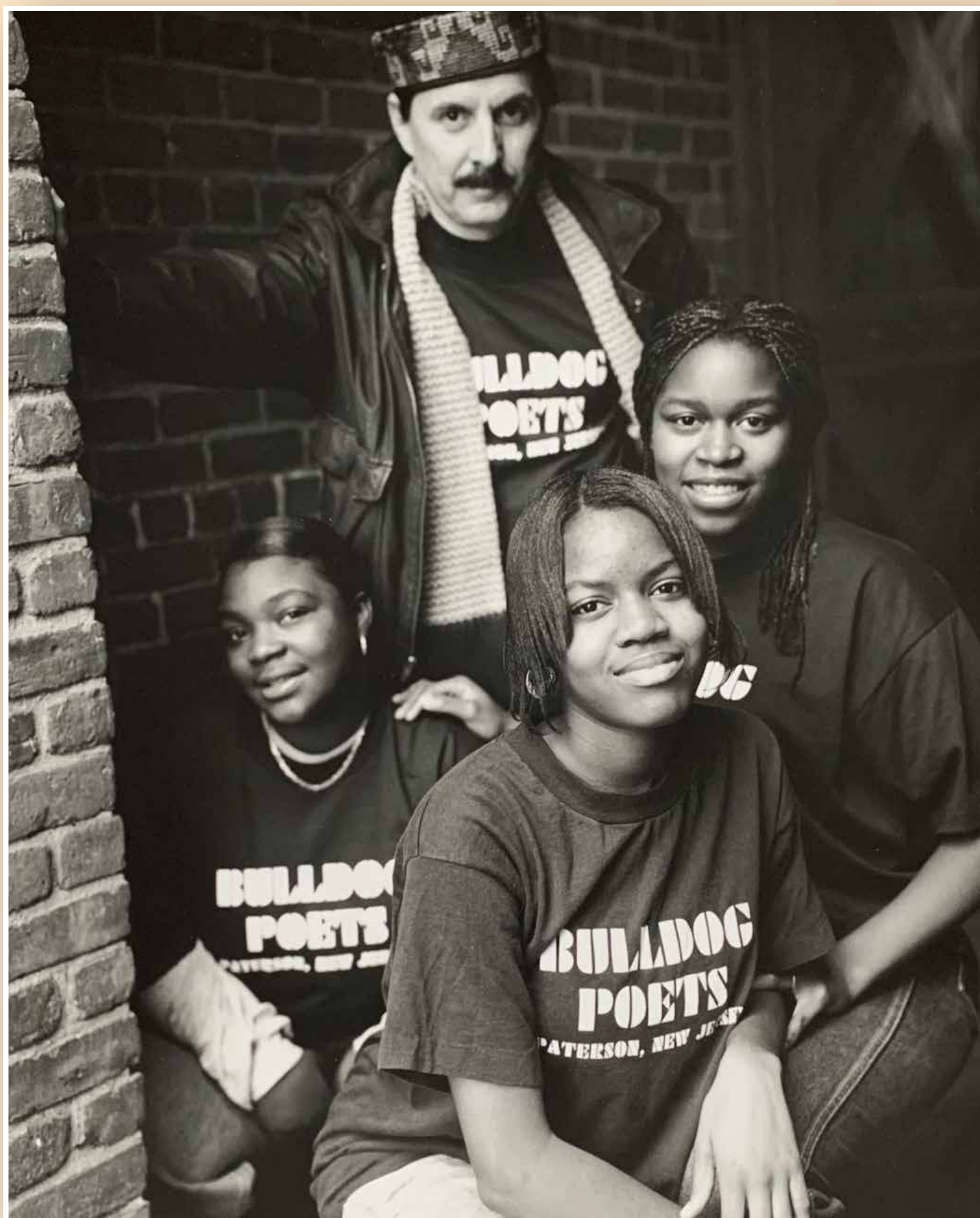
The BULLDOG POETS of School No. 4

In 1994, ESL teacher Joseph Verilla founded the BULLDOG POETS at School No. 4. Named for the school's mascot, the club was a core group of students who wrote with the club's motto in mind: "No bull, just dog." The poetry of Kamarra Fabor, Leslie Graham, Shernese Myers and La-Chaka Price drew from their lived experiences with crime, drugs and family struggles in the Christopher Columbus Housing Projects.

Through the club, the students both honed their writing skills, and also learned how to present and perform their poetry before a live audience. In 1995, the club performed as a part of the Poetry Center's annual Passaic County Community College Young People's Poetry Awards ceremony. Following their electrifying performance, the Poetry Center's Executive Director, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, said of

the students "They not only have a lot of talent, they have darn good memories." At the conclusion of the ceremony, the members of the group walked away with several prizes.

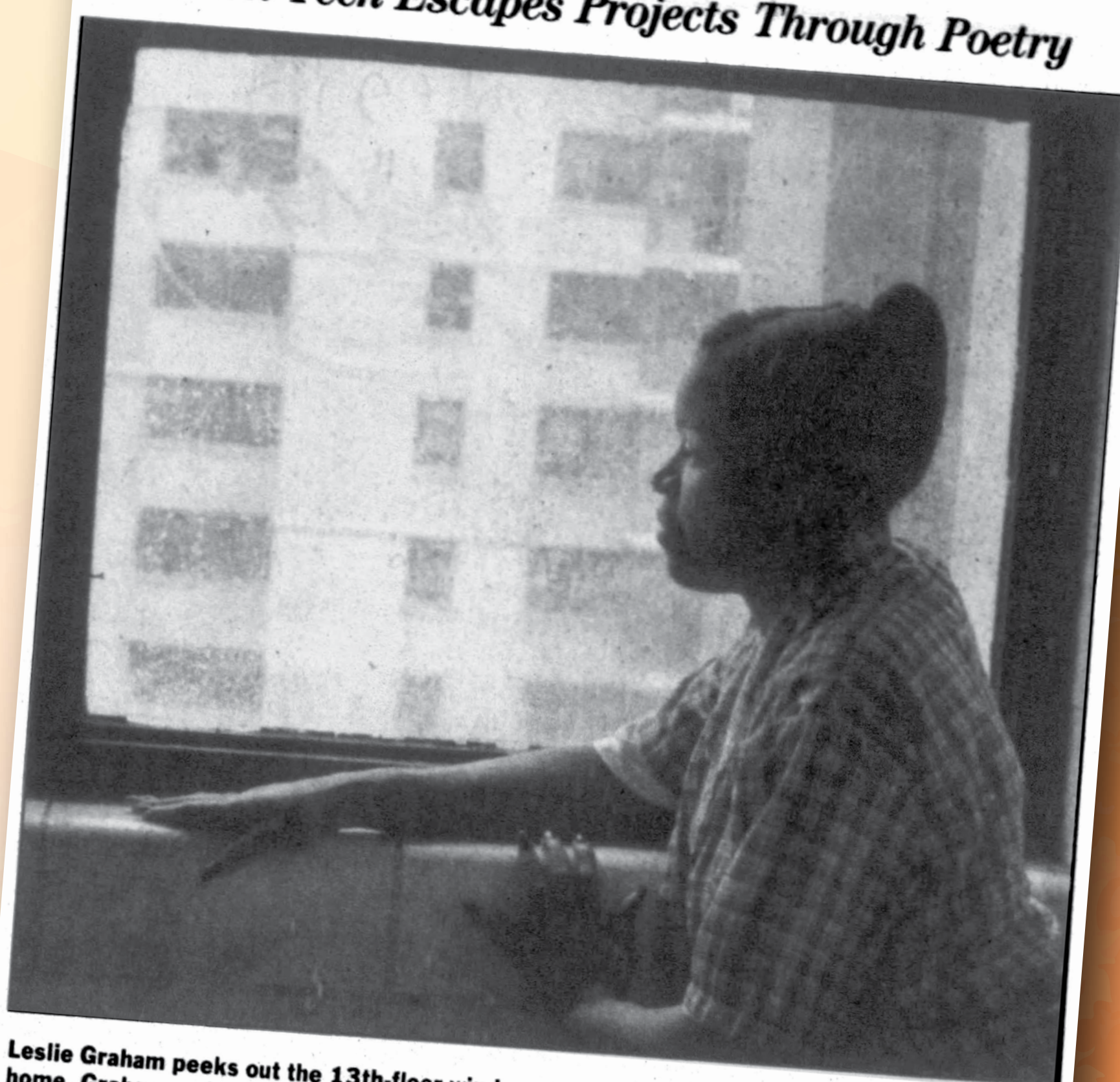
Upon leaving School No. 4 and the poetry club, several members of the BULLDOG POETS continued writing poetry and winning awards at the annual PCCC poetry contest. In 1996, Verilla brought the girls, now in high school, to the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival at Waterloo Village, Stanhope, N.J. where they performed as the BULLDOG POETS for the last time.



"The BULLDOG POETS got your attention with their performance. They got your respect with their words."

~Joseph Verilla, Founder, Director

Paterson Teen Escapes Projects Through Poetry



Leslie Graham peeks out the 13th-floor window of her Christopher Columbus Housing Projects home. Graham, a 16-year-old sophomore at John F. Kennedy High School, escapes hard times in the projects by writing poetry.

Verses Describe Life's Daily Grind

Writes About Feelings, Reads Poems Aloud

By KAREN SALMANSOHN
Herald & News

PATERSON — Leslie Graham lives in the Christopher Columbus Housing Projects and as a 16-year-old has seen some things that most hope they will never have to experience.

Down the hall from the 13th-floor apartment in which she lives, people sell drugs. They smoke crack. They sniff cocaine. Gunshots ring out as Graham hears the loud boom

boxes pumping beats into the night.

However, Graham does not follow those beats. She follows her own. Graham writes poetry twice a week. She writes about her feelings, and then performs them as she reads her own words.

"Played Double Dutch, Spin-the-bottle, hide-and-go-seek. As if in a second, all the childhood games become hood games."

Graham reads her poems out loud, for all to hear. She accentuates the name of each game as to instill the images

of childhood in the listener's head.

Graham was one of the first-place winners in the sixth annual Poetry Contest for Paterson Students for her poem, "Flashback", about life in the projects. The contest was held last week at Passaic County Community College.

It was the fourth time Graham, a sophomore and honor roll student at John F. Kennedy High School, earned a first-place prize in the contest. Graham said she uses poetry as an outlet to relieve stress in the often hostile en-

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Turning life in the projects into poetry

Even at 14 years of age, Kamarra Swindella Fabor has a reputation in her neighborhood for telling it straight. As straight as this:

"To me, my home is Dope, my furniture is Butter. To you, my home ain't nothing but a torn down, shaggy old house, that ain't worth a dime."

Her home is the Christopher Columbus Projects by the river in Paterson, and Kamarra knows what you think of it: dirty and tall, fenced and forbidding, dream-shattering and drug-littered. To outsiders, Christopher Columbus Projects ain't worth a dime.

She also knows she has no choice but to find sustenance inside its bricks, and she's fortunate that her grandmother, Julia Fabor, makes it soft and rich.

"My home is not the best place to live in and it's not the worst place to live in, but it's my HOME."

The lines are included in her poem, "My Home," that won a first-place prize in this year's Paterson Schools Poetry Contest.

Kamarra's poetry coach is Joe Verilla. A teacher at School 4 — just a blacktopped block from the Christopher Columbus Projects — Verilla respects Kamarra and dares not take her for granted.

"She can be defiant in school. She's



ROD ALLEE COUNTY LIFE

tough, trends that line. She wouldn't walk up to me and talk about her home. She was a cheerleader, sang and acted in talent shows and plays, and was a guard on the girls basketball team.

But it was the school's rarely defeated boys basketball team, the Bulldogs, which inspired Verilla to establish the Bulldog Poets. The Bulldog Poets won three of the six first-place prizes in the city contest, including Kamarra's poem.

The team performs its poetry, and for

Kamarra, that's as big a kick as the writing.

"We told some people that we say poetry. 'Oh. Uh. Uh.' But after they saw us, they said, 'You've got to teach that to me. I want to do that.'"

"The way we act it out, they'll listen." Kamarra lacks not for confidence, even though she has a poet's even introspective ticks, gnawing her fingernails and playing with her navel.

"I play with my navel in public, walking down the street," she says, laughing heartily at herself. "I'm known for it. I'm surprised I'm not doing it now."

She is, instead, playing fitfully with her new class ring as we talk.

"The larger the group, the better I perform. If you asked me now, I'd be nervous. But if there were 20 people here I wouldn't be. I have to look at people, and if there are just a few, it messes up my concentration."

Kamarra and the other Bulldog Poets performed several works at the awards ceremony for the city contest. The contest director, Maria Mazziotti Gillan of Passaic County Community College, said they were the highlight.

"They not only have a lot of talent, they have darn good memories," Gillan says. "One poem was about double-Dutch, and Kamarra recited it perfectly

while jumping up and down. The kid could go on Broadway."

At home, Kamarra says her grandmother provides support and rules, whether she likes them or not.

"Sometimes she doesn't let me do what I want to do, but it always seems like something bad happens where she doesn't let me go."

However it was her uncle, Christopher (3X) Fabor, who pointed her toward the arts. Christopher was in the first freshman class at Ross Parks, Paterson's acclaimed arts high school, and last month graduated from Rutgers in art. He draws and writes poetry.

Shortly after her uncle went away to college, Kamarra wrote "On My Street." It won second prize in the city poetry contest in 1993. It contains these words:

"On my street it's junky! All people talk about is 'Do you have wholesale?' 'Do you want ice and other stuff?' 'When I grow up I'll have some knowledge. I won't be a dropout. I'll go to college.'"

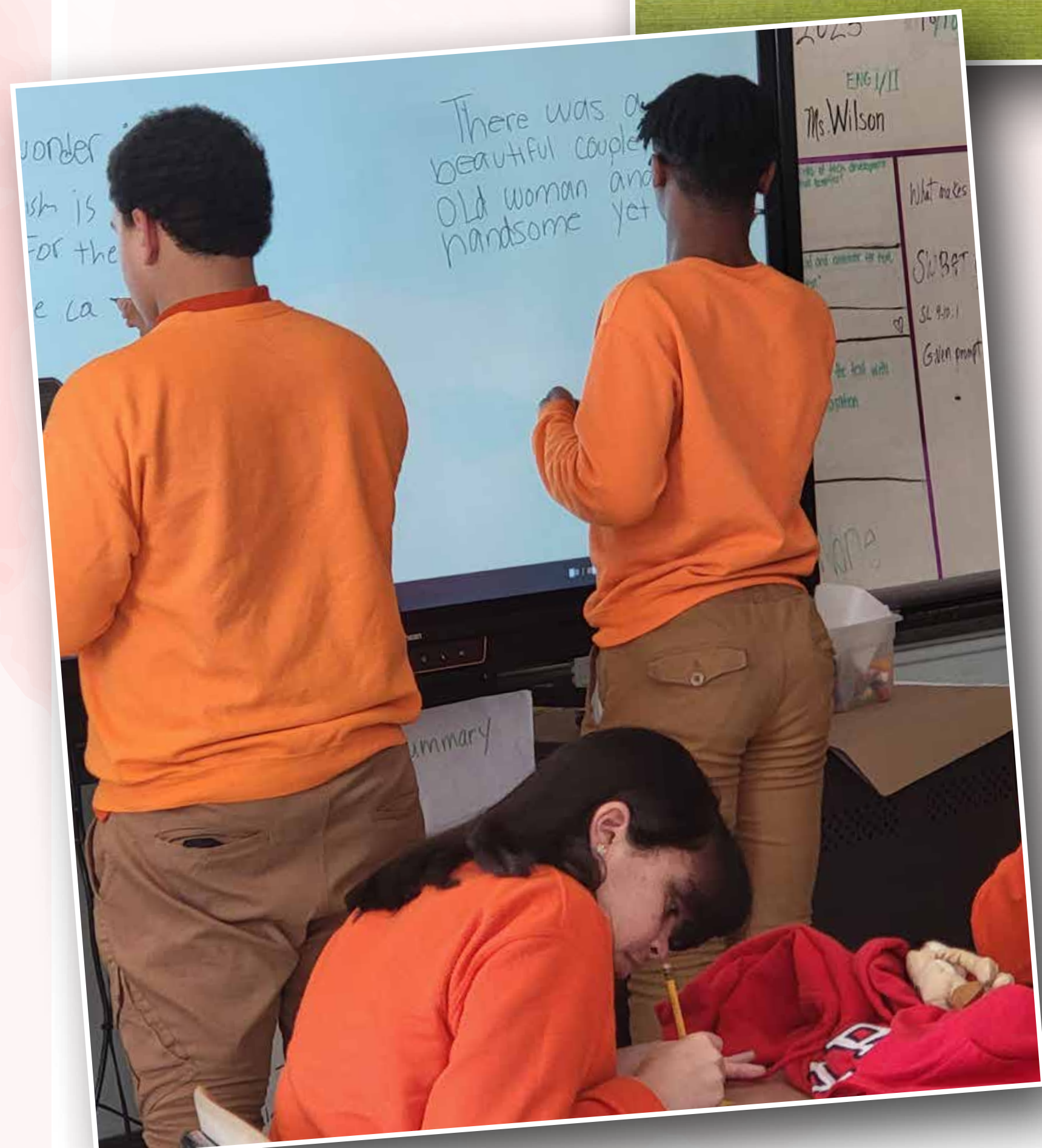
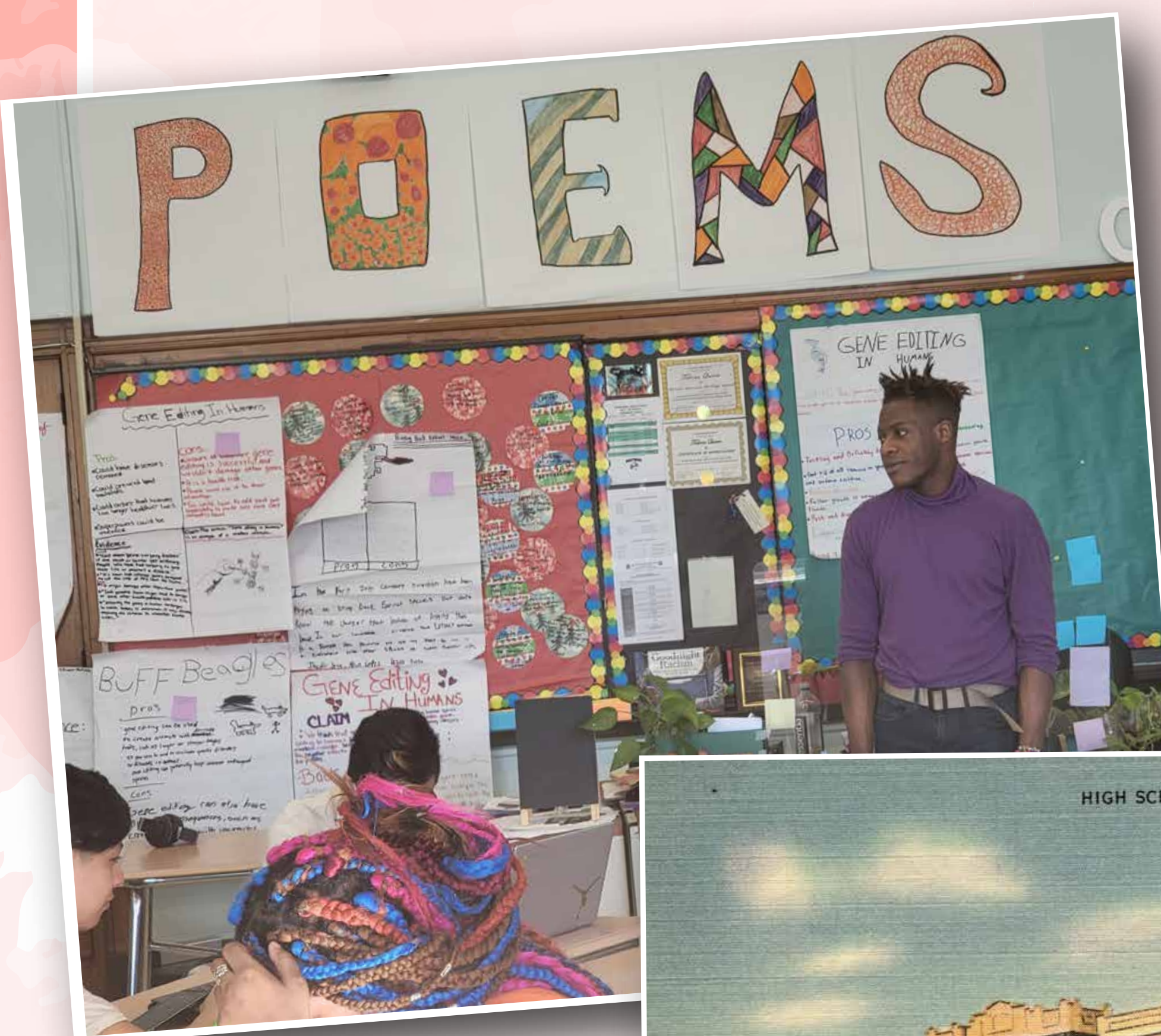
Not nearly enough children of the projects make it to college. But a clear-eyed kid like Kamarra has a chance. She has her uncle's example going for her, and her grandmother's firm guidance. She also has the infinite possibilities of poetry to keep her focused.

Eastside High School Poetry Club

Eastside High School has a long-standing history of student poetry clubs. In 1966, a poetry club was formed by Daniel Lawrence, Marilyn DiMartino and Joanna Gennerelli. They published only one issue of their literary magazine *Illusions*, before the school administrators shut down the club, claiming that the poems had inappropriate messaging. Not to be deterred, the students self-published and sold the magazine outside the school gates.

The current Poetry Club was established by teacher Cynthia Mamakos (now Werner) in the 1980s. At that time, student poets read at New York City's Nuyorican Poets Cafe and competed in the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Program's annual festival.

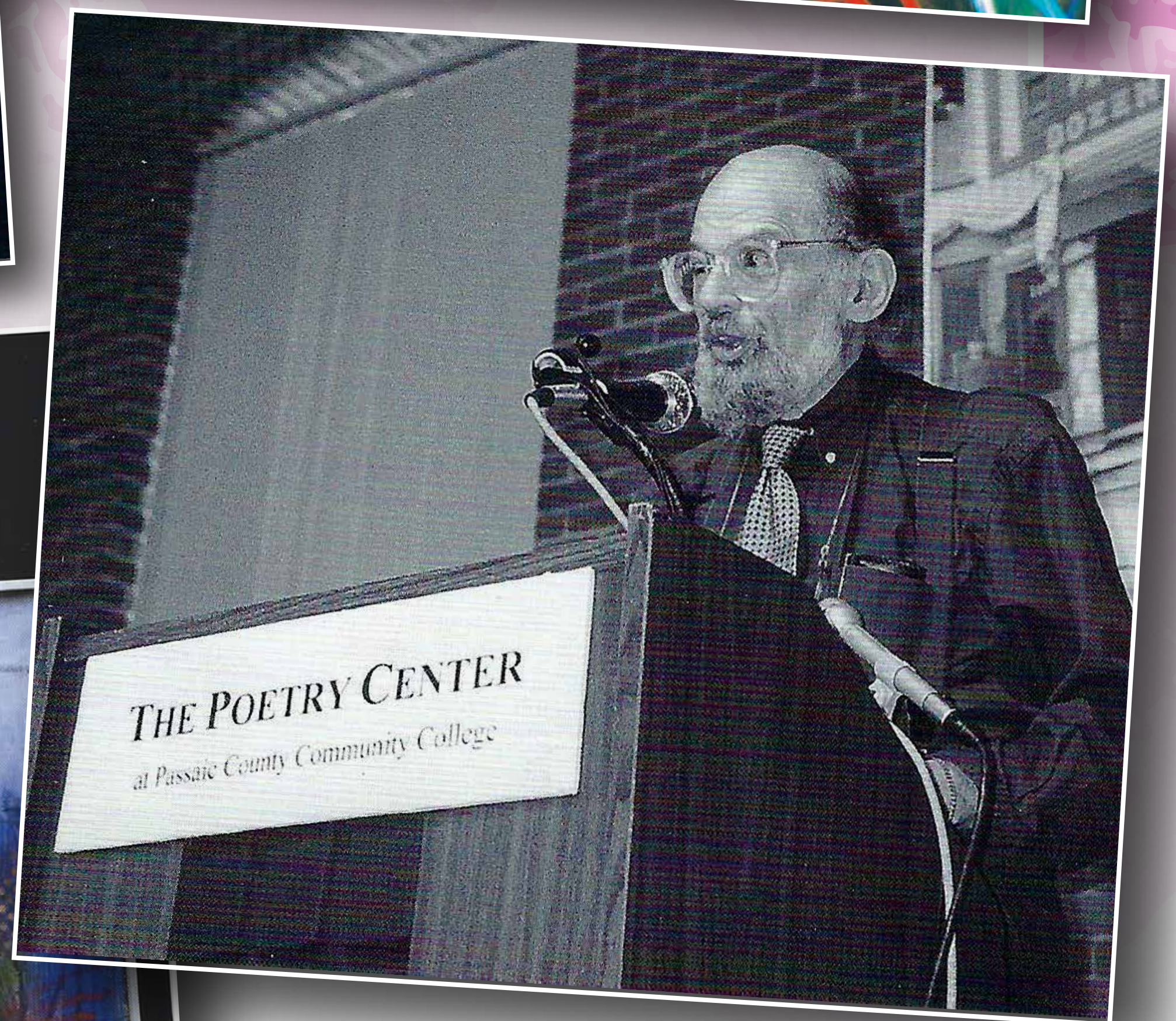
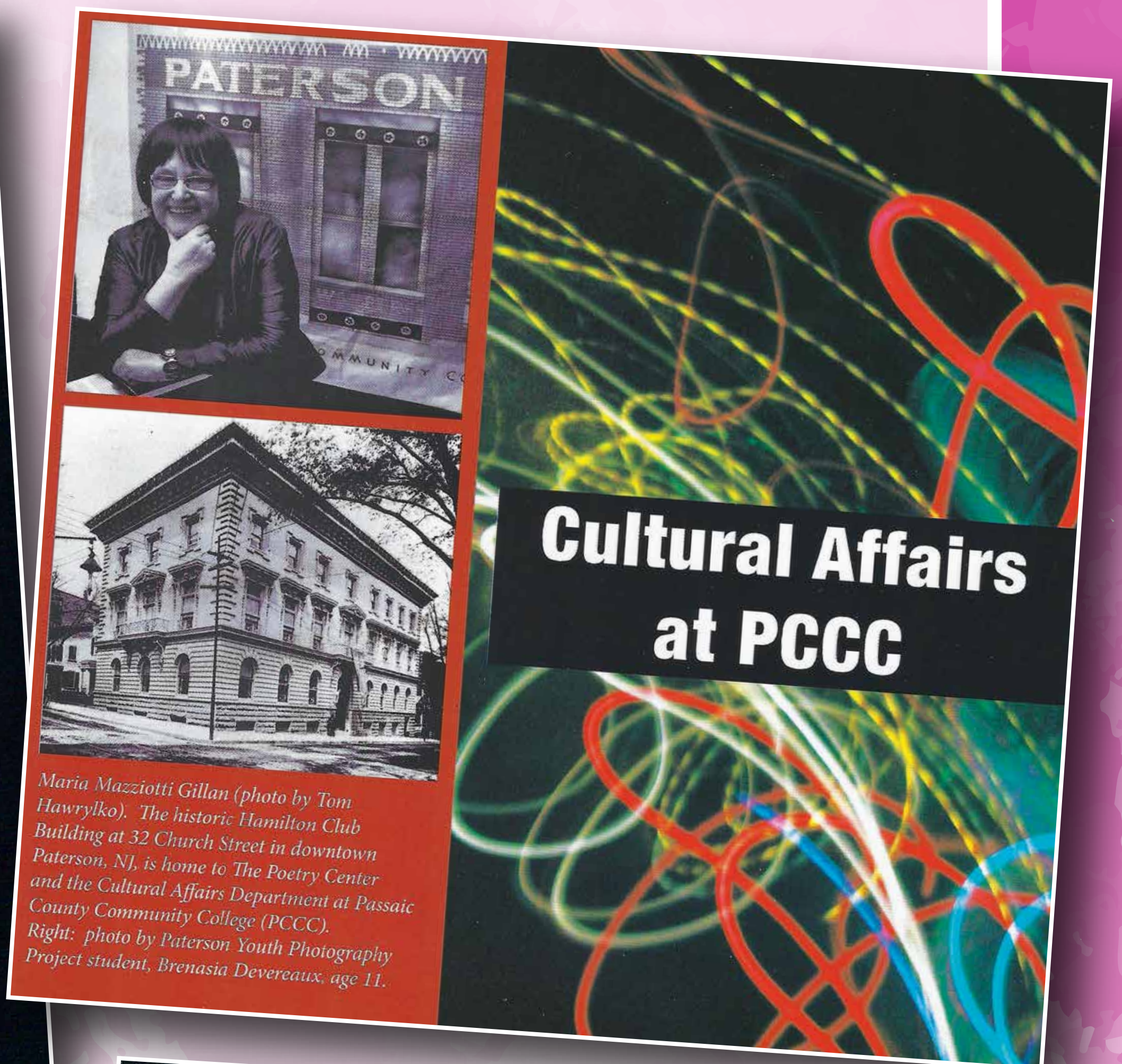
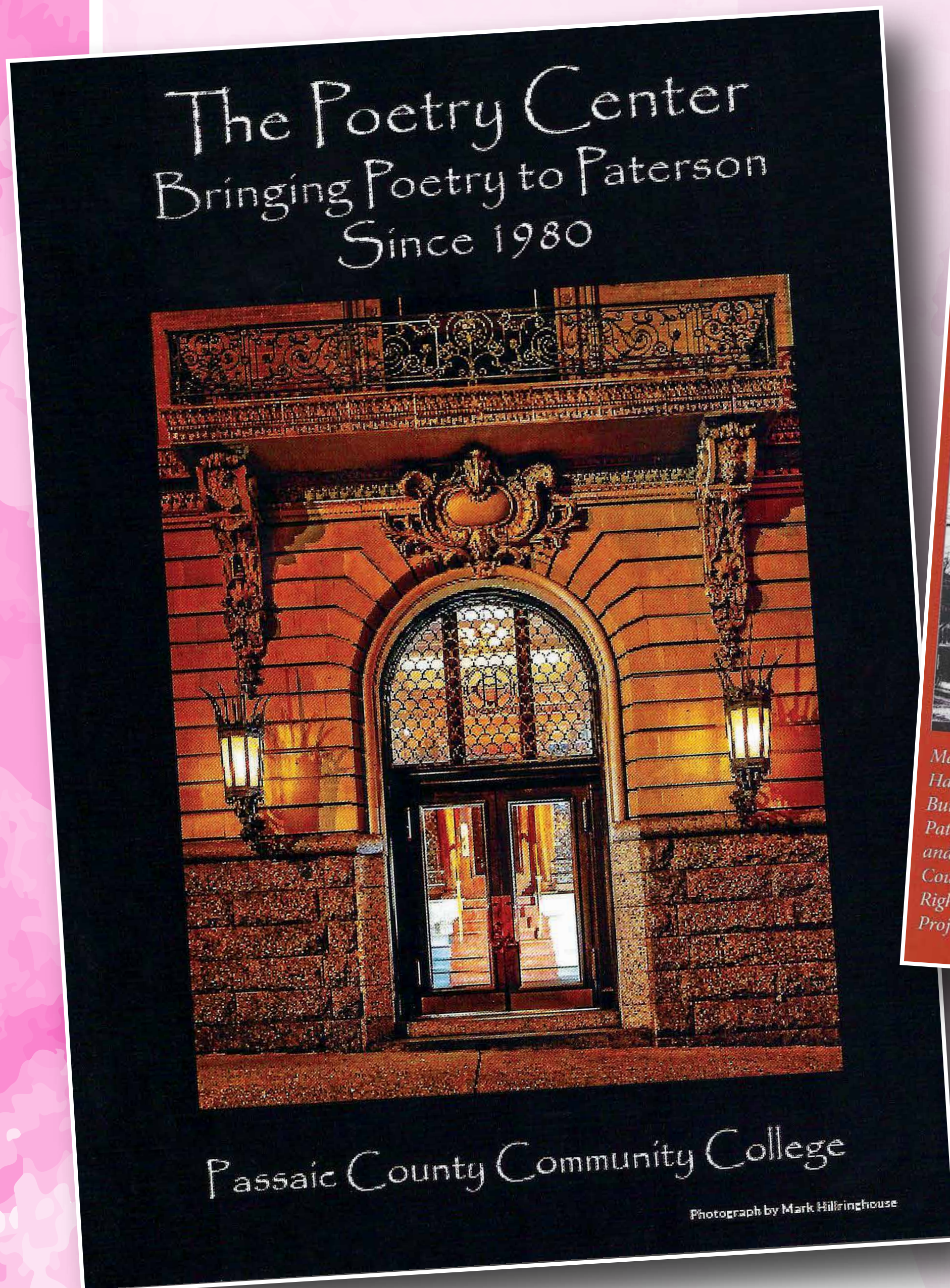
Today, the Eastside Poetry Club is led by teacher Talena Lachelle Queen, who is the club's faculty advisor. The Poetry Club invites professional poets to work with the emerging writers. The student poets read at the Paterson Poetry Festival, an annual event that is produced by Word Seed Inc. They also participate in Passaic County Community College Young Peoples' Poetry Contest.



The Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College

In 1980, the Poetry Center was founded by Patersonian poet Maria Mazziotti Gillan, who serves as its executive director. A part of the Passaic County Community College community, the Center is located in the historic Hamilton Club Building, in downtown Paterson. In over forty years of operation, the Center has welcomed thousands of national and internationally renowned poets to Paterson, including Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Lucille Clifton, Stanley Kunitz, Ruth Stone, Marge Piercy, Billy Collins, Richard Blanco, and Patricia Smith.

The Center promotes poetry in the community in a number of ways. The Distinguished Poets series and associated workshops bring poets from around the world to Paterson. The Center also oversees three literary competitions, the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards, the Paterson Poetry Prize and the Paterson Prize for Books for Young People. The Center has published several anthologies, but is better known for its annual *Paterson Literary Review*, a nationally used publication.



Silk City Poets

In 1977, Angela Costa, Don Kommit and Joseph Verilla formed the Silk City Poets. A poetry performance group, the trio created scenarios that incorporated each other's poetry into a collage style performance. Performances would combine poetry, mime and music.

The group appeared throughout Northern New Jersey and Southern New York. In 1978, as a part of the Greater Paterson Arts Council's Art Exposure Series, the Silk City Poets performed two sold-out shows at Paterson's Genesis Theater. They continued to be featured

locally at the Great Falls Festivals, and Poetry Center programs throughout the city. In 1979, they performed "Paterson's Great Silk Strike of 1913," at Education Collective and West End Café in New York City.

In the later part of 1978, Verilla left the group to pursue a career in education. Costa and Kommit continued to represent the group at events into 1980. The group dissolved when Costa relocated to New York to focus on a career in music.

*"... through the long days the mills
rolled out the thread/puffing out
smoke from burning coal/the engines
rolled with the river out to sea/with
trains chugging out the wealth of the
national manufactory ... "*

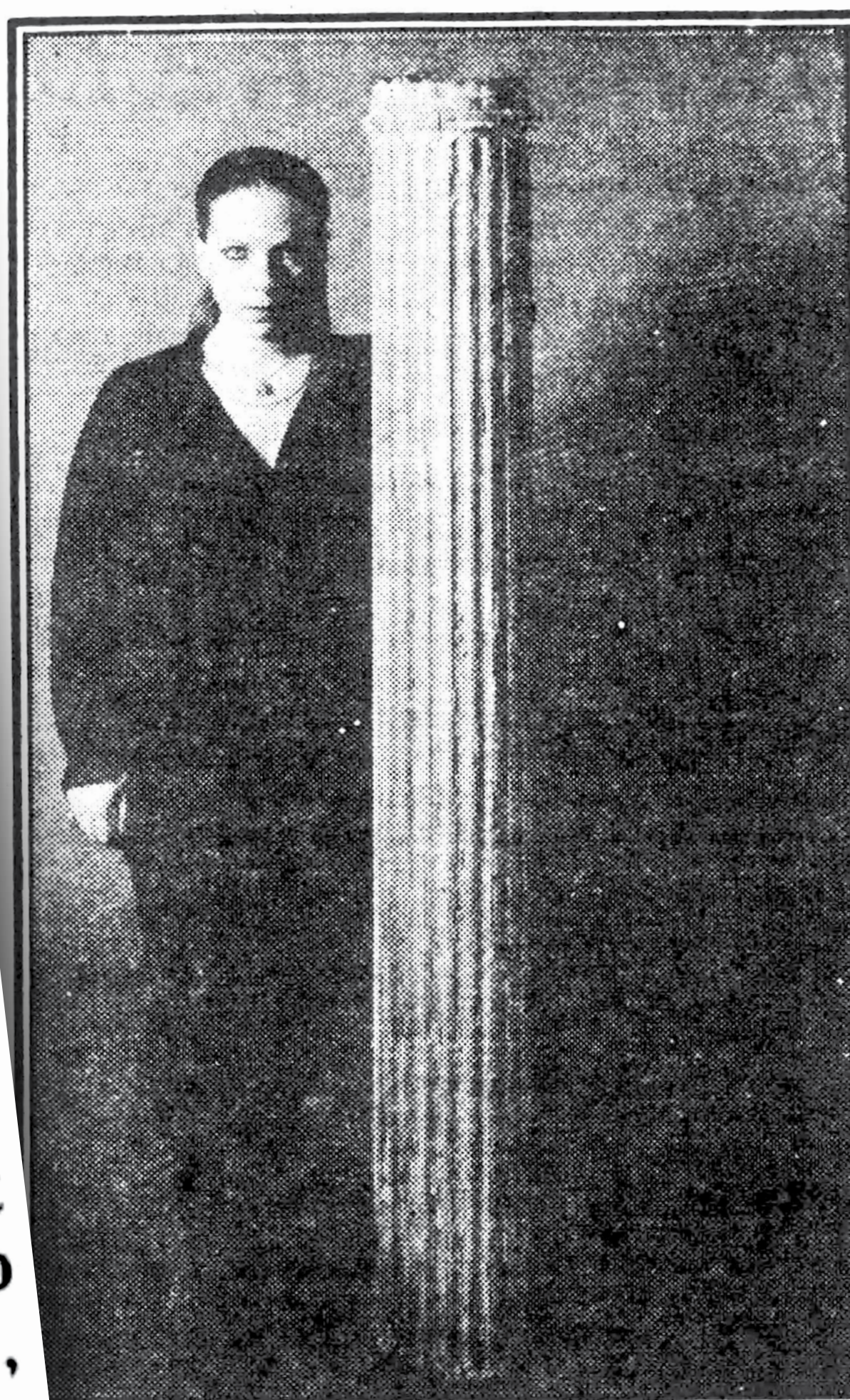
~The Silk City Poets



Silk City Poets Set for Genesis

PATERSON — The Silk City Poets, a performance group of Paterson poets, will appear 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, June 23 and 24 at the Genesis Theater, 39 Broadway.

Featured will be Angela Costa, Don Kommit and Joseph Verilla, who will focus on poetry, mime and music combined to form "Poetic Scenarios."



PATERSON POETS: The Silk City Poets featuring Angela Costa and Don Kommit will appear in the student ballroom at Montclair State College at 8 p.m. on Monday.

Word Seed Inc. Presents The Paterson Poetry Festival

Founded in 2019, Word Seed Inc., is a Paterson based non-profit that focuses on literacy education and access. The organization offers poetry programming in the community all year long. Writing workshops, geared toward poets of all ages, help writers to hone their skills with expert guidance. Word Seed's *Power of Words* poetry series provides monthly poetry programming with both featured poets and open mic opportunities.

Word Seed's signature event, the Paterson Poetry Festival, was first held in October 2018. The festival is a celebration of words, writers and poetry lovers. In 2022, the festival

celebrated its fifth year. The festival is the brainchild of Paterson Poet Laureate Talena Lachelle Queen and takes place outside the Historic Passaic County Courthouse, in the heart of Paterson's Downtown Business District. The multi-day program includes the Poetry In Motion Car Show sponsored by Classic Riderz Car Club, Feature Poets, Open Mic, a Poetry Slam, Lit Fest (geared toward young minds), the Youth Poetry contest, classes and workshops, vendors, food and much more. Described as the Super Bowl event for poets, the program has become international in recent years, with virtual programming being added to the roster in 2020.

