

# Remembering Bob Shelby...

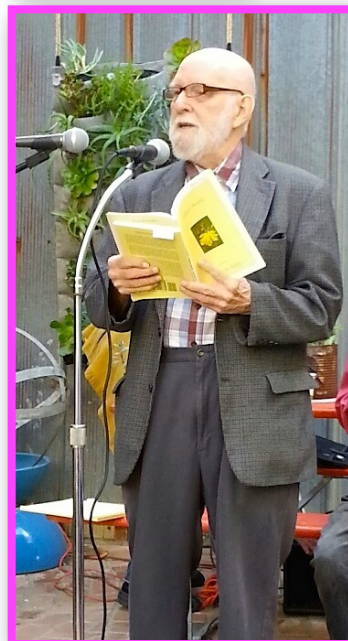
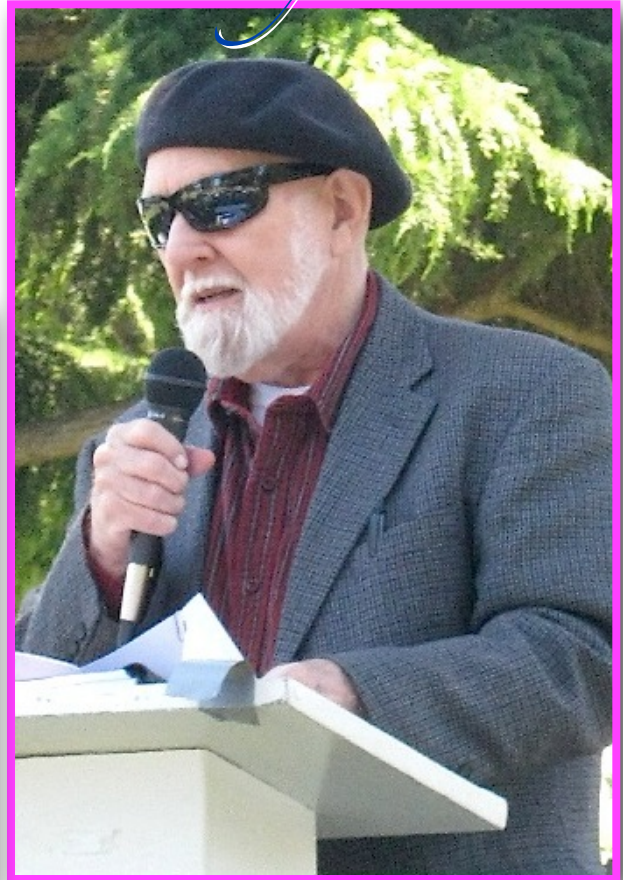
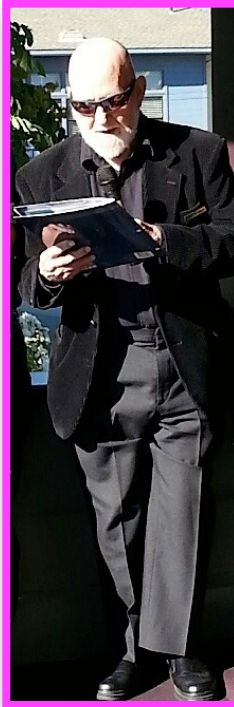


I was saddened late today to hear from Joel Fallon that past Benicia Poet Laureate **Bob Shelby** has passed away. We all

knew that Bob was ill and had not been able to come to our readings, which he dearly loved to do. I spoke tonight with his ex wife, Ella Hoare, in whose home he had been living for the last several years. She informs me that his son wants to hold a memorial for Bob at his business, 851 Music Studios, in Benicia, but has yet to set a date. She will call me as soon as she knows the date and time and I will get that out to all of you as soon as she does.

We all have our memories of Bob to sustain us. He will be sorely missed.

**Don Peery,**  
*Benicia Poet Laureate, 2014–2016*  
*March 16, 2016*

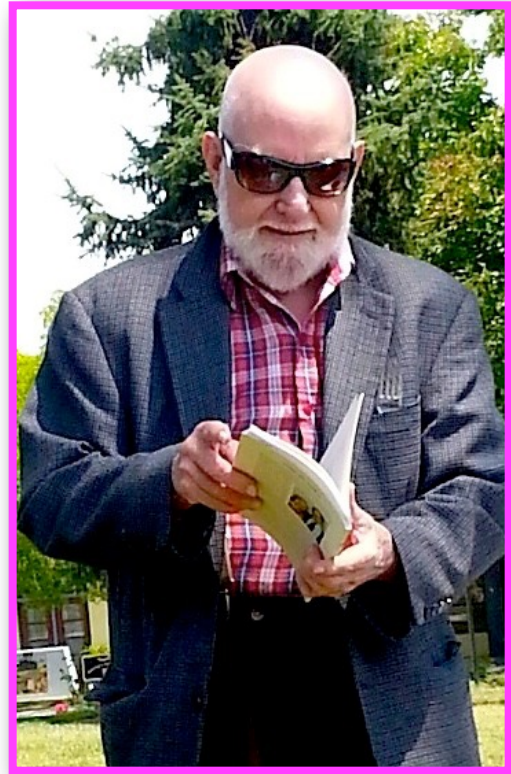


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## Poem for Robert Shelby

You died a poet, not a saint,  
but in the book you signed  
and gave to me, you wrote,  
“with blessings and cheer.”  
I will remember you as  
the Laureate who wore the black beret,  
who crowned his words  
with heroes of old and metered rhymes,  
yet had the wicked humor to sometimes  
write and cast a joke upon himself.  
And though I suspect you adored women,  
you didn’t tolerate bad poetry or fools.  
Your disposition seemed like sugar dissolved in hot tea,  
the sweetness not seen, but always tasted.  
I didn’t know you well,  
yet, you were kind to me,  
and once marked a poem I had read  
with scribbled words of encouragement  
as a teacher might write to a promising student.  
So, on this day after your death,  
a day you might’ve penned a poem about,  
with its greening grass, and blustery blossoming trees,  
let me say that I will miss you, dear poet,  
who praised so well the beauty  
of this dazzling, passionate world,  
and left me “with blessings and cheer”  
to find my own words.

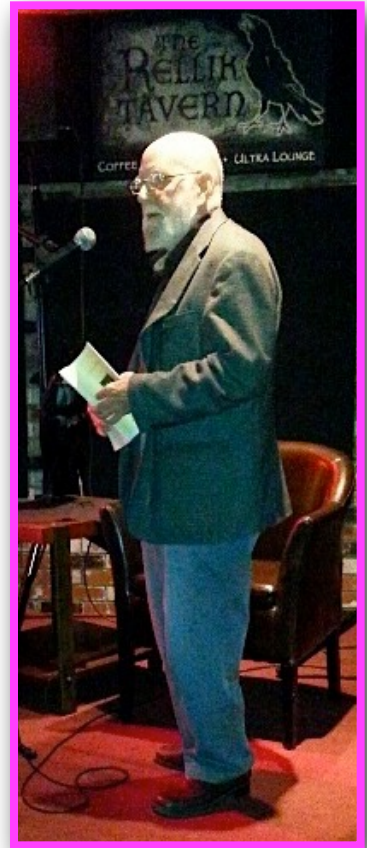
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## Robert Shelby

Robert Shelby may and well be sitting next to you tonight  
The shining apple of a man surely bled into our bones  
with more than one of his soft tones, his poetry so erudite  
and Bob so rapturous in flight from everyday banalities  
led adventures meant to please the mind and heart of all  
he shared a bite with. None could say they'd been abused  
by the way he had amused us with his rhapsodies and wit his  
Santa Claus visage was perfectly fit to the sweetness in his heart  
though he could squeeze the lemons tartness over those  
he thought were foul, yes the man could surely howl as well  
as Ginsburg we all know and yes we hate to see him go but  
he is with us we all know he was not one we will quickly forget.

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*Early condolences by e-mail  
following Don Peery's  
first announcement:*

“Bob loved to share his poetry,  
he was a wonderful speaker!!  
Blessings to him and family.”  
– **Gina Guzzo**



“Bob Shelby was such a gracious man.  
He created lyrical beauty with his thoughts and words. While I knew him only briefly,  
he was an inspiration, a true scholar and artist. My condolences to his family.”  
– **Dena Westerman**

“I am so VERY sorry to hear this! Bob was a true gentleman, a prolific writer and producer of  
chapbooks, and a supportive, kind friend. I will miss him – I have been missing him already.  
Please do keep us informed as I want very much to pay my respects to somebody who treated  
everyone with respect himself.”  
– **Deborah Fruchey**

“Sad news indeed. His poetry and style of reading were unique.  
We all will miss him.”  
– **Jeff Kingman**

“Bob and I also met online with adversaries in the local paper. He could be both a  
scrapper and a philosophical intellect. I will miss his poems and his fire, but they're  
never forgotten.”  
– **Peter Bray**

When a poet dies  
Words remain but are not as sweet  
In remembrance of Robert Shelby  
– **Genea Brice**

“Bob Shelby and I go way back to the 1970s, and our classes together at JFKU when the  
campus was in Orinda. I am “the last one standing” in our group that remained together as  
friends, as well as fellow poets, over all these years. I will really miss him and his hugs.”  
– **BJ, Barbara Britton**

## A Poet Passes

*Remembering Robert Shelby*

The poet put a shine on things  
and tidied up the way we see them.

He polished old truths until  
we reflected on them.

The poet had at least a hundred ways  
to make us change our mind,

to laugh out loud and yes,  
to break our heart.

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## Elegy for a Poet

Neither of us ever found the key  
(hell, neither of us even found the door!)  
but he helped me clean the windows now and then  
which left my view much better than before.

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## A True Gentleman

Bob's was the only other car  
in the lot of the church  
where our poetry group  
had met and adjourned.

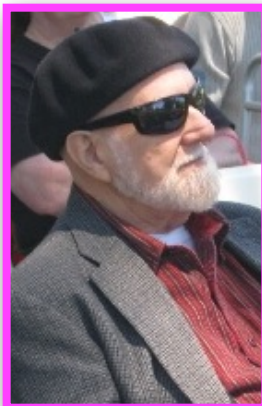
As evening rain began,  
I carried to my car  
the empty containers  
that hours earlier

had held refreshments.  
Finally inside,  
headlights and wipers on,  
I was ready to leave.

Bob was too  
but would not drive off  
until he was sure  
I could start my car.

His smile, our quick waves,  
feeling cared for, secure,  
I recall when it rains—  
Bob's car gone in a blur.

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Continues on Page 6 –

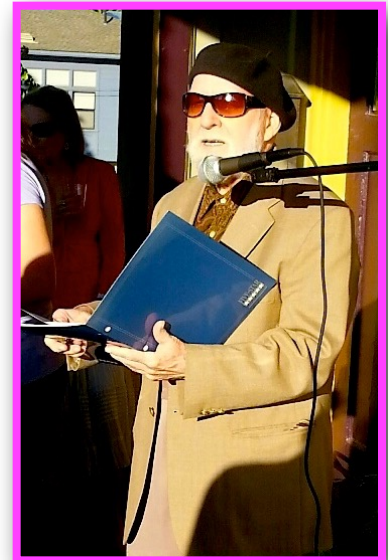
Rare Avis  
(For Robert Shelby)

Sometimes the prankster, making listeners chuckle,  
sometimes Homeric, vowels rolling royal,  
he had the sonnet lodged beneath his buckle.  
But what I noticed most was, he was loyal.

Attending in suspenders and beret  
he gently shared his philosophic mind –  
and in the papers he would have his say -  
but what I valued more was, he was kind.

His lines would scan, no matter how words shifted.  
Considerate throughout our friendship's span,  
he left us more than poetry; we're gifted  
the memory of a parfit, gentle man.

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In Remembrance of Bob

As geese glide through momentary blue,  
poppies are blooming their cupped petals  
of gold. Memories are like these pictures,  
but brilliance is more than shine, it is divine  
words you wrote that continue to speak,  
and yet like trembling stars that eventually dim,  
they will leave imprints and reminders.

Bob Shelby  
by Robert Eastwood

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I knew Bob Shelby for over 40 years. We were in the California Writers group workshop; in a readers' theater poetry play called "Survive." ( Bob served as our "intellectual" poet); and in Alameda Poets for many years. (Bob gave great workshops). Also, we shared membership in The Ina Coolbrith Circle. Bob was a reader and winner at the Poets Dinner. I knew Bob as a warm friend, a gracious host, an uncanny poet, and great guy – as others have said, "kind" and a "gentleman." Thanks for putting together this online tribute for Bob. I feel privileged to have known him.

In memory – *Claire J. Baker*

## I Saw Him Writing

I may have known him a little  
Erudite, cherubic even  
I may have had a moment  
To look into, looking in  
A magical world  
A wonderful place  
A special place that dresses  
all women in beauty  
All of us in grace

The wind blew a little  
When I saw him at the ATM  
I know you? He would say, quizzically  
Yes! I know you!

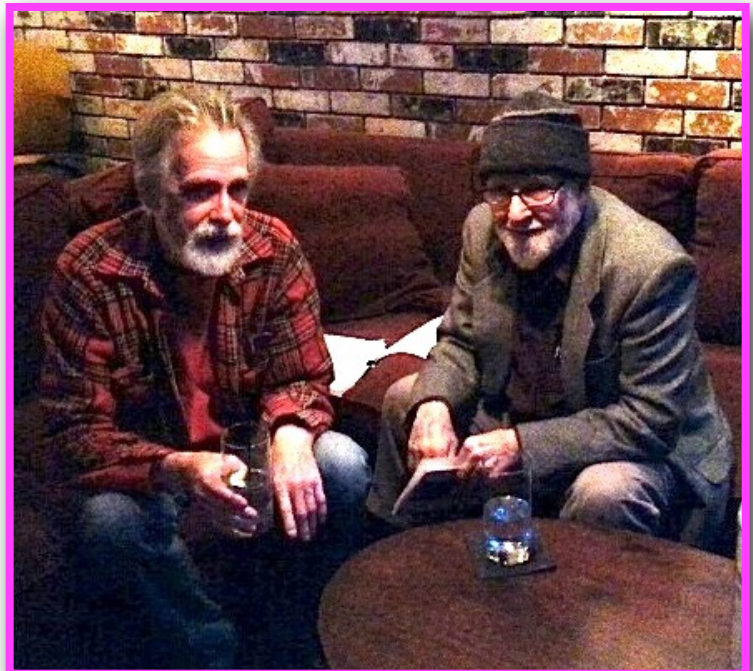
I may have had a drink with him  
Late nights after the show  
In a bar or on a street  
Conversations about beauty  
Possibilities for beautiful things  
Often ordinary in appearance  
Made Grecian and grand  
In the telling  
From voice ancient with song

I may have known him  
A little  
His beauty  
His song  
He knew us all  
Sang words

Crying out  
Sounded like real poems  
Made poems seem real  
All of us, living within them

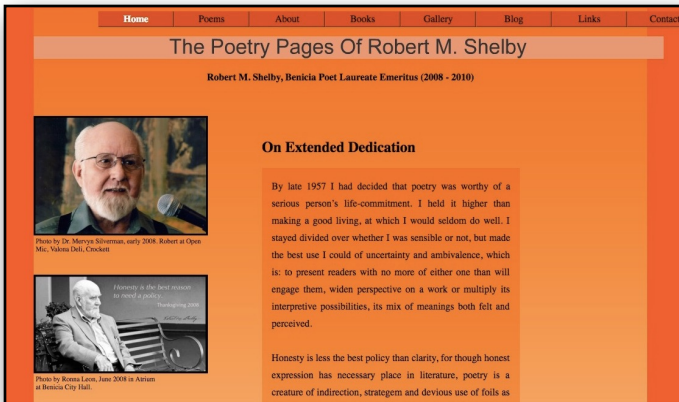
We may have known him then  
A little like he knew us.

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Continues on Page 8 –

Some of Bob's poetry can be found on his website: <http://robertmshelbypoetry.com/index.html>



*Videographer David Manley interviewed Bob in 2011:*

When I interviewed Robert for a series of talks with Benicia's early Poets Laureate, I was struck by his approach to poetry as a combination of rigorous intelligence and vigorous emotion. "Real poets," he said, "are jewelers of the intellect/ The deep-shaft miners of the mind." And down deep at bedrock was a profound affinity for the written word, for polishing thought into verse. During the interview he describes how his parents instilled in him a love for literature and poetry as he sat in their laps while they read to him. You can still hear the catch of love in his voice. But his was a tough love that had no patience for wringing of hands or dragging of feet. His was a celebration of the work to be done and the joy taken in work well done.

"Put your bare feet on the floor  
And start your day with grateful song  
Do your work  
The sun will roar the beauty to which we belong."

Thank you, Robert, for your song. – **David Manley**

An edited clip of the interview "Robert Shelby, Poet Laureate, Benicia, California" can be seen on my Youtube channel: [https://youtu.be/Bz\\_4s0XZQ9I](https://youtu.be/Bz_4s0XZQ9I)

Bob was definitely one of us and our second Poet Laureate, 2008-2010, see more of Bob at [www.Beniciafirsttuesdayspoets.com](http://www.Beniciafirsttuesdayspoets.com)

