

# Kelly's Corner

BY JAN KELLY



## SPEAK TO ME OF PROVINCETOWN

*This week we're glad to welcome back to the magazine our very own Jan Kelly, who brings to you another side of Provincetown's varied life. Here's what she found...*



(L) Ruth Littlefield (R) Mary Oliver

"Speak to Me of Provincetown," a fundraiser for the Provincetown Portuguese Festival, was held at the Red Inn on May 15. It was a delightful afternoon of poetry by Ruth Littlefield, an 87-year-old Provincetown native, and Mary Oliver, a Pulitzer Prize winner. Both took us to their thoughts and their loves of Provincetown.

If you were walking by, you would have heard a steady hum like insects buzzing or a low drum roll. To look in, you would have seen foreheads almost touching or heads thrown back, releasing laughter. There were over 150 people anticipating the spoken lines of Ruth Littlefield's and Mary Oliver's poems, and everyone was so happy.

The Red Inn provided a room-length table of varied and delicious foods- clam stuffing, Portuguese cheese balls soaked in balsamic vinegar, grilled vegetables, hummus, baked brie and so much more. Jose V. Silva playing Portuguese guitar and Variato Ferreira on classical guitar added another dimension to the day. The bar flurried and everybody present was 100% present, with not a thought to the outside world.

Donald Murphy, chairman of the Provincetown Portuguese Festival, was busy in all directions, greeting and introducing guests and photographing all. "The fundraising and planning are going well - we have the community support. It's their festival and we have the opportunity to do it. We have a website [provincetownportuguese-festival.com](http://provincetownportuguese-festival.com) and it's updated daily," he said.

Berta Walker joined us brightly and beautifully garbed, all smiles. "No better spot to ground yourself into the season." As she looked out at the harbor, "It was a good winter and it's good to start the season here with Ruth and Mary reading."

Susan Leonard joined us to catch us up on the planning of the "Blessing of the Fleet: The Portuguese Festival" show to be held at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum from June 24 through July 10. Susan told us that Napi Van Dereck and Jim Bakker will be "putting it together from several sources."

Berta added, "I have that 4' x 6' Nancy Whorf painting, 'Festival on the Wharf.' That will be a job to move, but we'll get it there."

Susan Leonard continued, "Peter Macara's 'Land's End' will be





Ruth "Ducer" Littlefield

there, too. It's four panels commissioned by Land's End Marine Supply as part of their renovation. It's a view of the town from the vantage point of Long Point. There will also be a photographic showing. It was suggested by PAAM Director Chris McCarthy that we make it an annual event."

Maureen Hurst, festival committee member, was hostess and so enjoying it all. "This is so wonderful. The poetry of Mary Oliver and Ruth Littlefield represents the merging of the artists and fishermen in Provincetown. That's

the beauty of the festival- all segments of the town come together for the love of Provincetown. Mary Oliver is a classic example of someone who came to town and loved the town and the people. She's lived here more than 40 years. Ruth Littlefield was born here, lives in the house she was born in, and sleeps in the room she was born in. Everybody being welcomed is the message that continues in Provincetown, the message that you want the festival to carry. It's unique, so many different people with that common thread, the love of Provincetown. You know what they say, 'God had a last fistful of sand and he pitched that into the bay to make Provincetown - he saved the best for last.'"

Beata Cook had walked in and caught the last phrase and gave "Amen" and a nod. Looking around, she said "I hope Ducer Ramos finds a parking space or she'll be reading her poetry outside!"

"Who?" we queried.

Beata explained, "Ducer Ramos- her name is Littlefield now, but when she was a kid her nickname was Ducer- her father was the village blacksmith. My grandmother, Sadie Patrick, lived next door to them. I was always up there at Chip Hill."

Maureen said, "Her poetry brings me to tears, reminds me of days I remember and what life was like for my father."

They both agreed how they love the poems of Ruth's when she was in high school and how they would watch the "Dorothy Bradford," the Boston Boat, round the Point. It was a sign of summer and they wanted to swim. Their mothers said, "Too early, too cold," so they would go down, around the breakwater and 'accidentally' fall in, long underwear, long cotton stockings and all. The boys would head for the pier to dive for nickels. "It's a visual of days gone by," Maureen said "Yes, she writes from the heart," Beata added.

Another group of out-of-staters arrived, thrilled at the opportunity to hear Mary Oliver and to be introduced to 87-year-old Ruth Littlefield's work. People arrived an hour early and they kept arriv-

ing. Nobody left, they just got readier and readier.

Finally, the buzzing and chatting stopped, the beautiful guitar music floated away, the chairs, windowsills and all the floor space possible were occupied, food and drink stopped at will, and people were only aware of their ears. We were knit together like a school of fish.

Chris Hottle of the Council on Aging introduced Ruth, saying that Ruth wrote young but married a naval officer, moved away, raised two boys, and then returned to her first home and first bedroom. While Chris was visiting Ruth, she said Ruth looked out her kitchen window and recited a poem. Stunned again by Provincetown, Chris confessed that a high school teacher had closed the door on poetry for her by over-analyzing and critiquing the poem. When she read Mary Oliver, Mary opened that door, and now Ruth added to the naturalness of poetry, or pushed the door open wider.

Ruth read, and a Provincetown of days gone by came to life: her



grandmother widowed and left to raise 11 children, and how they coped and grew strong, her father becoming a Hercules through the demanding work of being a blacksmith, the moving pictures with the hooting, hollering and stamping and "lights on" for silence. Tough and wistful, Mary Oliver sat on the floor with us and listened.

Maureen Hurst introduced Mary Oliver as a Pulitzer Prize Winner, National Book Award winner and on and on. Maureen noted that Mary does not prefer public readings and declines interviews, but was so gracious to agree immediately to read for the town and the festival. And read she did, from *Why I Wake Early*, *New and Selected Poems*, and prose from *Blue Pastures*. Mary Oliver's 40 plus years of loving the town became so precious to everyone present, many with closed eyes. As Mary Oliver read, the sound of the incoming tide accompanied her voice. It was half tide, and everything was closer to us.