

Stoking the Fires

Have you ever found that the “fire” of your enthusiasm and passion for writing poetry is down to the smallest flame or dying ember? I submit that these feelings are shared by most poets. So, welcome to the club of those with artistic temperament! But, how can we “stoke” these fires within us when only embers remain?

My wife and two sons and I used to camp in the Colorado mountains almost every summer. One of our favorite things to do was to cook our meals over an open fire, and later, after dark, sit in its warmth and glow. Eventually the flames would die down, and only red glowing embers remained. So, in order to return the embers into leaping flames again, we would “stoke” the fire, and soon new flames climbed up into the air.

I believe that the essence of the things we did to stoke the campfire also work for stoking the fires of enthusiasm and passion within us. Here are three examples:

1. Gently blow into the bottom of the fire/embers. The air we exhale still contains about 14-16% oxygen, enough to feed the glowing embers or small flames. Likewise, we can feed our lagging passions by reading some of our favorite poems or something brand new from another poet or ourselves. Sometimes it works for me to write a few paragraphs in prose. You might just find yourself lapsing into poetry with renewed intent and energy.
2. Add a log to the fire and/or rearrange the logs. This will create new space for air to circulate around the logs. When passion’s fire is flagging, we can create some space between ourselves and our passion. Space, as well as absence, can make the heart grow fonder. I find walks to be helpful in creating such space. It can also be helpful to “translate” a few stanzas of a poem into prose. The “muse” within might take exception and try even harder to inspire you!
3. Be patient, and trust the process. It takes a while for a spark to become a flame and a flame a blazing fire. The periods of low passion and enthusiasm are often like a field left fallow for a time, so that the soil can rest and rejuvenate. Often I experience, at the end of one of these times, a spate of new poems that seem to spring up from the fertile emptiness of the furrows.

Finally, when passion’s blaze burns low, it’s well to remember the old man’s reply when asked what his favorite Bible verse was. His response was as confident as it was immediate: he said, “And it came to pass...” “Why is that your favorite?” the questioner continued. “Because in all life situations I know that no matter what happens, it has come to pass and not to stay!” Soon this, too, shall pass, and the fire will again burn brightly in your passion and in your poems!

Peace and Poetry,
John

