

**Author to Author: with Mindy Friddle**

**The Book: "A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry"  
Edited by Gilbert Allen and William Rogers  
(Ninety-Six Press, \$20)**

**The Event: A celebration of "A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry"  
Sunday, August 28 at 7:30 PM at the Coffee Underground. Admission is free.**

Twenty-two of the 46 poets in "A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry" plan to read for three to five minutes each. Kimberly Simms, organizer of the Wits End Poetry Series, will be hosting the event. Poets scheduled to appear include: Bill Aarnes, Gil Allen, Fred Bassett, Wayne Cox, Phebe Davidson, Gene Fehler, Linda Ferguson, Keller Freeman, Vera Gomez, Aly Goodwin, Linda Lee Harper, Angela Kelly, John Lane, Joel McCollough, Ray McManus, Susan Meyers, Ron Moran, Rick Mulkey, Alex Richardson, Kimberly Simms, Ryan Van Cleave, and Marjory Wentworth (South Carolina's current poet laureate).

Obsessed! Smitten! Poets are always in love.

With language, that is.

As Gilbert Allen, poet and co-editor of "A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry" points out, those who read or write poetry (and who hasn't attempted a poem or two?) always do so for love: "love of the process of writing, love of a poem's particular subject, love of poetic form, or love of language itself."

"A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry," the latest anthology from Ninety-Six Press, includes 145 poems by 46 of South Carolina's most prominent poets. The anthology, with poetry ranging from melancholic to comic, tender to boisterous, "serves as a snap shot of recent American verse," said Allen.

Allen, along with Bill Rogers, both professors of English at Furman University, founded the Ninety-Six Press in 1991. "Both Bill and I knew South

Carolina poets who were publishing individual poems in some of the finest literary journals in the country--yet were having trouble placing a book manuscript," Allen said. "We wanted to do something to improve the situation." And indeed they did. In 14 years, Ninety-Six Press has published 11 collections of verse, with a number of titles from individual poets. "Poetry is alive and well--in South Carolina and in Greenville," Allen said.

Allen, a New York native who lives in Travelers Rest with his wife, Barbara, is himself an accomplished poet. He has lectured about poetry and read his own work at colleges, literary festivals, and libraries throughout the Southeast and has appeared frequently on South Carolina Public Radio, most recently on *SouthWords* and *Your Day*. His collections of poems include *In Everything* (Lotus, 1982), *Second Chances* (Orchises, 1991) and *Commandments at Eleven* (Orchises, 1994). His fourth book, *Driving to Distraction* (Orchises, 2003), was featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*, which airs on National Public Radio.

That is big news. Garrison Keillor functions as a sort "Oprah Winfrey" of the poetry world, introducing listeners from around the world to a few poems every week.

"Keillor's assistant telephoned to say he'd enjoyed my most recent book, 'Driving to Distraction,' and wanted to feature a poem from it on the show," Allen said, admitting the "call came out of no where." Allen found himself spending the better part of a week answering the letters and emails he received from people who'd heard his poem read on the program. "I thought Keillor voiced my poem ("Sonnet \$9.95") very well," Allen said. So did throngs of listeners to the show.

After a sabbatical leave last year funded by the Mellon Foundation and Furman University, Allen is now editing a new anthology of contemporary South Carolina poetry and working on a new collection of his own poems.

For closet poets out there who secretly scribble verse on coffee breaks and are scared stiff to show it to anyone, Allen has encouraging words:

“First of all, there's no reason you HAVE to show it to anyone. There's nothing wrong in writing just for yourself--just like there's nothing wrong with jogging rather than running the Boston Marathon, or with cycling in the local park rather than in the Tour de France.” Those who welcome “a public dimension,” might consider joining writers' groups, creative-writing classes, or finding a few like-minded friends to provide feedback. And don't forget poetry readings. “Poetry is what gives those of us who can't sing something to do,” joked Allen.

“A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry” is available at The Open Book, at Furman's University store, or directly from the Ninety-Six Press. Copies will be available for purchase at the Coffee Underground reading on August 28.

*Mindy Friddle is the author of the novel “The Garden Angel” (St. Martin's Press/Picador.) Visit her website, [www.mindyfriddle.com](http://www.mindyfriddle.com), for more information on writing and publishing.*

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