

# SEATTLE WEEKLY

ARTS

August 23, 2006

## Poets in Motion

Top city wordslinger Peshya Joyce Gertler steps aside for her successor.

By [Katie Becker](#)

**Some of the** most fervent local poetry enthusiasts haven't heard of Seattle's Poet Populist program, instigated by Seattle City Council President Nick Licata in 1999. Even the 2005–06 Seattle poet populist, Peshya Joyce Gertler, didn't know about the post until she was nominated. Today, as the sun sets on her reign, she is determined to make poet populists, well, popular. She even announces the title on her personal checks. The 2006–07 poet populist, elected by the public, will be announced at 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 2, on Bumbershoot's literary stage. Meanwhile, I met with Gertler, a purple-clad, effervescent woman "of the '60s era" known for her readings and workshops at North Seattle Community College and the University of Washington Women's Center. In a corner of Ravenna's Third Place Books, she reflected on her year in the city-sanctioned lit limelight and her thoughts on the future.

Seattle Weekly: Tell me what it felt like when you won last summer.

Has becoming poet populist given you a heightened celebrity status?

You know, it has. It supports a person on two levels. One: It is definitely ego gratifying—I would be a liar if I said it wasn't—but also for me it has been very deeply gratifying on a spiritual level, because I've always believed that the poem belongs to the community. The poet populist validates that. It's based on that premise—trying to get poetry out of the stuffy, erudite, exclusive, exclusive world that shuts people out.

Where is your favorite place to write?

Usually in my classroom when my students are writing, I write, too. I taught a haiku class at Green Lake and had my students tie their poems to the trees so that people walking by can read them and take them if they want, and then it's fun to sneak off somewhere and watch to see. I love being out in nature.

What would you say was one of the best projects you've had as poet populist?

Going to Katharine's Place, which is transitional housing for women. I took my poem "The Little



### EXTRA INFO

#### **Poet Populist End-of-Term Reading**

With Peshya Joyce Gertler and 2005–06 finalists Nancy Dahlberg and Don Kentop, Ravenna Third Place Books, 6504 20th Ave. N.E., 206-525-2347,

[www.ravennathirdplace.com](http://www.ravennathirdplace.com). 4:30 p.m. Sun., Aug. 27. For more info on the program, visit

[www.seattlepoetpopulist.org](http://www.seattlepoetpopulist.org).

Matchgirl, Revisited." [I thought I'd be talking to homeless women, but] when I walked in there were all these clergy . . . and then the mayor walks in. And I thought, "Oh, no," because in the poem I wrote, the matchbook girl takes all her matches and she burns down all the homes and offices of all the people that turned her out. I was concerned because I consider myself, if not a pacifist, certainly a worker for peace, and here I've written what seems like this violent poem. I thought, "What are they going to think of not only me personally, but what are they going to think of the Poet Populist program?" because I want to do everything I can to promote that because it's much larger than I am. So, I took it in to the director, and she looked at me and said, "No wonder you're poet populist." And with that encouragement, I was able to read it. I don't know what they thought, but the women liked it. And that's what's important.

[kbecker@seattleweekly.com](mailto:kbecker@seattleweekly.com)

**Poet Populist End-of-Term Reading** With Pasha Joyce Gertler and 2005–06 finalists Nancy Dahlberg and Don Kentop, Ravenna Third Place Books, 6504 20th Ave. N.E., 206-525-2347, [www.ravennathirdplace.com](http://www.ravennathirdplace.com). 4:30 p.m. Sun., Aug. 27. For more info on the program, visit [www.seattlepoetpopulist.org](http://www.seattlepoetpopulist.org).

---

Copyright © 1998-2006 by Seattle Weekly Media, 1008 Western Ave, Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98104. *Seattle Weekly* is a registered trademark. All rights reserved.