

**THE AMAZING  
J'DEN COX**

**TRAINING  
SUPERDOCS**

**THE LAUREATE  
ALIKI BARNSTONE**

**VISIONARY  
DORIS EAGLE**

**CHARITABLE  
MARK MCANDREW**

**THE INFLUENCER  
KENDALL MALKIN**

**THE INCLUDER  
KEVIN MCDONALD**

MIZZOU'S

SUPER

TIGERS

MIZZOU  
MAGAZINE

WINTER 2017

MICHAEL BYERS

WE KNOW TIGERS DO **WELL**. MEMBERS OF THE MIZZOU FAMILY WIN BIG AWARDS, LAND GREAT JOBS AND RAKE IN MAJOR GRANTS. BUT WHAT ABOUT ALL THE **GOOD** THEY DO? MEET JUST A FEW OF THE THOUSANDS OF TIGERS WHOSE EVERYDAY LIVES ENTAIL MAKING OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES A LITTLE BETTER.



**POWER POET**

*PROFESSOR  
ALIKI BARNSTONE,  
MISSOURI'S NEW  
POET LAUREATE,  
THRIVES ON  
CHILDHOOD MAGIC*

# THE POETRY GAME



DALE SMITH



SHANE EPPING



# IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO BE BORN AND BRED A POET, ALIKI BARNSTONE COULD BE THE PROTOTYPE.

She was born into the fine arts, with a poet father, Willis, and a painter mother, Elli, who gave her a childhood full of creative pursuits. Barnstone turned pro at age 12 with the publication of *The Real Tin Flower* (Crowell-Collier, 1968) and has since written 10 books of poetry and criticism, some from her perch as professor of English at Mizzou. This year, she became Missouri's fourth poet laureate, the third with ties to MU. In this new role, her mandate is to take poetry to the masses, and she has an almost missionary zeal about what the arts give — especially to children and teens.

In the 1960s, during her own childhood, the Barnstones lived most of the year in Bloomington, Indiana, where her father was an Indiana University professor. They summered in Vermont near National Book Award-winning poet Ruth Stone and her three daughters. Back then, Aliki was shy — painfully shy — she says. But her world was right in Vermont. The families were close, and the children spent their days suffused in nature and imagination, far from the electronic media of the time — television and telephones, which Elli forbade. “Eventually, we got a party line, like Mayberry RFD,” Barnstone quips. “We children walked together, read together, wrote together, drew together, told stories together, sang together.” In the cycle of their days, a predictable dinner — spaghetti with meat sauce, salad and garlic bread — was the precursor to a gathering around the fireplace, roasting marshmallows and playing a few rounds of The Poetry Game. It's as if Elli orchestrated the day's activities as sustenance for that moment of imagination

*I could eat the words,  
if one were “strudel.”  
If it were “cheese,”  
I couldn't stop myself  
recalling my friends' birthday  
parties,  
how the farmer takes a wife,  
the choosing game, and my  
shame  
to be the homely cheese  
standing alone on a braided rug  
breathing in sour smells,*

*not the savory thyme and  
oregano,  
not the sweet  
almond, filo, and honey  
of our home, my father  
leaning down to read  
my page  
of scrawls and doodles.  
“Bird?”  
he'd ask, fountain pen poised,  
“What kind of bird?”*

*“Chickadee,” I'd say,  
or “whippoorwill.”  
Their names were their songs.  
Chickadee,  
his black and white head  
at home in daylight,  
I could see when he sang,  
his sharpened beak writing  
letters that disappeared the  
instant  
they were formed on air.*

*Whippoorwill I knew to be  
a homely bird  
who sings only in the dark,  
invisibly, somewhere  
in a thorny locust or fragrant pine  
so beautiful, a little  
mournful. But why  
the mean picture:  
whip poor Will?  
I tried to think of another pun*

*less punishing. If I wrote “flowers,”  
I understood to cross it out  
before Dad questioned the word,  
unless  
it were a verb or arranged,  
a bunch of flowers I'd picked  
in our field, dried up in a homely  
jar.  
I'd say “tiger lilies,” seeing  
their orange blooming  
around the boulder where water  
pooled  
after a storm.*

*Excerpt from “The Poetry Game” by  
Aliki Barnstone*

and verbal creation.

In The Poetry Game, each player contributes a word to a list that all players use while composing their own poems on the spot. “Everyone would write, from the littlest child to my dad and Ruth, who were poets,” Barnstone says. “Everybody was encouraged and came up with great ideas. It was fantastic. I can't imagine myself without the Stone family and my family and those summers in Vermont.”

## DEEP HEART'S CORE

As a child poet, Barnstone got plenty of publicity — not that it meant much in the schoolyard. Her introversion made her a target of teasing and bullying, and her art was a sort of shield. “Nobody, but nobody, could take away my soul or my creativity. I had something that was mine. There was always a core that for me was self-preserving.”

And now, decades later, that realization has given Barnstone her mission as poet laureate: She will visit schools statewide and, what else, play The Poetry Game. But Barnstone aims higher than introducing children to poetry or glorifying her own childhood. In contrast to her idyllic summers far removed from corrupting influences, she sees today's youngsters as suffering under social media's pervasive push toward scrutiny and conformity. “The Internet is a great advancement in humanity. It is a shift in consciousness. But it's also clear that we haven't figured it out. When you think of child stars, the reason that so many of them have problems is because they didn't have the privacy to be children. And now with social media all our children are in that position.”

Barnstone has experienced how the arts can be protective, she says. “With all the bullying, the possibilities for having people destroy your selfhood and self-esteem are horrifying.” Teenagers might not always behave as adults would like, she says, “but if they have some core thing that is theirs, they will have a sense of who they are, and they will want to preserve themselves.”

The Poetry Game also teaches players to look beyond themselves, she says. “I think that if kids can be together, sharing each other's poetry, they'll know that this person, regardless of faith or skin color, is one of them. Another kid.”

## IT CAN BE SCARY

Barnstone also teaches big kids, including Miz-



† MU English Professor Alik Barnstone speaks to students at Columbia's Hickman High School. In her role as Missouri's poet laureate, she spreads a love of literature to people throughout the state.

zou undergraduates taking required courses. But when she asks whether they like poetry, she often hears trepidation in their answers. So, she offers students unintimidating ways to approach poetry.

She reassures students that poets don't write to invite analysis. "We write poems so people will read them and say it means something to them. And so I ask them to read the poem and let themselves go where the poem takes them. That's understanding the poem. And I ask them to describe what they see. That's where we start, with observation."

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE?

Barnstone's graduate students, on the other hand, arrive with experience and an eagerness to improve as poets. "We have one of the top doctoral programs with a creative dissertation," Barnstone says. "Our graduate students come into the program very accomplished. If they haven't published books, they will. Every time I encounter my graduate students, I learn something. They keep me current. And I like to think they learn things from me, too."

They do, indeed, says Monica Hand, a doctoral student who also assists Barnstone in

the classroom. Students want a mentor who is intellectually challenging and at same time cares about them, she says. "That's how I experience Alik. She's my friend. She knows where I come from. I know she cares about my academics and my creative writing goals."

With that sort of loyalty among her students, it would be easy enough for Barnstone to cast them in her own poetic image. But she'd much rather they "sing" in their own style. "I don't start with criticism," Barnstone says. "We aren't poetry mechanics. We're not trying to fix poems here. Where we start is with enthusiasms — what strikes you, what you love and why. Because why write if you can't be enthusiastic."

From there, she says, larger issues in poetry and writing emerge, as Hand attests. "When we are workshopping one of my poems, if Alik doesn't agree with me, I don't know anyone with more patience," she says. "Maybe she'll push back a little, and I'll get all excited. Then she'll get quiet and accept it, like, OK, OK. Most of the time she's right, and I come around to her point of view. But I know she's open to what I have to say. She listens in a way that I know I have her thinking about some things, too." **M**

## TIGER TROUBADOURS

When the State of Missouri introduced the position of poet laureate in 2008, Gov. Matt Blunt chose a Tiger for the job. Walter Barga, BA '70, MEd '90, took it to heart. In his two-year term, Barga tucked dozens of cross-state excursions as Missouri's chief literary ambassador among his duties as senior coordinator for the MU College of Education's Assessment Resource Center. Now retired in Ashland, Missouri, the prolific Barga, author of 19 books of poetry, writes full time — sometimes about his stint as poet laureate.

Webster University instructor David Clewell, a Missourian since 1979, succeeded Barga, serving as the state's top poet from 2010 to 2012. Since then, two more members of the Mizzou family have worn the metaphorical laurels. William Trowbridge, BA '63, MA '65, professor emeritus at Northwest Missouri State University, penned six full collections of poetry and three chapbooks after studying philosophy and English at Mizzou. His latest book, the poetic graphic novel *Oldguy: Superhero*, (Red Hen Press, 2016) is a genre-merging collaboration with Tim Mayer. He served as poet laureate from 2014 to 2016 before passing the title to Mizzou English Professor Alik Barnstone.

MIZZOU  
MAGAZINE

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