

# The Scarsdale Inquirer

Founded in 1901

VOLUME 92, NUMBER 10

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2014

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

## Well Versed

Poet Ann Cefola has her way with words



By DEBRA BANERJEE

For poet Ann Cefola, a third-generation Scarsdalian, “continuity is a wonderful thing.” Making her life in the community “where all my creativity began” anchors her. “The sense of place is something I value,” said the former Ann Gregory. It was her second-grade teacher at Edgewood School who sent a note home to Ann’s mother to say that her daughter “spoke in poetry.”

She still speaks in poetry and with a voice and cadence befitting a poet. Her conversation flows with an internalized rhythm, the meter of one used to thinking in poetry.

“All children speak in poetry and some of us remember it and never forget. It’s my second language. I’m most comfortable in it,” Cefola said.

It’s not only a Scarsdale state of mind that feeds her creativity, she also finds inspiration in Vermont, where she and her husband Michael, also a Scarsdale native, have a second home.

Cefola is the author of “St. Agnes, Pink-Slipped” (Kattywompus Press, 2011) and “Sugaring” (Dancing Girl Press, 2007). Her work also appears in many anthologies and she is the translator of Hélène Sanguinetti’s “Hence this cradle” (Seismicity Editions, 2007). She also writes a blog on her website.

When the Inquirer last interviewed Cefola in 2001, she had just received the Robert Penn Warren Award judged by John Ashbery for the poem “Express.”

### Found in translation

“My muse hasn’t changed,” Cefola told the Inquirer, “it’s still classic narrative poetry, but I’ve gotten more into ‘found poet-

*Continued on next page*

# Poet Ann Cefola has her way with words

*Continued from previous page*  
ry,' using outside text and incorporating it into my work. Found poetry is just an outgrowth of that. It's another way for me to be creative and have fun."

Last April during National Poetry Month, Cefola participated in Pulitzer Remix, where 85 poets from seven countries created found poetry from Pulitzer Prize-winning novels.

They posted one poem per day, creating more than 2,500 poems. Cefola's source text was Josephine Johnson's "Now in November," the Pulitzer Prize winner in 1935. "It was a massive online project," Cefola said. "That was lots of fun. I kept to the narrative."

Cefola has also been creating found poetry from the writings of her grandfather, Julius Gregory, an architect who designed "stockbroker tudors" in Scarsdale and also wrote articles for home and design magazines.

Cefola graduated from Scarsdale High School in 1975, spent a year at Connecticut College, then finished her B.A. in language and literature from Sarah Lawrence, where she also earned her M.F.A. in poetry.

Her company Jumpstart LLC provides communications strategy, writing and editing for Fortune 10 companies like IBM and Verizon.

On the surface corporate writing might appear to be very different from poetry, but "the actual work seems very similar," Cefola said. "My master's de-

gree serves me very well. I have to choose words well, by nuance and tone, just as creatively. It's just as demanding as writing a poem. I have a challenge. I have to meet it and use all my language tools."

Cefola's debut chapbook "Sugaring" celebrates the world of southeastern Vermont.

Reviewer Julie R. Enszer wrote in a poetry blog, "Cefola's poetry seeks to explore the natural world in counterpoint to human relationships — a theme and a trope that is worked and reworked throughout the poems of 'Sugaring.'"

"Saint Agnes, Pink-Slipped" is a chapbook of more spiritually oriented poems. "The title poem was inspired by an article I read about St. Agnes Hospital closing in White Plains. I pictured her [St. Agnes] out of work. It was the basis for a poem."

A YouTube video of Cefola reciting "Velocity," her poem based on George Jeffries's film of the Dallas parade route of John F. and Jackie Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, is part of Joel Allegretti's "Rabbit Ears: TV Poems (Poets Wear Prada)" anthology.

Cefola was a Witter Bynner Poetry Translation Residency recipient at the Santa Fe Art



Institute. She enjoys the challenge of translating the work of contemporary French poet Hélène Sanguinetti and is pleased to be able to "honor her efforts and her work." How does she know she's getting the translation right? "I would show it [the poem] to people who are

French experts and they would say, 'That's exactly what she's saying, but it doesn't make sense.' That's how I know I'm getting it right. Her work is challenging. I'm fascinated by this woman. She is breaking new ground. She writes on huge global themes of war and loss of identity and consumerism."

Cefola's blog and website are "a free, smart way to reach out," she said. "Most of my audience is made up of writers and editors and artists. It provides a sense of community." She is able to "promote people I know. All of us are writers and artists and need promotion. It is hard for us to do ourselves. I share what's going on with me and share the achievements of the people I know."

Cefola is a member of an informal writing group called the Sapphires with Greenburgh's arts and culture director and author Sarah Bracey White, poet

Linda Simone, and poet and fiction writer Terry Dugan. The group gathers for retreats to Vermont to discuss their goals and their work.

Although she said she is "blessed to have a partner in the arts" — her husband is a musician and songwriter in addition to his corporate life — "It's hard to commit a life to poetry," Cefola said. "The dailiness of life tends to take over. There's the internal pressure, I really ought to be doing my art. At the same time, I'm grateful that having my own business has supported my ability to write poetry, has given me flexibility. It's constantly about the poetry. I am always thinking about it. I'm always writing in my head."

Cefola, who called poetry "a condensed form of language," has no patience with other poets who "deliberately try to keep people outside of grasping the meaning. That's not something I can defend."

She quoted poet Brenda Hillman, who said "entering a poem is like going to the carnival: You enter, ticket in hand, and walk around, taking in all the sights and sounds."

"What a wonderful way to put it," Cefola said. "Maybe you don't understand everything at first, but read it, experience it, get a sense of it. Whatever you get from it is valid."

*For more about Cefola and to read her blog, go to [anncefola.com](http://anncefola.com).*