

# Rotary Poetry Awards



## 2025 Winners Calgary

We are pleased to announce the winners of the Rotary Poetry Competition which were announced by Rotary International President, Stephanie Urchick at the RI Convention held in Calgary, Canada in June 2025.

Following a welcoming and encouraging speech about how poetry relates to our Rotary family, President Stephanie announced and awarded to those present and/or their representatives, prizes and commendations.

The overall winner was Riaan Odendaal who received the Rotary Poetry Plaque whilst other submissions were rewarded with commendation certificates along with other benefits.

Interestingly every winner who received a financial award donated that to The Rotary Foundation.

Looking to 2026, we will launch in early September 2025 with awards being made in Taipei at the Rotary International Convention.

All the winners poems are attached.

## *The Wheels That Turn the World*

They say magic happens at the edges —  
where water meets shore,  
where twilight holds both day and night,  
where strangers become friends.

In the spaces between countries,  
where borders blur like watercolours,  
a wheel turns — not by grand machinery,  
but by hands joining across distance.

This is not the loud magic of stage lights,  
but the quiet kind:  
a well where once there was thirst.  
A school where silence once taught nothing.  
A clinic where pain had no answer.

The magic of Rotary lives in ordinary rooms where  
coffee cools as plans warm,  
where businesspeople find themselves  
becoming something else entirely:  
architects of small mercies.

There is a tide in human hearts  
that rises best in company.  
When we gather, something ancient wakes —  
the memory that we were never meant  
to carry our portion of the world alone.

So the wheel turns:  
In Bangladesh, a child drinks clean water.  
In Peru, a woman opens her first ledger.  
Here, in this room, we pass a hat, tell  
stories, laugh — seemingly small moments.  
But the wheel needs every spoke to turn.

I have seen valleys flood after modest rain, watched  
single seeds become abundant fields.  
So too with these meetings, these pledges,  
these quiet evenings of possibility.

The magic is not in grand gestures.  
It's in persistence.  
It's in showing up.  
It's in the sacred mathematics of shared burden.

One hand cannot lift the world.  
But many hands, joined around a wheel,  
can move it forward —  
inch by gentle inch —  
toward something very much like love.



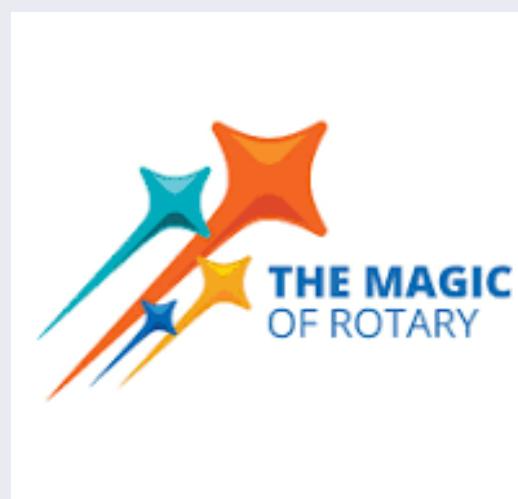
**Riaan Odendaal**  
**2025**

**Rotary**  
**Poet of the Year**



**Presented  
by**

**Rotary International  
President  
2024/25  
Stephanie Urchick**



*On behalf of Graham Ferguson. The President of*  
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## You Lose, AL Zheimer

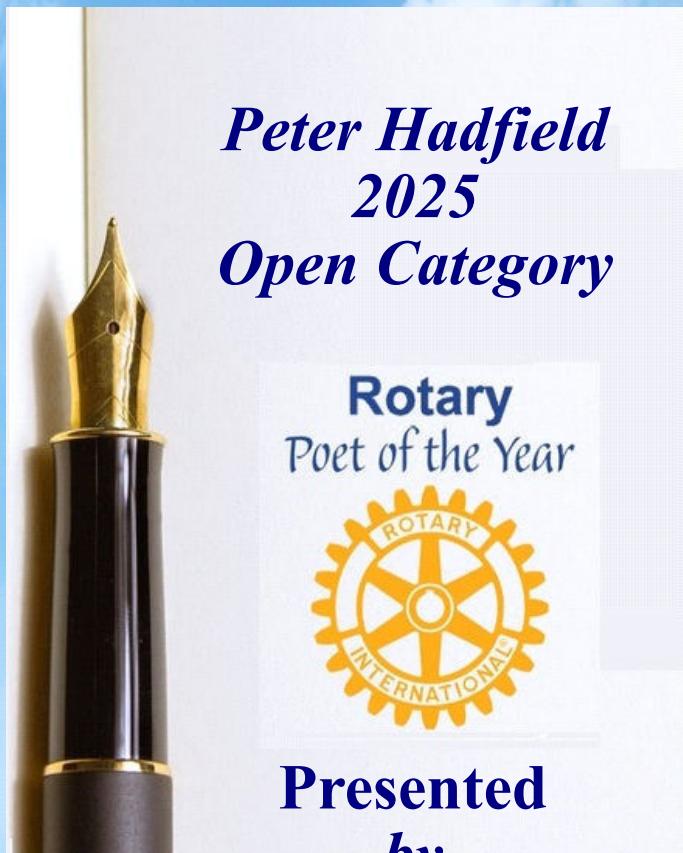
It was summer when you came, AL  
We thought you might be coming, AL  
But still we loved, as we'd always loved, AL  
We two, different per times, but never too different, AL  
We had dreams, We had plans, AL  
We loved our home ,our stronghold, AL  
We loved our life, AL  
We were stepping forth to consume the world, AL  
And oh how we loved!

Then came your cold draught at Autumn, AL  
When they talked of the Winter ahead, AL  
Dementia, Dread, Despair, Dying, Death, AL  
Despair, at first momentarily felt, AL  
But my Daphne is a soldier, AL  
Head on she faced you , AL  
Encouraging and lifting your weaker victims, AL  
Until your insidious presence began to ebb her  
strength away, AL  
But not entirely, so have a care, AL

But, oh you are a cruel, cruel man, AL  
Your relentless embezzlement of my girl's psyche  
Bears witness to your rapacious perverse appetite, AL  
Her grey locked hair now lies upon an institutional  
pillow, AL  
Wherein, your other victims mumble and sway and  
shriek, AL  
You prolong your perverted pleasure,until you allow  
death, AL

How noble is my warrior girl , AL  
Her elegance, you can never steal, is beauty to my  
eyes, AL  
And still she offers her dissembled care to those you  
seek to hurt, AL  
Learn this, AL  
Contexts may change, but love improves ( but how  
would you know? AL)  
The Long Goodbye goes on and you may have your  
cruel way , AL  
You may take a mind, AL  
But you cannot take a soul , AL  
And you cannot take our love, AL

SO YOU LOSE, AL  
Go back to hell, AL



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## Speech

In a quiet hamlet near the heart of Caborca's plains,  
We ventured forth with hope to soothe the world's remains.

Guided by a nurse with wisdom etched into her face,  
We brought two drops of life to every child's embrace.

At first, I felt detached, unmoved by what I saw,  
A skeptic's heart caught up in doubt, not in awe.  
It seemed a clumsy way to sway my mind and hand,  
To see the Foundation's worth and to understand.

But soon I felt the pulse of life at every door,  
The warmth of homes, the humble peace upon the floor.

The mothers welcomed us with smiles calm and true,  
Their trust unwavering as if they simply knew.

They handed us bright yellow books with pride aglow,  
Records of their love, the care their children know.  
I thought of my own mother, bless her dear,  
Who'd likely lose my book—It's somewhere near!

I heard her laugh, her sheepish tone within my mind,  
Imagining the nurse's patient smile, so kind.  
And then a truth emerged so clear it made me pause,  
A universal bond that ties our human cause.

What if that mother there was mine, and that child was me?  
Would we not yearn for health, for hope, and for dignity?  
A world where polio fades like shadows chased by light,  
Where clean water flows, and justice rights the night.

This thought transformed me from a member by the name,  
To a Rotarian who seeks to stoke the flame.  
Our purpose shines in service, lifting others high,  
In serving, we discover the reasons why.

And as we lead, we build the space for others too,  
To feel the joy of change, to see the purpose through.  
To laugh, to bond, to find true meaning in their part,  
To change the world through service born of the heart.



*On behalf of Graham Ferguson. The President of*

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## 90 Years

In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue  
In 1929 something equally true  
A landmark event in our history  
Recorded in "The Times" for all to see  
The granting of a charter to our Birkenhead club  
Who, having met first at the Woodside pub,  
Are still going strong 90 years on  
Shining in the District like a blazing beacon.

Of the British Empire it was often said  
A part of the globe was always red  
For on that great union the sun never set  
In which people of differing cultures met.  
Now that role today is played by Rotary  
In promoting international fraternity  
And the diversity of their wide range  
Is reflected in the pennants the clubs exchange.  
For around the world our fame has spread  
Even in New Zealand there's a Birkenhead.

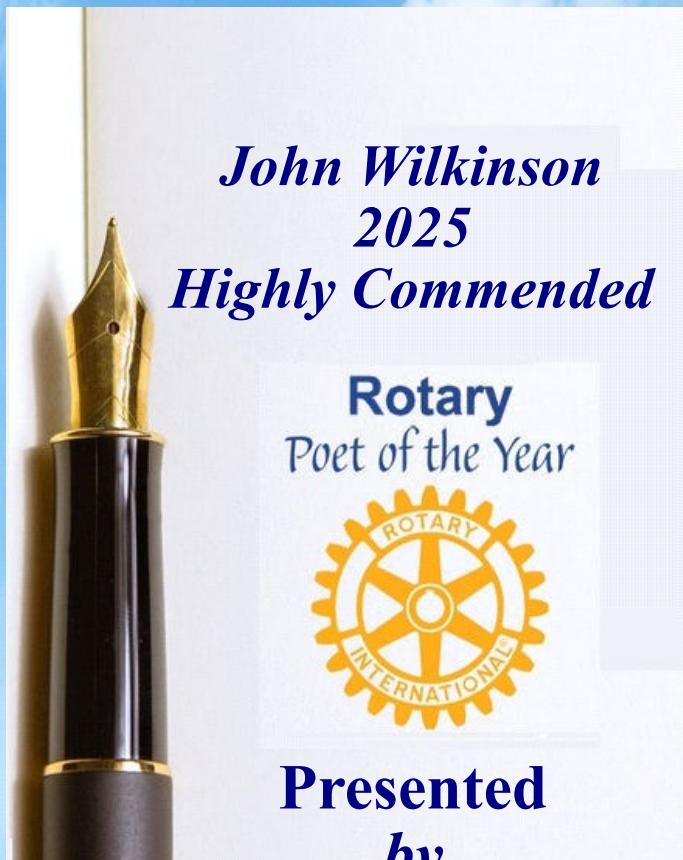
From its very beginning through every decade  
A major role Birkenhead has played  
In answering the needs of each charity  
With regular support you can guarantee.  
Including a project in far Nepal  
As well as Thailand, and that's not all.  
From the elimination of polio worldwide  
To Shelter Boxes, where needed, supplied.  
With Mercy Ships at a distant shore  
And Toilet Twinning- and many more!

Not only abroad but closer to home  
Are numerous causes which we own.  
In Education, an extensive plan,  
A Millennium Bus, a Life Caravan,  
For a range of support do we supply  
From Rotakids and Woodchurch High  
To Shaftesbury and the Wirral Hive  
And in "Youth Speaks" we're very alive!  
On Feeding Britain our goal is set  
And Alzheimer's, of course, we'll never forget.

For years we have extended our social dimensions  
Including both silver and gold celebrations,  
Canal cruising or London sights  
And singing concerts or racing nights.  
From Zwolle to Salford, with a mock wedding too  
We laugh at the panto-oh yes we do!  
To prevent the club becoming too staid  
An important change, by Council, was made.  
To shake some men stuck in a groove  
With a seismic shift- the earth did move.  
Ladies were welcomed!—an enlightened decision  
To lighten the mood and broaden the vision.

Over nine decades we've adapted how we relate  
Our news to members when we communicate.  
From pre-war booklets in black and white  
To colourful videos on our website.  
Be it bulletin, handbook or even newsletter  
Our knowledge of events has never been better.  
As proof we're comfortable with modern technology  
We're reminded to E-mail our lunchtime apology!

Abundant evidence from our rich Archive  
Reflects how this club's remained alive  
Recognised in numerous plaques and awards  
For dedicated work both here and abroad.  
So whether we wear our tabars  
Or dress up like Santa's elf  
Enjoying ourselves and working hard  
We personify "Service above self."



Rotary International  
President  
2024/25  
*Stephanie Urchick*



*On behalf of Graham Ferguson. The President of*  
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## SALT

Salt is never the main ingredient. It does not boast. It does not overwhelm. But oh, how it matters.

A pinch of it changes everything.

Without it, even abundance tastes dull. With it, the humble becomes unforgettable.

Salt teaches me that power does not always arrive with noise. Sometimes, it's in the quiet hand that knows just how much to give.

It is not the harvest, but the detail in the seasoning. Not the storm, but the mineral that remembers oceans. It preserves, it heals, it makes water buoyant.

In ancient times, it was currency. Not gold, not silver — but salt. Traded, treasured. Held in high regard because it made life not just sustainable, but savoury.

There are people like that. They don't need the spotlight. They don't need applause. They just show up — with grace, with presence, with essence.

They season a room. They anchor a conversation. They preserve what matters.

I want to be like salt.

I want my life to flavour the spaces I touch — not with grandeur, but with grounding.

To be known not for how loud I was, but for how gently I made things better. To be a quiet trace in someone's memory, a presence that stayed after everything else was gone.

Salt doesn't spoil. It keeps things whole.

And if I can choose — let me be that. Not the main course. Just the difference that made everything taste like it mattered.



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## What is poetry?

A form of literature that uses language in a way that evokes emotions and imagination—often through rhythm, rhyme, and figurative language.

A clear definition, but what stands out in this statement is emotions.

Poetry is the height of emotions;  
each word is a feeling,  
every syllable gives sensations.

Poetry is art—and what is art without its effect?  
To enact a feeling through the use of language,  
to use your thoughts, create something from  
nothing,  
and make it real through passion  
is a pinnacle of what we have to offer as humans.

Poetry is always adding colors to a canvas without limit.

If poetry is fulfilling, how can it be wrong?  
Poetry is purposely an accompaniment to the  
symphony of life.

How can a song be exactly the same  
if sung by different voices?

Words may have the same meanings,  
but it's people who make the choices.

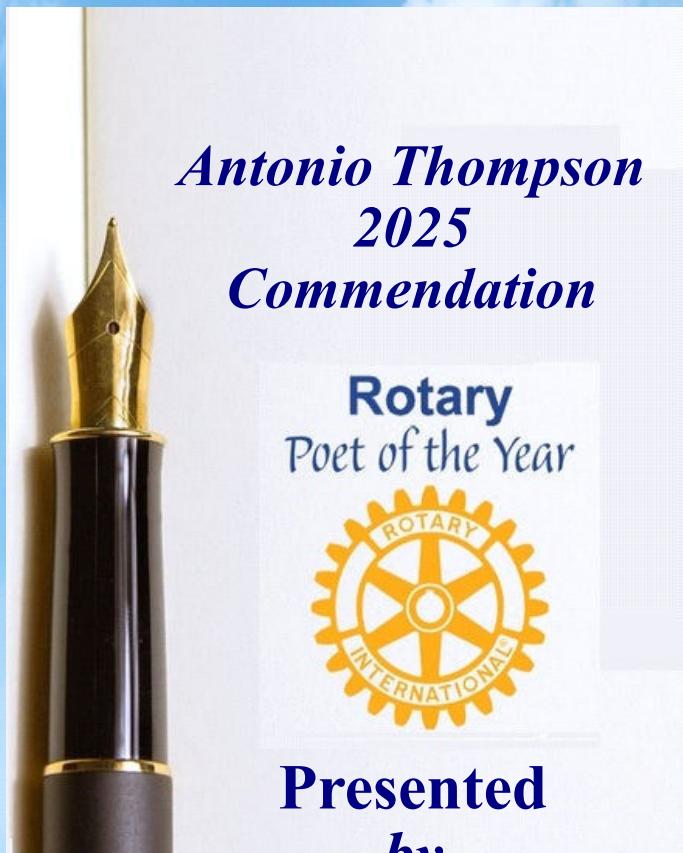
A short-lived haiku,  
Noticeably so, and brief—  
short, but tempts feeling.

A limerick's a jaunty march,  
With rhymes that soar like a lark.  
It's clever and sneering,  
With jabs that are jeering,  
And ends just a bit off the mark.

Sonnets that burst with love and burning fire—  
A rising wave that rolls through seas of thought.  
Each line ignites the soul with deep desire  
And finds what time and memory had sought.

Indulge me in my love of crafted word:  
A poet's mind commands all living thought.  
It speaks to free a life that time has scarred  
And offers peace that hardship never brought.

A poem is emotion's solemn creed,  
And poetry reveals a mind's true frame.  
If honesty and truth are what you need,  
Why push belief to dogma's cruelest flame?  
Let verse remain where thought and heart are free—  
A bridge between the soul and mystery.



On behalf of Graham Ferguson. The President of  
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## Then I Watched a World Forget

I joined Rotary in ripe middle age.  
My club secretary wore braces on his leg.

I recalled the frustrations of a young boy  
in Ohio summer not being allowed to play  
in the public pool for fear of a disease.

I recalled the rickety wheelchairs,  
wooden crutches, my brother's friend  
in a wheezing iron lung.

I recalled when they loaded my whole class  
onto a bus in the middle of the day  
and took us to the high school.

We were lined up, my stomach quaking  
for fear, not of a disease,  
but of a needle.

The next day, my arm was sore  
but I grew up — walking and breathing,  
and so did all my friends.

My mother thanked God.  
I decided to study biology  
and became a scientist.

I vaccinated my kids  
as the iron lungs  
fell silent.

I taught them to swim  
in the neighborhood pool  
and was unafraid.

I donated money to the Rotary Foundation  
and armies of doctors marched,  
needles instead of guns,

health instead of death,  
vital children with purple pinkies  
and we nearly won.

But our success became our enemy.  
and then I watched a world forget.



## Bartholomew Barker 2025 Commendation

Rotary  
Poet of the Year



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## MAGIC OF ROTARY TO ME

A man bought food from our Rotary stall,  
He looked at his change as though things were amiss,  
Then he passed it back and smiled to us all,  
Saying "Rotary can make good use of this."

We prompt spontaneous generosity -  
That's part of the magic of Rotary to me!

In its local district, its local town,  
The Rotary Club plays a pivotal role-  
It lifts the spirit when feelings are down,  
As local improvement is part of its goal.

We strive to improve our community -  
That's part of the magic of Rotary to me!

Rotary International then takes the stage:  
A major player in improving world health;  
It promotes world peace and alleviates rage;  
It tackles poverty and helps create wealth.

RI wants mankind to be free -  
That's part of the magic of Rotary to me!

In the fight against polio and other huge tasks,  
Our Foundation sees that financing is just.  
Philanthropists and public respond to its asks -  
Like the man at the stall, in Rotary they trust.

We belong to a world leading charity,  
That's part of the magic of Rotary to me!

In Rotary, there's people from all walks of life,  
From princes, great leaders, to folk in the street.  
We all work together for a world with less strife,  
In concert with those we'd not otherwise meet.

We broaden our views of humanity -  
That's part of the magic of Rotary to me!

Rotary helps us to do good, large and small,  
To challenge world problems and help children next door  
But fellow Rotarians are the keys to it all -  
Banding together, we achieve so much more.

Achieving great things with friends is the key -  
That IS the magic of Rotary to me!



*On behalf of Graham Ferguson. The President of*

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## A Bone to Pick

I've got a bone to pick with this world today,  
Where kindness fades and ego plays.  
Selfish minds, sharp tongues, quick hands,  
Spinning drama, making demands.

It's not your business, not your fight,  
Not your pot to stir at night.  
Yet here you stand, nose stuck in,  
Feeding the flames, thick as sin.

Once, respect was something real,  
Hard work, strong hands on the wheel.  
No clicks, no likes, no viral fame,  
No need to make life one big game.

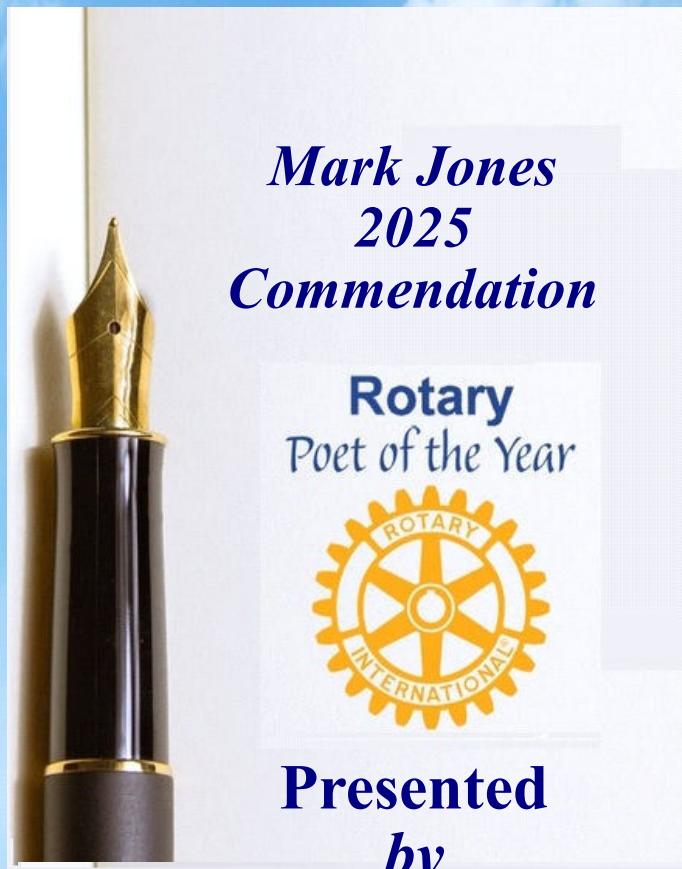
But now the kind are dying out,  
And even the elders scream and shout.  
What happened to grace?  
To dignity's place?  
Now all we see is a ruthless race.

I'm tired of labels, of broken rules,  
Of people pretending when pain still pools.  
Why fake a smile when you're drowning  
inside?  
Why fear the truth, why run, why hide?

And in the shadows, watchers lurk,  
Judging, whispering, doing their work.  
But can they be trusted more than your  
own?  
When their voices rise but remain unknown

No shadows needed, no stirring the pot,  
No turning your life into someone else's  
plot.  
We owe each other more than this,  
A little respect, a little bliss.

So step back, step up, and clear the view,  
The world's not meant to revolve around  
you.



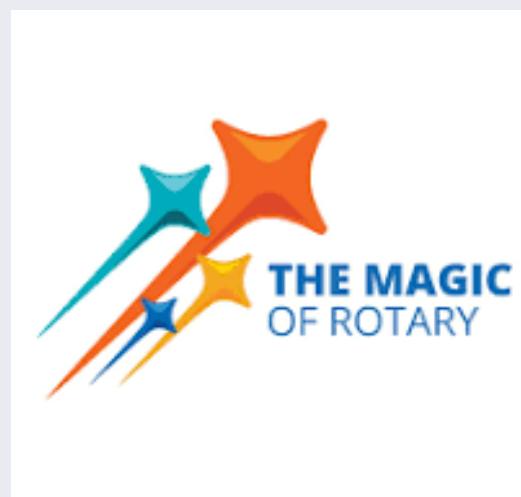
## Mark Jones 2025 Commendation

Rotary  
Poet of the Year



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## The Magic of Rotary

In hands that serve, in hearts that care,  
Lies the magic of Rotary, beyond compare.

With every step, with every deed,  
Rotarians weave a tapestry of noble creed.  
Their compassion knows no bounds, no  
shore,  
Embracing humanity, evermore.

From Paul Harris' vision, a spark took flight,  
In 1905, a movement began, shining bright.  
Through decades of service, Rotary's flame,  
Has guided generations, with a heart that's the  
same.

From distant villages to urban streets,  
Rotary's kindness touches hearts that beat.  
Clean water flows, hope is rekindled bright,  
Education blooms, and darkness takes flight.

Polio's chains are broken, eradication's call,  
Rotary's courage echoes, standing tall.  
Disaster relief, a helping hand,  
Comforting the afflicted, across the land.

In a world of differences, Rotary's the thread,  
That weaves our shared humanity, unsaid.  
A beacon of hope, a shining light,  
Guiding us forward, through life's plight.

Oh, the magic of Rotary, pure and true,  
A testament to love, shining through.  
May its spirit inspire, may its heart ignite,  
Building a better tomorrow,  
one act of kindness at a time,  
shining with love and light.



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## TOTAL ME

I had built walls around my heart  
soldered and cemented with stony eyes  
plastered to a tough gateway  
drugged with dusky emotions  
denied me to the nectarous petals

the mysterious sun eclipsed  
candied clouds and gusty winds  
whispering the innermost secrets  
puddles pebbles boulders  
all dashed up and about  
swirled me around  
I was stuck

until I knocked down my old shaggy self  
drowned in the divine me  
hugged the angelic fabric in my bones  
wiped the fog and mist  
trimmed the weeds

I let the glorious sunlight filter through my shadow  
I let the silver moonlight purify my veneer  
I let the sparkling dewdrops drizzle on my soul  
pouring all the grace, all the tenderness  
all the goodness to a bountiful heart  
I looked up, I felt light

a mosaic of paradoxes  
a montage of colors  
a potpourri of medleys  
imbibing the hues  
soaking in the chroma  
a polished tiptoeing ballerina  
an ornate gem, flowery and jeweled  
nimble with dainty steps  
featherweight and ethereal

I wonder if I am an unsolved mystery  
bewitching and illusory, a conundrum for many  
find me if you can; unearth me slowly  
restoring and reclaiming, piece by piece  
in the mammoth of this puzzle, I built a sanctuary  
of the finesse in me, surrendered my spirit in divinity

the denial was over at last  
carried me in my open arms  
sniffed the fragrant lavender  
sipped the holy ambrosia  
I unchained  
I delivered to myself  
my silent soul  
a sense of calm finally

united with calm in the chaos, never to leave me alone  
having a gentle affair with my baroque life  
born to be in full swing on the cusp of epochal change  
ushering in a flowering crop for the world to revere  
the feeling of being me in acceptance of the total me



## Monika Chugh 2025 Commendation

Rotary  
Poet of the Year



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## YOU ARE PEOPLE OF ACTION.

In a world of worry no one deserves,  
People of action are ready to serve.  
Your magic is love, and each day you  
show us.  
You are the strength of Rotary's focus.

Education's light you bring.  
Inspired by knowledge, dreams take  
wing,  
Helping economies grow and thrive,  
Rotary keeps hope alive.

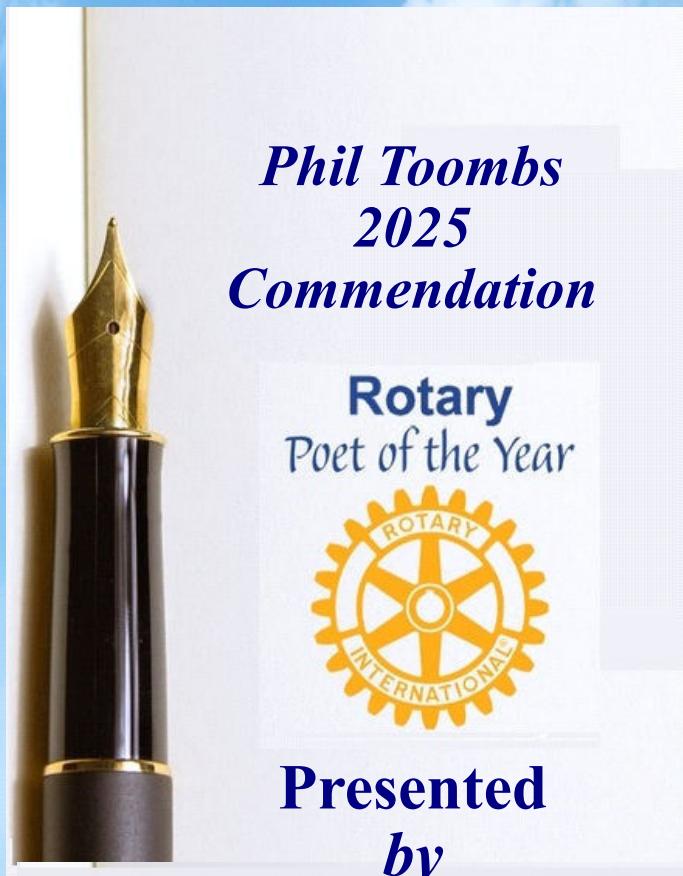
Peace is your goal, your voices rise,  
A brighter future in your eyes.  
You fight disease with hope and care,  
No Polio, you're almost there.

Clean water, Pure, and Sanitation.  
A basic right for every nation.  
Mothers with children born safe and  
strong.  
Into a world, where they belong.

Each club, each district, each Rotary  
zone  
Around the world or close to home,  
People of Action take the lead  
Rotary feeds those in need.

Climate action guides what you do,  
Meets the Four Way Test, is it true?  
One point two million friends at your  
side.  
For D.E.I., you stand with pride.

United for good, your mission clear.  
You act with love, you persevere.  
For every voice, for every Faith,  
Rotary's choice is peace and grace.



**Phil Toombs  
2025  
Commendation**

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## Thoughts on Ukraine - A Synopsis

My heart bleeds for you, dear people of Ukraine

Again and Again, Again and Again  
Screaming shells, Ricocheting Bullets,  
Fragments of a life that's past,  
In this inferno, this melting blast  
This nightmare of a space  
That has been befallen our human race.

Shattered lives, shattered dreams  
Life falling apart at the seams,  
The unearthly glow of exploded light  
Wreaks havoc with our sight,  
Maimed limbs, twisted and torn  
Seer a landscape so forlorn.  
Houses open to the sky  
Reveal signs of a life gone by.  
Treasured possessions strewn around  
This dusty, rubbed, black waste ground.

Will the guns not cease their firing?  
The eerie wailing of the siren  
Calling us all underground  
But there no peace will be found.  
The shocks, the blasts still penetrate  
While we survive this onslaught of hate.  
For I fear this war will grow  
And a different destiny will sew  
for those entrapped in its path  
On a scale, now so vast.  
We cannot comprehend,  
But just pray it will end.

Our bruised and broken world, he said  
These words reverberate in my head  
So true, but we will make it whole.  
With compassion in our soul.



**Suzie Tydeman  
2025  
Commendation**

**Rotary  
Poet of the Year**



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