



Poetry can be good for a laugh, but it can also be useful. Often placing information within the framework of a poem is an effective way to remember it. Now, I have heard the more elitist of my literary brethren say that poetic memory aids do not constitute real poetry. Memory aids do not, after all, possess the emotional intensity, vibrant beauty and profound thinking that makes a poem a work of art.

Well, they can bite me. No diploma from any university gives someone the right to speak for all of humanity. So if, in your view, a poem can be a poem without being profound or beautiful, then so be it. It is a sort of stubborn adherence to old and elitist ideas that puts many people off poetry in the first place -- they think it's boring and stuffy. Therefore if the way to get more people reading and writing poetry is to knock it off its pedestal, then grab your piñata sticks, boys and girls, and whack away.

I like poetic memory aids because I am a very forgetful person ... until something rhymes, then I can remember it forever. I was a child of eight when a series of animated poems was introduced to children's television called "The Dough Nuts". The purpose of these poems was to teach consumer awareness. I remember them to this day. There was, for instance:

“Little Sally Meazmer never knew what guarantees were
That is why she had a fit when things would break.

She never thought she could return them
For a refund or a new one
And that was little Sally's big mistake.
Her new radio wouldn't play,
Her clock struck three all day --
So Sally screamed and yelled and screamed some more.
Her new record had a scratch,
Her new toy came unattached --
So Sally through a tantrum on the floor.
You have rights to be defended if a product is defective.
You have rights if something's wrong with something new.
But Sally never stopped to see just what those rights might be.
Getting mad is what she thought she ought to do.
Now poor Sally's nearly sunk beneath a load of broken junk
And this moral we present for Sally's sake:
If you take the time to read just how things are guaranteed,
You'll know how to get your dough back if they break."

I am ashamed to admit that I can't remember people's names when introduced. I have forgotten probably 60-80% of what I learned in school. And every year, I have to dig out the recipe card for turkey stuffing so that I can make Christmas dinner - and I have made that dish hundreds of times. But I remember "Little Sally Meazmer." How sad is that?

It does, however, illustrate just how useful poetry can be when used as a memory device. Why do you think that advertising jingles have a set rhyme scheme and a catchy rhythm? So that the product will stick in your mind and you will be more likely to buy it. People are musical animals. We like rhyme and anything with a beat. And we respond to it by dancing or buying the latest innovation in loo roll or by remembering lessons taught to us in childhood.

Take this one, for instance:

“I” before “e”
except after “c”
or when sounding like “a”
in “neighbour” or “weigh.”

To learn how many days are in each month, you have but to remember...

“Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November;
February has twenty-eight alone;
All the rest have thirty-one,
Excepting leap-year, that’s the time
When February’s days are twenty-nine.”

Have difficulty spelling, well, “difficulty”? Not anymore thanks to Roald Dahl’s book, Matilda ...

“Mrs. D, Mrs. I, Mrs. FFI
Mrs. C, Mrs. U, Mrs. LTY”

You get the picture. It occurs to me that I don’t have any examples of my own to share with you. Maybe if I turn my recipe for turkey stuffing into a poem, I won’t have to tear my kitchen apart every year looking for the card. So here goes nothing...



I know. You don't have to say anything. It's painful. But don't laugh too heartily because now it is your turn. Take something that you need to remember and write a poem about it. It is, you'll find, harder than you think.