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Well versed

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At 86, Elmhurst's poet laureate publishes children's volume

By Nick Pullia
Entertainment editor

Fairy tales can come true if you're young at heart.

At 86, Hazel Stevens Dame remains young at heart, and so her friends, playing the role of fairies, collected the children's poems she had written over 50 years and collected them in one volume, just released by Bullen Publishing Services of Glen Ellyn.

"Popsicle Tree: Poems to Read with Children" brings together 46 poems that Dame penned and then filed away in her desk. Even as plans for the book were being made, Dame continued writing her poems, connecting with the ideas that delight children generations younger.

"Mine is a case of arrested development," she confesses with a smile. "I seem not to have ever left the child viewpoint of having fun and letting it be spontaneous and just let it bubble out. I still think like a little kid."

Dame is a sweet lady. She has no grandchildren, but it doesn't take a grand leap of imagination to see her as a grandmother. She addresses people as "my dear" and "my darling," and she shares stories of the old days — especially Elmhurst history — as if she were sitting at the foot of a child's bed.

She started writing when she was a small child herself in Elmhurst.

"My mother wrote verses, and had a little gift of rhythm and rhyme, and seemingly there's been a little leaning for words in my family," she says. Her brother was an advertising man, and her great uncle from Norway also wrote verse.

"There is a peculiar compulsion about writing," she says. "I've often called it a pleasant agony. I never awaken in the morning and say I'm going to write a poem. It has to come to me, and it comes with this little peculiar compulsion that makes you have to set it down. Through my life when I think of how many times I have gotten out of bed at 2 o'clock in the morning, just wake out of a sound sleep, and here are singing lines that have to be caught. If you don't catch them they're gone."

A resident of Elmhurst since 1912, she was named the V.I.P. Woman of the Year in 1982. An expert on the city's history, she's appeared on cable television with "Lifestyle" host Pat Cheffer to discuss Elmhurst's progress. A graduate of Northwestern's School of Speech in 1926, she became the first female teacher at Elmhurst College, which was an all-male seminary when she started her career.

She served as head of the



Hazel Stevens Dame recites. (Staff photo by Irene Pullia)

college's department of dramatics and speech from 1926-29. She turned down several other jobs that would have taken her away from the community her father called the best place in the world.

In 1929, she married Jim Dame, whom she met at Northwestern, and quit her job. She raised two sons with her late husband.

"At that time, my dear, women's liberation hadn't

members. "He had H.O. railroad-ing and he had photography and I had the typewriter. We were project people really. We were satisfied with the setup, and it was the best of two worlds, because I could do as I pleased. I think I was a little forerunner on this [idea of] women being other things than just domestics."

Though she wrote nothing expressly for publication in

peration. She has a 50-year stack of poems to which she can return, to tinker with a word here or polish a phrase there.

"I think I'll be at it until my last breath," she says, acknowledging that her epitaph might describe her as "that queer 'dame' who wrote poetry."

The book's publisher, Martha Bullen, counts Dame as a family friend as well as a talented poet.

"My grandparents and my parents knew her. We've kind of been admirers of her poems for years," Bullen says, recalling how Dame would often recite her finer verses from memory, finding just the right poem to define any given situation.

It was a mutual friend, Vivien Michaels, who suggested to Bullen that she produce a collection of the unpublished children's poems Dame had kept tucked away.

"I thought about it for a while, and decided it was a good idea," said Bullen, who worked for major publishers like Scott, Foresman before starting her own company here in DuPage. She still works as a consultant for the larger houses.

Bullen selected the poems she liked best, and edited the text.

"It was so unpredictable, and I'm sitting here more surprised than anybody to see it come from the intangible to the tangible," Dame says.

When it hit the stores on Dec. 15, "Popsicle Tree" became the first book Bullen worked on from start to finish.

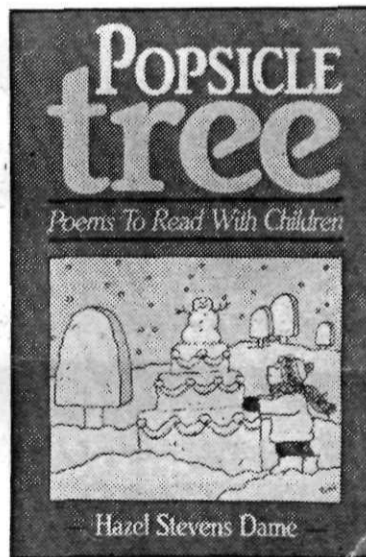
The cover price of the book

Grown-ups

By Hazel Stevens Dame

Grown-ups never skip,
They never swing.
They never somersault
Nor even fling
Their arms about,
Or give an Indian whoop
Or shout.

It's plain for anyone to see
They don't have frisky fun like me...
The only thing they do is walk
And talk and talk and talk and TALK!



taken over so completely so when you were married, you felt that was your interest, and it was," she says.

Giving up her vocation, she devoted even more time to her avocation.

"My hobby was pursued mainly as a project for myself, just as were his," she reme-

"Popsicle Tree," the book includes a poem she wrote just weeks before the collection hit the press. She's probably writing something right now.

"I'm never quite free of it, you know," she says, quoting a French saying which asserts that poems are never finished but only abandoned in des-

is \$10.50, and with the first printing comprising only 500 copies, Bullen doesn't expect it to be a financial windfall. She said she doesn't get very much out of the publication "other than the satisfaction of putting out a book."

"I'm delighted it turned out (Continued on Page 14)

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At 86, Elmhurst's poet laureate turns to kids...

(Continued from Page 12)
so well and that Hazel is
pleased with it," Bullen said.

"Pleased?" Dame says.
"How can I help but be?"

The book is selling well, and
Bullen anticipates that the
proceeds will cover the costs
of printing. Additional print-
ings will be ordered as
needed, Bullen said.

Dame has been listed in the
Who's Who of American
Women as well as the Inter-
national Who's Who in Poetry.
Though this is her first book
for children, Dame has pub-
lished two volumes of poetry
for adults, "This Too-Brief
Moment" and "Star-led to
Bethlehem." Both are out of
print. She also wrote a three-
act play about Elmhurst his-
tory called "But That Was
Yesterday."

The tickling tome is avail-
able at The Book Store of
Glen Ellyn, Anderson's Book-
shop in Elmhurst, Live and
Learn Toy Store in Elmhurst
and Toad Hall Bookstore in
Wheaton.

It's easy to see why she's
been called Elmhurst's poet
laureate. When asked about
her affinity to poetry, Dame
recites a verse she wrote
years ago on that very sub-
ject: "Poems may be brief as

birdsongs./Momentary melo-
dies, born of heartache, joys
or yearning/Light as dew on
budding breeze./Broken bits of
cosmic splendor splintering
the predawn gray./Brilliant as
the thrust of sunrise./Poignant
as diminished day./Poems
may be revelations, set direc-
ted, thought./Lyric notes of
unschooled cadence/Peer into
wisdoms yet untaught./
Whence then comes a poem's
compulsion?/Paradox of
known desire that propels it-
self to phrases,/sets the world
of mind on fire./Well, now tell
me, you who know the an-
swer./How to catch both
breeze and bird/So that
morning's glimpse of glory/
And its birdsongs can be
heard./Well, now tell me
what's a poem, please, a little
lad asked me./Well better had

he queried: what's infinity./For
how was I to answer him?/
How can truth be told?/How
was I to answer him?/Seven
times the sea?/Seven times
the silver chant in April's
rhapsody?/Seven times an ar-
row, worried, ringing to its
mark?/Seven times the broken
branch or red birds in the
rain?/Seven times the dove
that mourns before day dawns
again?/How was I to answer
him?/How can truth be told/
Seven times more fabulous
than rainbows and the gold."

Dame is quiet for a second
upon completing the poem,
then she smiles.

"I know you didn't expect a
poetry recital. Nor did I," she
says with a laugh. "I never
know what to expect. That is a
little bit of the essence of po-
etry."

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