by Nancy Simpson

I was shy and didn't speak much in my young life because I feared whatever I said would come out of my mouth sounding quirky. I did not know then I was using figurative language. I only saw puzzlement on my mother's face and almost stopped talking.

Life changed for the better when someone in Raleigh sent three poets to read their poems at my local library. I heard free verse for the first time, and I recognized on the spot it was similar to what I had been hearing in my head most my life.

At age forty, the state of North Carolina certified me to teach. At the same time, I began writing my thoughts and published poems right away in literary magazines. I entered the first writing class offered in the Warren Wilson College MFA Writing program . After graduation, I kept taking poems apart, hoping to see how they were made, especially wanting to understand the writing process. More advanced poets warned me, "Be careful, Nancy. Poetry is meant to be mysterious. If you learn how it works, you might stop being able to make it happen." Nothing could stop me. Writing poetry changed me, smoothed my tongue, and greatly enriched my life. I

kept practicing poetry, publishing poems, and passing on what I had learned to others. As Gary Snyder said, “You get it right, and then you pass it on.”

My upcoming workshop "Poetry Writing Here and Now," scheduled for the 2011 Fall Conference, will focus on Contemporary Free Verse Poetry. I’m not one who believes “Free Verse” is a free-for-all, without rules nor responsibility. We will consider a list of specific guidelines aimed to guide you beyond the use of ordinary language. Where to break the line and how to make your poems sing with sound will be discussed. We’ll talk about specific forms of free verse and see what drives each kind. I’ll share my definition of the lyric poem, and we’ll write some poems.

NANCY SIMPSON is the author of three poetry collections: *Across Water*, *Night Student*, and most recently, *Living Above the Frost Line: New and Selected Poems*, published in 2010 by Carolina Wren Press. She is also the editor of the recently published anthology *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge*. Her poems have appeared in the *Georgia Review, Prairie Schooner*, and other literary magazines, as well as in several anthologies. She holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College and is a recipient of an NC Arts Council fellowship. She is one of the co-founders of North Carolina Writers’ Network – West, the Network chapter for writers in the westernmost counties of the state. She lives in Hayesville.

Registration for the 2011 Fall Conference is now open.