

SPEAKING UP: Rhyme over reason

Wilton man, 91, enters Trump poetry contest - By Stephanie Kim

WILTON VILLAGER 10/8 - Gordon Nugent was never one to be vocal about politics — until now. When a friend suggested he enter a poetry contest about President Donald Trump, the 91-year-old Wilton man could not resist his chance to speak up.

In a way, entering the contest is a means of redemption from his silent past, he said. "I've somehow been detached from politics and only come out because I've felt my country's in danger, by this fellow," Nugent said. "It's the simple case of better late than never."

The contest, conducted by The New York Times, calls for up to three entries per person until its Sunday deadline.

Nugent answered the call and wrote three. One proposes Trump make a deal with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un that could win them both a Nobel Peace Prize, by building one of his towers in Pyongyang. Another jabs at "Foxy Trumpeters" of fake news, or "word-storms as damaging as, nukes." And the third speaks about refugees "who reach our shores," bringing riches of "heart and mind and tribal lore."

He has sent one poem to the White House and plans on sending all three to different publications, if his poems are not selected this time around. "Trump has been such an unexpected shock and such an accident of our system's functions. So unexpected. A man so utterly unqualified for the job," Nugent said. "I guess that's partly why I've become excited about it and involved and done a little bit to try to stir opposition, and I'm inclined to do more, but need to figure out how." Although Nugent considers himself the most primitive of poets, he has always been a wordsmith.

Once employed by The Times in the late '40s, Nugent started out as a copy boy at 23. He made an impression on the hiring department by driving from Peoria, Ill., where he was born and raised, to New York City — so he could learn from some of the nation's best journalists, he said. Soon after, he became a clerk on the night foreign desk, working from 5 p.m. until midnight. He took journalism classes at Columbia University during the day. Nugent fondly remembers shuttling papers to and from the typesetting room and celebrating the paper's 100th anniversary in 1951. "It was just an exciting place to work," Nugent said.

After two years, then young and recently married, Nugent left journalism behind for a long career in public relations — a decision he seems to regret to this day — working for General Electric and Union Carbide for nearly 30 years.

Retired for some time, it seems Nugent will not let go of poetry as he did with journalism. Entering the Trump poetry contest served as a moment of awakening, he said, to the world of poetry and the power of speech.

He is just beginning to feel the comfort of using rhythm and rhyme, as ideas come to him while sitting in his yard, riding the bus or reading a book. Those thoughts take on a new life on his computer upstairs, in the Wilton home he has lived in since 1959.

"I haven't yet accomplished alliteration or onomatopoeia or half a dozen other technical accomplishments that are part of the writing process. But I plan on tinkering with them," he said.

"Maybe I might become a poet someday," he said, with a playful grin on his face.

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