

***Valynda King helps residents write original poetry at Autumn Leaves of Cityview, an assisted living memory care community in Fort Worth, Texas***

**Residents at the memory care community are all living with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, yet many still remember favorite poems and appreciate poetry. King taps into their memories, elicits words and ideas, and helps residents shape them into poetry.**

Valynda King has helped residents create about a dozen original poems as part of the weekly Book Club at Autumn Leaves of Cityview, an assisted living memory care community in Fort Worth, Texas.

What makes this remarkable is the fact that all of the residents at Autumn Leaves have Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. Some are limited in their speech or other abilities. Yet King works her magic, tapping into memories, eliciting words and ideas, and working with the residents to shape them into poetry. With King's guidance, the Book Club has created dozens of poems.

King, the community's Life Engagement Manager, says she's amazed by what the Book Club members are able to create.

"The residents have these pops of awareness, when all of a sudden, everything is clear," she said.

King works with the residents as a group. At each writing session, they sit in a circle, tossing out ideas. King writes their words on a large whiteboard, adding and editing as the poem gradually takes shape.

The first effort was a sestina, a poem which follows an intricate pattern of repetition, with six stanzas followed by a concluding stanza of three lines. That poem, called "End of Winter Life Does Spring," required several sessions of work; it's one of King's favorites. Other poetic creations include haiku, a three line, 17 syllable poem, and acrostics, in which the letters of a word each form the first letter of each line of the poem. The Book Club is working to create at least one poem for every major holiday.

As with all poets, the muse can be fickle among the residents, King notes. Some days, they don't seem to have the interest or the energy. When that happens, she will put the poem aside, and return to it later.

"Some days it works, some days it doesn't," she says.

King joins a growing number of caregivers who are creatively employing the arts to improve quality of life for people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. In New York, for example, leaders of the Alzheimer's Poetry Project use a "call and response" technique to read poems with groups of people with dementia. Research shows that a significant number of people in mid to late stage dementia remember words and lines from poems they learned in childhood.

King is a published author who enjoys writing poetry herself. But her co-workers say the real secret of her success comes by way of her deep connection with the residents.

“She’s just extraordinary with the residents,” said Nelda Davis, Cityview’s Executive Director. She adds, joking: “And if Valynda is gone for a day, it’s like a Greek tragedy. They really miss her.”

## **Autumn Leaves**

**Written by the residents of Autumn Leaves of Cityview with the guidance of Valynda King**

All leaves

Undulate in

The wind

Under the bridge

Mostly in the fall

Now

Leaves

Everywhere you look you see

A red, yellow or orange leaf

Vanishing upwards

Easily falling

Softly to the ground

## **ABOUT AUTUMN LEAVES**

Family owned and operated memory care assisted living communities, Autumn Leaves® is dedicated to serving those living with Alzheimer’s and dementia. Autumn Leaves communities are committed to providing exceptionally high-quality care and research-based programs that allow for safe, secure, and active environments for its residents. An acknowledged leader in memory care, Autumn Leaves combines clinical expertise, knowledge of dementia, and heartfelt compassion to create the best possible care environment. Autumn Leaves currently operates 36 communities in 4 states with the ability to serve more than 1,800 residents. For more information, visit [AutumnLeaves.com](http://AutumnLeaves.com) or call 888-662-8886.