

## "A joyful thing": The man who wrote his wife a poem every day for 25 years

### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

Put these types of writing in order from 1 (the one you like to read most) to 6 (the one you like to read least).

- |          |                    |
|----------|--------------------|
| 1. _____ | a. romantic novels |
| 2. _____ | b. poetry          |
| 3. _____ | c. fantasy novels  |
| 4. _____ | d. thrillers       |
| 5. _____ | e. biographies     |
| 6. _____ | f. travel writing  |

#### 2 Key words

Complete the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers can help you.

regret

custom

rhyme

sort through

shed

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a poem that has lines ending in the same sound. (para 2)
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something that a person does regularly. (para 2)
3. If you \_\_\_\_\_ things, you look at a lot of them to find what you want or need. (para 5)
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a small building, usually made of wood, in which people store things. (para 5)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is a feeling of sadness about something that has happened. (para 5)

ambition

joyful

unintentional

thrilled

stir

6. If you are \_\_\_\_\_, you are very pleased and excited. (para 8)
7. If someone causes a \_\_\_\_\_, they create a situation in which a lot of people feel interested or angry. (para 8)
8. An \_\_\_\_\_ is something that you very much want to do, usually something that is difficult to achieve. (para 8)
9. An \_\_\_\_\_ action is one that you did not plan or want to do. (para 8)
10. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it causes very happy feelings. (para 9)

#### 3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. For how long did Peter Gordon write a daily poem for his wife?
2. When did his wife die?
3. When did he meet his wife?
4. When did they get married?
5. When did Gordon first start writing poetry?
6. How many of his poems are now on the website *A Love in Verse*?

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Alison Flood

21 May, 2020

- 1 Thirty years ago, "just for a laugh", actor Peter Gordon wrote a poem for his wife, Alison, and left it under her pillow. She liked it, and so he continued to write poems, every day for 25 years. Even today, Gordon continues to add to the thousands of poems he has written for Alison, even after her death in 2016.
- 2 "She liked it and found it quite funny. I went on from there to writing little rhymes, and then the rhymes got bigger and bigger, and I started doing it every day. So it became a custom," says Gordon, now 87. "I was out of work sometimes or doing nothing in the theatre dressing room, so it was something for me to do and something I wanted to express quite deeply."
- 3 Gordon met Alison King in 1971, when they were in a play together. They performed together again in another play in 1973 and married a year later. He wrote a bit of poetry in the 80s, but it was in the early 90s that he began writing daily verses, often about his feelings at being separated from his family on tour.
- 4 Alison, who began directing and teaching acting at drama schools in the 90s, was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2014. In 2015, she performed with Gordon in the play *Love Letters*, directed by their daughter Anna Jordan, a theatre writer and director. Alison died the next year.
- 5 After her death, Gordon began sorting through the thousands of poems left behind. "I realized that I had thousands of these pages in a big wooden box in a shed at the bottom of the garden. I thought I should sort them out and see if they were any good," says Gordon. "If I was going to do something to show my love for my wife and my regret that she'd died, I wanted it to be good. I thought that some of them might be quite good. That kept me going."
- 6 Around 300 of the poems are now on the website *A Love in Verse*, which has been put together by the couple's daughters, Cassie Davis and Anna Jordan. It is attracting attention. Friends and actors are recording performances of some of the poems. One poem is 'The Last I Wrote While She Was Still Alive', in which Gordon thinks about his feelings for his wife on a rainy afternoon: "Who minds getting wet when you've got a Rose / A treasure, a pleasure past all dreaming?"
- 7 Jordan says the thing she loved most about the poems was "the hope in them. Even those written after my mum's death – and some of them are really quite sad – are lifted by the same message: love remains, even after death. We had to do something with them, to share them with people. I think she would be very proud of him."
- 8 Gordon is thrilled by the attention the website is receiving. "At my age, suddenly, this has caused a stir, and it's very nice," he says. "I always wanted to be a writer. That was my ambition. I never really did it, but in fact, I used to write verse almost without thinking – it was almost unintentional."
- 9 He continues to write for Alison but no longer every day. "Only once every so often. It's difficult because it's quite painful," he says. "Although there is lots of pain involved, *A Love in Verse* is joyful. I spent all that time, all of those hours, all those years, showing my love for her. That expresses it best, I think."

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First published in *The Guardian*, 21/05/20

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#### 4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Peter Gordon left the first poem he ... | a. ... began sorting through the poems that were in a wooden box in his shed. |
| 2. In the early 90s, he started ...        | b. ... his ambition to be a writer.   |
| 3. After his wife died, he ...             | c. ... wrote for his wife under her pillow.                                   |
| 4. He thought that some of the poems ...   | d. ... put together a website called <i>A Love in Verse</i> .                 |
| 5. When he was young, it was ...           | e. ... might be quite good.   |
| 6. His daughters have now ...              | f. ... writing a poem every day.  |

#### 5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

- for a laugh just
- day for 25 years every
- the at garden of the bottom
- so every often once
- early the in nineties nineteen
- to something me do for

#### 6 Two-word phrases

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- |            |              |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. write   | a. a stir    |
| 2. attract | b. time      |
| 3. cause   | c. a play    |
| 4. do      | d. poetry    |
| 5. direct  | e. nothing   |
| 6. spend   | f. attention |

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### 7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

|    | noun      | adjective |
|----|-----------|-----------|
| 1. | fun       |           |
| 2. | joy       |           |
| 3. | pain      |           |
| 4. | intention |           |
| 5. | rain      |           |
| 6. | day       |           |

### 8 Discussion

- Do you like poetry? Why? Why not?