

[Susan Terris: Three Memo Poems](#) [1]

June 4, 2014 [Featured Poetry](#) [2]

Memo to the NRA

if I tell you I need an assault rifle
to explode watermelons would I be sane

or would I be one more whack job who should be
locked up brandish that Second Amendment

but guns do kill people walking down the street
people in a corner store school children

if I'd had a pistol when I found a burglar ten feet
from where my children slept I would have

tried to kill him but he young and scared
might have taken both it and me



Memo to the Little Girl in a Tutu and Froggy Rain Boots

no curl in the middle of your forehead just a need
to stomp one foot and a voice that projects

don't tell me you stepped in dog shit and that's
why you're in frog boots on a day with no rain

indeed an individualist already baby woman
and clear-sighted as my granddaughter who

in Disneyland didn't dress like a princess but
as Minnie Mouse stiff blunt-toed shoes and all

Memo to the Woman Who Thinks You Can't Be Too Rich or Too Thin

the coda you added to rich and thin was white blouses
one could never have too many you said

the daughter who tried to starve herself into submission
changed my mind about thin and old ladies I've noticed

come either too thin or too fat one a-penny two a-penny
money its own story coins for the ferryman may be required

but happy has no price tag and thin is better for watches
or pancakes though you may be right about white blouses



About the Memo Poems

In the far, far distant TV past, NBC's *The Tonight Show* was hosted by Steve Allen, who would often read newspaper letters to the editor aloud, insisting that the letters should be read with the tone of voice in which they were written.

The three poems here will appear in a chapbook called *Memos*, forthcoming from Omnidawn in 2015. They represent unsent letters to a variety of persons and organizations as well as to myself, houseplants, and the cat who brings me dead birds. The memo poems are also meant to be read with the tone of voice in which they were written: some angry, some tender, some thoughtful, some amusing.

The 39 poems that will appear in *Memos* represent only about two-thirds of the ones I wrote. The less strong pieces, as well as some of the angriest, have been omitted, including "Memo to the Teacher Who's Spent Too Much Time with Undergraduates" and "Memo to the Woman Who Stole My Mother's Snake Ring and Watch." Sometimes a rant is just a rant and isn't a poem.

"Memo to the Little Girl in a Tutu and Froggy Rain Boots" was one of the earliest, written after I saw a child dressed this way on a very warm, sunny day. The child's father told me she had stepped in dog poop and had no other shoes to wear. In my piece, of course, the girl has no excuse to wear the boots and tutu except the force of her baby woman will. "Memo to the Woman Who Thinks You Can't Be Too Rich or Too Thin" was another early one—a combination of the statements of a friend and my personal reaction to them.

"Memo to the NRA" was written in 2013 and is one of the last. All the 2013 poems are political in nature. Why? Because I am currently obsessed with issues of guns and climate change and strip mining and natural disaster.

Each memo poem is twelve lines or less. Each has four spaces in place of punctuation, because I believe memos are mostly written unpunctuated. Also, because I am a person who loves punctuation, this was a test for myself—to see if I could, without punctuation, create the kind of pauses I felt necessary for these pieces.

Memo to the Editors at *Talking Writing*

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some smart people always manage
to publish work that seems fresh and

surprising how lucky the writers who
find here acceptance and a home

Art Information

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- "[I'm Still Waiting](#) [4]" © Jenna Carver; Creative Commons license.



Susan Terris's books include *The Ghost of Yesterday: New and Selected Poems*; *The Homelessness of Self, Contrariwise*; and *Fire Is Favorable to the Dreamer*. Her work has appeared in many journals, including *the Southern Review*, *Journal*, and *Ploughshares*. A poem of hers from *Field* appeared in *Pushcart Prize XXXI*.

Susan is the editor of *Spillway Magazine* and poetry editor of *In Posse Review* and of *Pedestal*. In recent years, she has won both the George Bogin Award and the Louis Hammer Award from the Poetry Society of America.

An interview with Susan appeared in the November 2010 issue of *Talking Writing*: [Susan Terris: "You Can't Be Afraid to Fail."](#) [5]

Her book *Memos* will be published by Omnidawn in 2015. For more information, see [Susan Terris's website](#) [6].

Photo of Susan Terris by Margaretta Mitchell.

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[5] <http://talkingwriting.com/you-cant-be-afraid-to-fail>

[6] <http://www.susanterris.com>