

# TAKE YOUR POET TO WORK DAY

Celebrated the 3rd Wednesday in July

## Mary Oliver

Mary Jane Oliver was born September 10, 1935, in Ohio. Though she suffered abuse in childhood, she found solace on long walks in nature, a habit she would continue—along with writing poetry—throughout her life and which would always inspire her. She went to Ohio State University & Vassar, but didn't receive a degree.

When she was 17 Oliver went to the home of the late Edna St. Vincent Millay and became friends with the poet's sister Norma. They spent the next six to seven years organizing Millay's papers.

Oliver taught at Case Western Reserve University, was Poet In Residence at Bucknell University, and Margaret Banister Writer in Residence at Sweet Briar College, before holding the Catharine Osgood Foster Chair for Distinguished Teaching at Bennington College. Oliver wrote academically and had already won a National Endowment of the Arts Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship by the time she started publishing her poems. She would go on to win other awards, including the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Lannan Literary Award for lifetime achievement.

The morning her Pulitzer was announced, Oliver was walking through the town dump, trying to find shingles to fix her roof. A friend joked, "Looking for your old manuscripts?"

Her style was mostly lyrical nature poems, but she dealt with classical myth in *The River Styx* and *The Night Traveler*. She also wrote about poetry in multiple volumes including *A Poetry Handbook* and *Rules for the Dance: A Handbook for Writing and Reading Metrical Verse*. "I never have felt yet that I've done it right," Oliver said. "This is the marvelous thing about language. It can always be done better."

In the late 1950s, she met photographer Molly Malone Cook, her future partner. "I took one look [at Cook]," she said, "and fell, hook and tumble." They would end up moving to Provincetown, Massachusetts, where they would live until after Cook's death.

Oliver was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2012, but recovered, and eventually died of lymphoma on January 17, 2019, at her home in Florida, at the age of 83.

"Walks work for me," she said. "I enter some arena that is neither conscious or unconscious. It's a joke here in town: I take a walk and I'm found standing still somewhere."



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## How to take your favorite with you on Take Your Poet to Work Day

1. Color your poet
2. Cut out your poet along dotted lines
3. Attach a popsicle stick to the back of your poet with tape or glue
4. Take your poet to work



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