

# GLENIS REDMOND

POET-IN-RESIDENCE



S STATE THEATRE  
NEW JERSEY

KEYNOTES

# STATE THEATRE NEW JERSEY'S ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Since its inception in 1992, State Theatre New Jersey's annual Artist-in-Residence program has given the gift of live performing arts to 70,000 people at more than 325 host sites throughout New Jersey. From classrooms to boardrooms, homeless shelters to libraries, the program takes talented and dynamic performers to places where the arts seldom (if ever) go. Engaging with the audience through performance and conversation, residency artists create a friendly, relaxed atmosphere that transforms even the most unlikely of places—employee lunchroom, church basement, school gymnasium, or senior center—into an impromptu arts arena where people can make a direct, personal connection with the performer. All residency activities are free of charge, ensuring that the program is accessible to everyone as it builds bridges across the community through the arts.

Poet Glenis Redmond has been State Theatre New Jersey's Artist-in-Residence since 2009. Over time, her annual visits have grown from two weeks to eight, with her work increasingly focused on in-depth poetry writing classes with key organizational partners. Each year's residency concludes with a public poetry reading showcasing some of the poets—of all ages and backgrounds—from Glenis' workshops.

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*State Theatre New Jersey—creating extraordinary experiences through the power of live performance.*



# MEET GLENIS REDMOND



*"I help people find their voices.  
That is the most important  
thing there is.  
I try to be a poetic bridge."*

Glenis Redmond's extensive travels nationally and internationally reading and teaching poetry have earned her the title "Road Warrior Poet." She is Poet-in-Residence at State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick and at the Peace Center for the Performing Arts in Greenville, South Carolina. In February 2016, at the invitation of the U.S. State Department's Speaker's Bureau, Glenis traveled to Muscat, Oman, to teach a series of poetry workshops and perform poetry in celebration of Black History Month.

Glenis tells stories with poetry—tales from her life, her family, her African-American heritage, and her sensitive observations of the world around her. She pays particular attention to unsung heroes—both past and present—from the state of South Carolina, among them Peg Leg Bates and David Drake, and explores the great migration of those who left the Carolinas and went north to New Jersey. Glenis also inspires others to pick up their pens, find their voices, and pay poetic tribute to people in their own lives.

In 2014-16, Glenis served as the Mentor Poet for the National Student Poet's Program to prepare students to read at the Library of Congress, the Department of Education, and for

First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House. Glenis is a Cave Canem Fellow, a North Carolina Literary Fellowship Recipient, and a Kennedy Center Teaching Artist. She also helped create the first Writer-in-Residence program at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site in Flat Rock, North Carolina.

Glenis has published three full-length books of poetry—*Under The Sun, Backbone*, and *What My Hand Say*—and the CDs, *Glenis On Poetry* and *Monumental*.

Before finding her calling in poetry, Glenis worked for seven years as a family counselor. This experience has enhanced her special gift for working with at-risk teens, adults in recovery, people who are incarcerated, and other vulnerable, underserved groups. These communities are a special focus of her State Theatre residencies, and were the inspiration for her poem, "Bruised," which she performed as a keynote speaker at the 2013 TEDx in Greenville, South Carolina.

Glenis believes that poetry is a healer, and she can be found in the trenches across the world applying pressure to those in need, one poem at a time.

# WHAT IS PRAISE POETRY?

Glenis Redmond is known for writing and performing a style of poetry called the **PRAISE POEM**, a type of **TRIBUTE POETRY**. Tribute poetry can be found in many cultures, going back hundreds, if not thousands of years. It can celebrate a single person, a family, a people, a hero, a god, or even oneself.

Praise poetry is most closely associated with the West African tradition of oral poetry. These poems are created so that the young people in the tribe know who they are, who their ancestors are, why they are loved, and what special gifts they bring to the tribe and the world. In Africa, praise poetry has served as a form of oral documentation. Professional poets carry and recall the narratives detailing the history of the people, the great leaders, and their outstanding achievements. The poems are sung or chanted, sometimes to the accompaniment of music or drumming.

## "PRAISE TO THE MOTHER OF JAMAICAN ART"

She was the nameless woman who created images of her children sold away from her. She suspended her wood babies from a rope round her neck, before she ate she fed them. Touched bits of pounded yam and plantains to sealed lips, always urged them to sip water. She carved them of wormwood, teeth and nails  
her first tools, later she wielded a blunt blade. Her spit cleaned faces and limbs; the pitch oil of her skin burnished them. When woodworms bored into their bellies she warmed castor oil they purged. She learned her art by breaking hard rockstones. She did not sign her work.

—Lorna Goodison (Jamaica)  
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## "SONG OF SOLOMON"

How beautiful are your feet in sandals,  
O prince's daughter!  
The curves of your hips are like jewels,  
The work of the hands of an artist.  
Your navel is like a round goblet  
That never lacks mixed wine;  
Your belly is like a heap of wheat  
Fenced about with lilies.

—The Bible

## "THE PRAISES OF LOBENGULA, SON OF MATSHOBANA"

The owner of many books, son of Matshobana,  
Where did you disappear to, Black Rod  
That beats cattle and men?  
You, the big elephant of the forests,  
Whereas other elephants leave a trail,  
You do not leave even the smallest trail.  
You, the lion of the forests!  
Whereas other lions can be tracked,  
But this one of the Khumalo  
Moved across without leaving a scent.  
You who are as big as the earth, you are big news.  
You refused to be captured by foreigners  
You chose to die a free man  
Your grave shall be known by your ancestors only, you who  
are as big as the earth!

—Ndebele praise poem (Zimbabwe)

## "PRAISE POEM"

I am a crystal diamond—  
You have to dig a lot to get me  
from the ground,  
but also  
I'm 5-foot-3 mountain, tall, strong,  
and  
Almost impossible to take down.  
I stand like no other on the earth.  
My DNA is 100% Hispanic and  
proud.  
I flow from a small country called  
Honduras,  
But from my bird's-eye view I see  
it as  
A huge place where I first opened  
my eyes and saw the world.  
My last name Rivera is like a river  
that  
Keeps on flowing through  
the rocks and not stopping.  
I'm like an eagle that sees this  
world  
as a huge place—  
That just keeps on flying through  
the sky.  
—Jhony Rivera, New Brunswick, NJ  
(USA)

## ODE

She is a pool of gleam.  
She is a seed, the rain.  
She is a prairie of idea,  
the harvest of motion.  
She is rosewater  
in a sandstone bowl.  
She is the refugee, the tarp  
of tent, the fame of fugue.  
She is the arms of mothers,  
a ribbon in a porcelain moon.  
She is a lioness and loneliness,  
the newborn swathed in blush.  
She is earth yellow, jade,  
aquamarine. She is the sea—  
el mar, la mer, il mare, samandar.  
She is a threshold, an arch,  
a minaret. She is every headscarf—  
magenta, celeste, amethyst.  
She is majestic,  
magnifique.  
She is a luminous lagoon.  
She is our hands, our pen.  
Malala.

—Judith Terzi

From *Malala: Poems for Malala Yousafzai*, ed by Joseph Hutchison & Andrea L. Watson, FutureCycle Press, 2015. Used with permission.

# "MAMA'S MAGIC"

My mama is Magic.  
 Always was and always will be.  
 There is one phrase that constantly bubbled  
 from the lips of her five children,  
 "My momma can do it."  
 We thought my mama knew everything.  
 Believed she did, as if she were born full grown  
 from the Encyclopedia of Britannica.  
 I could tell you stories  
 of how she transformed  
 a run down paint peeled shack  
 into a home.  
 How she heated us with tin tub baths  
 from a kettle on the stove.  
 Poured it over in there like an elixir.  
 My mama is protection  
 like those quilts her mother used to make.  
 She tucked us in with cut out history all around us.  
 We found we could walk anywhere in this world  
 and not feel alone.  
 My mama never whispered the shame of poverty  
 in our ears.  
 She taught us to dance to our own shadows.  
 "Pay no attention to those grand parties  
 on the other side of the tracks.  
 Make your own music," she'd say  
 as she walked,  
 she cleaned  
 the sagging floorboards of that place.  
 "You'll get there."  
 "You'll get there."  
 Her broom seemed to say with every wisp.  
 We were my mama's favorite recipe.  
 She whipped us up in a big brown bowl  
 supported by her big brown arms.  
 We were homemade children.  
 Stitched together with homemade love.  
 We didn't get everything we ever wanted  
 but we lacked for nothing.  
 We looked at the stars in my mama's eyes  
 They told us we owned the world.  
 We walked like kings and queens  
 even on midnight trips to the outhouse.



Glenis and her Mama

We were under her spell.  
 My mama didn't study at no Harvard or Yale.  
 The things she knew  
 you couldn't learn in no book! Like...  
 How to make your life sing like  
 sweet potato pie sweetness  
 out of an open window.  
 How to make anybody feel at home.  
 How at just the right moment be silent  
 and with her eyes say,  
 "Everything's gonna be alright, chile,  
 everything is gonna be alright."  
 How she tended to all our sickness.  
 How she raised our spirits.  
 How she kept flowers  
 living on our sagging porch  
 in the midst of family chaos.  
 My mama raised children like  
 it was her business in life.  
 Put us on her hip and kept moving,  
 keeping that house Pine-Sol clean.  
 Yeah, my mama is magic.  
 Always was and always will be.  
 Her magic?  
 How to stay steady and sure  
 in this fast paced world.  
 Now when people look at me  
 with my head held high  
 my back erect  
 and look at me with that...  
 "Who does she think she is?"  
 I just keep on walking  
 with the assurance inside.  
 I am Black Magic!  
 I am Jeanette Redmond's child.

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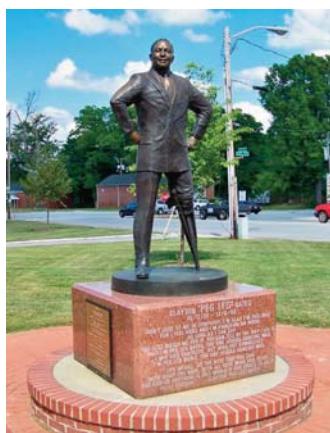
**Who are the magic people in YOUR life?**

# I'M FLY

## FOR CLAYTON "PEG LEG" BATES

**Some people got two good feet  
and still don't know what to do.  
My smoothness makes the argument  
for just one. My other leg be long gone  
  
sacrificed to the cotton gin god.  
They pinned my mangled mess down  
to the kitchen table. Made me suffer more  
under the hand of an unsterilized knife  
  
with only a cotton bit to bare the pain.  
I got up and spit out that terrible taste  
of Jim Crow and pity. Spun my mama's guilt  
and worry into a dance that twists past  
  
the neighbors' prayer, gossip and stares  
of how he gonna make do with just one leg?  
I strap on my dreams with tux, tails and flair.  
Turn can't into can without losing time  
  
not even in my mind. This Fountain Inn son  
done good, I knock beats on wood.  
I'm a worldwide showstopper all right.  
Shout rings around all those two-footers.  
  
I'm the master of my own fate,  
when the world cut me at the thigh  
I don't shuffle off in misery,  
I get up on my one good leg and fly.**

©Glenis Redmond



Statue of Peg Leg Bates in his hometown of Fountain Inn, SC



## PEG LEG BATES

Legendary tap dancer Clayton "Peg Leg" Bates was born in 1907 in Fountain Inn, South Carolina. His mother was a sharecropper and housecleaner. Clayton began dancing on the street for pennies and nickels when he was five years old. At 12, while working in a cotton mill, his left leg became caught and mangled in the cotton gin. As a poor black person in the segregated South, he could not go to a hospital; his leg was amputated on the kitchen table at his home.

Returning home after World War I, his uncle Wit made him his first peg leg. Clayton quickly taught himself to dance on his artificial leg, and was performing in Broadway shows by the time he was 20. He became renowned for a move called the Jet Plane: a huge leap, with a perfect landing on his wooden leg. Soon an international sensation, Peg Leg Bates gave two command performances before the King & Queen of England, and appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* 22 times.

In 1951 he and his wife opened the Peg Leg Bates Country Club in New York's Catskill Mountains, the largest black-owned-and-operated resort in the country. Throughout the rest of his life, he continued to perform and teach for children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. He worked in many segregated schools in the South, among them Fountain Inn Negro High School, where he taught both of Glenis Redmond's parents. Peg Leg Bates died in 1998, at the age of 91, in Fountain Inn—just a mile-and-a-half from the place where he lost his leg.

Watch Glenis' favorite Peg Leg Bates video:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=hayM4B7hcBQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hayM4B7hcBQ)

*"Life means, do the best you can with what you've got, with all your mind and heart. You can do anything in this world if you want to do it bad enough."*

—Peg Leg Bates

# "PRAISE DAVE"

**First time I see a jar rise up,  
I be midwifed into life.**

**Understood how these pots and I be kin  
- dismissed to what's under foot.**

**I learned to turn and turn -  
people the world with pots.**

**I pour my need into the knead  
until forty thousand around me crowd,  
but everything I love, I lose  
so I want what I mold to hold.**

**Even my empty pots  
be full. One say:**

**I wonder where is all my relations  
Friendship to all - and every nation.**

**There are lanterns in my words -  
every story got another story.**

**Some call me Dave the slave, if that's all they got,  
I say leave the rhymes to me.**

**When people look at me, a slave be  
the first excuse they use not to see me.**

**I say praise me. It won't fall on deaf ears.  
I catch praise like most people catch naps.**

**I am a 6-foot vessel of anything, but ordinary  
a one of a kind with a Carolina shine.**

**I stepped out of the rows of cotton  
to master the potter's wheel.**

**I take the wind out of can't.  
with my mark, I make a mark.**

**I sign my name Dave.  
I don't write slave.**

**See if my pots and me spin history.  
See if we hold hold hold.**



## DAVID DRAKE

David Drake, better known as "Dave the Potter," was a remarkable man—a talented potter and poet who also happened to be enslaved. Because

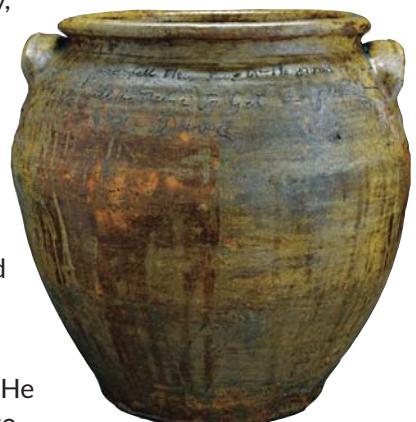
he was a slave, he did not receive credit or recognition during his lifetime; much of what we know about him comes from the family and business records of his owners. Dave lives on today through his enormous stoneware pots, many of which he signed and dated and inscribed with his couplets (two-line rhyming poems).

Dave was born around 1801 and lived most of his life in and around Edgefield, South Carolina. His first owner, Harvey Drake, was the nephew of Abner Landrum, who owned a pottery factory where Dave went to work. Landrum also published a newspaper, which is where Dave may have learned to read and write—in spite of South Carolina's harsh laws forbidding slaves to do so. It took a special kind of courage for Dave to write his name and poetry on his pots for any and all to see.

It is estimated that Dave made 40,000 pots in his career. While many of them have survived, only 40 of his poem jars still exist. Today they sell for as much as \$175,000 at auction! Dave's pots are notable not only for their inscriptions, but also for their huge size—some big enough to hold as much as 40 gallons of liquid. They are among the largest pots ever made by hand in the U.S.

At some point in his life, Dave lost his leg in an accident after falling asleep on a train track. Unable to operate the foot treadle (a pedal used to turn the potter's wheel), he teamed up with another slave, Henry, whose arms were crippled but whose legs were strong enough to drive the wheel.

Dave's last signed pot is dated 1862. He was freed after the Civil War, but there is no record that he produced any more pots. He died sometime in the 1870s.



# "BRUISED"

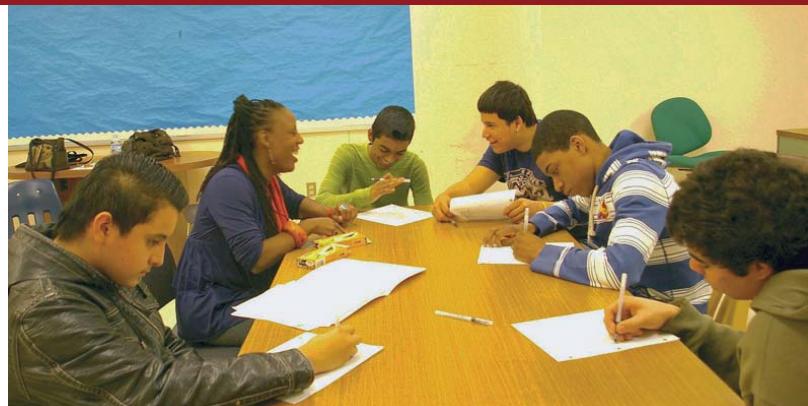
Glenis wrote this poem during her residency at State Theatre New Brunswick. It was inspired by her experience leading writing workshops for students at an alternative school for at-risk teens and for a group of adults in a residential treatment program for addiction recovery. "Bruised" is based on a conversation she had with the students about the different kinds of punishments they have received. The words in the poem in italics come directly from that conversation.

**They banter back and forth like boys do:**  
**You charcoal, son. You so black you purple.**  
 I tell them, *hol'up* in defense of my mahogany skin  
 and the boy they're putting down. I say,  
**You know what they say?** In cue as if we rehearsed it,  
 we both chime, *the darker the berry, the sweeter the juice.*  
 We flash twin smiles. There's a moment when the air  
 gets less complicated in the room. The space is large  
 enough  
 for me to ask, *why y'all hate on each other so hard?*

*Oh, he? He my boy. See, that's how we show love.*  
 They crush so hard I want to weep –  
 I'm so tired of everybody being gangsta hard,  
 but they are being real. I know 'cause I got 3 brothers  
 and growin up I never saw them show love,  
 except in that one on one – man on man dunk in yo face.  
 Call you *ignant* ten times a day kind of way.  
 Their talk swags like their walk.  
 I follow the conversation as it dips and drags.  
 We end up talking about how we were punished as kids.

I lead with, *I'm from the South and ya'll don't know nothin about a switch – havin to go 'round back*  
*fetch your own hickory, the same stick use to beat you.*  
 I say these words and I still feel the sting of the switch.  
 See welts raising into an angry language of graffiti on  
 my skin.

One says, *don't bring back no skinny one neither.*  
 I shake my head in solidarity-the blood we've spilled  
 makes us kin.  
 Another boys says, *what about those belts?*  
 I hear my mama's beating cadence,  
 a belt whip with every word, *I-told-you-not-to...*



Another says, *extension cord.*  
 I'm brought fully awake, cause  
 I don't know nothing 'bout that kind of whippin.  
 We only heard of Cedric down the street gettin beat like  
 that.  
 Then, we did not know the word, *Abuse*  
 or the phrase *Child Protective Services.*  
 We just said his mama was MEAN.

*Hincarse, another says, I say huh? Rice.*  
*You kneel on raw rice for hours.*  
 We walk down alleys; I listen as they go deeper  
 into the shadows farther than I have ever been,  
 but we don't skip a beat. We laugh –  
 joke about our beatings and nobody mentions  
 the pain, but it's all understood – we are all battered.  
 We bump up against each other's wounds before we  
 brainstorm.  
 I pick up the marker and they bicker blue versus red.  
 I read between the gang signs. It is not lost on me,  
 that when these colors mingle, they make purple.  
 I muse in my mind how violence for them still continues.  
 I come back to the poem, that we are here to write;  
 the ones that saved my life. I know this detour we took  
 down old roads is a place we had to go,  
 places where we have been loved so hard it hurts,  
 so hard we are still bruised.  
 We bear our scars,  
 then we pick up our pens  
 and write.

©Glenis Redmond

# READY, SET, WRITE!



When Glenis Redmond begins writing a new piece, the poem doesn't just magically appear. She has a process that she uses to work out her

ideas and then put them into creative, powerful language. The exercises outlined here were developed by Glenis to help students get their creative juices flowing and begin to think like poets. Here are the basic steps:



photos: Nancy Swolensky

## 1 CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC

The writing process begins with generating ideas. Immerse yourself in the subject matter by reading, taking a field trip, or interviewing someone who knows about your topic. You can also create a visual art project based on your subject to get the creative juices flowing. Then share what you've learned through "show and tell" with your class.

## 2 BRAINSTORM YOUR WORDS

Brainstorm answers to the questions below. Each answer should be only one word. Write your answers down to create a word list. (This can also be done as a group activity, with each person in the group contributing one answer to each question.) This is not the place for comparing or critiquing; you want ideas to flow!

- What is your favorite animal?
- Not including animals, what is your favorite thing in nature?
- What is your favorite gem?
- What is your favorite food?
- What is your favorite toy or game? (Do not include video games.)

## 3 APPLY POETIC TECHNIQUES

- Use texture—color, imagery, and sounds—to provide depth in your poem.
- Create layers by combining two word choices from your brainstorming exercises that might not normally be used together yet resonate poetically.
- Use metaphor and simile, which are both forms of comparison. (Metaphor uses "is," while simile uses "like" or "as.")
- Use a variety of interesting word choices: for example, abstract nouns (such as feelings or ideas), concrete nouns (anything you can actually see), verbs, and descriptive words (such as colors). Try to make your word choices as precise as possible.

## 4 KEEP REVISING!

Don't settle for the very first thing you put down on paper. Go back and re-read your poem again and again—aloud, if possible. Working in small groups with your classmates, give each other feedback, keeping the comments constructive. Don't be afraid to get rid of any words, sentences, or ideas that just don't seem to be working. As you read, ask yourself: Will your poem make sense to the people who are hearing it? Will it captivate their ears and their imaginations? Keep revising your poem until it says exactly what you want it to express. Read your finished poem to the rest of the class.

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

*Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave*, by Laban Carrick Hill, illustrated by Bryan Collier. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2010. Grades K-4.

*Etched in Clay: The Life of Dave, Enslaved Potter and Poet*, written and illustrated by Andrea Cheng. Lee & Low Books, 2013. Grades 4-6. A biography in verse.

*In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet's Portable Workshop*, by Steve Kowit. Tilbury House Publishers, 2003.

*Leaf and Bone: African Praise-Poems*, edited by Judith Gleason. Puffin, 1994.

*The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*, by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux. W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

*The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach*, edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twichell. Collins, 1992.

*Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution*, edited by Alix Olson. Seal Press, 2007.

## GLENIS' POETRY READING LIST

*Black Out Loud: an Anthology of Modern Poems by Black Americans*, edited by Arnold Adoff. Atheneum, 1970.

*Vice: New and Selected Poems*, by Ai. W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

*The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*. Random House, 1994.

*Loose Woman: Poems*, by Sandra Cisneros. Vintage, 1994.

*Original Fire: Selected and New Poems*, by Louise Erdrich. Harper Perennial, 2004.

*Rice: Poems*, by Nikky Finney. Triquarterly, 2013.

*Conjure Blues*, by Jaki Shelton Green. Carolina Wren Press, 1996.

*Rise*, by A. Van Jordan. Tia Chucha, 2001.

*M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A*, by A. Van Jordan. W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.

*Affrilachia: Poems by Frank X Walker*. Old Cove Press, 2000.

*Too Black, Too Strong*, by Benjamin Zephaniah. Bloodaxe Books, 2001.

## WEBSITES

Glenis Redmond  
[www.glenisredmond.com](http://www.glenisredmond.com)

Poems, poetry resources, poetry forums, and more  
[Everypoet.com](http://Everypoet.com)

Poetry Portal  
[www.poetry-portal.org](http://www.poetry-portal.org)



## EDUCATION & OUTREACH SUPPORTERS

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