



# What's Not to Like? Learning to Enjoy Contemporary American Poetry

Presented by Paul Willis, Poet Laureate  
Unity Church Chapel, 227 E. Arrellaga  
Parking: Enter on Valerio Street  
Thursday, November 1, 1:30pm

This single-session class will be taught by Paul Willis, a professor of English at Westmont College and the current poet laureate for the city of Santa Barbara.

“Can Poetry Matter?” was the title of a much-discussed essay by former National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Dana Gioia, published in the *The Atlantic* some twenty years ago. One would think that poetry might disappear in our media-soaked age, but it not only persists, it flourishes, finding numerous and ingenious ways to surprise and delight us.

This session will be aimed at those for whom poetry might seem distant or intimidating. We will examine how poetry did indeed lose its popular audience in the twentieth century but is now regaining it in the twenty-first. To do this we will read and discuss a number of highly accessible poems by American poet laureates such as William Stafford, Billy Collins, Donald Hall, Ted Kooser, and Kay Ryan—and also poems by recent Santa Barbara laureates Barry Spacks, Perie Longo, David Starkey, and Paul Willis.

Can poetry matter? Let us count the ways.

What He Can Do  
by Paul Willis  
After Elizabeth Holmes

Bounce a flat basketball between his legs  
without looking. Dive through a breaking wave.  
Find anything on the Internet in six seconds.

Batter a drum till the walls shake.  
Sag his jeans to the lowest  
inch possible. Refuse to sing.

Polish his cymbals until they shine  
with his own reflection. Call out the note  
of the vacuum cleaner—a middle C.

Skate off a curb with both hands  
deep in his pockets. Sleep till noon.  
Hold a dog the way a dog likes to be held.

(over)

## Contemporary Poetry

VISTAS Members \$15/person — Non-members \$22.50/person

Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: VISTAS Lifelong Learning, Inc., P.O. Box 23228, Santa Barbara, CA 93121-3228

Deadline for registration: October 20, 2012

Please carpool, if possible



## Biography

Paul J. Willis, Poet Laureate of Santa Barbara, is a professor of English at Westmont College. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Wilderness* and *The Best American Poetry* series. His most recent full-length collections are *Visiting Home* (Pecan Grove Press, 2008) and *Rising from the Dead* (WordFarm, 2009). With David Starkey, he is editor of the anthology *In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare* (University of Iowa Press, 2005). Willis is also author of *Bright Shoots of Everlastingness: Essays on Faith and the American Wild* (WordFarm, 2005) and *The Alpine Tales* (WordFarm, 2010).

## VISTAS Fall 2012 Calendar

Seminar/Event	Inclusive Dates	Time	Venue
Documentary Club (9)	Thurs, Oct 18	2:00pm	Maravilla Theater
Fall 2012 Election (3)	Tues, Oct 16, 23, 30	1:30-4:30pm	Goleta Library
Astronomy (3)	Wed, Oct 10, 17, 18	1:30-4:30pm	Goleta Library
Poetry (1)	Thurs, Nov 1	1:30-4:30pm	Unity Chapel
N. American Indian Tribes (3)	Mon, Nov 5, 12, 19	1:30-4:30pm	Maravilla Clubhouse
Round the Horn (1)	Sat, Nov 10	10:00am-Noon	Valle Verde Social Rm



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