

Woman pairs photos with mom's poetry

By Will Broadus. The Salem News Staff writer, Apr 26, 2013



Dorothy Monnelly will present her new book, "For My Daughters" at Ipswich Museum on May 3.

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Courtesy photo

In her poem "For My Daughters," Dorothy Kerper compared happiness to a fragile butterfly.

"Be still and let it come to rest," the poem advises. "Drink deeply of its beauty then / But be most careful when you touch / Its iridescent wings."

Kerper studied poetry at Vassar College, where she graduated in 1917, then taught English at St. Mary's School in Concord, N.H.

Kerper's daughter, Dorothy Monnelly of Ipswich, was 8 years old when her mother died of breast cancer at age 50, in 1945. She held onto a volume of her mother's poetry that her father had printed privately and later found more poems that were stored in boxes.

Several years ago, Monnelly, a photographer whom the naturalist Edward O. Wilson has called "the Ansel Adams of the wetlands," started pairing her photographs of natural scenes and objects with her mother's poems.

They were recently published in a collection that borrows its title from "For My Daughters," which appears in the book beside "Snow-Covered Beech Tree," a photograph taken in Ipswich in 2008.

The result is a conversation between two forms of art and across generations, between mother and daughter.

"I tried to select poems that had a visual component I could work with," Monnelly said. "I chose my favorite poems, the ones I loved the most, and started looking for matches."

Before publishing "For My Daughters," Monnelly shared the project with members of n+1, a photo critique group in Cambridge.

"The first time I tried putting up poems and photographs together, they were a group of very passionate entries," she said. "They liked the pairings, and that got me going."

Monnelly's work has focused on different landscapes over the years, from Hawaiian lava fields to deserts to the Great Salt Marsh in Ipswich.

Her photographs of the latter were published in a book in 2006, "Between Land and Sea: The Great Marsh," and were also exhibited in Massachusetts, Denver and Seattle.