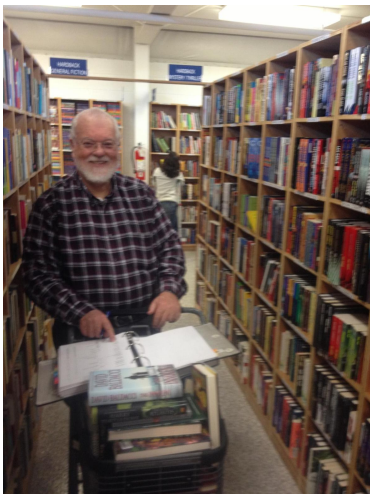


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Dear Friends,

Wow, what a year 2016 has been! I know, I know... it's not quite over yet, but I wanted to send this message to you as we enter the season of thankfulness, before the election, and before the busyness of the holidays takes over. I'm excited to share with you many of the ways my year has been a [DELIGHT](#) (my 2016 One Little Word), including travel and friends and words and poems and... I've got some inspiring links for you, a giveaway just for subscribers, and also some news of one kind or another.

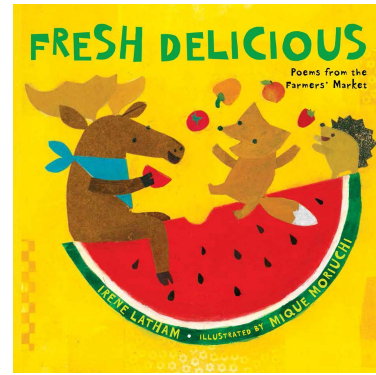


*Papa in the bookstore (one of his favorite places to be!)*

But first I want to take a moment to remember my father, [Kenneth E. Dykes, Sr.](#), who died June 8, 2016. My writing life is so connected to him, my faith and optimism, as is my love of books and of people and stories and of the natural world -- I wouldn't be ME if it weren't for Papa. I miss him every day, and I'm learning that a relationship doesn't necessarily end when someone dies -- it can continue to grow and change and bring joy. I'm grateful. Thanks for all your comforting words and cards and unexpected kindnesses during this time. And shout-out to [Bismarck Cancer Center](#). Keep up the amazing work you do!

## Oh, the Places I've Been!

This year has been an especially busy travel year for me, with two books releasing in the same season. I've met readers in 11 states! Thank you to the schools, festivals, conferences and my publishers who have helped make that happen. Here are some highlights:



Creating food art and "bones" for poems with teachers and librarians at [Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival](#), [Alabama School Library Association](#) conference, and [Georgia COMO](#).

Eating, drinking, breathing poetry at WWU's [Poetry Camp!](#)

Hiking Crater Lake and perusing the quilts at [Sisters Quilt Show](#).

Sharing *Leaving Gee's Bend* as part of Decatur, Alabama's "River Read".

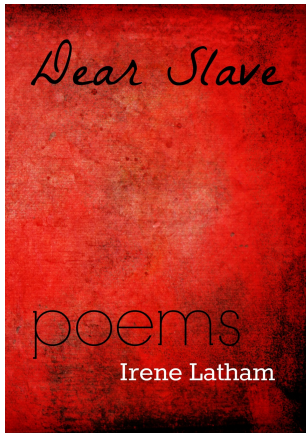
Exploring Los Angeles with my favorite fellas.

Presenting talks on [the power of One Little Word](#).

## Awards & Other Awesomeness

Awards are wonderful things. It's not what we writers write for, but wow, they sure can provide validation, encouragement, joy and put a little happy in one's walk through Walmart. I'm honored to be the recipient of the [International Literacy Association-Lee Bennett Hopkins Promising Poet Award](#). I invite you to read my thoughts on [what it means to be promising](#). Also, *When the Sun Shines on Antarctica* earned a Silver [Moonbeam Children's Book Award](#) for Poetry. Fly, penguins, fly!





In other news, I have a new chapbook, just released from [Blue Rooster Press](#)! It's called *Dear Slave*, and it includes 19 poems written in response to slave narratives collected by Ruby Pickens Tartt in Sumter County, Alabama. I started writing the poems in 2015 after I heard [Dr. Alan Brown](#) speak about Miss Ruby's narratives at a symposium put on by [Alabama Folklife Association](#). The narratives are chilling and heartbreaking, and often difficult to get through -- but it's important that we try. My poems are an attempt at empathy and an effort to bridge the distance between

these individuals and their stories and my life and this world of the 21st century. ***I am currently seeking opportunities to share this work with others, so high school and college teachers, writing groups and poets, I would love to hear from you!***

## Giveaway!

I've got 10 copies of *DEAR SLAVE* ready to personalize and drop into the mail to 10 of you! If you'd like a chance to win, simply reply **by November 15** to this newsletter including:

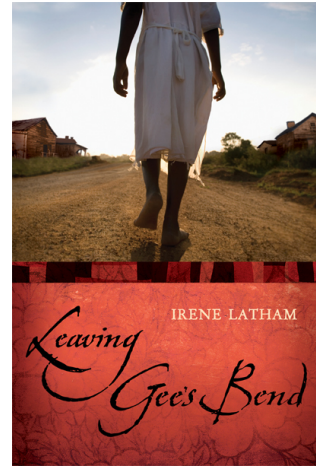
1. your snailmail address
2. the name of someone dead to whom you'd like to write a letter
3. (optional) one thing you would say to them

*Good luck!*

More good news: *Leaving Gee's Bend*, first published in 2010 by Putnam/Penguin will be released in paperback by [NewSouth Books](#) spring 2017!

I am thrilled to be able to offer a more affordable edition for teachers and students. I'll be back in 2017 to share with you a new cover (!) and some fun events we've got in the works to celebrate this new release.

Also coming from [Millbrook Press/Lerner](#) in 2017: *Can I Touch Your Hair? Poems of Race, Mistakes and Friendship*, written by Irene Latham and [Charles Waters](#), illustrations by [Selina Alko](#) and [Sean Qualls](#). This may be the most personal project I've ever worked on, so I am excited (nervous!) to share it with you.



## Good reads.

[Hope in the time of a dismal election season.](#)

[3 Rules to Write World Changing Memoirs.](#)

[The power of the internet to cultivate beauty, connection, healing and maybe solve a few mysteries, too.](#)

[Imagine: terrestrial birds living on Antarctica!](#)

[Jane Hirshfield's Ted-ED talk on the art of the metaphor.](#)

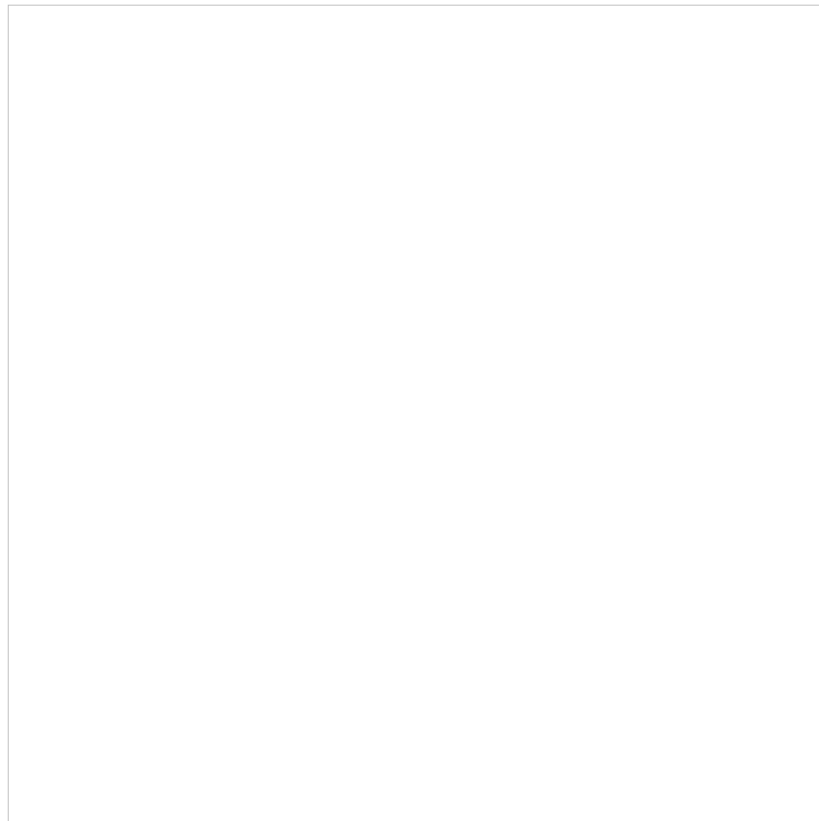
## Always Beginning.

As many of you know, I starting playing the cello in 2015, and I've fallen in love! It's tough to have the courage and vulnerability and humility to be a beginner. But if I'm doing it, you can do it too! [Check out this TedEd talk that challenges the 10,000 hours idea and says we can learn anything in 20 hours.](#)

Also, I'm proud to announce the arrival of the [Birmingham Cello Project](#), a group of amateur cellists who gather to share music and fellowship. Our first performance will be Sunday, December 18, 3 pm at Chateau Vestavia, 2435 Columbiana Rd, Birmingham, AL 35216. We'll be playing Christmas songs along with some other choral groups and musicians, and you're invited to the FREE event.

Another free event: SHINE BRIGHT: A Poetry Reading in Celebration of the Winter Solstice. 7 pm, Wednesday, December 21 at Desert Island Supply Co. 5500 1st Ave N, Birmingham, AL 35212. Featured poets will read on the topic of "light" or "winter" followed by an Open Mic.

Finally, I will leave you with this thought, which happens to be the focus of my part of an [NCTE](#) talk "Writing for a Better World: Poetry Responds to World Events," which I'll be presenting alongside [Katherine Bomer](#), [Margarita Engle](#), [Margaret Simon](#), [Laura Shovan](#), [Tara Smith](#), and [Amy Ludwig VanDerwater](#):  
"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." - *Muriel Rukeyser*



Thank you so much for reading!

Love,

Irene

p.s. If you like what you've read here today, please spread the joy! I am delighted when friends share this newsletter on social media or forward to a friend.



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