

Joanne Diaz on Brett Foster

I first met Brett in 2008, at an undergraduate research conference at Illinois Wesleyan University. He was the faculty adviser for the English honors society at Wheaton College, and he had dutifully—and enthusiastically—come with a group of his brightest students to Central Illinois to listen to and support his students. When we introduced ourselves, I felt like I had met him before—I was certain I'd seen him in some other context, he just seemed so *familiar*—and when I look back now, I understand why. Brett could make you feel like you were already someone he wanted to know and enjoy. He was such a warm, unpretentious, gregarious person—such a rare combination in academia!—and he continued to share his warmth and intellectual curiosity whenever we met at conferences, poetry readings, and many coffee dates at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

In Fall 2015, I asked Brett to be the next featured Illinois poet for SRPR. He was quite ill; even so, he eagerly offered me a sheaf of beautiful poems to publish, and we had set a date for our conversation. Sadly, he died before we could meet to conduct our interview. I am so saddened by the loss of this man, but I'm grateful that we can engage with him through these brilliant poems. I'm pleased, too, that the poets who knew and admired his gifts have written introductions to his work. Brett was such a gifted conversationalist, and he saw his poems as a way to converse with the world. I think he would be pleased to know that we all want to keep talking, and listening, and sharing in his honor.