

# Secret to Writing or Painting? Once You Start, Don't Stop

By Bonnie Pollard-Johnson, Executive Director at Academy Point at Mystic, a Benchmark Senior Living Community | Photographs by Heather Farnell, Programming Director

A poet, painter, musician and resident here at Academy Point at Mystic, Ken Richards recently published *Down East Journeys: Looking Back*, a heartfelt collection of poems exploring fishing, religion and growing up in rural Pennsylvania. Like his paintings, Ken's poetry depicts a warm picture of nature.

But writing and painting "warm" pictures didn't come without inspiration and practice. Lots of practice.

Back in high school, a group of students Ken called the "in-the-knows" inspired him to write. "Everyone can write," he says, "but most people give up. The key to writing is, once you start, don't stop."

Later, a chance meeting with renowned painter and art teacher Harvey Stein transformed Ken's craftsmanship. When Ken asked him to accept one of his landscapes into his gallery, Stein told him it was "too cold" and to "warm it up." His instructive critiques of Ken's work continued for four years until Stein finally granted Ken's art worthy of his gallery.

Ken has continued writing and painting since his move to Academy Point, and last year, he and his family decided to publish a book of his best poems. His daughter traveled from her home in New Hampshire to deliver the hot-off-the-press books to her father, and at lunch that day, Ken gave each of his "tablemates" a copy and proceeded to read a few of his poems.

Several poems in *Down East Journeys* reflect Ken's spirituality, and two playful poems are takes on biblical stories. In "Last Laugh," one of Noah's neighbors scoffs at his ark project but later tries making amends as the water rises. In "The Inquisitive Neighbor," Adam and Eve's neighbor presses for the reason behind

the loss of their garden, which seemed to be "tended by the hand of God."

Another common theme in Ken's poetry is gratitude, the key to happiness. His "Looking Back" closes with:

*Be thankful for this gift of life  
Grateful for each blessing you receive  
Share with others your good fortune  
Which God has allowed you to achieve*

Last summer, we partnered with the library to host the month-long Academy Point Art Show where Ken's paintings were a featured attraction. Several people from the local art and church communities recognized Ken's signature and his work.

We'll soon start a writing program with a local author who'll teach Academy Point residents how to unlock memories and write stories from their lives.

Whatever our residents want to do, we'll do everything possible to help them keep doing it. After all, we take our cue from Ken, who taught us, "Once you start, don't stop!"

Bonnie Pollard-Johnson can be reached at Academy Point at Mystic by calling 860-536-1133 or visiting 20 Academy Lane, Mystic, CT, [benchmarkquality.com](http://benchmarkquality.com). Attend their free event, "A Life Less Ordinary." See insert box.

Kenneth Richard with his book, *Down East Journeys: Looking Back*. Ken's favorite painting depicts abandoned ships that once carried coal from Providence to Newport, R.I.

**"A Life Less Ordinary"**

Thurs., April 26  
@Mystic & Noank Library

Find fulfillment, creativity and meaning. Bill Crawford, a licensed Long Term Care Administrator and a Life Coach, will help attendees focus on living a purpose driven life. His dynamic and humorous style engages his audience, using worksheets to help identify opportunities for interacting, connecting and embracing life as we get older. Bill Crawford of New York is an Executive Director at Ridgefield Crossing, a Benchmark Senior Living Community.

Refreshments will be provided.  
Time: 2pm  
Cost: Free  
[www.mysticnoanklibrary.org](http://www.mysticnoanklibrary.org)

The "familiar" is a recurring theme in Ken's paintings, including Union Baptist Church, Ken's place of worship. A five-minute walk from Academy Point, the iconic church with clocks on its steeple is the subject of many of his works, which he continues producing. His only concession to age? He recently shifted from large 3' x 5' paintings to smaller canvases.

At Academy Point, Ken is surrounded by other writers, painters, crafters and musicians, and we are committed to helping them flourish.

