# Audio file – Kay Ryan remembers her grandmother

[17-Track-17.mp3](https://neagov-my.sharepoint.com/personal/travisd_arts_gov/Documents/Transcribed%20Files/17-Track-17.mp3)

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How does someone first fall in love with poetry in great language? Kay Ryan remembers her grandmother reciting Longfellow.

Kay Ryan

I loved my grandmother, my old grandmother, who would recite poetry to me, and she would look me right in the eye and she had false teeth and her voice was a little bit floppy, the way old people's mouths get, they get kind of juicy and floppy, and she would say “Life is real! Life is earnest! / And the grave is not its goal. / Dust thou art, to dust returnest, / was not written of the soul.

And I loved that. I didn't really know what it meant, but I thought it was very great and she was also a very loving grandmother, so I associated her reciting poetry to me with being loving.

The only reason poems last is because they are so amusing and so affective they last in us. They're the best language, so they stay in us because they are the most beautiful and useful language, so that by learning poems you really are keeping the very best of English speech or English expression and you have it to pull out when you need it. Like let's say your best friend gets in a big car crash and is really badly hurt. You don't think of a novel. You think of a little snatch of a poem that you learned. You always put poetry out when it's really desperate. Poetry is for desperate occasions. It works in those occasions. It's sufficient to a desperate occasion.