



**NAME:**

Katherine E. Young

**YEARS IN ARLINGTON:** 30

**LIVES IN:** Arlington's Yorktown neighborhood, but also has lived in Ballston, Shirlington and Moscow

**RÉSUMÉ:** As Arlington's first poet laureate—a two-year, part-time appointment that pays a small stipend—Young is committed to writing four original poems, promoting poetry as an art form and serving as a judge for the county's annual Moving Words poetry competition. Her book of poems, *Day of the Border Guards*, is set entirely in Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

# Words to the Wise

Arlington's first poet laureate discusses Russian fervor, poetry with soul and the power of pen on paper.

**A POETIC MEMORY:** The Soviet poet Andrei Voznesensky came and spoke in Farmville, Virginia, where I grew up, when I was about 10. It was the height of the Cold War and the auditorium was packed. I remember feeling that poetry must be a very, very powerful force in the world.

**TRAVEL AND TRANSFORMATION:** I majored in Russian in college, but I didn't start studying Russian poetry in any serious way until I was living in Moscow in the mid-1990s, when I found a teacher interested in reading the Russian poetic canon with me. Doing that work was very freeing in terms of how I thought about English.

**FOUND IN TRANSLATION:** I didn't start translating for an audience until around 2009. There's a really warm

community of translators of Russian in the U.S. and around the globe; I feel lucky to be part of it.

**ON BREVITY:** Formalism and unself-conscious passion remain central to contemporary Russian poetry even as American poetry remains stubbornly attached to free verse and knowing self-consciousness. Every time I'm writing I ask myself, "Do I need that adjective? Do I need that adverb? Can I say what I want to say without those things?"

**FIRST BOOK:** *Day of the Border Guards* was the culmination of my experience living in Russia. One poem is called "Speaking Russian." It's in fragments and phrases, like snippets of Morse code. That is intentional, to convey the difficulties of learning a new language.