The template tucked alongside your copy of *Ampersand* represents an invitation, and a challenge, to participate in a quirky nationwide event called *Poem in Your Pocket Day*.

It’s a day—this year it’s April 30th—when people carry a poem in a pocket and read it to any willing soul they encounter. Taking the fun a step further, it’s also an opportunity to hand out pocket-sized poems to all and sundry, purely for the pleasure of sharing a treasured verse, brightening someone’s day, reminding others of the magic that words can work.

The event started in New York City in 2002 and went national last year, as part of National Poetry Month, under the auspices of the Academy of American Poets.

Playing this game makes a nice dent in the day’s routine, to judge from a few of last year’s goings-on: Imagine surging out of New York’s Grand Central Terminal bound for work as usual, only to have a poem thrust into your hand. Lots of museums around New York offered free admission to people who had a poem with them. Visitors to the Library of Congress who sported poems in pockets got a 20% discount in the library store. A bookshop in the Sierra Nevada gave a homemade cookie to anyone who came in with a poem and read it to the staff. Kenyon College students strung a clothesline with poems. Kids in Queens swapped the poems in their pockets for other kids’ verses at a Poem Exchange. There were lots of readings, lots of slams, lots of photos on Flickr. Some San Francisco school kids chose poems to copy, tucked them into library card pockets and read them aloud.

And although it was virtual—no print, no pocket, no reading aloud—I greatly enjoyed a variation on California poet John Waldman’s *Envelope Project*. Devised for his students, Waldman seals a poem inside an envelope, writes the first line on the outside of the envelope and distributes them. The idea is for the kids to use the first line as a starting point for a poem of their own and then later open the envelope—like a gift, Waldman says—to see how the poem evolved in its author’s hands. Online at the New York Public Library, librarian Josh Greenberg posted first lines on his blog and invited readers to post their finished poems in the blog’s Comment section. The results were witty and wry, with some heartfelt contributions by 4th graders.

But for me (and, I’m guessing for others in the PCBA, too), there’s something missing from all this once-a-year poetic fervor. The beauty of the printed word is missing. And the intrigue—or should I say inspiration?—of a book structure is missing.

What better organization than the PCBA to redress this problem?

The intersection of poetry and small-format publications and free distribution has a history far older than *Poem in Your Pocket Day* and National Poetry Month. The example that first leaps to mind for me is Richard Brautigan’s imaginative *Please Plant This Book*. Published in 1968, it was a collection of eight poems printed on eight seed packets, each set tucked into a folder. It was a limited edition of 6,000 copies(!), all intended for free distribution. Brautigan also published many other poems and distributed them for free.

Another instance—not a book though arguably book art—is the *Weathergram*. Devised by calligrapher Lloyd Reynolds, Weathergrams featured short poems or poetic fragments, beautifully written on paper strips cut from grocery bags. With a loop of jute string threaded through a hole atop the paper, these little messages were left in bushes and trees for passersby to discover before the elements did their work.

A wonderful contemporary example comes from Accordion Press Collaborations in St. Paul/Minneapolis. Along with a boxed pair of books that comprise its *Kinship Circle Poems* project, the press also produced 4,500 letterpress keepsakes, each combining a poem and sketch from the books. These were distributed over three weeks in September 2008, at farmers’ markets, on light rail and bus stops, out-
side the Dorothy Day Center and at other Twin Cities locations. The aim was to share something beautiful for free. “In the end,” the colophon reads, “we received more than we gave. We learned something deep about openness and fell in love with our cities and their people. It changed who we are.”

I’m hoping Ampersand readers will treat the enclosed template with its accompanying library card pocket as an occasion to focus their skills—as printers, binders, printmakers, paper decorators, calligraphers, paper engineers, designers and more—on creating a pocket-size work of book art for Poem in Your Pocket Day.

The template is one of the many, many variations on a single-sheet book. But with a self-cover featuring both triangular and rectangular panels, it’s a little out of the ordinary and should make an interesting canvas for both words and artwork. While this structure can be made with any size paper, the template is sized to fit the library card pocket.

Beyond using the template and the pocket as your starting point, there are no rules. Calligraphy is okay, letterpress is okay, laser-printing is okay, inkjet printing is okay, xeroxing is okay. Any and all forms of artwork are okay. Original poems are okay, published poems are okay. Solo efforts are okay, collaborative works (maybe with a kid?) are okay. One-off books are okay, but I’m hoping for some editions, too. That way, you can give some away on Poem in Your Pocket Day.

Bring your finished books (with or without pocket) to the Printers’ Faire at Fort Mason on May 9th. Look for Natalie Marsh at the PCBA table—she’ll be organizing the Poem in Your Pocket Day book display.

Cathy Miranker teaches bookmaking to children, teachers, librarians and families around the Bay Area and takes great pleasure in writing the Bookmaking with Kids blog, www.bookmakingwithkids.com. She also experiments with historical bindings and contemporary book forms and make boxes and protective enclosures to house antiquarian books and ephemera.
Single-Sheet Book with Triangular Self-Cover

1. Start with a rectangular sheet of paper (to fit inside the library pocket provided with this *Ampersand*, the rectangle should be 8½" × 12¾")
2. Fold in half lengthwise
3. Accordion fold horizontally
4. Open top panel of booklet, holding at point B.
5. Align point A with the spine fold of the booklet and crease to form an equilateral triangle.
6. Fold left half of triangle to back of booklet, forming self-cover.