

Updated September 5, 2026

Details: Picture poetry: At 22nd and Penn

Company: Bus Stop Poetry, LLC. **Owner/Poet/Designer:** Mark M Pierzchala. **All Rights Reserved.**

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April composition date: May 5, 2026. **August composition date:** August 31, 2026. The poems describe an evolving situation. The August version updates the April version when the National Debt increased to \$40 trillion from \$39 trillion in just over 4 months.

Imagery poetry: an interplay of images with poetry (my term). In each version there are 6 poems, 16 (17) images (one fitted trend line), two titles, one splash, and 4 arrows. Elements combine to paint a dynamic description of the National Debt.

Poetry: All six (6) poems are original works created solely by Mark M Pierzchala. The large poem starting with 'Whoa!' is of a Shakespearian sonnet form of 10 syllables per line (usually) and rhyming pattern *abab cdcd efef gg*. In the last stanza there is deliberate internal rhyming though the form does not require this.

The poem titled 'The Curve' is a Tanka of 5 lines with a 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic structure, an ancient Japanese form. The rhyming is not required.

The other 4 small poems I call side-remark poems. These are the ones starting with 'There isn't', 'What', 'Solutions', and 'April 2026'. These have various ad-hoc forms. The small poem starting with 'What' is read bottom up. All 4 side-remark poems rhyme.

Medium: Cell phone pictures and original text on a portrait-oriented Power Point slide.

Software used: Microsoft Power Point, Microsoft Photo for image display, Microsoft Excel to generate the curved trend line, TechSmith Snagit for image capture and image file handling, Adobe Acrobat for pdf display and creation, Dictionary Media Group's Dictionary.com and Thesaurus.com, and RhymeZone.com.

Non-Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): I do not use AI to write poetry. The software I use for word searching may use AI in their respective algorithms. I use such software to find rhymes, synonyms, and definitions to find specific replacement words that better fit the already written poetry, as part of the revision process. For example, I replaced the word 'disaster' with 'debacle'; this was found using Thesaurus.com. Probably, I would have figured this out on my own, but the use of this kind of software speeds things up. I also did some general searches by typing into browser search boxes. For example, I confirmed the syllabic count of the 'The Curve' Tanka this way.

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Photography: All photographs are original works by Mark M Pierzchala, taken over more than six (6) years at the bus stop at Pennsylvania Avenue and 22nd Street NW in Washington, DC. Pictures are routinely uploaded to a private Dropbox repository from the cell phone. All images in this artwork are cropped and sized with differing scales to fit the work. Images were brightened and/or given increased contrast and/or sharpened using Power Point tools.

Background: Sundays, I drive from Rockville, MD to the District of Columbia and park on the K Street access lane east of Washington Circle, [1] in the map. I walk past the bus stop at 22nd and Penn [2] on my way to church [3]. After Mass, I reverse the walk.



Map image source: MapQuest (April 7, 2026). Used for reference purposes only.

Starting in 2020, at intervals, I took Sunday pictures of the bus stop, and of the messages posted by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation. These were saved to the Dropbox archive. In 2025, it was becoming obvious that the national debt level was increasing very rapidly. In November 2025, knowing that I had an archive of pictures, I started mentally laying out how I could create a picture-poetry artistic work.

For the **April version**, I made a trip to the bus stop on April 1 to see how the bus stop functions during the work week. The side-poster image of \$39 trillion was captured that day. The related picture of \$114,271 per person, was taken on April 5. For the **August version**, I visited the bus stop on August 27 and 30 and took updated images then.

The first (lowest) picture is of a debt of \$26 trillion. When the debt hit \$39 trillion in March 2026, that was up 50% over 6+ years. This is the theme of the Tanka.

Technical notes: The trend line reflects my data; picture dates versus pictured values. The art decision to enlarge later images, the spacing of the artwork vis-à-vis the poetry,

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and to display each number, means number images are not centered on the trend line. This is art. Apparent steepness always depends on the scales of the axes for any graph.

I briefly reviewed the following web site locations: pgpf.org, the Congressional Budget Office, and the US Department of Treasury. I did not use data from these sources.

How this artistic work differs from others about the National Debt:

1. It effectively portrays the accelerating value of the National Debt. Other works tend to portray only the current large value. The rapid increase in the size of the debt, and its runaway and uncontrolled nature, is the work's main message.
2. This work is organic in the sense that it uses pictures taken over a more than 6-year period, from the street, as passerby would encounter them. These pictures were never intended to be used in a work of art until those taken starting November 2025. Then pictures were taken with an artistic purpose.
3. It includes an artistic rendition of a statistical trend line.
4. It portrays the debt in human terms, especially the main poem.
5. It emphasizes the 'you', and we must all be part of the solution.
6. It uses poetry to communicate complexity simply.

About Mark M Pierzchala: I hold a master's degree in mathematical Statistics from Michigan State University following a bachelor's degree in mathematics and biology from Central Michigan University. I think analytically and scientifically.

After graduate work, I joined the Peace Corps and served in Swaziland (now eSwatini) in Southern Africa. I met my wife Lesley there; she was a British volunteer. I have visited approximately 45 countries through that experience and many others.

I worked for over a decade as a statistician with the US Department of Agriculture before leaving for the private sector. I specialized in advanced data collection technology for some of the world's most difficult scientific surveys on a variety of topics.

I served as a Rockville, Maryland, City Councilman for 12 years over a 14-year period. Every time I ran for Mayor (3 times) I lost, and every time I ran for Council (4 times) I was barely elected (in at-large races). My political career can be described as 'Policy good, politics bad.' I know full well the difficulty of persuading constituents to care about long-range esoteric issues. As a Councilman, I came to understand the value of visual, literary, and performing arts, and their ability to communicate differently from the dry scientific literature.

As I was organizing the pictures and data, I was shocked to learn that it takes only 4 or 5 months to add another trillion to the debt. This awakening further motivated me.

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