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Relative of Henry Longfellow to read for 'The Children's Hour'

By Lorin McLain, The Daily Courier

The new Prescott Fine Arts Association show features the relative of an American great. Layne Longfellow, a distant relative of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, sets the mood of the show with a few stanzas from the Longfellow poem, "A Children's Hour," after which Lillian Hellman named her story as an ironic reference.

Longfellow's poem pondering innocence and beauty, inspired by his three daughters, contrasts with Hellman's story about a bad seed, Longfellow said.

"It's one of the sweetest, most innocent poems in the American language," Longfellow said, adding that the PFAA called him and asked him if he was interested in reading as part of the production.

"It's a marriage made in heaven. It's just fabulous. I've actually thought about putting the word out to the people who publish the play to make myself available to do this at other performances (across the country)," he added.

Since retiring from a career as corporate speaker, Longfellow, 70, has worked to keep alive the poems of his antecedent, reciting works at guest appearances around the United States and recording the CD "Longfellow reads Longfellow."

Longfellow said his great-great-grandfather is Henry Longfellow's cousin.

Longfellow read at the National Gallery of Art this past November at the request of the poet's closest living relative, Ann Guest. "She flew over from London to host the reading that I gave at the National Gallery," Longfellow said.

Coincidentally, the great-great granddaughter of "the village blacksmith," immortalized in the Longfellow poem, is the curator for the National Gallery of Art.

"It's amazing," he said. "Halfway through my reading, we read 'The Village Blacksmith,' his great-great granddaughter and I, alternating stanzas. So it was a reunion of families after four generations. It was very, very cool."

Longfellow said he started 2007, the 200th anniversary of Longfellow's birth, hosting a dinner at Longfellow's Wayside Inn in Cape Cod, where the poet reportedly penned poems like "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" in his collection "Tales From the Wayside Inn."

Longfellow said he has lived in Prescott off and on since 1970, and was the academic vice president of what is now [Prescott College](#) between 1970 and 1975.