Sharp among the sweet, she came from fairy-tale stock, trees older than the stars.

She knew the value of warm milk and soft consonants, words thick and knotty as her wool sweaters.

The above verses from the poem “Ferment and Grow Old” were written by Bailey Spencer ’14 to evoke the lasting memory of her great-grandmother, whose family was from the Black Forest region of Germany.

“I’ve heard stories about my great-grandmother, making sauerkraut on her back porch,” said Spencer of the inspiration for the fantastical piece. “In this poem, I imagine a jar of the fermented cabbage sprouting and becoming a little piece of that mythological ‘ancestral land’ here, today.”

“Ferment and Grow Old” will be among her original works highlighted when she represents Boston College in the 2014 Greater Boston Intercollegiate Undergraduate Poetry Festival on April 22. This celebration of talented student poets will once again take place at BC, at 7:30 p.m. in the Murray Room of the Yawkey Center.

Spencer and the other student participants – all selected by their respective professors – will represent some two dozen Boston-area colleges and universities at the festival, which also features keynote remarks by Elizabeth “Betsy” Sholl, poet laureate of the state of Maine from 2006-2011.

“Students always enjoy seeing the great range of work presented, as well as the diversity of reading and performance styles,” said poet and festival organizer Suzanne Matson, BC English Department chair and professor. “They also value feeling themselves to be a part of an accomplished group of like-minded young poets. Writing is solo work, and poetry can feel even more isolated, so the sense of community created by the Intercollegiate Poetry Festival is a gift to them and to all of us.”

Matson described Sholl – author of several collections of poetry, including the Four Lakes Poetry Prize-winning Otherwise Unseeable (2014), and winner of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship and numerous other honors – as “a wonderfully wise and generous poetic voice — full of appreciative detail over the things of this world, but also attuned to social iniquities and life’s absurdities. She’s funny, warm, and down-to-earth.”
Spencer also drew praise from Matson: “Bailey is a skilled poet who has immersed herself in reading and writing poetry for years. I met her during her freshman year and could tell already that she had a focused and mature literary sensibility. Since then we’ve worked together, and her sensitivity to language and mastery over its effects convince me that she’s the real thing.”

A chapbook of student poetry, including Spencer’s tribute to her great-grandmother, will be published in conjunction with the festival.

“I am really honored to have been chosen to represent BC,” said Spencer, an English major from Michigan. “I’ve spent this year writing a collection of poems for my senior thesis, which explores the mythologies that develop in small towns and become woven into the fabric of place, and I’m excited for the opportunity to share some of my work and to hear what my peers at other universities are writing.”

A reception will follow the program. The poetry festival — which takes place during National Poetry Month and is sponsored by Poetry Days and Boston College Magazine — is open to the public, free of charge. For more information contact soyerd@bc.edu.

—Rosanne Pellegrini, Boston College Office of News & Public Affairs