

# Poetry Porch: Poetry

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## **The Lost Sailors of the Reuben James**

By Mary Ann Larkin

When the German U-boat  
took the Reuben James down  
to rot forever  
on the cold ocean floor,  
even before December 7,  
almost no one noticed,  
not thinking war yet,  
but Woody Guthrie did.  
He wanted to put all their names  
in his song.  
“It’s important,” he said,  
“to name them all,  
no matter the length of the song:  
Jesse Weaver  
Leonidas Dickerson  
Joe Polizzi  
John Joseph Fitzgerald  
Nebraska Dunston  
Let them be together in the song,”  
he argued.  
“Pedro Ortizuela  
Lester Gaskins  
Walter Sorenson  
Clarence Rygwelski  
and the Appleton brothers  
from Mississippi,  
the two who were lost,  
even the two who lived.  
Name them all,” he said.  
“Let the song hold them  
as the sea does.

Let their names dwell in air  
as their bodies rest in the sea.  
Yes,” said Woody Guthrie,  
“Yes, let their names  
be the song.”

Note: This poem was inspired by an interview with Woody Guthrie. The USS Reuben James was the first US naval vessel lost to enemy action in World War II. For a complete list of the sailors, see <https://wrecksite.eu/peopleView.aspx?rvmDBfQNCYOU2G9AbXzbZg==>