



129+

More Poets of Washington

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129+: More Poets of Washington 4

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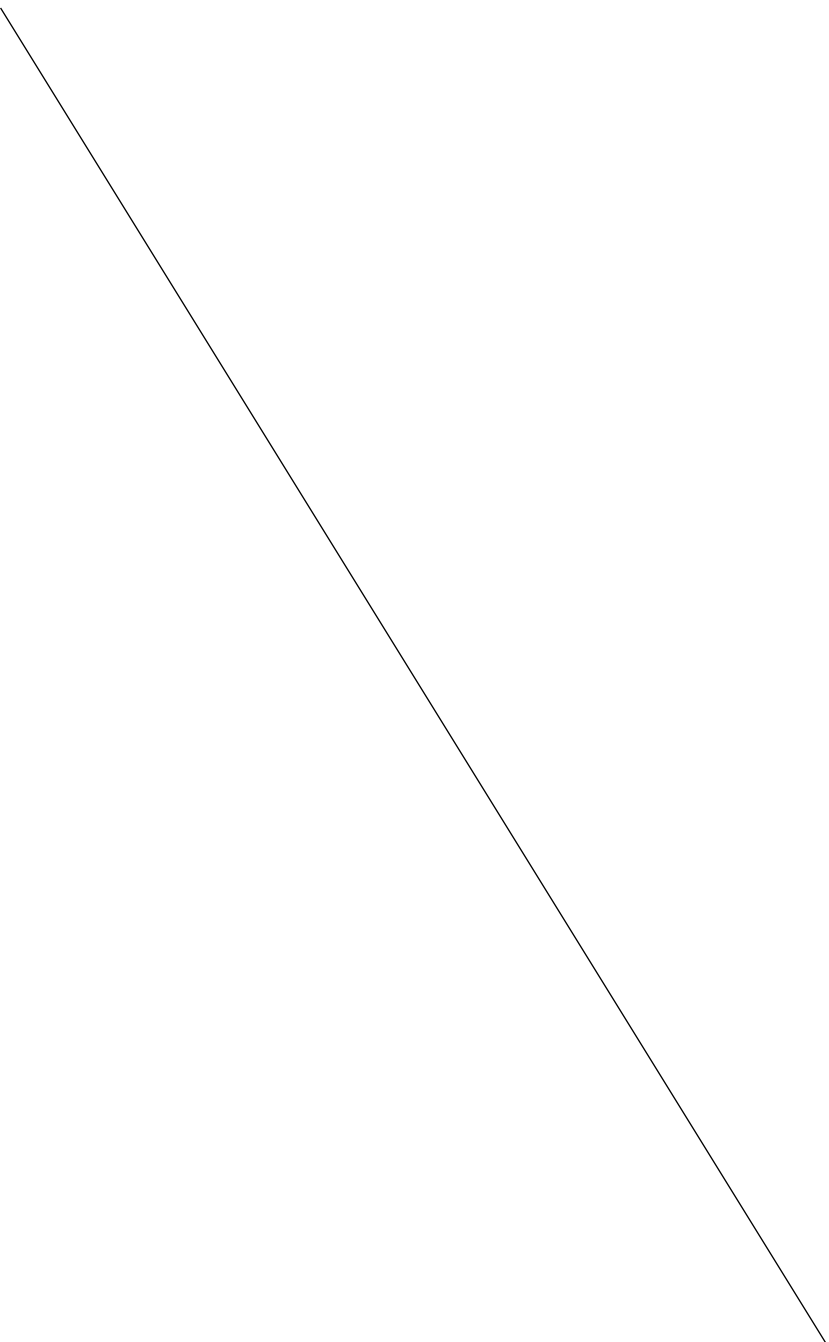


WASHINGTON STATE
ARTS COMMISSION



Contents

<i>Chris Dahl</i>	
A Personal Topology of Issaquah	5
<i>Rachel Nutter</i>	
Driving Home	7
<i>David Fewster</i>	
A Rhyme for Nihongo Gakko (411 S. 15th Street, Tacoma)	8
<i>Pamela Krueger</i>	
driving down I-5	9
<i>Leon Petty</i>	
My Brother Drew Monsters	13
<i>Joannie Stangeland</i>	
January River	18
<i>Devin Devine</i>	
Son of Mirrors	19
<i>Susan Johnson</i>	
When Nothing's to be Done	21
<i>James Rodgers</i>	
Southerly	23
<i>Don Foran</i>	
Flights	24
<i>Alex Gallo-Brown</i>	
To the North Seattle NIMBY With Whom I Shared Garlic Prawns	25
<i>Danica Ready Kaufman</i>	
Serotiny	27
<i>Mona Lydon Rochelle</i>	
Albariño	28
<i>Suzanne Simons</i>	
Lake Chelan Trail	29
<i>Scott Van Amburg</i>	
Mariner Game	31



Chris Dahl

A Personal Topology of Issaquah

Something venomous but tiny, chigger-like, pricks her attention whenever she passes the turn-off to Issaquah.

This Issaquah is not the city, not even its site, but a compound of sensations buried in the understory of brooding mountains. A personal topography, where a sixteen-year-old had her first grown-up drink: vodka and orange juice, sticky-sweet, an aromatically overripe emblem of Christmas.

An internal Issaquah where the businessman great-uncle lived up to his success. Where she could finger the brocade of what it meant to have money, the kind of money that soared beyond sustenance.

Her mother's cousin, a grown-up twenty-three, mixed her the drink before he drove her to see his wife and new baby, the baby not well, the wife watchful.

But before that, before they reached the house, half a mile away, he pulled into a snowy field and stopped (Was it snowy? She remembers being surrounded by white. She remembers answering the kisses—though that's all it was—a few kisses).

Later, there were token presents wrapped in shining gold paper, foil, with reflections flushed from the tree lights.

The cousin dies—shot by a jealous husband. The great-uncle dies. She's in her forties when she visits him for the last time. He still grins sideways. He talks about prohibition and trapping squirrels at a hidden still. The youngest son dies and the sister retires to Maui. No Issaquah has been left in her Issaquah, except some snow and a silent field and that intimation of what it means to grow up: the bitter sweetness of stolen kisses; the false promise of glittery wrapping that overshadows the trinkets inside.

Since then she has stood with one foot on the North American continent and one on Eurasia as the plates pull apart two centimeters a year. She thinks about massive underground forces and how, with such a magnitude of change, what surfaces is a slender crack.

Yes, surely there was snow blurring the edges, the way time always blurs and softens and sets some scenes in relief.

One foot in the present, one in the past, the gap widening, and still, every time, that sting when she passes the turn-off.

Rachel Nutter

Driving Home

I realize how starved I've been for trees.
I mean real trees,
not ones scattered here and there,
not ones measured along streets
or spaced around manicured lawns.
I'm thinking of driving home
through the Gorge today, reaching
that point along Highway 14 or 84
where there's a definite break,
a line along the landscape, when
suddenly there's green.
I mean real green, layered
along both sides,
a solid mass of trees
too thick to count:
pine, cedar, hemlock, fir,
evergreens, evergreens, evergreens.
I realize how starved I am for trees.
I mean real trees.
I'm driving home through the Gorge today.

David Fewster

A Rhyme for Nihongo Gakko (411 S. 15th Street, Tacoma)

Bix would often walk past
the old wood Japanese school
and watch the children laugh and run.
It was different the day
that he strolled on by—
December 8, 1941.

A lonely silence reigned
where once the courtyard rang
with the shouts of the little scamps.
They've all gone away
on that midnight train
to their far-flung internment camps.

*Father William J. ("Bix") Bichsel S.J. (1928-2015) founded
Guadalupe House, the Tacoma chapter of the Catholic Worker.
An ardent anti-war, anti-nuke activist, he served two stints in
federal prison for his protests against School of the Americas
and Bangor Naval Base.*

Pamela Krueger

driving down I-5

this car is my sanctuary
suburban blue, mid-size, it
holds the key to my sanity
on the road between
leaving one son
and riding towards another
the transition somewhere in Fife
the half-way point of
my ripped-down-the-middle life

in these windowed walls
I cry and pray and
scream and wail,
grieve for that life
that came before
while driving up and down I-5
between hospital bed
and teen sleepy head
since that dawn

when foreboding was only

a piece of shame spicing joy
an illusion of temperament
an imagined tragedy
and now, the Nisqually Bridge:
signaling home incomplete
driving down my forested street
half my life on the other side of Fife
pulling me back
tilting me forward

when I drop you off at school,
see the back of your head bob
towards that edifice,
once casual

now, you look small
even at 14 and six feet tall
you walk away and fade softly as I
drive towards your brother
and grieve my goodbye to you
this pulling me apart
day-by-day, sends
my jawline into a fixed firm pose
sets my skin to crawl
sends chills through my spine—
no it's not the air vent
circulating gloom in this hospital room
it's the separation that blows in
between who we were

and who we are becoming, now—
letting go of school lunches,
mother's day brunches,
all that time to spare, be scarce,
mock danger
let teenagers become strangers.
adding up now to rolling
slowly over speed bumps
where no one dares go over 10

we who tread there, cautious,
averting further tragedy
see those tired parents' eyes
almost in total glaze
running fast past the white lines
and past the tree-tiled

gleaming white halls
 holding breath in
 until turning the corner into that room

then, upon seeing nothing changed,
 moving slowly towards that seat
 that permanent seat
 no speed bump
 to ward off what lies here, now
 the only sign
 a slight smile or surrendering sigh
 signaling nothing
 got worse

the miles add up the distance,
 a vacuous thunder of
 craters of time
 peel back what once-was
 sure, regular, certain.
 now hiding underneath visors of pain—
 I lift my head up
 shielding my eyes
 from the bright sun rising

1.15

that last lone drive—
 I can't recall it now,
 it's make-believe quality
 suspending my disbelief
 can it be what we leave behind
 carting carloads back home
 barreling up Fairview
 taking a sharp turn onto
 that highway of freedom

now we greet our home again

cross the threshold
together once more, we
rush to our separate spaces
huddle back together
then part again
now the parting is only between
rooms in our house
can we rest now?

Leon Petty

My Brother Drew Monsters

Have you ever seen a cowed down dog
crawling up to you
looking up at you with sorrowful eyes
and saying to you "I want your love
but I don't want to take your beating"

My brother drew monsters
He had one of those
cardboard, blue linen covered three ring binders
that he had taken a black Magic Marker to
and drawn Megazoid dinosaurs
with gigantic incisors
Smug, round headed ghouls
with spike shaped ears
and flat headed Frankenstein's monsters
with bulbous bloodshot eyes

These heads of horror
so captured the essence of evil for me
that I had to possess these images for myself
so I stole my brothers binder
and hid it away for a million years

Once I had a disobedient puppy
and I would beat the puppy when it did not follow my
instructions
and one day when I was beating the puppy
I happened to look into his sorrowful eyes
and the puppy said to me
"Please my companion, get it across to me
what it is that you would like me to do
and I will do it"
and I was changed by this moment

but a few days later
the puppy was killed by a car at the top of the hill
and it laid dead at the side of the road for three days
and when I was riding the bus home from school
a neighbor boy told me
that if somebody didn't do something
about that dogs dead body
that his father would
So I walked up the hill
and with a shovel that I will carry forever
I picked up the dog's fetal body
and chucked it over the side

School was difficult for me
They would escort me down
to the principal's office
to wash my clothes
and make me take a bath
or down to the nurse's station
to dig out some infection
and I really could not relate very well
to people who did not know
how to bleed from their backs

My brother grew to be the hero
Straight A's for a while
and basketball with the boys
then off to Viet Nam
and back
barely with an honorable

I have written poetry ever since I can remember
so after I was thrown out of school
for the second or third time
my neighbor invited me to take his poetry class
So I took the binder
that my brother had adorned so long ago

and I used it to bind the poems
that my neighbor
would mimeograph
for his poetry class
And so it came to pass that the likes of
Archibald MacLeish and Matthew Arnold
W. H. Auden and Denise Levertov

Wallace Stevens and Grace Slick
and the works of many other poets
were bound inside
the linen and cardboard arms
of my brother's monsters

For many years
I groveled around
thinking that the act of groveling
certified my humility
convinced that
as unlovable as I was
begging for love
was the only true way to attain it

If only I could have appreciated
that some forms of mercy
are impossible for humans to give
and although the role of a dog
had saved my life many times
it was still only a role in which I had hidden
and not nearly the person I really was
and wanted to be

And through the thick of it
I can now see
how much easier it was for me
to have been a dog
rather than to have been a hero

and how grateful I am
for the incidence
of my brother's monsters
and for the understanding
that sometimes
it is only a monster
by which I may be moved

Creation and destruction
are utterly tantamount

I can only be created
to the exact extent
that I am being destroyed
but sometimes, lately
as I commonly witness
the process of my destruction
if I choose to proceed
slowly, gently
and carefully as I can
I have some control
of what soon
is to be
created

A few days ago
as I drove into town
I passed by the bullied body
of a long haired black cat
dead at the side of the road
Then when I returned home that afternoon
the corpse of the crumpled cat
was still there

Early the next morning
once more I passed by the cat
but this time

I had brought with me a blue linen sheet
so upon returning at dusk
I stopped to wrap the cat into the sheet
and to take it home
where I would bury the cat
in the sunny southwest corner
of my eternal garden

Joannie Stangeland

January River

When winter hangs its gray head low,
is it wrong to want a river,
drive east across the mountains and slow by Ellensburg,
set up a camp chair, blanket,
thermos full of coffee on the bank,
snow dusting the ground
as ice crusts old footprints,

and where a few yellow leaves
might yet cling, wind in the slender trees
a master of branch language,
the scritch-crack chatter,
bone-clack sound, each twig
a tongue the water answers?

Is it wrong to want to step outside
the walls, outside the fight, and listen
to creek talk, cold running
another name for a new year
rushing past, Columbia-bound
then heading west for the Pacific—
that the stillness here
might stream around the planet?

Is it wrong to spend my hours
breathing in what speaks
so quietly, and maybe sun, a streak
to make those last leaves glow,
a ray to silver the rippling skin
until the day waves me gone
and I drive home? Tire mumble,
road and road and road.

Devin Devine

Son of Mirrors

If I were to ever meet his son,
his, the man (one of) who didn't listen,
didn't hear, no,
didn't want to hear,
decided not to hear,
ignored, no,
maybe his eyes
were bigger than his
hands.

He couldn't get enough to drink.
He was thirsty.

I want to ask his son,
"Do you know the story of
Narcissus & Echo?"
(funny, isn't that, *echo,
a word repeated back, like me,
like this moment, like a word)

"Narcissus died,
staring at his own pretty
little face,
like this, like yours, boy.
While Echo, who loved him,
was condemned to exist
as a reflection of words,
both of them
falling in love with
nothing but the water."

But,
when his son answers 'no'
I will tell him of Athena
instead. (You know,

the goddess of wisdom & war,
law & justice, born fully armed.)

I would hit him
on the forehead,
stun this boy into shock,
gift him bow & arrows,
hearts & bones,
maybe then he'll understand
why the gods & their children,
have origin stories
& why *women
are more scared of his father
than they are of dying,
why all women run from mirrors.

Susan Johnson

When Nothing's to be Done

I left you that day with friends in a cabin,
near the shore of Lake Cle Elum. I'd go sailing
with a friend—a few hours—not long.

The clank of trailer chains rattled
as the boat slid from the ramp
to the swell of snowmelt waters,
cold spray against my cotton pants.
Wind thrummed through cedars,
reluctance through me. I climbed
to the canvas of the catamaran.

He raised the sail—a thunderous flap,
and we sped from the gravel beach,
loosened the ropes to control the thrust,
and rushed through tattered waves.

We lurched in zigzags, cabins
on shore shrinking to dots. A shiver
of surprise flashed in his eyes.
Mine locked shut, helpless, afraid.

One wild gust flung us to water,
bodies and sails slapping, mast
plunging to dark below, hulls upturned,
a drifting beetle, helpless, absurd.
We struggled, chilled, too far from shore to swim,
too muted by wind to be heard, and the water
so cold.

I couldn't slow the light fading that day
or shorten the shadows dimming the beach.

We finally ran out of ideas, of hope.
When nothing's to be done, there's nothing.
A peace settled on me.
We drifted.

Out of that peace, drifting in twilight,
an image of you in the cabin.
They say a mother can lift a two-ton car
to save her child's life. Your mother,
that moment, knew to live.

A shout—sudden from shore—
then the hum of a motor.
Last light held still on the darkening beach.
We abandoned the carcass drifting in darkness,
found grace in a stranger's face.

James Rodgers

Southerly

It's only early October,
but I can see my breath,
even during the day,
the leaves no longer green,
now multi-colored dancers
pirouetting on the breeze.
A large flock of geese,
somewhere close
to two hundred birds,
honk and squonk overhead,
spread out
in waves across the sky,
swiftly moving south.
I'm also heading southerly,
but just down to Third Street
to grab a bite,
my journey less distance,
yet we are all still traveling,
yearning for something warm.

Flights

I set out early on my Saturday morning jaunt, listening
To the conversations of crows and seagulls
playing in Budd Inlet.
By the time I had traipsed south to West Bay Park
My neck and shoulders had released most of their tension
And I looked east to Mt. Rainier, resplendent
In the fresh and bracing morning air.
There I saw three perfectly shaped spaceships
Hovering over the mountain, their inhabitants
Presumably come to save us from ourselves.
Well, yes, I knew what I viewed were not extra-
Terrestrials but lovely lenticular clouds,
But, wait, might some interplanetary denizens
Of higher intelligence than we have descended
With a plan to end the bellicose, sexist, racist,
Homophobic, elitist gunk we daily feast on
Or regurgitate, depending on our proclivities?
I thought about how a great blue heron once,
Years ago, took off from a dock where I had
Spent an hour meditating, to give me an
Epiphanic jolt, a salvific shock which I, in my smugness
Badly needed.
This morning I mused on such sudden visitations
And almost stepped on a tiny caterpillar as I resumed
My walk. My God, I might have terminated the life
Of a future butterfly sent somehow from an unknown
Sphere to keep us mindful of the freshness
Deep down things which would help us survive
Our silly selves.

Alex Gallo-Brown

To the North Seattle NIMBY With Whom I Shared Garlic Prawns

You want more police, you said, more patrols,
 the Aurora crap pushed away,
 some other neighborhood, some other place,
 somebody else's problem now, somebody else's fate.
 They don't want help, anyway, they want
 to snort powder in the back seats of cars,
 to break into decent people's homes,
 make your mom afraid.
 Our system is capitalism and democracy,
 which means people will be poor.
 Keep them the hell away.

In the poem I've been trying to write you,
 I tell you about the hole in my car
 where the radio used to be,
 how it was taken two days
 before we shared prawns
 at the Thai restaurant on Eastlake,
 eating family-style at a long table,
 all of it civilized, all of it peaceful,
 all of it equal so long
 as our bank accounts were sturdy enough
 to sustain cocktails and too greasy Pad Thai
 and a nice spicy beef salad
 alongside talk of the homeless,
 criminal justice, the mayor,
 and your lawn.
 You see? I've been trying
 to write you a poem
 but all I can come up with
 are these banal thoughts
 and prosaic observations.

In the poem I've been trying to write you,
I tell you about how I look down
into the hole where the radio used to be,

how I stare into the cords and wires
and Styrofoam each morning before work.
The radio's absence like a wound,
like a gap between the way I used to live
and the life that now belongs to me.

I tell you about the thief, a man
who I never saw but now sense, a small man
a little ashamed

as he disconnected the wires and cords
causing the minimum amount of damage.

I tell you about the pity he felt for me
and the lack of peace he felt
in himself.

I tell you about his sadness
and fragility and fear.

I tell you the police will not help you,
the prawns will not help you,
playing civilized or socialized
or familial will not help you.

I tell you
you will die.

Danica Ready Kaufman

Serotiny

The serotinous pine cone
opened only by extreme heat
disperses its seeds as the cone expands and releases.
A summer wildfire,
the midwife to a determined landscape,
up here in the north country.

Like the fall run Cutthroat,
exhausted and nearly perished by her long journey home,
she lays her eggs in the clear, gravel bottom stream.
New life given only through death.

For the Lodegpole pine,
a fire, the essential catalyst for opening,
is not enough.

If not followed by a
mild, wet season,
if the conditions for germination
are not just so,
the seeds will have to wait quietly in the soil.

Perhaps this too, is the human task
after the heat of change.
To wait patiently
for the next season.

Nature is like that.

Mona Lydon Rochelle

Albariño

A goldfinch on the highest branch burned with brilliance, as if offering all its joy to us, as if its song, night-into-dawn cried, 'The beauty of it all.' August alighted in warm fullness, Cascades and Olympics arching a purple backwash into infinity. Outside, the sky's arrayed with violet-green swallows swooning and rubied hummingbirds courting as a full-moon ascends Mount Rainer. We chime glass after glass of Albariño. Ah evening, we talk as blossoms fall from roses divine. I say I must leave. We quarrel without a kiss. And there, outside the window, screech owls trill, trill upon trills, their melodies clamoring for love.

Suzanne Simons

Lake Chelan Trail

A thin brown line stretches
across a hillside of lodgepole pine,
leading from here

to somewhere, this trail the width
of my body wends along the deepest
of North Cascade lakes. Our days

of respite mingle with harshness
of charred stumps from old
forest fires. Some desires ripen

into fruit, others haunt like magi
in a tree. I once spent a summer
yearning for a boy and his promises

to appear in my mailbox. This trail
a desire at fruition. The ferry drops us
mid-lake, a tawny young man pulls

up the gangplank. The boat's chug fades
as we hoist our packs. To embrace
a yearning is to let go. We've forgotten

playing cards, wristwatches. Thoughts slow,
words too. We are filled with breath.
Sudden rain leaves only brief traces

on arid land. Tracks of deer,
mountain goat soften into mud,
dry quickly and harden. Gullies of green

claim the moisture, slurp deep. An American
flag on a pole burrowed into giving earth,
a beer cooler and youth claimed

the campsite we'd hoped for. We continue
in amethyst dusk, past a black bear foraging
in the woods. She looks up. Dusk pulls

us to a deserted lodge, two claw-foot bathtubs
on the deck overlooking a lake melting
into vast shadows.

The bath water hot, we shed
packs, no longer bothered by lack
of playing cards, settle in with meteors

streaking across jeweled heavens.

Scott Van Amburg

Mariner Game

The day's arrived to don my favorite hat
supporting men who play with ball and bat
down to the ballyard headed with a smile
avoiding pricey parking costs a mile
but one of many ways to make a stat

The numbers are what draws me to the game
those beasts that roam the Clink just aren't the same
great violence in their clash is not the rub
a lack of tidy digits earns the snub
one can't judge whom should make the Hall of Fame

Cascading sounds of merry fill my ear
dudes hawking peanuts plus a cheaper beer
gents holding signs with scripting on each side
this skirting of the law engenders pride
'cause only StubHub scalpers have no fear

The navigation to my seat is long
new metal detectors slow down the throng
the chap in front of me fails seven times
yet wearily waved through despite his crimes
I hope he managed to sneak something wrong

A stench of garlic fries pollutes the air
consumed while glued to phones without a care
by those whose greatest thrill throughout the night
is watching cartoon hydroplanes take flight
I really do enjoy this stuff I swear

Concession lines are short yet move quite slow
professional cashiers left long ago

it's nice that volunteers support a cause
but lack of training does expose their flaws
a missed DP as my rage starts to grow

No good shall come should I decide to fight
these trips do have the power to excite
a passive method to express my pain
capacity is endless to complain
which surely helps enable me to write