

Seattle City Council

**Culture, Civil Rights, Health, and Personnel Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, 2:00 PM, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008

**Words' Worth**

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **John Burgess**

Today's poet is **Mary Lou Sanelli**

**Mary Lou Sanelli** works as a writer and public speaker. Her latest essays appear on the OP-ED pages of *The Seattle Times*, *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*, *Seattle Metropolitan Magazine* and are, periodically, aired on NPR. She is the author of eight collections of poetry, her latest entitled *Small Talk* (High Plains Press, 2008), and a recent collection of essays entitled *Falling Awake*. She presents her stage reading of her book, *The Immigrant's Table* (made possible, in part, by a grant from Artist Trust), throughout the country and will open in New York City's Tenement Museum Theater in 2008.

**Train Headed East**

By Mary Lou Sanelli

At first, I wanted romance  
and wonder if I'm getting lazy:  
No carafe of wine shared between us  
in the lounge car, or tea served on white linen,  
silver spoons clinking cups.

And not because such luxuries are impossible  
on American trains, but because ever since boarding,  
I don't want anything  
other than aimlessness, don't want to work  
on improving the worst of me or at sliding  
the future into place.

I also try not to try *too* hard  
at not trying.

Geography is enough, even more  
than enough: wide open sky,  
one field running into the next, flowers  
I can't name next to scrubs I can't name under trees  
I can't name, and chicken coops  
we creep by on our way out of town.

I want pleasure to rise and expectation  
to lie flat. Also: trivial things  
like a newspaper plucked from the trash  
and, I admit, half a bag of M & M's.

Gladly, I leave the city behind,  
grandiose lawns lush beyond rainfall, the filling up  
that creates a void, you know? The compromise,  
the next best thing, the excuse that is just  
fear talking, and the want that always returns.

One could call traveling a loss  
of bearings in order to find them, or else  
a search for balance, one of my apparent skills,  
which like all the others, has brought me little profit  
and, yet, everything I need.

-- end --