

Seattle City Council
Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting
2 p.m. Wednesday, April 10, 2013

Words' Worth
The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Jourdan Keith**

Today's poet is **Allison Green**

Allison Green is the author of a novel, *Half-Moon Scar* (St. Martin's) and poetry and prose that has appeared in publications such as ZYZZYVA, Calyx, Bellingham Review, Willow Springs, Raven Chronicles, The Teacher's Voice, and Yes! Magazine. She was the recipient of a Seattle City Artist Grant in 2010, and she lives and teaches writing in Seattle.

The Urge for Going
by Allison Green

Over thirty years ago I trolled the Ave. in the University District, which was about a mile from where my family moved when I started eighth grade. At Budget Records, I flipped through bins of bootlegged albums in white sleeves. I still have my record of Joni Mitchell singing early songs like "Urge for Going" ("I get the urge for going...when the meadow grass is turning brown").

At the Continental Cafe, Greek men smoked on one side, and I spent my allowance on feta cheese sandwiches on the other. Lefties smoked and drank espresso at the Last Exit on Brooklyn, while my high school friends and I ate warm apple pie, dripping with cinnamon sauce.

I bought candies wrapped in rice paper at Shiga's, slices of pizza at Pagliacci's, and all of Anne Sexton's poetry at the University Book Store.

But I got the urge for going after I graduated from high school. I went an hour south for college, then points east. When I returned to Seattle in the early 1990s, the neighborhoods around the University District were too expensive for community college teachers, and besides, I was a different person. Arline and I bought our house in Columbia City, and I felt at home.

But recently, Arline and I sold our house and moved into a co-op apartment just a few blocks north of the building that once housed Budget Records (long since raided for its bootlegs and gone out of business).

It's odd to come home to the neighborhood where I was an adolescent. I can almost see myself, slightly hunched from self-consciousness, my growing-out curly hair whipping around my face as I walk past the building where I now live, green steno pad — my diary — in my rain jacket pocket. I had just turned fifteen when I wrote, "Three more years and I will move out. I mean it." I calculated that there were 1,070 days until my eighteenth birthday: 25,680 hours! 1,564,800 minutes! 92,448,000 seconds! My urge for going was more than an urge; it was a desperate need.

And I did leave. And I didn't look back nostalgically on my old neighborhood, didn't feel homesick, didn't miss high school, which had been mostly alienating. I was out in the world, learning how to be myself and still survive.

In the last verse of "Urge for Going," the narrator is the one staying, lighting the fire and pulling up the blankets, while summer wanders away. It's an exaggeration to say I've entered the winter of my years, although time has frosted my hair. I stand in the bay window of our new apartment and look down at the people walking along the edge of Cowen Park. They walk the same sidewalks, beside the same trees that were there over

thirty years ago. That's when a girl not yet of summer, still of spring, shuffled along, yearning for escape. She wouldn't have thought to look up at the window, to imagine the woman of autumn watching over her.