

Seattle City Council

Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, January 9th, 2013

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Jourdan Keith**

Today's poet is **Jourdan Keith**

Jourdan Keith has been awarded fellowships from VONA (Voices of Our Nations), Hedgebrook Women Writers Retreat, Jack Straw Writer's Program and received funding from Artist Trust, 4Culture and Seattle's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs for playwriting, poetry, and creative non-fiction. Seattle Poet Populist Emerita and Seattle Public Library's first Naturalist-in-Residence, she is a storyteller, naturalist and educator. A student of Sonia Sanchez, her work blends the textures of political, personal and natural landscapes to offer voices from the margins of American lives. *Coyote Autumn*, an excerpt from her memoir, is included in the travel writing anthology *Something to Declare: Good Lesbian Travel Writing* from University of Wisconsin press. Her essay *Human Estuaries*, which is based on her TEDx Talk, appears in the fall 2012 edition of YES! Magazine. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Urban Wilderness Project, providing storytelling, environmental education, and wilderness programs rooted in social change.

A Climax Species

by Jourdan Keith

*roots knuckle, the fight
against concrete breaks out-
red fists bloom as roses*

it happened slowly. no one even noticed at first.
the rust is what gave the trees away.
 along the ridgeline
where the topography had been changed
from uneven
 terrain and wooded slopes

to the simple flattened terraces
that made for stairs to condo complexes

Trees
were turning the strangest colors--
perhaps it was the development,
disturbed soils. autumn always brought
a change
even in the Evergreen State, but the

Trees
were turning red and brown
in the oddest places and in the wrong seasons.

Bill and Lucy noticed it first.

Uncle Bill had always taken Lucy for walks,
she was the oldest dog in King County
and rumor had it,
so was he.

"It was like watching Alice fall
into the rabbit hole when Lucy disappeared.
A beautiful black Lab of 101 years old, gone just like that."

That's how the papers reported it, even though Uncle Bill had told them that that
wasn't how it happened. He'd even called the editor of the *Issaquah Times* himself.

"Somebody's built a tunnel or road or something I'm tellin' you. That is where Lucy
is. Isn't that illegal, no signs or anything?"

No one called him back.
No one seemed to investigate.
He left more messages.
"She's lost in the tunnels, I'm telling you. I know my old girl.
She knows the scent of all these woods. She knows my voice."

It was the rust
that gave it away
when Uncle Bill was taken to Overlake Clinic, with his arm slashed open.

"All the trees are sculptures.
I'm telling you. Metal, bronze or silver—
supposed to look like moss
when they oxidize

like aspens or alders.”

He was hysterical they said.
Hysterical.

“Poor man, he loved that dog, he’s old, and he’s gone mad,”

but
it was the rust that gave the trees away.

The rust that infected his cut,
the rust that poisoned his blood,
17 years since his last tetanus shot.

Lockjaw.
Cause of the death.
There was an investigation.
We sued the hospital.
They won.
How could anyone
be expected to believe that the trees were bronze.

Our team of lawyers found the tunnels.

“New earth lungs” is what the *Times* named them. New Earth. The machines had large HEPA filters and they “breathed out” of the tunnels stacks. They were designed to look like evergreens, Hemlocks—wispy needled arms, a lead that always bends.

A climax species.
We had finally figured it out.

*homeless, hemlocks cross
highways—green palms stretch to
reach humanity*

--End--