

April 8, 2023

Dear City of Olympia Poet Laureate selection committee members,

I am excited to share this proposal to serve as The City of Olympia's Poet Laureate to address the themes of the environment and climate change. If selected for this role, I will commit to work with the city to engage our community in literary arts in ways that holds space for the duality of grief and hope in the face of climate change and with an emphasis on climate justice.

This proposal is grounded in over twenty years of experience at the intersection of literature, the environment, and arts activism as a working poet and community college teacher, and in participation with various community organizations and events.

My poetry is grounded in eco-poetics and my creative inspiration is fueled by collaboration. I am committed to work that empowers people to reflect on the reality of climate change while imagining and envisioning connection, resilience, and renewal in the face of climate change. My work has been published in local journals and presses, and I have self-published two poetry, chapbook conversations with Dan Leahy *Hand it Over*, 1st and 2nd editions, in 2019 and 2023.

I have recently submitted a book-length manuscript of poems to several contests and small presses. *Hold the Babies*, a collection of over 50 pages of poetry, was written over the course of 5 years, on themes of climate grief and hope; stepping into elder-ship during times of climate disruption and political upheaval; attempted reckonings with white-settler privilege, and the healing, solace, and joy found in the natural world.

I have been involved in many community-based workshops and events related to poetry, the environment, and climate change, most recently with Carrie Ziegler of Thurston County Climate Action Team. Carrie and I have collaborated on companion poems and paintings, and we have worked collaboratively on two community events related to climate grief, hope, visioning, art, and climate action. I also volunteer with Olympia Ecosystems Preservation and Wild Grief and regularly contribute to SideWalk.

I have several ideas for engaging our community with poetry in connection to the environment and climate change. The following proposed workshops and events are intended to engage a variety of audiences with opportunities for writing and reading poetry online and in person.

- **April as post-card poetry month:** Host Zoom and in-person workshops in late March early April (for Spring Arts Walk) to kickoff a month of postcard poetry where participants are partnered and have a month-long postcard poetry exchange with the theme of connection to the environment. At the workshop, participants will be introduced to post-card poetry and will be invited and encouraged to make their own up-cycled postcards in the spirit of making do and re-using materials. Follow up with a reading event in late summer or fall perhaps for fall arts walk?
- **Poetry and climate grief and hope for youth:** Partner with local organizations such as Wild Grief, Yoga for Teens, and other local organizations and summer programs for youth to offer youth-focused writing and poetry workshops in outdoor spaces or on walks on Olympia's urban trails; spring - fall. Invite participants to submit poems and work with the City of Olympia to post/publish poems at sign posts for urban trails such as at Squaxin Park, Grass Lake Refuge, and Watershed Park.

- **Reading group on poetry and climate justice:** Lead a quarterly, seasonal, reading group on collections of poetry by 3-4 diverse writers on the theme of climate justice. Partner with Browser's books. Invite poets, including Rena Priest, WA State Poet Laureate for readings / events; include a Zoom option to discuss poems.

### **Strategies for engagement**

- Partner with local organizations doing climate change and climate justice work, e.g. Thurston Climate Action Team, Olympia Ecosystems, Squaxin and Nisqually Tribes, Yoga for Teens, Wild Grief;
- Social Media: Create an instagram account for posting original poems with art and images, using photographs and collage art; use this account for promoting workshops and events; Work with the city of Olympia to promote events and workshops on social media accounts;
- Online events: Host workshop and events in Zoom as well as in person to increase access and participation.
- Out reach to neighborhood organizations, especially for post-card poetry event;
- Collaborate with Browser's Book Store and Olympia Poetry Network to host reading group and poetry night;
- Work with programs at SPSCC and Evergreen for events related to climate change

In closing, thank you for your support of the literary arts in Olympia. I am continually inspired by and honored to be a member of Olympia's community of artists and writers.

With appreciation,

Kathleen Byrd

## Kathleen Byrd

### Education

- Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing, Poetry. Western Washington University, 2022.
- Master of Education. University of Washington, Tacoma, 2003.
- Bachelor of the Arts. The Evergreen State College, 1992.
- 200 hr Certified Yoga Teacher Training, The Yoga Loft, 2017.

### Relevant professional experience

- Professor of English and creative writing: South Puget Sound Community College, 2006-current;
- Faculty lead: Integrating climate justice across the curriculum, current;
- Integrative studies leadership: English and Environmental Science; English and Sociology; English and World Religions; English and Oceanography. 2009-2019;
- Curriculum for the Bioregion Project, curriculum development. Regional faculty group focused on teaching in an age of climate consequences and sustainability and contemplative practice, 2014-2022;

### Poetry publications and awards with links

- Sue Boynton merit award for “Still Life: Geneva Pond”, 2022;
- *Subjectiv. Visual and Literary Art of the Pacific Northwest*, 2021;
- *Works in Progress*, 2021;
- City of Olympia’s Poetry Rides the Bus. 2018;
- Pontoon Poetry, *Floating Bridge Press*. 2016;
- Unspoken Northwest Video recording of “Herons Wait”, 2012;
- *Godiva Speaks: A Celebration of Women Poets in Olympia*, 2011;
- *Crosscurrents*, A Literary Arts Publication of the Washington State Community College Humanities Association.

### Community poetry workshops, events, and readings

- Forthcoming: SPSCC Faculty Spotlight Series: Writers on intimacies of body and place with colleagues Jenn Berney and Sarah Tavis, May 16, 2023.
- Thurston County Climate Action Team (TCAT): Collaborative Poetry Workshop for Art and Climate Action Kick-off event; Art and Visioning in the Forest event; Collaborative works with Carrie Ziegler, 2022-23, and ongoing;
- Olympia Poetry Network, Tribute to Lucia Perillo, 2023;
- Nisqually River Education Project, reflective writing and poetry related to wildfire, prairies, and place. Summer institute for K-12 educators, 2022;

- Browser's Bookshop, 3 events: Poetry Night; Nostalgia: A collaboration with visual artist Liza Brenner; and an Ekphrastic Poetry Workshop; 2018-2019.
- Community Interfaith series on Sustainability, presentation: *Poetry and The Earth*; 2010.

### **Relevant professional and academic affiliations / presentations**

- Climate Solutions in Washington State Community Colleges; current;
- Curriculum for the Bioregion: Sustainability and Contemplative Practices, 2014-2020;
- Imagining America National Conference, presentation: *Recreating Place: Between Environmental Arts and Environmental Science*; University of Washington, Bothell, 2010;
- SPSCC Sustainability Committee Earth Day Events, 2009-2010;
- Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, presentation: *Pedagogies of Place*. University of Victoria, B.C. 2009;
- Northwest International Education Association: *Human Rights in a Time of Global Crisis Conference*. Henry Jackson School of International Studies, panelist: Literature, human rights, and student engagement. 2007;
- Washington Community College Humanities Association, presentation: *Found in a sense of Place*. 2007.

### **Academic Publications**

- *Hold the Babies, a collection of poems*. Western Washington University, 2022;
- Byrd, Kathleen Curriculum for the Bioregion <https://serc.carleton.edu/bioregion/index.html>
- **"Defining college readiness from the inside out:** First-generation college student perspectives". *Community College Review*, 33(1), 22-37, 2005;
- Byrd, K & Harrigan, K (2002) *The parity of esteem: Students' aspirations and our work as educators* summarized in: Malnarich, G with others (2003) in *The Pedagogy of Possibilities: Developmental Education, College-Level Students, and Learning Communities*. National Learning Communities Project Monograph Series Publication.

**I don't know**

how the mud flats  
or how the prairie grasses  
how the garlic scapes or the beet  
greens above the soil. I don't know how the blue  
berries or how the wind picks up and carries on in a maelstrom  
how the night mares or the morning dews. I don't know  
how the river knows its way to the sea,  
but I do know gravity. The weight and heft of the thing,

of living that is. How tenderly one can fall into the grass  
and hope, despite all signs otherwise, that the world

will turn, though I don't know how the world turns only that  
it does

...

## **I'll stay behind**

There's water  
on the South polar solar terrain  
of Mars. Good news, apparently, for those  
who see their fate in abandoning our world of water  
and lava. Given a choice, I'll stay behind with other crawling creatures,  
living among the rubble. It's a loss I dare not romanticize, the extinction

or escape of the meanest predators. Walls of fire, rivers of rain, winds of destruction.  
The suffering. It seems the lowly are surest to survive - scavengers and foragers,  
parasites and fireweed, clover, bed bugs, sugar ants and ferns, deer, raccoon, rats,  
possums, gleaners, and fixers.

Let them go, the shadow kings with their shiny things and dry-cleaned suits; Let them  
leave their blue origins, the ancient paths of ferns, their mother's arms. Let flow the  
deep rivers of water and lava from a jeweled underground of ancient saints, seeds, and  
larvae, rhizomes, embryos, mycelium - mitochondrial repair. Underworld intelligence:  
Let it renew us even as my skin withers to husk and dust

...

**This is a love poem**

for a grandchild I long for  
and also

for Tahlequah or J35.

I love you irrationally  
as murmur of a future  
as mammalian fur

as mother after mother

after mother

as memory of sweet nursing  
at breast, milk colostrum cream  
memory is also chemical

Oxytocin is also love

I love you mysteriously  
as ocean depths, sonorous and dark  
in corners of dreams, our

futures

I love as bivalve, with fins, and with all four  
chambers of a clambering heart

I wish for you ocean moon glow  
long silver sunrises  
second chances and - oh

salt

figs and persimmons ripening  
soft on winter windowsills  
springtimes and  
de-polluted, new

oceans

I wish for magical mycelium remediation  
of toxins,

pure clean

mother's milk free

of poly-chlorinated bipheynals or poly  
-fluoroalkyl substances

I wish for you moments with other  
- love -  
-mammals- sweet nuzzle of being to being,

futures

and a love that will carry you for days and miles  
over the ocean, not in grief, but in joy

after joy after joy

...



## **Hérons wait**

here amidst rain, tides, sky  
and sidewalks near ferns  
mosses and evergreen spires  
- between politics and communion

where a river is stopped  
from meeting the Salish Sea.

Their waiting is a slow motion  
of dinosaur wings that open  
and close with muscular thrust  
and subtlety. Shoreline shape-shifters

among us. Great Herons still

stalk in silt, in ancient mud.  
They hunt here at this thin inlet end  
competing with seals when salmon return  
praying by waiting.

Greying the waters toxic  
The 1974 Clean Water Act  
permitted pollutants  
flame retardants, polycyclic  
aromatic hydrocarbons -  
mercury, lead, and dioxin.

Grey herons at the Sound's farthest finger  
beat their wings in mythic time  
and land on our near shore. A world we're waiting for  
It was/ it is  
here

...

## Shore lines

Water birds fly near the shore. Water birds fly away. Fly away when a human shows up.

Herons	Gulls	Cormorants	Kingfishers	Eagles	soar
shoreline bluffs	barnacles	urban shoreline	Salish Sea	mud shrimp	
neighborhood shoreline	ravines	upland properties	brownfield		
Budd Inlet	logging trucks	low-dissolved oxygen			
Coho Salmon	Deschutes River Estuary	resident Orcas	Barrow's Golden-eye		
Schneider Creek	dioxides furans phthalates	blight	contaminated land	eye	sore
	red-breasted Merganser	resident Orcas	Oyster reef	desolate-	
waterfront	humans	common Merganser	Cut-throat Trout	sea-level rise	
Loons	tidal currents	intertidal wetlands	oil-barge unloading	eye-sore	
neighborhood ecosystem preservation	Garfield Creek				
	benthic dioxin	nutrient overload	tank farms	home less	eye sore
endangered salmon	contaminated land	sand			
endangered orca	erosion	blight	homeless		
	estuary	shore crabs	mussels	clams perch	flounder
tideland	Ruddy Duck	cobbles and gravel			
mudflat	logging trucks	steep-slope topography			
future generations	Hooded Merganser				
humans	Ghost Shrimp	Gulls	Grebes	Blue Heron rookery	
shoreline habitat	birds soar near the shore				

fly away when a human shows up

...

Carrie Ziegler's painting, titled "*Sea Level Rise, A Mother's Tears, Tahlequah*", painted in response to the poem: "This is a love poem"



## 1. I don't know

In this short poem, I want to convey wonder with the world while playing with language. Turns of phrases are meant to help readers pay attention to the details of life and to ways that language can enliven our responses to the mundane as miraculous and magical. This poem was published in Olympia's local progressive paper *Works in Progress*.

## 2. I'll stay

This poem was prompted by headlines announcing that water was found on Mars along with recurring news that billionaires are preparing to leave planet earth for a future on other planets. My aim in this poem is to imagine life on earth continuing, that the seeds of birth and renewal will continue as we face what many call the greatest threat to humanity - climate change. This poem was published in *Subjectiv: An online journal of Pacific Northwest Art*.

## 3. This is a Love Poem (for a grandchild...)

From my book-length collection of poems titled *Hold the Babies* in which I consider the role of elder during these times of climate change. Like many others in the Pacific Northwest and around the world, I paid attention in awe and grief as Tahlequah carried her still-born infant orca for miles in the Salish Sea. This poem holds space for shared grief along with hope of renewal and change for future generations. Local climate artist Carrie Ziegler of TCAT responded to this poem with a painting titled: *Sea Level Rise/ Mother's Tears / Tahlequah*.

## 4. Herons Wait

This is the newest version of this poem. This poem has been written and re-written over the course of several years and frequent heron viewings from the 4th Avenue Bridge. Along with Herons, one can spot red-wing blackbirds, kingfishers, cormorants and many other species of water fowl along with salmon and seals that are a part of the unique estuary ecosystem of Olympia. This poem acknowledges environmental damage while honoring the resilience of life and beauty despite this degradation. Vimeo link: [Herons Wait](#) then titled "The End of an Inlet"

## 5. Shore lines

This is a "found poem" -meaning I used language found elsewhere to compose the poem. All of the language in the poem was taken from public testimony related to the West Bay Yards Development Proposal found online. My aim is not to take a position on the issue, but to bring forth words and names that highlight shoreline life and human interaction and protection of this place. The word "line" in the title plays with the relationship between lines in the poem and the changing line of water and land. I wanted the words to fill the page but also to contain a lot of space - much like when one stands at the shore line, witnessing both life that moves in and out of view and the spaciousness of water and sky.