



poems and photographs
by Jana Kelsay

I'll pay attention long enough
to one day suck in my breath
and close my mouth around
the whole wide world.

Inside me at the center of it all is this reverent belief that I am Someone Extraordinary. From this center comes the voice that writes.

I knew it when I was a child sitting in the grass in my backyard. Sitting in the grass in my backyard as a child I could feel my whole life happen, and it felt important. Monumental, even. The voice from the center whispers to me, hoping to expand, to realize its potential.

The rest of my body around the center doesn't believe it. There is the pragmatic constitution of my head and limbs to work a job. I can't be convinced that the feeling in the center of it all is true, if it means anything. I can't interpret the feeling into the movement of my hands or the direction of my thoughts. I am unsuccessful in the conversion of my ability into currency.

I am now an adult looking from the window into my backyard at the overgrown grass. This day looking into the backyard from the window where I, an adult, notice the overgrown grass, I am on the opposite side of the feeling that my life is Extraordinary. I confess that I am of no use.

But here You are,
Someone Extraordinary



To write a poem

To write a poem
I become solemn,
Serious and still,
Quieting my mind.

Rushing at the door
Of my head
 pleading to enter
Are feelings I have never felt
And bad metaphors.

I take note of these
Showing them through the house
And out the back door
As quickly as possible,
 holding my breath
For the guest of honor to arrive.

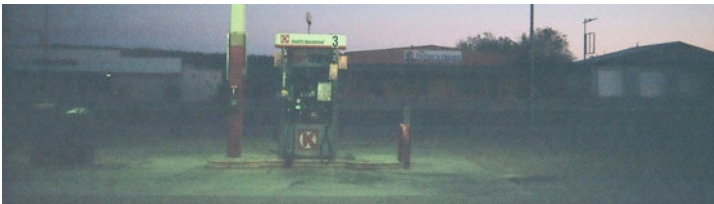
And when she does,
As we embrace, I'll say
I've missed you and I'm listening.
Truth will take my hand,
Lead me to the bedroom,
 speaking sweetly,
Calming my heart with her touch.

Before we begin
I'll have a final glance
At my reflection in the mirror.
Put my hair in order,
Note the clothes I chose.

My lover responds.
Without a word of protest,
She'll stop removing my clothes,
Retreating as quickly as she came.

My face will grow warm
And Shame, unannounced,
Will break up the party.

There will be silence
In the house I occupy alone,
And a blank page, void of use.



Eating my days

I'd like to sit down to a feast
Of all the days I have lived.
See them in solid form
Examine each one by the light
Note their purities and
Certain imperfections.

To eat my days
Would be an experience
Of time that I can digest
More sensibly than by
Living.

Tasting, consuming, inhaling,
Serve as senses more useful
For knowing than
Being.

Letting my body work to remember
Each morsel of who I was
On any given day - last week, years ago -
Until I've had my fill.





crystal structure analysis

and so a gleaming shape emerges
from a set of rules

a terrifying match of fates
this is how the story goes

what isn't molten into what is

owed to divine transfiguration
out of mythic schema

and so I face myself, go to work
break the rock, eat the fruit

this is my promised life

what is forty years to Moses
what is modernity to molecules

Questions over coffee

Is there something in my buying and spending
and smoking and going?

Is there something at the bottom of the coffee cup?
less fear? is it at the bottom
of a bottle of beer?

Is there something in the work my hands can do?
can my head, my brain, come up with anything
new? does it matter if I do?

Is there something about my friends becoming scarce,
becoming too much, becoming their own?
did we grow up?

Is there something I left in a previous year?
is it essential to my being?
can I get it back?



Asleep on a bench

*Til human voices wake us
And we drown*

I know that I'm experiencing a chemical imbalance
But I wish you could feel the intensity of life that I feel.

I feel everything.
The sun warming my thighs,
The wind brushing my ankles
Sleeping on a bench.

The leaves gracefully dance on the backdrop of the sky
As it turns from gray to blue, then blue to gray
While the clouds play tricks with shadows.
I wouldn't notice this on any other day.





There must be something in the coolness of the air,
The cool remembrance of another somewhere.
I'm not here, oceans away the train is taking me to
Shoreham by Sea.
Then I wake up, alert to the feel of the wooden bench
planted firmly beneath me.

I want to textualize everything.
I want to take a bite from today
And devour it for the rest of my life

I am dancing the expression of every moment.
Watch my shadows on the concrete
Conduct the shaped you've never seen before
Like the waves that Eliot's mermaids
Comb back and drown in. Wake up! Join me!
Take my hand and take a bite of life!

Preserving hands

I.

When I am old,
Let my poems go.
Float them on the water
In the pink evening.

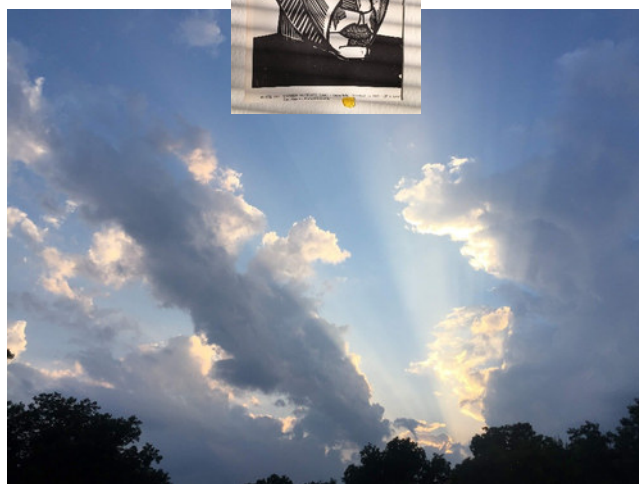
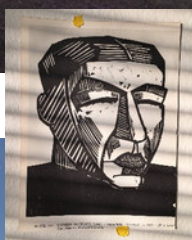
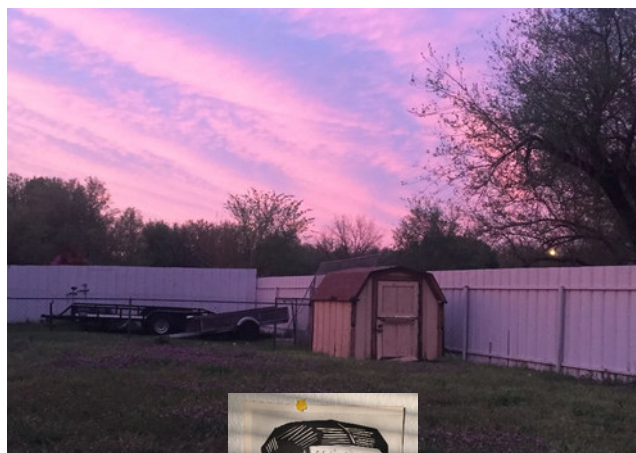
When I am dead
Give my hands to the ground
Return them to their birthplace.

Preserve the hands of those
Who were better than I,
Who could force the universe
Into a ball, probe it with questions,
Make words of the answers.

When my poems are written,
Will I no longer feel this urgency
To interpret everything I perceive
Into words that mirror what I feel?

When I am dead
Will I live in books?
If you miss me will you find me
In the words that I spilled,
A product of buried hands?





2.

I feel power in my hands.
If buried, they may spin and crawl,
Move the dirt to find the light of day,
Move until they find another way.

There is power in my hands.
If I do not write the truth,
If I do not pen the universe
Into an essay, a poem,
They will find another way.

Now
I can taste it in my mouth,
The Need to Be Alive.

Pay no attention to me until I am dead
Then bury my hands.

From above the carpet tiles in your room

Out of my smokestack shoes,
a billowing cloud.

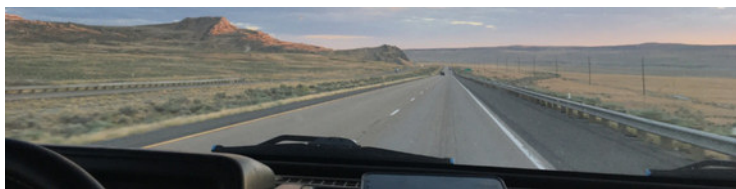
My head, full of smoke
Vaporous, my thoughts

Through a mist I see
your face, familiar to me.

The height and depth
of your chin, your nose, I know.

I plant my gaze
on your whirlpool eyes,

I just noticed we're rising.





sitting idly by

my brother welcomed his son into the world yesterday

this morning I saw a train pulling along
a hundred tanks

his lungs weren't clearing on their own,
he's got tubes through his nose

someone is mobilizing some effort, somewhere, but I
can't know it for certain

I know it's his care in mind, this tiny baby,
but the tubes in his nose make me wretched

everyone along the path of the train slowed down, I
wonder if they thought of war as I did

My mythology

On an evening when the sun did not set by a
contrasting glow a multitude of unfamiliar colors were
made known and I might have time traveled

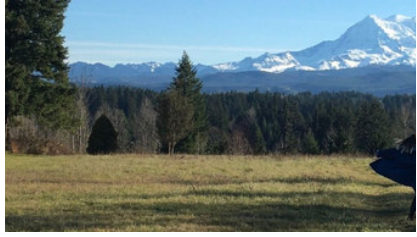
I visited an upsetting moment of regretful hesitance
and from it I have formed my own mythology going
blonde and blindly following it I am a hero with zero
accomplishments and someday everyone will know
that

I'm also a good guesser I think if you sit beside me on
this bench forever you'll understand what I need but
don't let me tell you come and see tomorrow the sun
will rise indifferently and I'll think up a new story
never write it

And that's mostly how I guess we'll exist in a soft
romantic glow feeling every color shadow absence
texture and change in the weather and then this show
is over but not before we've come up with the best way
to spend the light between sunsets

I have an idea of how it goes you and me thinking of
everything and doing nothing



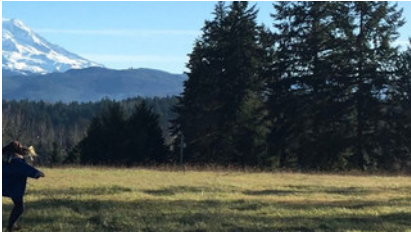


When I am alone

When I am alone,
When I am surrounded,
When I think,
And in my thinking am alone
While surrounded,

Stillness,

The pulsing of the world,
The minute details of life,
A shoelace, meal preparation, cartoon
animation, commotion, the ocean,
Envelope my senses,
Pounding and rushing,
Give us attention.



Stillness,

I am full of love:
The stuff we collect
And that we are collected from.

I am scared for the rest of my life
If this is my resting state,
My circadian rhythm, this pounding
And rushing of life within me.
When I am alone and idle. Hot. Sad
And finding no reason.
Feeling this and finding no source.

Aren't we beautiful on the trail for a moment?

It's half our lives we spend passing by
us without seeing us.

Then autumn comes,
and is not to be ignored.
red yellow orange green blue
today we cannot take away the tree's beauty,

and aren't we beautiful, too?

If you took notice of me
as you brush your toe across fallen leaves,
to stop your parade along the waterfront,
rest in a colorful pile,

and if you knew I was seated here
with my sketchbook and pen
writing a poem to you
on your beauty. . .

The canopy's light rests on your shoulders
giving you a hug.



On a retreat to the mountains, I escape
to step outside of regular life for a time.
The peaks dressed in winter white,
time refrigerated by the falling flakes,
and lovely folks around me, old and new,
alight all the artist parts of my brain.

On a shelf in an old bookstore, I meet myself,
a mixture of the past and future,
and she is disappointed, mournful.
While browsing poetry titles, she cries.
I listen to her, and she says,
you're running out of time.





On a separate shopping excursion,
I adopt a pair of sunglasses -
two perfect black circles to conceal
the passing of time that my eyes can't hide.
I show my friend of photo of me at 16,
she says, you look exactly the same.

On my return flight, all that I am
packaged back inside my bags, inside my body,
my appetite for life appeased for the moment,
I decide I like myself, and I can change,
as everything will mix with time,
coming out the other side, beautiful.

I cannot be certain what kind of life
these poems may live,
but they won't be staying with me any longer.



Jana Kelsay is a writer and maker residing in Austin, Texas, with beloved family members: husband and cat.

All photos, with one film exception, were taken with her iPhone.

More of her work can be found at plebpoet.com.

