

At the edge of my body

According to my father, I was born talking a blue streak—telling stories, reciting poetry. “Lutheran Hospital’s first Poet Laureate,” he brags.

When I learned to write, I was smitten with words. I wrote stories. I wrote poems. I was going to be an author when I grew up. I started my own little “publishing company,” each book (including classics like *Dear Mr. Jello and Other Poems*) a hand-made original.

*where my skin is
wait for me,
I’m coming.*

I’m not sure exactly when the joy of creating began its slow-leak out of my life. I do know that several traumatic events tilted the axis of my world toward fear, leading me to risk less and less self-expression.

*Listen,

you can crawl
into the cave
of yourself,*

And survival is the quintessential squeaky wheel. By my early-thirties, I was a single-mom working two jobs to make ends meet. I was pretty wiped out by the end of any given day.

*abide there numb,
incapable of speech,*

Still, the urge to create is tenacious. It is the very essence of life. Out of nowhere I’d get a burst of energy and swoop my daughter off to the beach after work. Instead of doing laundry or packing tomorrow’s lunches, we’d be sprawled on our backs—laughing hysterically—making sand angels at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

*but see how
the cave walls bloom
with luminous mosses*

I never (entirely) gave up on writing. I did what a lot of artists do, I became a *shadow artist*. I did accounting for a graphics firm that designed book covers. I was an author’s assistant. I went to work shelving books in the public library.

*how they gather
radiance
from the faintest light?*

I can almost hear the *whoosh* of my creative fire crackling back to life as I ran my fingertips along the spines of row after row of books. How could it not? I started helping the children's librarian with storytime. Before I knew it, I was making up little stories for the kids. Their exuberance was contagious. I know a lot of artists who find their way back to their art through children.

I employed multiple therapeutic modalities to heal my past trauma. And, I started reading poetry again. Lucille Clifton, Ellen Bass, Naomi Shihab Nye. I started writing poetry again. I enrolled in a three-day workshop in the mountains (despite the fact that it cost more than my rent). That's where I met my first writing mentor, the woman who would later introduce me to Sarah Luczaj.

*Last night
I dreamed
I journeyed
to the desert,*

At a writing workshop in 2003, I had the good fortune to be paired with Sarah for the focusing activity she was facilitating. When, as a part of the process, she posed the question, "*What does your felt sense want you to know?*"—I'd say we were equally gobsmacked when I blurted out, "I want to go to Poland and work with you helping women."

*sweet water
in a bota bag
slung over my back*

I can still feel the jolt of electricity amping through my body as I voiced that revelation. I was, quite literally, shocked. The idea was incongruent with any thought I'd ever had and yet it was so forceful, so resoundingly true, that it was categorically undeniable. I felt as if a switch had been flipped and suddenly the room I'd been standing in, never knowing it was dark, lit up like a supernova. I had plugged into my inner-knowing, consciously, intentionally.

*that the parched earth,
when I wetted it,
burst into flames,*

*into a burning sea
of red-violet wildflowers.*

In April 2020, after 29 years, I retired from my job at the public library. I'd worked my way up to head of the library's family literacy program—the most rewarding work I'd ever done. And the most demanding. I was exhausted.

Enter Sarah's six-month Creative Regeneration Intensive. I'd loved the month-long version (online) and had eyed the six-month intensive when first announced. But the timing hadn't been right, until now. I emailed, *did she have an opening?* "YES!" We plunged right in. Six months later I emerged—transformed.

And here I am working with Sarah!—not *in* Poland (at the moment), but firmly rooted in terrealuma's mission. In January, I facilitated my first Creative Regeneration Poetry Workshop, a hybrid model I developed that combines the CR components with complementary craft lectures, example poems, and writing prompts. It was especially meaningful to offer this particular workshop during Covid (et al 2020). I'll never forget the first glimmers of relief as people meditated, focused, wrote, and painted. As they reconnected with their art, transmuting fear, anger, loneliness, and grief into poetry.

*This morning
I awoke
with the memory
of floating
in my own womb,

of suckling
at my own full breast
in that sea of myself,

translucent as a jellyfish,
but human, nearly.*

As I write this, the world is slowly emerging from the isolation of the pandemic. I feel like I am emerging too, moving more fully into my new role—the crone. She intrigues me. I can feel her power sizzling right beneath my skin. At times my path has seemed relentlessly circuitous (and occasionally Sisyphian). But in retrospect, I've been right on track, always heading here. Along the way I've been gathering what I'll need for this leg of my journey: a pocketful of stars here, a field of sunflowers there. Creative bliss—everywhere.

Bio:

Kim Noriega is the author of two collections of poetry, *Name Me*, the title poem of which was a finalist for the Joy Harjo Poetry Prize, and *This Rock is Not My Heart*, forthcoming in 2022. She was the winner of the San Miguel de Allende Flash Nonfiction Prize and a finalist for the Edna St. Vincent Millay Poetry Prize. Her poem, "Heaven, 1963" was featured in former Poet Laureate Ted Kooser's syndicated column, *American Life in Poetry*. Kim recently retired from a 29-year career with San Diego Public Library as the head of its family literacy program. She is a Teaching Artist with Poetry Barn and President of the Board of Directors for AIM Higher. She is a certified facilitator of the

Creative Regeneration Process and a consultant in family literacy through the Pacific Library Partnership. She lives in San Diego with her husband, Ernie, and 6 cats, 5 of whom were formerly feral.