

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 was the 2006-2007 Seattle Poet Populist and a 2006 Jack Straw Writer. A student of Sonia Sanchez, she is a poet, naturalist, educator, and storyteller. She was 2005-2007 Writer-in-Residence with Seattle Arts and Lectures. She was a 2001 Writer-in-Residence at the Cottages at Hedgebrook, and a teaching artist for Book-It Repertory Theater, Powerful Schools and the Nature Consortium. Her poems, essays and articles have appeared in magazines, and newspapers, as well as, on the radio, television and in video, including, when it rains from the ground up, the anthology, Ma-Ka, Diasporic Juks. (Sister Vision Press). Keith's "Umbilical Topography" was released in 2007. Keith is the Founder and Director of Urban Wilderness Project, which works to restore and encourage positive communities by providing culturally and environmentally based service-learning projects for youth and adult participants.

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--