

Seattle City Council

Culture, Civil Rights, Health and Personnel Committee Meeting

2:00 p.m. Wednesday, September 9th, 2009

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Felicia Gonzalez**

Today's poet is **Karen FinneyFrock**

Karen Finneyfrock is a ten-year veteran of Poetry Slam stages from Washington, DC to Seattle, Washington. She was honored as a "Legend" at the National Poetry Slam in Austin, Texas. An alumna of Hedgebrook Writers Colony, Karen's recently completed book of young adult fiction is titled "Celia, the Dark and Weird." She teaches in Seattle Arts and Lecture's Writers in the Schools Program and is a Writer-in-Residence at Richard Hugo House. She has a new book of poems forthcoming in 2010 to be published by Write Bloody Press.

Neighbors

by Karen FinneyFrock

Neighbors are like daughters.
What they want more than anything
is to know if you are planning to stay.

They seem to say, "Out of courtesy
I will ask your name, but I'm only
going to remember it if you've signed
a two-year lease." On this block,

we aren't made of spare time. Names
sail out of our mouths as soon as we
unmoor them. I'm still learning the ones
on my floor, forget anyone removed
from me by grass. My best friend lives

next door. Its necessity over cliché when
I borrow milk. It is frustration and lonely
over thirsty when he comes

asking for wine. He doesn't lock

his door, I don't own a broom.

I have his dustpan, he has my cheese
grater. We barely know who owns the coffee
cups. We love to talk, talk, talk, talk, talk,

talk, talk. We talk so much our houses
are mistaken for radios. People keep trying
to turn down our volume. The saddest thing

is knocking to no answer. The best thing
is an unexpected meal. One night, he knocks

while I'm in the tub. I yell, "Come in."
He sits on the floor outside the bathroom
door, which is cracked wide enough
to slide through a dresser.

The steam rolls through the door like the
bathroom was a kettle. The water hugs
my knees like tall sox. It makes my
belly a volcanic island. "Today," he tells me

from the other side of the door, (and maybe
his head is leaning against it), "I yelled at myself
for everything," (and maybe he is crying
or maybe that's just the trickle of an incomplete
drain. "I was mad at myself for every idiot thought

and lack of action," he said. I can hear how
his hands hold his elbows. "Can I just sit here
a little bit," he pauses, "and wait?" Inside the bathroom,

the mirror is silver dressed in white,
begging me to write on it. I take a dripping,
prune finger, soap-bubbled from the tub
and ink, "you're welcome here,"
squeaking hard on every letter
except the E.

-- end --