Seattle City Council

Public Safety, Government Relations, and Arts Committee Meeting Tuesday, 2:00 PM, June 19, 2007

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Brian McGuigan**

Today's poet is **Jourdan Keith**

Jourdan Keith, Seattle's 2006-2007 poet populist and storyteller, is a Jack Straw writer and Hedgebrook alum. A 2004 grant recipient from the Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs for the choreopoem, "The Uterine Files: Episode I, Voices Spitting Out Rainbows," her publication credits include ColorsNW, Seattle Woman, when it rains from the ground up, KUOW, the video "Silence...Broken" and the anthology, "Ma-Ka, Diasporic Juks." She is the founder of Urban Wilderness Project, which provides storytelling, restoration and adventure programs for youth and adults.

A Climax Species

by Jourdan Keith

Trees

roots knuckle, the fight against concrete breaks outred 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

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 or like aspens or alders." He was hysterical they said. "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, the lead always bent.

A climax species. We had finally figured it out.

homeless, hemlocks touch highways—green fingers bend to reach humanity

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