

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

Pam Rosenblatt

Photographer/Poet Keith Moul



**W**hat can you get when you ask an artist or a poet questions about his work, his life, his interests? You can get a lot of different wonderful things. So when Wilderness House Literary Review's arts editor Pam Rosenblatt asked poet/photographer Keith Moul questions about mainly about his photography and a little bit about his poetry, we were not too surprised –and were very glad – that Keith came up with wonderful insights.

The following article is an emailed November 2012 interview between Keith and Pam and an assortment of Keith's photographs and poems. We hope you are as taken with the depth, vibrancy, and beauty of Keith's photos, poems, and comments as WHLR is.

### INTERVIEW

*How would you like your name to be written in the arts article? Simply Keith Moul? And if you want to, please let us know your age.*



Keith Moul is my preferred usage. I am 66 years old, but turn 67 on November 18, 2012.

*Where do you currently live? Have you always lived there? If not, where else have you resided?*

I live [in] Blaine, WA. And have since 2001. In the past 45 years I've lived in more than 20 homes in Washington, California, South Carolina, Illinois,

Iowa and Missouri.

*You recently had three poems accepted to Wilderness House Literary Review. Once again, congratulations! While in this interview you're being interviewed as a photographer, I'm wondering when you began writing poetry and when did you begin doing photography? Do you create other art genres like painting, sculpture, drawing, etc.?*

I first wrote poetry during my undergraduate college years and published my first poem in the University of Missouri student magazine in 1967, just over 45 years ago! Although I've been a serious amateur photographer for most of those years, taking thousands of slides from my travels and family experiences, I've only been seeking a wider audience in magazines and books since March, 2010. With your acceptance of my five photos more than 220 have appeared, or soon will appear, in more than 80

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online and print publications. I once, when very young, experimented as a painter in oils, but knew early I was out of my depth.

*Did you go to college? If yes, where did you attend? What is your primary occupation?*

Yes. I took an AB from the University of Missouri in 1967; an MA from Western Washington University (then college) in 1971; spent one year at the University of Iowa to begin my PhD studies; and was awarded my PhD from the University of South Carolina in 1974. I never was able to find the college teaching job I preferred and spent more than 30 years in the commercial insurance business in underwriting, marketing and management, retiring at the end of 2000.

*What types of photography do you do?*

I'll give you my statement of artistic photography that answers this question as well as some:

### KEITH MOUL'S STATEMENT OF ARTISTIC PHOTOGRAPHY

I do not restrict my subject matter except to common decency. Good photos require good light, or at least enough light to manipulate with editing software. Any photo taken may produce at least one version of itself that is worth retaining; often it contains more than one version by cropping the original. I never alter content by eliminating part of it or changing its position within the frame.

I alter an original photo with five priorities in mind:

- High resolution
- High color saturation
- Maximum contrast
- Superior brightness



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- Depth of subject, especially on landscapes or panoramic views; or roundness of more intimate subjects

Therefore, I do not seek “realism,” but vibrancy.

*You submitted five photographs to WHLR, all of which were accepted. Each of the photos has several things in common: 1) each photo deals with the ocean in one way or another. 2) each photo is so colorful, or should I say, vibrant. 3) each photo except the one with the knotted ropes on a ship/boat is at a distance. May I ask why to each one of these three observations?*

My only limitation as to subject matter is “common decency.” I take thousands of photos and have decided to group them by 3-5 for submission to magazines based on what my understanding of editorial policy or the types of photos that are on display in the magazines’ archives. This group was called “Coastal 2.” At present, I have five groups of Coastal shots, but I have many more from my travels in such places as Belize, Brazil, California, Canada, Croatia, Florida, Hawaii, Iceland, Maryland, Mexico, Oregon and Washington. Hopefully soon I’ll need more groupings to submit because all I have ready now will be published! In addition I have groupings that I call Bits, Covers, Doors (open and closed), Foods, Landscapes (Bodies of Water, Deserts, Mountains, National Parks and Monuments, Plains, Roads, Rock Formations and Valleys), Maritime Shots, Plants, Rural/Small Towns, Urban Design and Urban Sights. Please see my artistic statement regarding “vibrant” color. Thank you for picking up on one of my most important photographic objectives. Regarding panoramic versus tight perspective, that’s merely how this group of photos was collected. I’ll shoot anything that appeals to me as beautiful, informative, exciting, even ugly if not compromising to any subject.

*Steve Glines, WHLR’s editor-in-chief, commented that he thinks the vibrant colors are a technique of photoshopping. Did you manipulate these photos? If yes, why? Do you think photoshopped photos make a higher quality of artwork? And, I suppose, this previous question leads to another rhetorical question: What is art, to you?*



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Absolutely these photos were enhanced. Again, see my artistic statement and what I want my finished photo to be. I don't know if this technique results in a higher quality of artwork, but I know that every photo I take can be made more exciting to look at. This is a process of examining my subject matter in a condition of light and, frankly, the sun and shadows are exceedingly fickle. I don't have time to spend a day or two, or more, waiting for perfection because something very close to perfection is accessible to me by using Photoshop. I said above I took slides for more than 40 years. I preferred slides to prints because the projection added brightness that prints could not portray. Digital photography, particularly enhanced, gets me to a much better place. I think my art involves finding the best photo inside the image captured when the shutter releases. Almost every time I can produce a satisfying, and exciting version of what prompted me to shoot.

*What is the process you go through to take and make a photograph? What type of equipment do you use?*

I think I've described "making" a photograph above, but the process of "taking" a photograph involves an almost giddy romp through life looking for unexpected opportunities. I travel quite a bit, more by car all the time so I can stop and shoot where I want, as long as I'm far enough off the road. Some might call me no more than a tourist, but I think I offer something better than a tourist's snaps. I use a Nikon D40X with 2 zoom lenses, from 28mm to 350mm. I don't like using a tripod because it's awkward and doesn't provide me that much stability. But I am getting older and do not always hold the camera as steady as I would like, so in those cases I have to try to use the tripod. I only use skylight and polarizing lenses, mainly for better contrast in big sky situations.

*Do you name your photographs? Would you be so kind as to tell the titles of some of your favorite photographs (3 to 5)? And why are they your best work? Please describe them. [Please feel free to use examples of your photography outside of the five photos that you submitted to WHLR.]*



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Normally I do not name photographs except for my catalogue description, including the location (country, state, city etc.) and the number assigned to the photo by my camera. Occasionally a magazine may want to use a picture within a thematic context and will ask for a name, which I am happy to provide. I attach 4 photos that I think achieve my objectives as stated in my artistic statement. These represent my best work because they compelled in me an even more complete expressions of memorable inspirations. Often a photo alone can do this for me, but sometimes what the photo has evolved into during its editing inspires me to a fuller expression that combines image and language. So I've included 4 poems that accompany the photos. All are included in a collection of poems and photos due out soon from Broken Publications called Reconsidered Light.

*Are there any guiding lights in your photography? Or, in other words, do you have mentors or well-known photographers who have guided you in your career? Or are you self-taught? Please explain.*

Well, I see a lot of photos that actually give me chills, but I don't follow professionals for tips. In that sense I'm mostly self-taught. My best mentor is my daughter, Ianthe. She's now in her forties and I found out some years ago that she had serious talent as an artist. She also has an incredible eye with a camera that on many occasions I find it impossible to duplicate. But there have been so many occasions when I'll survey a scene and recall one or more of her photos. This pushes me to seek a more dramatic angle or a more felicitous framing. Such a photo might be the one with the knotted ropes referred to above that you accepted. The ropes are key working elements of a sailing vessel at anchor in San Francisco Bay, plenty interesting in their own right, but the frame of the picture extends to include, beyond the rigging, beyond the long spit protruding into the bay, well into the distance, the Golden Gate Bridge. I hope by capturing this context the effect is heightened. This awareness is a learned part of taking quality pictures and I attribute it to my daughter's talent.

*Where do you get your inspirations to take photographs, etc.?*



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I'm retired, with enough time and energy to look for pleasing subjects and enough commitment to make as much of them as I can. What I now know is that I can be almost any place and find a handful of worthy subjects to make a photo.

*Do you have any words of advice for people just beginning in photograph?*

Yes, until I got my Nikon camera, a gift a couple years back, I was constantly frustrated with pedestrian images. A good camera can bring subject matter to life. I'm revitalized! Also, be prepared to experiment. In this digital age there is no expense except camera, lenses and whatever travel you are willing to do. As the seasons change I constantly go around my own property, busily capturing light changing before my eyes, as it alights on constantly altering plants, cats, birds, rocks and doors. There is no penalty for taking chances.



PHOTOGRAPHY & POEMS

[Part of a collection of 45 photos and 45 poems in *Reconsidered Light* by Keith Moul to be published by Broken Publications in late 2012/early 2013]



CRATER WITHOUT DEVICE

*I cannot approach beyond road's end. I am no explorer.  
Remaining mountain snow tempers even this timid approach.  
How can I know the crater without perspective on it?  
Strong contrariness, like a harness, holds me rapt, here.*

*My photo exaggerates the rim's trembling at the sky,  
courtesy of my polarizing filter: dense blue saturates.*

*I've captured light at its moment of formulation,  
clarity exempt from space's interference, begetter  
of unnatural beauty's eruption in high resolution.*

*Yet, I find from a safe perspective, I can go farther:  
a crater appears without device, preternaturally,  
with no eruptions of subterranean gases, silently;  
already dormant, quiet but for punishing winds,  
circling and plunging well above absolute tree line,  
with no more need as foundation than presence of light.*



LEWIS RIVER, LOWER FALLS

*That such undiscovered treasures still exist  
comes as no surprise: we have not seen it all,  
with dog-days coming on. We like erasures  
of our ignorance, especially high, cool and total.*

*You had been happy on our small plot, pattering  
among your speckled lilies, awaiting discoveries.  
I had appeared in several long lines, waiting my turn.  
Neither had warned the other of impending change.*

*Then intuition got the better of complacency.  
Character stepped forward. Cunning of a kind  
revealed advantages to be had at higher altitude,  
short of flight. We were moved to circle, then back.*

*Heading upward toward the source of steady water  
cannot, for sanity, become an every day event:  
we must feel close to each other, close to forever,  
close to the rush of purity, composed in light,*

*close to crystal intelligence, anxious with desire.*

*After the falls, Eve, the titillation, the cedars, the moss,  
and pleasure filled me to aver my adamant Adamness,  
hot, hard and bent on revelation on the quiet forest lap.*





SPITE THE OBVIOUS

*At last, fruitful April of showers tempts again with performance,  
aligns us at this edge, to kneel to this ocean of believable red,  
to consider disbelief in flower deities a grievous fraud, a lie  
cartoonish in its spite of what is obvious, what is surely true.*

*A tulip phalanx, pastel shields drawn, green spears ranked  
across the battle field, ongoing clones soldiering to triumph;  
beauty finally lost to distinction, fully obedient to superior will;  
pawns to the chessman, fodder to cannon and tiller, glory to sun  
for a moment, soil enrichers for the next when its bow perfects.*



COASTAL FOG, OREGON

*In the coastal forest, one tree anchors fog down low,  
trickling from branches: an ordinary enough tree day,  
here.*

*As I begin my walk toward the land's edge,  
I smell the sea's edge, ripe with the sea's jetsam;  
I hear the gulls' sharp report of hunger; I bathe  
in the air's wet alliance with the sea: it staggers me.*

*Along the path, I have forgotten details of yesterday;  
I step into the spongy resting place of a fallen cedar;  
there are no echoes here, but I feel common surrender,  
late in creation's timetable, a furor of living and dying  
beneath so many surfaces, just below my feet, out of reach.*

*Were my bones less complicitous, the fog might stop me cold.*

