

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

*Irene Koronas*

### **About being an ordinary poet**

The poets I admire are similar to myself. They come from humble backgrounds, lower working class folks, who struggle to get by. Their education limited to public schools. Being one such person, my education consisted, from mother's purchases at the grocery store, like our fine china, and records. Our books sold to us by a drive by encyclopedia salesman. Those were the days I like the most, when salesmen opened their car trunks and I got to pick out new shoes or books not sold at the grocery store.

My world opened like a trash can lid flips up on windy days. The lid flies down the street and cars roll over it like its a paper bag. The trash can tips over and all the stuff inside flies up and around onto the concrete steps on main street. I sift through philosophy, religion, science, literature and real poetry. I mean real because it comes by way of the dead poets society. Milton, Blake, and Patty Smith, well not Smith, she came later and is still alive. I mean poets like Chaucer and grapefruit skins, all get thrown into the same trash can. I don't mean to demean education. But. My experience with learning is rather static and full of worms.

Poetry hit my brain at about the age of twelve, the same age I discovered painting. Writing love poems to boys and painting flowers and trees with eyeballs all started at puberty. I kept my words in notebooks and eventually they became angry. My expectations didn't pan out. So anger replaced love, then I gave anger away and found profound words, sentences that lead thereader to heavy thoughts or so I thought.

In my late forties I enter art school. What an eye opener that experience taught. I find myself with twenty year old people who come from similar backgrounds and some come from the privilege studios, where they are catered to and already knowhow to read Chaucer. They also know about Rembrandt, howto light up a room with a match, and how to smoke dope. Being self taught I could recite the alphabet backwards. That accomplishment took me a couple of months. My vocabulary was often better or different than the younger people in my studio class. I could curse like a sailor on shore duty. Yet I did not know about bi-sexual or transgender. By the time I graduated my education was complete. My friends were open minded, beer drinking, sexually active at any time of day.

I learned Egypt was not part of Europe, Benin was a classical kingdom, Gentilesci who cut off the head of the head of Holofernis (please excuse any spelling errors) (too lazy to check) and my poetry teacher Lila Chalpin turned me onto inner rhyme and south American literature. I could create a multi signature book, paint on 'huge' canvases, control my tongue, eat spinach, stay away from handsome men who got laid in the student studios at night and I could chew food slowly. I'd already learned the most important lesson before I received my bachelor degree. I was not equal to professors. To be looked down upon was a privilege. To be able to say thank you gracefully was required reading. To bow to a younger professor another requirement. I learned to pretend I knew almost nothing and that I was not able to think unless thought too by professors. Of course I exaggerate. Art school taught me how to paint as I already painted before

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I entered the painted doors of academia. Expect I did learn to paint bigger and talk about the forms with or without color. How the forms integrate and protrude...

My poetic arty painterly friends are as awe struck as me. They are not necessarily worldly, as in travel to the old countries, or have read Shakespeare, but they don't necessarily like Shakespeare, and my creative friends are not jaded and sophisticated, as worldly people may be. Most people I know are educated, with degrees from b to p. They enjoy me because i'm not like they are and I enjoy being taught to. (I know i'm grammatically incorrect). My creative friends still enjoy playing, dressing up, experimenting with wordplay, we play with mistranslations and we are often deadly serious when it comes to warring and genocide.

The big problem for me is in how to end an essay about myself. Who really cares if I'm smart or not so smart about poetry and foreign policy. I know I'm suppose to circle around to the beginning which means talking about the trashcan. When I was younger our trashcans were made from tin. My trashcan is plastic and I recycle. I use both sides, paper with incorrect poems or revised poems get crossed out and used again. If you print out this small essay please pass it on. In that way my guilt is less and your doing yourself a favor by recycling. If you throw this essay in a trashcan, make sure the lid is tightly fastened. My favorite poets recycle their old books. They bring them to our Saturday morning meetings. The books are placed on the tables joined together to make one long table. Our coffee and pastry spread out onto of the Formica table, the books get passed around and inspected like an old gold coin flipped in air, we get to chose which ones we absolutely need to read again and again and I get to learn what I was not taught as a kid or as a grown-up, there are book fleas.