How Does a Poem Become? The Poetry of Sarah Kendall

"…between the page turns, prayer lingers, dawn slips out
hard tasks, taming cacophony, ranted shoulds:
scrabble on shingle beach, iced shore, bits of work
a dust of glitter blinds, chickadees blot the page
small birds footprint sentences on snowruled branches…" *



PHOTO: REBECCA UPJOHN SNYDER

Sarah Kendall

Flashes of familiarity, both sensory and emotional, jump out from Sarah Kendall's lines of poetry. Images of nature entwine with the mechanics of writing, and the seeming stream of random thoughts, once seen, can be read as more deliberate. And Sarah's writing is deliberate. Each word stands alone and yet the combination of words offers a shift of understanding, of new awareness.

Sarah developed her style of poetry through years of exploration and study. She remembers her father reading Rudyard Kipling and A.A. Milne to her: "I grew up hearing a lot of poetry in my ears." And at a very young age she heard music at church and learned the canticles through a children's service; so began a lifelong fascination with music and language.

In sixth grade she discovered writing. She grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, during the 1960s, a time and a place where progressive education was rapidly growing. During a cross-curricular unit that started with salmon and ended with Inuit peoples, a teacher introduced the Japanese poem known as haiku. The short form, its structure, and the fact that it was nature-based appealed to Sarah, so she began to write poems, and "I didn't ever really stop."

For her senior thesis at Wesleyan University, she wanted to combine her Religion and Music majors and proposed to write a mass. Her department chair (Antrim's Richard Winslow) sent her to Richard Wilbur (poet laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner). "Now I was terrified!" says Sarah. He suggested a new direction because her poems were so dense, so she composed music that created an underlying texture for the poems. "That was the other influence. Realizing I could do this avant-garde work. I could form my own path, and the intellectual freedom of having worked with John Cage at Wesleyan musically and having Richard Wilbur say, 'Do something with your work that's not standard.' All that percolated."

Her interest in religion drew her to the collects in the Episcopal church—written for individuals, feasts, certain times of year, seasons, and events in human history. These vernacular prayers, she says, were developed as a system for organizing the listener in a church service. That organization and the elegant language in which the collects were written has informed Sarah's own work.

The philosophy of the atonal music of composers Schoenberg, Webern, and Hindemith influenced Sarah's thinking about, and crafting of, poetry. "These early 20-century serial composers, this 12 tone system, and the idea that every note stands on its own . . . can be very difficult for people to listen to," she says, but the intent is to create a new sense of awareness.

The haiku structure, a short form with a surprise ending, and its tribute to nature still resonate with Sarah. She also uses a sonnet form and some free verse. "My work is very dense," she says. "You can take a little piece of it. You don't have to read the whole thing. . . . I'm hoping that because it's out there in ordinary nature, that it brings people to poetry in a different way . . . of thinking how we can use words."

Her lifelong connection to language and music, both religious and secular, her love of poetic structure, and her desire to experiment have led her to a particular daily practice of writing. She begins with meditation. "On a purely instrumental level it's just a routine. But it changes my level of awareness. I begin with the Book of Common Prayer. I read some George Herbert, the great metaphysical poet, and then I walk out the door."

The specifics of place have always been important to Sarah and are reflected in her writing. The landscapes of her

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home in Harrisville, early days of camp in New Hampshire, and memories of childhood visits to her grandparents' farming communities—in Connecticut and in Maine—are reflected in her poems.

Sarah often composes in her head as she walks, using her own short form as a way of remembering what she has observed. Once home, she writes it down and over time builds the poems, often in a sonnet form, from the shorter pieces. "The 11- to 12-syllable line—those are each a haiku—that's the elemental form." It takes her about a month to write a sonnet with layers of the shorter pieces.

"The idea is to take you out . . . in whatever way I can get you there—that you have that moment of recognition. And if that's simply a visual recognition, great, if it goes somewhere else, that's great too. But the idea is to take you along . . . purposefully aware of what's going on around you in some level of detail that you might not access if you just thought about going for a walk."

The Harrisville library has copies of Sarah Kendall's two poetry collections, *abscission* and *rencounter.*

* Excerpt from "printing," page 4, in *abcission.*

Rebecca Upjohn Snyder

A Taste of India



Join us for authentic Indian cuisine and a glimpse into the rich culture that is India. On Saturday, January 28, at 6:30 p.m. Ginny and Ed Brooks invite you for a unique opportunity to savor an Indian meal, share dinner conversation with friends and neighbors, and learn a bit about the people and customs of India.

Ed spent two years in the Peace Corps in the mid 1960s teaching in an orthodox Hindu boarding school in Rajasthan, India. Since then he and Ginny have made six trips to India over the years—reconnecting with Ed's former students, exploring the subcontinent, and learning firsthand about the religions, politics, and lifestyle of both rural and urban India.

Many people mistakenly assume that Indian food is merely about spicy curries. Instead you will enjoy a delicious and varied menu of Ed's chicken masala, basmati pilau, vegetarian side dishes, condiments, Indian bread, sweets, and chai. Come with an open mind, and we can virtually guarantee that you will depart with a satisfied palate.

The venue is Fellowship Hall in the Brick Church at the center of the village. Space is limited, so please call early to make a reservation with either Ginny (827-3166) or Vicki Riley (827-3127). The meal is $25 per person, with all proceeds to benefit the local mission effort of the Community Church of Harrisville & Chesham in its outreach to Hundred Nights Shelter & Resource Center and the Community Kitchen in Keene. We look forward to seeing you there.

Ginny and Ed Brooks

Attention, Scrabble and cribbage players!



As winter sets in once again, Sunday afternoon Scrabble and cribbage at the Harrisville General Store will resume for anyone interested in some fun, friendly games.

Play begins at 1:00 and concludes by closing time of 4:00 p.m. For more information email Amy Stodola at amys@mileskellystudio.com or Deb Abbott at heathwing45@gmail.com.

ADAM DREW
MASONRY
603-540-6985
Harrisville, NH
adrewmasonry@yahoo.com
AdamDrewMasonry.com

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