

HCR

44

SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT

FURTHER

2/29/88

DATE TURNED INTO OFFICE 4/6/88

Mr. President:

- State Affairs Committee considered BLR 44

Appointing Joanne Townsend Poet Laureate of Alaska

and recommended

replace with _____ CS _____) same title
 or adopt _____ CS _____) new title

attached amendment(s) and

do pass

do not pass

no recommendation

individual recommendations

further referral to _____

letter of intent adopted _____

Committee attached or adopted fiscal note(s)

new updated or previous

zero fiscal impact

MEMBERS SIGNING DO PASS

[Signature]
[Signature]

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

[Signature]

[Signature]
Chairman signature and recommendations

Committee Backup attached

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: _____
Title: APPOINTING JOANNE TOWNSEND POET
LAUREATE OF ALASKA
Sponsor: ULNER
Requestor: _____

Agency Affected: EDUCATION
STATE ARTS COUNCIL
BRU: _____
Components: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
CAPITAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
REVENUE	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND						
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

[Empty box for analysis]

Prepared by: CHRIS D'ARCY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Phone: 279-1558
Division: ALASKA STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS Date: 2/19/88
Approved by Commissioner: *Christine D'Arcy for ASCA* Date: 2-19-88
Agency: _____

- Distribution (by preparer):
Legislative Finance
Legislative Sponsor
Requester
Office of Management and Budget
Impacted Agency(ies)

Alaska State Legislature

Committees:

Chair State Affairs
V. Chair Judiciary
Telecommunications
Special Ethics
Legislative Council
Finance Subcommittee
for the University of Alaska
Joint Committee
on Economic Recovery



PO Box 7
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 465-4947

REPRESENTATIVE FRAN ULMER

MEMORANDUM

MAR 31 1988

March 29, 1988

TO: Senator Mitch Abood, Chair
and
Members of the Senate State Affairs Committee

FROM: Representative Fran Ulmer

SUBJECT: HCR 44

Thank you for scheduling a hearing on House Concurrent Resolution 44, appointing Joanne Townsend Poet Laureate of Alaska.

HCR 44 was introduced at the request of the Alaska State Council on the Arts to recognize Joanne Townsend as Alaska's Poet Laureate. Alaskan writers were invited to apply for consideration as poet laureate. A selection committee consisting of all past living poets laureate, the Alaska State Council on the Arts, and the Literature Panel of the Council made the decision from among fifteen applicants.

The State of Alaska has recognized the importance of poetry by naming a poet laureate since 1963. Passage of HCR 44 will continue that tradition.

Your favorable consideration of this resolution would be appreciated.

Attachments



February 8, 1988

Representative Fran Ulmer
Alaska State Legislature
PO Box V
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Representative Ulmer:

I am writing at the suggestion of Carol Beery Davis who has been involved in the process to nominate Joanne Townsend for the post of Poet Laureate of Alaska. As a result of inactivity at the Juneau Poetry Society (the group which normally makes recommendations to the Legislature regarding the Poet Laureate), the State Arts Council, its Literature Panel and the former Poets Laureate participated in a nomination and selection process for the next Poet Laureate of Alaska. Writers statewide were invited to submit letters of interest and selections from their work for review. Panel members reviewed material submitted by about fifteen writers and recommended that Joanne Townsend of Anchorage be appointed to the post by the Legislature.

Members of the panel further recommended that since the Poet Laureate post is a significant one and the Laureate is called upon not only to produce work but to read publicly at any number of events, that a stipend of \$5,000 be requested as an add-on to the State Arts Council's budget. Ms. Townsend is a significant writer within the state and someone who has a serious commitment to Alaska and its literary arts. It was the feeling of both the panel and the Council that a stipend in addition to the honorary post was entirely appropriate. Since Mrs. Davis resides in your district, she suggested that you be contacted regarding this. We agreed with her suggestion since you have long been a supporter of the arts in Alaska.

I am hopeful that you will agree to sponsor a resolution in the Senate naming Ms. Townsend Alaska's Poet Laureate and would be happy to discuss her qualifications, the panel discussion and the process in more detail. We will also be contacting Senator Sturgulewski in the Senate so that resolutions from both bodies can potentially be introduced simultaneously.

For your information I have enclosed Ms. Townsend's material which was submitted for review by the panel. I have also enclosed some background material on the issues facing the State Arts Council as we move forward into the future.

Alaska State Council on the Arts

619 Warehouse Avenue, Suite 220/Anchorage, Alaska 99501/(907) 279-1558

5522 Cope Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99518
October 27, 1987

Poet Laureate Review Panel
Alaska State Council on the Arts
619 Warehouse Avenue, Suite 220
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Poet Laureate Review Panel:

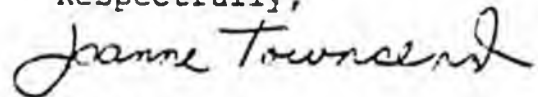
Well, what can I say? This is my second time around expressing interest in and consideration for this poet laureate position which "carries no salary or job description."

I regret that I haven't had the opportunity to move around the state as much as some writers, but in the Anchorage area where I've lived for the past 18 years (with the exception of four semesters at an Arkansas graduate school), I believe I am respected by my colleagues for the quality of my writing and for my long dedication to poetry as a vital force in our community.

Joseph Brodsky, the recent Nobel prize winner, was quoted in the press as saying that poetry should make us aware of our human existence, of "the passage of time." I believe that my own poems try to do that. They carry stuff of memory, comings and goings, geography and history that are circular as well as linear. They are not all about the North, but they are always aware of it: who and what we're bound to, and the natural world, non-judgmental with its gifts of harshness and beauty.

Many of my waking hours have been spent increasing "public awareness of writing in Alaska." I would be honored to represent Alaska as its poet laureate.

Respectfully,



Joanne Townsend

P.S. If there is anything on my application that is not clear or warrants any questions from the review panel, I am available by phone at (907) 562-7835, or by mail at the above address.

RESUME

JOANNE TOWNSEND

5522 Cope Street, Anchorage, Alaska 99518

(907) 562-7835

EDUCATION: M.A. in English, University of Arkansas, 1984
B.A. (*cum laude*) in English/Humanities, Alaska Pacific University, 1981

OTHER CONTINUING EDUCATION: Sitka Summer Writers' Symposium, June 1985
International Writing Conference, University of East Anglia,
Norwich, England, March 1985
Midnight Sun Writers' Conference, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 1980, 1981
Napa Valley Poetry Conference, Napa College, 1981--poetry-writing
workshops with Philip Dow, Galway Kinnell, Carolyn Forché
New York University, Poetry Writing Course with Louise Bogan, 1962
New York University, Seminar in Creative Writing with Charles Angoff, 1963

COLLEGE TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

Fall semester, 1985 to present. Instructor in English, part-time, New
University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA, ACC)

1984-1985, Adjunct Professor, Alaska Pacific University, taught writing,
English skills, etc.

1982-1984, Graduate Teaching Assistant in English, University of Arkansas,
Fayetteville, Arkansas

1981-82, Adjunct Professor, Alaska Pacific University. Taught a women's
creative writing course both for credit and non-credit, also taught
Effective Writing Skills.

COMMUNITY/OUTREACH TEACHING:

1985, taught 6 week course in poetry-writing for the Alaska Women's Resource Center.

1982, Creative Writing Teacher for children ages 7-17, Alaska Pacific University
Summer Fine Arts Camp.

1981, Poetry-writing Workshops: Abbott Loop Elementary School, East High School

1981, Creative Writing Teacher, Alaska Pacific University Fine Arts Camp

1980, conducted a children's poetry workshop, ACC Arts Fair.

1980, Nov. 13-Dec. 19, taught four seventy-minute classes per week in creative
writing to 5th and 6th graders, Lake Otis School, Anchorage, Program
for the Creative and Artistically Talented (PACT).

1980, Sept.-Dec., Creative Writing Teacher (volunteer), Third Avenue Men's Prison,
Anchorage.

1979, co-ordinated a dialogue series, "What Makes a Poem Go?" for Immanuel
Presbyterian Church, Anchorage.

1977-78, co-ordinated experiences in poetry and art for the then new Susitna
Optional Elementary School.

1987, current, am working to develop a fifteen week course on creativity to be
offered by The Seminary of the Church, an ecumenical teaching institute
of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Anchorage.

HONORS AND AWARDS:

1985 Alaska State Council on the Arts Fellowship in Creative Writing

1984 University of Arkansas, Felix McKean Award for poetry

1981 Co-ordinating Council of Literary Magazines Publications Grant Award for
Harpoon. Harpoon was also nominated for an editorial development grant.

1981 Travel Grant Award to attend Napa College Poetry Conference

RESUME, CONTINUED

HONORS AND AWARDS:

- 1980 Poetry Purchase Award for "Poem Making" by the Alaska State Council on the Arts. The poem was later published by the council in its anthology Finding the Boundaries.
- 1980, 1981, elected to Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities.
- 1982-1984 fellowships, graduate teaching assistantship awards, University of Arkansas
- 1978-80, Alaska Pacific University Trustees' Scholarships
- 1984 "February: Letter to Alaska" winner of literary review contest (annual), The Grapevine
- 1986, 1981--Tanana Valley Fair, Creative Writing Division--my poems took prizes in free verse, experimental, light verse, haiku, and collection categories.

PUBLISHING/ PRODUCTION VENTURES:

- 1986 Assistant to Christine Walter, producer for Leading Edge Video Productions on Alaska: A Place for Poets (Part I). Co-ordinated writers, catalogued poems read, selected sites, etc. Assisted with and appeared in Alaska: A Place for Poets (Part II). On the 2nd video I read my work, also conducted an interview about the sense of place in Alaskan poetry with Sandra Eacker.
- 1981-1984 Sedna Press, a women-owned business, published poetry broadsides, postcards, posters; also offered editing services and poetry workshops for events such as the ACC Women's Arts Fair.
- 1978-1982 Co-editor and Co-publisher (with Steve Levi) of Harpoon and Harpoon Press. Harpoon was an award-winning literary journal published three times yearly for a total of nine issues.

PUBLICATIONS:

BALANCING ACT (Anchorage: Harpoon Press, 1979)

LEAVETAKING, a finished manuscript for which the publisher Intertext backed out is currently in revision.

POEMS AND BOOK REVIEWS PUBLISHED:

Please note--this is where my resume is weakest. Our house was destroyed by a huge cottonwood last year and suffered two subsequent floods. Many records were damaged or shoved in boxes. Thus, I can only really give a partial listing. I tried to indicate on my fifteen pages submitted which poems had been published since, for those, I had an acknowledgements list.

- 1975-1981 Poems appeared in The Alaska Woman; The Album (Tagore International Institute of Creative Writing, Madras, India); A Long Line of Joy: Poetry, Commentary, and Interviews; The Anthology of Magazine Verse and Yearbook of American Poetry (1981, "With Due Deference to Thomas Wolfe"); Broken Streets; The Christian Science Monitor; Etcetera; Finding the Boundaries; Harpoon; Karmic Runes; Minotaur; Northward Journal: A Quarterly of Northern Arts (21/22 Alaskan Art and Writing featured "Southeast," "Those Twenty-four Hour Days"); Orca II: A Collection of Alaskan Poetry and Prose; Maelstrom Review

RESUME, CONTINUED

Poems published 1982-1987

Poems have appeared in AKA Journal (forthcoming); The Alaska Quarterly Review; Calliope's Corner; Grapevine; "Heartland" in The Fairbanks Daily News Miner (appearing in 1985 were "writing Teacher: Summer," "Mist," and "Afternoon Song for Jean"); Hunger and Dreams: The Alaskan Women's Anthology; Interim; Loonlark: Orca Anthology of Poems and Prose; Rhino (forthcoming); The Wayward Wind: On Being Jewish.

Book reviews 1978-82

In Harpoon I reviewed and wrote critically on books by the following Alaskan authors: Sheila Nickerson, Ann Chandonnet, Ruben Gaines, Dick Dauenhauer, Helen Slwooko Carius (*SEVUKAKMET: Ways of Life on St. Lawrence Island*), and others.

Recent review "White Space" of Ann Chandonnet's "*Auras, Tendrils: Poems of the North*" appeared in The Small Press Review.

READINGS: PARTIAL LISTING

- 1985-87 Participant in "Wednesdays in the Dark, which is now "First Mondays" on a regular basis.
- 1985 Open reading participant, Sitka Conference
Featured reader, Anchorage Museum of History and Art World Poetry Day Celebration
Performance piece, Immanuel Presbyterian Church; three of my poems were done with modern dance by Lynette Turner and readings by Dick Madden and myself.
- 1984 August, featured reader with Sheila Nickerson at the Alaska Women's Bookstore.
- 1984 May, Pueblo, Colorado, Pueblo Public Library
May, Pueblo, Colorado, featured reader and guest of Pueblo Poets Assoc.
- 1984 Anchorage, World Poetry Day Reading
- 1983 Fayetteville Public Library, Fayetteville, Arkansas; one of four featured readers for "An Evening of Women's Poetry"
- 1981 Co-ordinator (with Ann Chandonnet) of the memorial reading for Margaret Mielke, Alaska's first poet laureate, at the Eagle River Public Library.
- 1981 One of four featured readers at the Spenard Public Library, "Poetry Arts Festival."

- 1976-1981 Ran with Jim Gove of Minotaur the monthly Minotaur readings which featured many Anchorage poets. These began at the Nunaka Valley Community School, later moved to the old Bridge restaurant. Steve Levi took over for Jim; by 1981 the readings were sponsored by Harpoon and were at the Bridge or at the museum.
- 1980-82 Co-ordinated readings in the Alaska Arts Council Series and invited out-of-town poets. Also read at some of these readings at St. Mary's Episcopal Church

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Chairman of the Poetry Judging Committee for the University of Alaska Anchorage/Anchorage Daily News Contest in 1986 and 1987.

Judge, poetry, American Mothers Contest, 1986

Member of Literary Review Panel, Alaska State Council on the Arts, 1981-1982

Destinations

San Francisco, 1965.

Chilly. 5 in the morning. Down to our last twenty dollars.
Drove non-stop, Nevada border to the Bay Bridge. South of
Market we find an all night cafe, order coffee. Swiris
of steam rise from the heavy mugs, fog our faces.

Two winos come in,
place a dollar on the linoleum counter top,
are served tawny port in cracked water glasses. No one
can give us directions. Later I write home:
Wine is cheaper here than bread.

Anchorage, 1970.

I sold enough and bought the ticket.
You meet the plane with a borrowed car,
hoist to your shoulders our two-year-old and his teddy bear.
We drive to Sears;

you buy tacks, a plumber's helper, a three-pronged plug.
Already I know what I want: your closeness and Northern California
spring, the green-gold mustard fields--to run through them
shifting all I carry. Know what I want: all simultaneously.
Winter is dark. The snow is dirty.

Anchorage, 1981.

The house breathes a belly
in which we stumble, too constricted to really see.
Eleven years spent in three rooms...who
would have thought it? "A starter house," the realtor said.
But the box curled around its center. Tentacle grips.
I tell you some days the air
is bad, as if cracked plaster gave off poisons,
and there are moans behind the scuffed paneling,
peculiar cartons in the attic. If I scrub the window glass,
we can see the mountains. The mortgage is low.
We take trips to California.

Some place or any place, this day or any day....

Continents. One half inch per year, the plates slide.

The house loosens. How many years
to learn our silences? We smile forgetfully.

Change is as certain as the pulsing wings of one
hundred hoary redpolls rising from the highbush cranberry
when the dog barks.

Leavetaking

I gather the late peas.
How the wind has snapped the tall vines!
They lean bent as an old man's failed back
in the direction of the cornflowers
and those stubborn cornflowers,
their fringed faces more violet than blue,
keep blooming
as if to deny chill in the air,
the thinning of light,
fresh snow on the mountain.
Short hours from death they pulse
like notes from Delius' *English Rhapsody*,
and this land, this shaman that holds me,
throbs too, alive under my feet.
True, the water rushes towards its season of ice,
the leaves fly from the birch,
the tourists and I make our reservations,
but before the goodbyes, while there is still
the one bud on the wild rose,
Spirit Woman will rise from these furrows.
She burns like fireweed.
She is strong as seal gut.
She is plump from salmonberries.
"Here is the map," she will say
and wind her hair into rings of tree.

published in Hunger and Dreams:
The Alaskan Women's Anthology

I Am Not A Swallow

Now
toward what side of the horizon
does your hair flutter?

Yannis Ritsos

Beyond the creek
a night freight rumbles
and these windows rattle
while the plastic clock
with the broken alarm
ticks off panic
ten minutes at a time.

I am sleeping alone.
It's the wrong bed:
full of crumbs and too wide.
I can't recall his face or the child's--
Trying, I rub into crumbs.
Aspirin doesn't help
or that white ghost, the phone,
only morning.
Grey light on old snapshots.
Rain on the roof.

published in Calliope's Corner (fall, 1985)

February: Letter to Alaska

Snow is tamfoolery
in Arkansas what falls
an inch or less of wet
barely dusts the dandelion shoots
teases tree limbs and disappears

Last night leaving the Restaurant on the Corner
stepping from dimness
I fancied the pavement washed with white
a stroke of incandescent light or mind

Now a flood of warm sun
Savannah sparrows cheep in the sycamore
I raise the window and think
of you stomping in at twenty below
ice crystals lodged in your bushy brows
Moose blocked the highway
Power out Waterline frozen
 Raven scolding

Distant as the Aurora
the sharp sounds of home

Winner of literary review contest,
The Grapevine (Fayetteville, AR), and published
in The Grapevine (Nov. 1983)

Southeast

for Sheila

In driving rain
 we leave your car
 (a warm cocoon)
 to stand where Muir stood,
 at the base of Mendenhall,
 specks in yellow oilskins,
 voyeurs infringing
 upon the storm's eye.
 The glacier flaunts
 the fresh scars of motherhood,
 black and blue, deepest indigo.
 Ice children, what life they had
 expended in the breaking away,
 lie in the bay
 like stilled creatures of the sea.
 To the right, a sharp-finned fish.
 To the left, a whale.
 Perhaps they will drift with night,
 a change of moons,
 the current's long fingers.
 The tide pulls,
 laps at pebbles, smooths them.
 Weather too spends itself.
 Each wait a clean sweep.

published in Northward Journal 21/2

Friend

Rain on Tuesday.
Rain on Wednesday.
Rain on Thursday.

You leave your warm house
 overflowing with rabbits, dog,
 children, toys, books,
 tasks begging to be done,
 to show me your city,
 anxious lest I miss a single sight.
 Wipers work like sturdy horses,
 even hands must keep rubbing
 steam from car glass
 to frame the space
 from which I view.

Flying home, the pilot
 points out Hope, Alaska.
 I look down on a village
 flooded with sun
 and think of you,
 how you move with grace
 through those gray days of sameness,
 making of your life
 a palette of courage colors.
 The true rainbow is the heart.

published in Hunger and Dreams

Iris: The Goddess, the Rainbow, the Flower

for Phydella Hogan

Next year I'll return
when the crescent moon
hangs over Arkansas
thin as a teacup handle.
In the warm spring.
In the season of Iris.

"My hands are too stiff,
I can't play," you say.
We urge, coax,
hold our breaths
while you reach for the smaller instrument
(less burdensome on your lap)
then ease your fingers from pain to plucking
Barbara Allen and Dish Rag.

White iris petals lean
over the rim of a mayonnaise jar
Iris stalks your fingers
Your notes rise across the kitchen
float past mahogany
the table
one hundred years of scratches.
The baby crawls to the screen door
presses her tongue to where night hovers.
When the Mockingbird Sings in the Lilac Bush
Goodbyes are so hard.

In the warm spring I'll loosen my wools
and come carrying spruce boughs
from the dark corners of my life.
We'll finish searching the craft fairs
for the dulcimer with the perfect tone.
I will learn your music
in the season of Iris.

And Words Shall Have Dominion

Words make woodpiles of their own,
 some thin as shavings,
 some sturdy as a good birch log,
 and if they are burned,
 they rise and fall again,
 flower and seed.

When they are barred or banned,
 they live on
 sewed into the linings of sleeves
 or the hems of ragged coats.
 Chapter numbers of Bible verse
 etched on the insides of wedding bands.

Poems too are memorized,
 storage against the cold, lean times
 as a stacked woodpile insures against winter.

Stored in the heads till the heads do burst...
 words rise and fall,
 blossom and seed,
 boundless as love.

Margaret Mielke, 1912-1980,
 Alaska's first poet laureate,
 In memory.

Kay: Blue Rose

They say you've been missing four days now,
 that you left letters, a will, a suicide note,
 you took your car.
 I shudder thinking icy roads,
 thinking little explosions, ravines, wolves,
 the raw edge of wilderness.

Damn it, I want you here
 safe, walking in, helping yourself
 to coffee, piling your plate with seconds on spaghetti.
 I want your voice painting the dim air
 with wry wit.
 Don't you remember two months ago,
 September, when we sat around the teak table--
 Ruben on your right, Steve across from you,
 Dan and I at opposite ends--
 passing the bowl of honey?
 We dunked quartered apples into sweetness,
 dipped and bit into a sticky Jewish New Year.
 Only two months ago we toasted *The Book of Life*.

If I meditate on the strength of a blue rose,
 affirm love and healing,
 can I draw you back?

I need you here
 telling me you drove towards life,
 that the mountains hold you, prism-like,
 in your own found poem.

Kay Deeter, poet, 1937-1984

On a Bright Morning

On a bright morning we must have climbed into Morry's boxy black Cadillac, Rose sitting high in the front next to her beau, Daddy and I in the bumpy back, and traveled two hours on the dusty old road to Nantasket Beach. On that morning we must have made it without the car breaking down or my upchucking cornflakes all over the plush upholstery and getting Morry mad, for here we are, in faded sepia, smiling into the camera. Rose is pretty as a rose, Daddy looks neither Polish nor Jewish, just boyish, his bare chest is lean, muscular. I reach nearly to his knee. I am holding out a toy pail of carefully gathered blue-black clam shells. I don't understand yet about angry gods or the threatening clouds above the Warsaw houses of my great great-aunts. It is 1939. Behind us, an unfinished sand castle. The surf is gentle, wind to the south.

published in The Alaska Quarterly Review (fall, 1981)

Machnovka, You Exist

for Frances

*and after the Nazis murdered the Jews
of Kiev, they sent patrols and trucks
into the neighboring villages and towns
and they rounded up the Jews
and they burned the villages,
and they murdered these Jews also,
at the ravine called Babi Yar*

and

facts of history

Machnovka, town of my ancestors,
limp herring swallowed by an iron bear,
your wooden synagogues taught Torah too gentle.
Machnovka, fate as bitter as horseradish root,
a void on the map,
you exist
etched in the lifeline of my palm.
Machnovka, you exist.
The bend of your stream
is the crook in my finger
that nags and will not

straighten.

published in Balancing Act, 1979,
and in The Wayward Wind, 1985

Grandfather Poem I

My grandfather was a tall man,
a tailor, a teller of tales,
Carried a pocket watch and silver dollars,
read the newspapers in Yiddish.
The Jewish Forward was his favorite;
sitting at his table he always read it
back to front.
Once he read the newspapers in English,
front to back;
It was the day Hitler marched
into Poland.

He took the news into the bathroom, locked the door, let the
hours pass, came out finally into the dimly lit hallway, his eyes
reddened, fists clenched, shoulders slightly turned in. He stood less
tall.

The war years passed;
he worked twelve hours a day
Stitching, steam pressing,
fitting the cloths
For the men's trousers,
the ladies' skirts.
Good garbardine could be pieced and cut;
not so the changing world
Where shapes and forms
no longer fit the same spaces.

On the tracks below his shop window,
trains rumbled;
Every hour on the hour things shook,
then settled;
He lost a wife, a son,
became more bent,
Went home evenings alone
ate his black bread, meat,
potatoes and prunes,
Read the Jewish Forward
back to front.

His second wife had half-frozen in the death camps.
She survived,

a refugee to America.
Spending money was her personal revenge.
Furs, no matter how tightly wrapped,
could never warm her enough;
She needed blazing fires,
hot suns.

When he was eighty-four,
she talked him into going to Florida.
He was small now, stooped, taciturn,
too tired for traveling.
Not given to quarreling,
he sold his shop--
they went.

(continued)

(Grandfather Poem I continued)

Florida morning. Orange ball of sun filters into a gray hospital room; a few beams of light rest on the Yiddish papers. They sit still folded on a bedside table. He lies in a diabetic coma irreversible the doctors say. His wife pulls her sweater tighter, finds the room too cool, heads for the solarium.

They come from the shadows
as he lies alone,
The people from his Polish village;
on the day of his death
they fill his room.

First the women, wives and girls in their Sabbath best,
lace headscarfs, wool shawls around their shoulders,
soft skirts billowing;

Then the curly-locked boys, and the men
the men deep-eyed, dark bearded, rough textured,
carrying well-worn prayer books;

Then the male dancers, the dancing Hassidim,
frock coats askew, whirlingtwirling, fervently moving forward
moving forward in front of the others

Moving closer
dancing and chanting.
On the day of his death they come to meet him,
the faces of his Polish village
Descending, ascending
in
a
long
line
of
joy.

published in A Long Line of Joy: Poetry, Commentary,
and Interviews (William J. Robson, 1978) and in
Balancing Act

Epilogue: After the Grandfather Poems

It was a tradition my grandparents carried
 along with packs, prayers, dietary laws,
 as they fled the old country
 for the new.

*When the Dead are dead, do not pass on their shoes.
 The souls have already walked in them.*

New York, 1964...after the death of a loved one,
 I drag the heavy box of shoes
 from our apartment to the incinerator room.
 Unable to lift the box and send it
 down in one fell swoop,
 I drop the shoes
 by pairs into the incinerator chute.
 As shoes hit the bottom,
 the fire hisses leaping
 sparks reverberate
 fly upwards.

In the hot closet of an incinerator room,
 I stand after a death
 dropping shoes down a chute....

Anchorage, 1979...this night
 I sit trying to finish a manuscript,
 arranging a book
 that defys arrangement.
 Poems, punctuations
 deny finality.
 Past memories interrupt
 as if the shoes of departed loves
 were tapping out messages.

It is more than that.

The shoes of the ancestors--
 abandoned, destroyed, burned
 ash
 scream for resurrection.
 They say they are tired
 of oblivion;
 they say the hell with
 ritual. They want life.
 Strident, demanding,
 they send sensations,
 pulsings to the nerve roots of my fingers.

Who knows from what source creation comes?
 A point to be debated with clergy.
 I am the channel.

(continued)

(Epilogue: After the Grandfather Poems continued)

I type the last word, pound the last period,
slip the final page
 out from the typewriter...rise
and step outside, breathe in night,
pale camel humps mountains
snow against sky.

I dare you stars to fall.
I dare you
 (stars)
to make a noise.

published in Harpoon

Riddle

If there is a dream,
there is a woman who looks like no one;
she pushes her way in, bathed in light,
brighter than the fat half-moon.
Her arms are strings of letters,
her fingers are words.

If there is a woman,
there is a dream made of words.

If there is a dream,
there is a woman made of words.

If from the dark, the owl
calls, who is to answer,
the dreaming woman
or the woman in the dream?

forthcoming, fall 1987, in Rhino

To Julie

Teasingly I flaunt my years
 as if age were wisdom;
 often it is not.
 Still I feel compelled to say,
 remembering how we both laughed
 when you showed me the clipping
 "Emotional baggage spoils vacations,"
 that it's not what you lug
 but what you glean.
 And what I coaxed you 5000 miles
 north of home to learn
 was never weather but possibility
 sharp as the cold air that stung your face
 at Hatcher Pass where we stood
 two nights before Christmas
 and counted stars.

 Afternoon Song for Jean

"Tie on colored feathers."

Fairbanks, 1982.

A line from a workshop poem.

We stargaze, eyes at the tops of our heads,
 while our children's feet push through
 the pinching shoes, advance to longer pairs:
 squeaky, stiffly new, and turning, already
 turning to routes beyond the back yards' trees.

We scan weather for patterns,
 signs (blessed or ill), while our parents,
 now thin-wristed,
 slip worlds and their fringes.

Why does the horizon look so--
 this unrelieved wash of blue?

Look,
 a V of geese to the north!

At last, mauve fills the edges.
 Feathers drift from the sky.

Thoughts for Solzhenitsyn

*The clock, surviving through it all,
Measures the time as honorably
Between the others and ourselves,
Those who've come and those who've fled,
With the same ever-even tread,
Only the ancient hands' fine lace
Is trembling slightly on its face.*

Solzhenitsyn, Prussian Nights

Say that an hour is still an hour
even though styles of clocks have changed.

Say that this pea soup fog
makes everything outside the windows
eerie, otherworldly,
that the far ridge of bare trees,
stripped by Sunday's sharp winds
of their last clinging leaves,
becomes a menacing forest.

Say that I refuse
all ghostly beckoning,
all time suspended.

Say that indoors there is color:
red and blue and yellow,
music from the radio,
tea water boiling in its kettle,
the knowledge that sooner
or later the phone will ring.
The voice might be my own.

As Through a Far Window

three frames (a poem in progress)

I

At Wingaershaek in August,
 if you frame the morning right,
 the clear sky dips cloudless to the horizon line
 meeting the sea where everything stops
 and begins: the breakers rise,
 thunder in, splashing time, then trickle out
 having made no novels of the world.

Between the booms you hear your sister's voice
 on the receding waves. Not the grown-up
 voice you've listened to for years over telephone lines,
 but the shrill voice of the three-year-old, crying
 because you, seven, pushed her down the back stairs,
 rubbed her face into weeds and dirt,
 then blamed it on your playmate Ruthie,
 all because your favorite aunt
 from whom you expected only good things,
 chocolate bunnies and Tootsie Pops,
 had come to the porch door,
 tears smearing her rouged cheeks.
 She told you your father had gone to heaven.

II

Your grandmother Hanna in her black mourning dress
 spoke broken English, never traveled
 north of Boston, never saw Wingaershaek in summer
 when white-bellied terns brood over their young
 and marram grass tops the dunes.
 Washed silver in sun this rustling grass
 anchors the beach, yes, holds
 even the fine sand through storms and seasons
 by matted roots, thick subterranean

underpinnings that twist
 and tunnel to the tideline, twenty feet or more,
 to pull sustenance from the sea.

There's no stopping.
 Hanna would have understood.

"Eat, *esse*," she always said
 filling your emptiness with the sweet, sticky
 cinnamon rolls she'd prepared on swollen legs.
 Food was the bond between you.
 And how she doted on you, always watching,
 smiling approval each time you bit
 into a warm spongy bun.

As through a far window, softened angles,
 diagonals of light on a bruised wall...
 if ever you learned the luster of pearl,
 it was there in Hanna's kitchen
 on those lost afternoons.

(continued)

(As Through a Far Window continued)

III

At Wingaershaek in August,
if you get the memory right,
you lie with your lover on a rumpled blanket.
Your fingers stroke his sun-tanned back.
Suddenly he asks whether *anything*
has ever satisfied you, severing the day.

And now the hourglass has broken,
codes, translations, stored fragments
of your gypsy self shower the ground--
beached sea creatures, water-smoothed, recognizable:
fabric snips, paper, shopping bags,
green string from parcels,
messages retrieved from pockets of suitcases,
holdings you've clung to crisscrossing the continent,
east to west, west to east, square to circle.

*Here is the ivory tea mug you bought in Arkansas,
your name still on it, one letter missing;
here the dry crusty bagel
your husband brought to your hospital room
for luck on the eve of a serious operation.
Here the turquoise menorah you gave to your infant son,
a leap into light for the child's beginning;
and here, seeping wax, is the cracked Yahrzeit glass:
its wick refused to burn--
perhaps moist air, a breath had stilled it,
yes, your father's ghost whispering Enough, enough.*

All these tokens of, if not love, at least benevolence,
you relinquish at Wingaershaek.
"Eat, *esse*," she always said.
She died when you were twelve.
Who could know then the routes flexible as vision,
the journeys, the voices begging resurrection?
Losses swirl like kelp in eddies.
Your hands are free.
There are the gains--visible or invisible--
footholds under the unswerving sky.

*Yahrzeit: Memorial remembrance of
the dead; especially on the
anniversary of the dead, a candle in
a glass is burned.*



March 29, 1988

Senator Mitch Abood
Chair, Senate State Affairs Committee
Alaska State Legislature
PO Box V
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Senator Abood:

I am writing in support of House Concurrent Resolution 44 naming Joanne Townsend of Anchorage as Alaska's next Poet Laureate. Ms. Townsend is the state's most respected writers and her appointment as Poet Laureate will mark the first time in over fifteen years that an Anchorage writer has been selected for this prestigious post.

I know that your schedule of committee work is full. However, I encourage you to calendar consideration of this important resolution for Alaskan artists in within the next two weeks. The Alaska State Council on the Arts will hold its spring meeting in Juneau on April 28 and 29 and, if possible, we would like Ms. Townsend's appointment officially made by the Legislature on one of those two days. There is a zero fiscal note attached to the resolution and it is very uncontroversial. Legislative appointment of the Laureate, though, is one of several ways public support for Alaskan artists and writers is enhanced.

Thank you for your past support of the arts of our state. I hope I can count on your continued assistance in behalf of this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine D'Arcy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Christine D'Arcy
Executive Director

cc: Members, Senate State Affairs Committee
Senator Rick Uehling
Senator Ken Fanning
Senator Joe Josephson
Senator Willie Hensley

CD:kh:3489A

Alaska State Council on the Arts

619 Warehouse Avenue, Suite 220/Anchorage, Alaska 99501/(907) 279-1558

28 March 1988

Alaska State Senate
P.O. Box V
Juneau, AK 99811

Attn: Senator Mitch Abood, Chairman
Senate State Affairs Committee

Ref: HCR No. 44 ... "Appointing Joanne Townsend
Poet Laureate of Alaska"

I'm aware you've had an unusually busy session so far and that much legislative work still lies ahead for your consideration prior to the closing of this session.

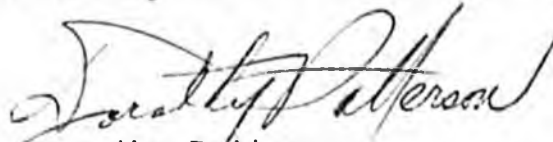
May I remind you of a "pride in Alaskans" type of resolution which the legislative affairs office only this morning informed me is still on your desk and which I believe you will wish to rescue as the earliest time.

I am referring to House Concurrent Resolution No. 44
- appointing Joanne Townsend Poet Laureate of Alaska.
(Copy enclosed.)

After a long cold winter and a much longer period where a harsh and depressed mood set upon Alaskans by the sad state of the economy, it would be a breath of fresh air to hear some good news; that pride and caring is still very much alive and well in Alaska.

Since I am aware that you will be retiring from the Senate at the close of this second session, I think this "good news" announcement for we Alaskans would seem very appropriate coming from you. I would like you to be remembered not only as an astute politician, but more appreciatively as a considerate Alaskan Senator whose politics of caring extends to the total person.

My best wishes for a good life upon your retirement, and please accept my thanks for all the good you have accomplished during your tenancy in the Alaska Senate.



Dorothy Patterson
1928 Thunderbird Place
Anchorage, Ak 99508
(907) 276-7086

encl.

RECEIVED
MAR 31 1988

Senator Rick Uehling

Senate District H
Downtown, Elmendorf, Northeast Anchorage

RECEIVED
MAR 22 1988



Senate Finance Committee
Chair, International Trade Committee
Vice-Chair, State Affairs Committee
Labor & Commerce Committee

March 21, 1988

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Senator Mitch Abood, Chair
Senate State Affairs Committee

FROM: Senator Rick Uehling *RM*

SUBJECT: HCR 44, Appointment of Poet Laureate of Alaska

I would respectfully request that you schedule HCR 44, "appointing Joanne Townsend as Poet Laureate of Alaska," as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.