

On January 7th, my appointment as the news Madison Poet Laureate was approved by the City of Madison! I began my role at the Martin Luther King celebration on January 29th by reading my poem, "Everybody is Somebody's Child." I sat on stage with civil right icons, hugged the Lieutenant Governor, and sat facing packed theatre seats at the Overture Center. On February 6th I read to over 50 people at A Room of One's Own from my latest collection, *In Light, Always Light*. We don't talk about it much as poets, but nothing is more pleasing than when more and more people show up to hear your poems, and the hosts have to keep bringing out chairs to accommodate the crowd. February 22nd was my big public reception downtown at the Central Library, and again many people showed up and I did my thing - taking the audience through the trajectory of my work reading from all of my books. I even danced with my dance teacher, Barb Wesson, to one of my poems entitled, "Wild Prayer." My family came from Chicago and Milwaukee, and we had a gorgeous chocolate cake brought by Karin Wolf who is my contact at the city – the person I am fortunate to work with in my new role. I just started January 20th about three months ago now.

I went to AWP in San Antonio the first weekend in March. People and organizations were cancelling. Some friends questioned my husband on the wisdom of my decision. I went anyway, and participated on a panel entitled, "Writing Empathy Across Cultures," and to represent Madison. The Isthmus where my face was on the cover was featured prominently at the IAIA booth, and people who walked by did a double take, and stopped to talk. I must say, to see the teeming masses along the River Walk you would not think anything was coming for us soon as a country. It was a beautiful sight, all of us coming together around Alamo Plaza, intermingling not worried about what we could not see. Music, dancing and laughter pouring out of every door way.

Things, situations can change very quickly. Sunday I was at the airport by 5AM, and the coughs echoed in the empty airport as did the news. Someone sneezed without covering their mouth and another passenger glared. We were herded through security and led on the plane. I made it back, but the country had changed from Friday to Sunday, and I was thankful to be back in Madison. I had a great time doing my literary thing in San Antonio: reading poems, talking on the panel, sharing space with old and new friends, and reconnecting with my IAIA colleagues. I did not regret going. I do not regret going. It was the last time I would read my poems in public, and talk about the work I have always done, being a poet and an activist living in Des Moines, in Seattle, in Milwaukee and now Madison. I met someone from my maternal grandmother's home state in Mexico. I connected with other writers who bought my books, and were moved by what I said during the panel. I shared the panel with one of my MFA cohorts, Joaquin Zihuantenejo, I did an impromptu interview at the IAIA booth with two of my favorite poets, Santee Frazier and Jennifer Foerster. I supported my friend David Tromblay and went to his offsite reading to celebrate his new book coming out in the Fall. I joined the Latinx and Indigenous caucuses, and met people I heretofore only knew from FaceBook, or because I selected their work for a journal I was co-editing. I was with my people, writers, people who are passionate about words and the world around us. I was in my element...these are my people.

The very next day I returned to Madison. I realized what was coming, and signed up for a ZOOM account so I could continue my work as the Madison Poet Laureate. I taught Indigenous Poetics for the Speakeasy project in early 2018, and knew the platform. I started emailing the library about taking our April 4th event online, and communicating with the poets about the changes I saw coming. And then Conor Moran, Wisconsin Book Festival Director, offered to help with CrowdCast, and my contact at the Madison Public Library and I went on, and I polled all the poets I had invited, and they agreed to go forward in this new format for the first time. And someone who couldn't participate before was able to participate with the onset of the pandemic, and us being basically limited to our home, was now free. And so the show went on and 120 people tuned in, and we had a great time. I laughed and cried all dressed up in my staged living room solo. The recording is now saved for posterity, or as long as the internet lives. We celebrated on April 4th online just like we would have in person minus the hugging and leaving our homes, driving. Conor was the magician behind the curtain, bringing us forward and back. Sean logged information into the chat feature on where you could buy the poets' books. There was a robust conversation throughout the event on the side by the poets across the state and those who read with me. We were eight poets strong. We were brilliant.

My work continues. One thing I know as a long-time activist is that you must pivot when something comes up that blocks your current plans, and you must be flexible on how to achieve what you want to achieve. There is always another way. No one ever gained anything giving up. "Imagination is the greater activism." These words my poetry mentor at IAIA, Joan Naviyuk Kane, once uttered in a poetry workshop come back to me now. She was right.

I am now making final comments on the art work completed by the Edgewood College design students to match the poems I selected for the Bus Lines Poetry contest for Metro. Twenty-seven poems are being illustrated by the students – ekphrastic poetry in reverse. We will have a virtual poetry celebration in early May for the poets, and the college students. I chose four students from Wingra School where my husband went when he was a young boy bussing from the east side to the west side. At the end of April, I will participate in Wingra's virtual poetry celebration for national poetry month online from my home.

I will begin offering free poetry workshops to the community via my ZOOM account in May. Pre-pandemic my poetry dance card was full. There was one weekend I was free between the months of March to May, and I had at least two poetry events scheduled per week. Now I am working from home for my day job, and my days and nights blend. I write and work on poetry in the early morning and late at night. Other poet laureates had told me this is the busy time gearing up for national poetry month. For the entire month of April, I have worked with the Madison Public Library in delivering a Poem a Day via my personal FaceBook account. Now I am sharing poems from people who mentored me at IAIA, the Institute of American Indian Arts, and promoting their works and books and art daily. I buy my friend's new books as they come out. I read. I am helping the Wisconsin Poet Laureate, Margaret Rozga, publish a book of poetry to mark her term through my small press, Art Night Books. I continue to write new poems, edit my own work, and submit poems and books. I continue to dream, and do yoga. I garden. My

work as the Madison Poet Laureate continues online until we can be together again in community, and when we can it will be glorious and I will not take it for granted.