

April 13, 2019

An e-interview with Alison Hawthorne Deming for *The Wenatchee World*

Derek: *When and how did you know that the natural world was going to be a primary concern for you as a writer?*

Alison: When I was a child, I wrote a poem for my father's birthday about his battle in the vegetable garden with the rabbits who were stealing his carrots. So love, nurture and struggle with nature inspired me from the get-go.

Derek: *You are coming to Wenatchee Valley College to celebrate Earth Day and Poetry Month. Do you think poetry has a special relationship with wilderness? Or can prose do similar work?*

Language has the power to engage us with both inner and outer worlds, and to bridge our differences across divides. Whether in poetry or prose, writing can speak for the mysterious intensities we feel when encountering the power and beauty of wilderness. And our grief at its diminishment. Poetry, because it is so compact and musical, is especially good at this. Poetry is our birdsong.

Derek: *As a writer of deep ecology in the time of the sixth mass extinction and our species' failure to address the climate crisis, what gives you hope?*

Alison: I've made a moral decision to be hopeful, because otherwise the grief over our losses is too overwhelming. Nature teaches endless lessons in resilience, so that gives me hope. Local action, vocal youth, human inventiveness and empathy give me hope. Every new day gives me hope.

Derek: *How does your art interact with your activism? Do they live in a kind of balance for you or do you sometimes feel guilty about paying more attention to one instead of the other? What kinds of things do you do to live a more sustainable life?*

Alison: I am a writer and educator. I see that work as activist, because it is about working to create a more sustainable and just culture. Of course I always feel inadequate in my activism, because there is a moral crisis in our nation's leadership and we can never do enough to right the wrongs that has led to. For my own accountability, I put solar panels on my home, so all of my electricity comes from the sun. And I pay carbon offsets (usually to plant trees) to help compensate for my frequent professional travel.

Derek: *Some believe science and poetry belong in separate rooms, but not you. How do these two powerful fields interact with one another in your writing? So much attention and funding is going to STEM right now, but should we really be talking about STEAM?*

Alison: I see strong movement to bring art and science together, since both are ways of knowing that deepen our connection to the natural systems that sustain us.

I've been involved with zoos, museums, etc. working to enhance their science education with poetry. Science inspires me to look more closely at nature and gives me language that stokes my process. We need to become a more science literate society, and for those who don't geek out on data, poetry can turn them on to the dazzling discoveries science continues to make. Poetry can bring heart and soul into the data.

Derek: *What is the value of the non-human world to our species? Beyond materialistic and medicinal uses of plants and animals, how is wilderness important?*

Alison: We owe our lives to the natural world. That is what evolution teaches us. So to slaughter nature is to slaughter our mother. The loudest "Me too!" of our time is coming from Mother Earth. We owe her more care and intelligence. Together we must learn to honor and protect her. Perhaps this is a spiritual value, some deep core sense in us that we belong to something much greater than ourselves that makes even the most skeptical among us feel something like reverence.