

National Poetry Month Radio Commentary WVXU, FM, 91.7

(1) As the time set aside to pay attention to Poetry rushes by with little time to pay attention to it, I recall Ken MacCrorie's description of what a poem is and does:

*When you see what appears to be a poem on the page (he advises) it's a signal to slow down, pay attention.*

The late poet, Audre Lorde, wrote that *Poetry is not a luxury. . . Poetry is the way we give names to the nameless so it can be thought.*

For me, writing and saying poems is an ongoing practice of re-membering, connecting,--dare I say *healing?* of *saving* my life, not *spending* it in a rush to *do* and *get* which will leave nothing of substance to pass on to my son, now *his* sons' generations.

In poems I say who I am, who my people are, where we come from, what (and how) we love.

In poems I go back: to my people, to our ceremonies, to the land we grew in for a time.

My going back is accomplished by remembering, or trying to remember, the *names of things*.

(2) Perhaps my love of poetry began with my father, who taught my brothers and me the names of every tree, wildflower, bird and mushroom we encountered in our rambles through the woods of our Northern Ohio home, and visits to the hills and hollers of his boyhood home in Southeastern Ohio.

I am haunted by all my forgettings, so much lost not only to the passage of time but to leaving my place as well as my class, going to college, living in a city. In any "widening of horizons" there is the risk--if not the probability--of losing depth.

I am haunted by our forgettings as a society. We have no time to learn the names of things, the stories of our people.

I grieve, not only the going away of the ancestors, but the going away of naming in our culture: poetry-writing, botanizing, composing litanies of the sacred, leaving us an anonymous world where the joyful activity of naming is replaced by the hostile activity of name-calling.

So let us call poetry by its rightful names: slowing down, paying attention, giving people, creatures, and places the honor of their names.