

AT EAGLE POND FARM

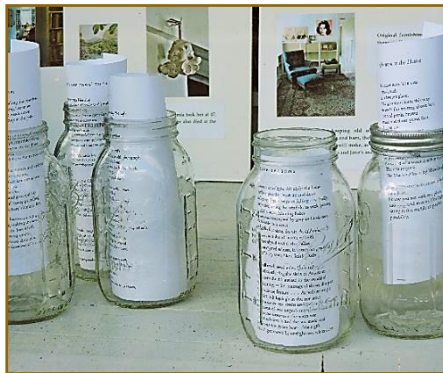
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AN OCCASIONAL LETTER

January 2024

Stock your poetry pantry for winter

Filling the window of the Wilmot post office allocated to At Eagle Pond, Inc. this fall was a display of canning jars holding poems by Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon. A small sign exhorted, “Stock your poetry pantry for winter!” In changing weather throughout the month, the window glass reflected, as Don’s and Jane’s poems do, the place that grounds the poems--like the presence of the church across from the post office, the subject, in part, of Jane’s “Potluck at the Wilmot Flat Baptist Church” that closes her “American Triptych” with the smell of coffee, a familiar town hall “luminous in moonlight,” memory of the first time she voted, and “love for the Republic.”



New poetry at Eagle Pond

Not everything happening at Eagle Pond Farm is apparent in furnishings restored to the house or books returning to bookshelves.

Back in 2019 when the farm was being sold, and a nonprofit was being created to be steward of it, we were committing to more than preserving just the house and barn and land. We were also promising to keep the farm a place where poetry happens, where it’s written and rewritten and read, and where conversation invites a look at why it matters.

At the time, we were thinking that meant--primarily--residencies for poets, along with readings, workshops, and other events and collaborations. Those would, however, have to wait until the house could be repaired and refreshed (but not changed). And all of *that* would have to wait for assessing what needed to be done and fundraising to do it.

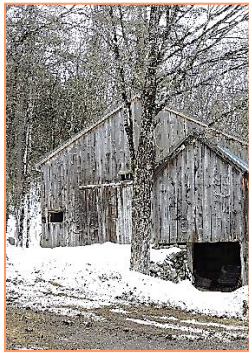
Those residencies and programs will happen as soon as they can. But we hadn't expected that in this stage while we're finding our way (and funding) toward what's ahead, poetry--and what goes with it--could bloom *now*. We were wrong.

Among visitors coming to pay homage, and to learn from the house and farm how living here informed Jane's and Don's lives and work, are a host of poets--some nearby, some faraway. Some have known Don's and Jane's poetry for years. Some have only recently found it. Some are long-established, some setting forth. Hearing what brings them, and getting to see what they're writing (especially poems charged in some way by what they experience at the farm), invigorates us mightily--to borrow a word from Jane--while also confirming the new life we've hoped for Eagle Pond.

Here, we introduce three of these poets: Georgia Jones-Davis, Peter Guy Witzig, and Keely Leim.

Georgia Jones-Davis grew up in northern New Mexico and Southern California and lives now in Santa Fe. For more than twenty years, she was a literary reporter, book review editor, and book reviewer; for fourteen of those years, she was an assistant book editor at the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. She had wanted to write poetry after studying English at UCLA, but news work and being a parent made small time for it. When, however, she left the newspaper world, and her daughter went to college, "Poetry," Georgia says, "came back to me like a long-lost, muddy dog."

As poems accrued, Jane Kenyon became for Georgia "one of the most inspiring poets to read and turn to" in her own writing. Then a trip east last year allowed a visit to Eagle Pond.



"To have the opportunity, on a dark, snowy afternoon in March, to walk through the rooms and look through the windows that Jane did in the course of her daily life opened new vistas and a new sense of companionship for me. Now I can look over her shoulder as she sat at her desk, and it brings her poems even closer to my heart."

Georgia cites "The Hermit"--which, in some way she "can't clearly say," haunted her visit to the farm--as "a most remarkable example of how the everyday, the ordinary, mysteriously translates into poetry." A poem about a kitchen sink? Yes!"

Jane's Room at Eagle Pond Farm

Two days into cold spring,
I stand in her room beneath the eaves,
where she composed the poems,

beside the womanly, wood-burning stove,
a scallop-collared locomotive
breathing out clouds of thin heat

on ice-age days in Wilmot.
Out her window: woods, barn,
the sleeping bear, Mount Kearsarge.

Did she read new lines to Gus,
his tail thumping with dog knowledge
that she was following the right scent?

Farmed memories, harvested scenes
of marriage, mortality, no daily moment
too small to be caught in the headlights.

Consider her poem "The Hermit"--that harrowing
winter night drive home,
her focus on safe arrival, standing at the kitchen sink,
sipping a cup of water in the dim circle of light.

On this icy day of receding sun, I stand at the same sink, thirsty
for her presence in the kitchen that pulses
with her loss and with the calm of my own arrival.

--*Georgia Jones-Davis*



Peter Guy Witzig first read Don's work closely in graduate school "and from there," he says, "I discovered Jane's, then the life these two poets lived at Eagle Pond. After hearing the farm had been bought and was being preserved, I determined to one day make a pilgrimage there."

On the October day Peter chose, cars were in the drive, the porch door was open. It happened that the nonprofit's board was lunching with colleagues. He knocked--and was "received with just-made coffee and dessert," then shown the house. "To be close," he states, "to the spirit and lingering presence of these two poets whose work has come to mean so much to me, to see how they lived, to witness the place they knew, and to be made more aware of what I can bring to my own work: that will stay with me as much as their poetry will."



After growing up in Duluth, then “thumbing rides along the West coast, collecting perspective,” and next making his way to Atlanta and Emory, where he studied poetry, Peter continued to New York City for an MFA in Poetry Writing at Columbia. Since then, he’s moved about from central Mexico to rural Vermont to upstate New York before settling now in Minneapolis.

Peter sees Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon as “two poles of [his] poetic planet.” From Don, he says, “I gained confidence in how the ordinary lives of ordinary people can be the subject of poetry. From Jane: the exquisite texture of her language and the emotional bravery she possesses when writing about her mental health. Reading her poems, I noted lines and words that grabbed me, then recombined them in this poem that grew around them and let me find a way to return to my younger self--that queer child being raised in fundamentalism--and to call him stouthearted rather than broken or outcast.”

The Stouthearted Son
after Jane Kenyon

The shirt touches his neck
as a full moon in winter,
cold and windless.

Dogs bark across the pond.
A curtain lifts and falls
like a troubled father.

Look at the hay--the beautiful sane
and solid hay, laced with rain
in January.

We play Rook in the evenings
on the floor of the woodshed
like melancholy sparrows.

There are sorrows keener than these.

All I can do is wait, wait
for the hours warmed

by honey light, hours when I can't tell
if the day is ending or if the holy
of holies is bent over

the beheaded grasses again.
Let evening come
over stacked piles

of birch and maple. Let
evening come over
everything under

the sun and moon. *If you really
believed in God, you wouldn't
be so downhearted.* Yet I am.

A faint glow remains over the black pond.
A table is backlit by a woodstove while
smoke tumbles through

the chimney, smoke broken here
and there by downdraft. You
come back to me like a ghost,

like woodsmoke. I am reminded of fire.
Now come those wordless contemplations
as the moon moves across the lake.

I remember feeding a length of wood into a saw:
It had to be done just so. I remember
fumbling with the radio

while you drove. I remember reading aloud
to my father. I remember the cradle
that rocks above the abyss.

This is the abyss, as calm as a pond
at dusk. I am only a visitor
with heavy luggage

to this tender field of language:
*oarsmen suet cloth
crows shroud*

*timothy bees fox
billets ditch*

eaves

smoke

-- Peter Guy Witzig

Keely Leim--following what she calls a two-decade hiatus from serious writing--is “delighted” to be a candidate for an MFA in Poetry at Eastern Washington University. She says that growing up in Nashville as an only child, she early found company in poems. At Rhodes College, she earned a BA in Political Science, though she admits, “I should have majored in English.”

Now away from the South for many years, Keely, her husband, and their four children make their home at Creek River Farm in Chattaroy, Washington. There, in the midst of family and teaching and community and farm, she writes “at the intersection of faith, disability, motherhood, and marriage.” When Keely was returning to writing, a friend introduced her to Jane’s *Otherwise*. “And with that,” she says, “I found my guide. For these last several years, Jane’s work has shaped both my poetic and my spiritual imagination.” Grief that rose from knowing she couldn’t learn from Jane directly compelled Keely to journey to New Hampshire in hope of understanding “even more of Jane’s life and writing.”

“Being able to visit the house and farm at Eagle Pond,” Keely says, “to walk where Jane walked up New Canada Road on Ragged Mountain, to kneel where she knelt to plant her beloved peony bulbs, to imagine her in the kitchen cooking curry at the stove or at her upstairs IBM Selectric drafting poems while Don was downstairs at his desk, or in his blue chair, also writing? This was a singular gift to me and my work, something I’ll hold in my heart and ponder for years to come. Not only was I present where Jane found poetry within her world and within herself; there I also felt encouraged in my own writing.”

Remembering Jane’s “February: Thinking of Flowers”

December’s mail brings the seed catalog
with flowers whose names
and natures I do not yet know.
Queeny lemon peach zinnias,
cupcake cosmos,
and a new cornflower this year--
a bachelor’s button deeply purple
and almost angry.

Pass over the dahlias--
they are not for me
to exhume, cellophane wrap,
and rebury. No.

Give me those bright annuals,

who, with their short lives,
give it all they've got
and leave me pining
at season's August end
for a longer, southern summer.

--Keely Leim



Photograph by Keely Leim

The morning I spilled my large coffee on Jane Kenyon

On her collected works, I mean.
I wish I had not spilled so much.
I am lucky it glanced her outer edges,
that her pages still flip at all, though stiffly.

I like to think she liked
the coffee I made her drink,
the sugar-free chocolate syrup
flavoring, though she was a purist.
“You did not like it at all, did you, Jane?”
“Not really,” she replies.

With a wry smile she offers me a delicate
china cup with flowers on the rim.
“This cup belonged to Don’s great-grandmother Lucy.”
She pours us tea to drink together.
Bold, floral flavors: echinacea, sweet basil, and licorice
leave a sweet aftertaste on the tongue.

“I like your poems, Jane. They almost always
make me feel better,” I tell her.

She lifts her brow archly above her glasses.

“Almost?”

--Keely Leim



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The board of At Eagle Pond, Inc. is saddened to note the death of Dana Greene, author of the new biography of Jane Kenyon, on December 29, 2023. Her obituary is posted at <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries>.

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At Eagle Pond, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit established to preserve the farm where poets Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon shared a writing life, as well as to honor their work, open the house to the public, invite reflection on poetry and place, and provide residencies where poets and others can take up their own work.

Donations can be made at www.ateaglepond.org or sent to the post office box below.

AT EAGLE POND, INC. P. O. Box 452 WILMOT, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03287

WWW.ATEAGLEPOND.ORG AT.EAGLE.POND@GMAIL.COM