

Featured Writer Interview with Kathleen Glenn

Kathleen Glenn, 74, grew up in Alaska, where she homesteaded with her parents and trained as a journalist. “I was always writing in some way,” she says. “It’s just the way I think.” Before moving to the Portland area, she worked as a certified nurse aid and founded and managed a homeless shelter in California. She has lived in Laurelhurst Village for a year and a half, where she is participating in her second Write Around Portland workshop. Her many creative outlets include jewelry making and cooking. Her piece “Twilight to Dawn” was published in the fall 2015 anthology, *Headed Home, Looking Back*.



Twilight to Dawn

by Kathleen Glenn

It was golden twilight when two aging women sat quietly overlooking the city. With generous and grateful hearts—they reminisced.

In hushed tones they spoke of times past. Of dreams and schemes for the year to come. Or maybe of life’s little quirks...

Listening intently we could barely distinguish haunting bagpipe melodies escaping underneath the neighbor’s apartment door.

City sparklers flipped on and off
Dawn barely peeked over the horizon
as the city began its business.

Yes I listened to the quiet with you, Mama...

And now I cling to the memory and share the visions with a clamoring, intrusive, noisy world!

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Interview with Featured Writer Kathleen Glenn

Interviewer: Betsy Porter, volunteer

How did you first hear about Write Around Portland?

They put a group together about eight months after I got here, so I jumped into that. My teacher, Natalie, oh my gosh, she was something else! She was a poet and she had words that would explain life in a whole different way than I ever dreamed of it. I wanted to understand what she was seeing. That just spurred me on.

When you took your first Write Around Portland workshop, you hadn't lived here [at Laurelhurst Village] very long. Did the intimacy of hearing other people's writing change your relationship with them?

I don't know whether it made me feel closer to the person, but I felt close to their experience. Some of the people in the workshop lived in another area of the Village than where I live, so we didn't necessarily know each other at the start. But in the workshop, I had a chance to go in their mind and see what they really meant. That was very meaningful.

What did you get out of the workshop?

The knowledge that I could come out with a piece I was proud of and that made sense to other people. My poem had so much meaning behind it because I'd lived it. I'm proud of that piece.

Can you give us some background about your poem?

It's about my relationship with my stepmother. I didn't know her very well until I came to Portland to help her in the last years of her life. We would sit on the porch and turn off all the lights and watch the lights come on in the city. We talked about the feelings and experiences we hadn't had a chance to share for all those years. It took away the difficulties of the past and made my stepmother into a human being who I loved. That was my reason for writing. I wanted to share that experience.

Do you have anything to say to your readers, anything you want them to know?

I hadn't thought about having readers! Wow. What a question. Well, I think that being willing to drop the façade and let someone into your life is always special. It's what's wonderful about writing.

What was it like to read your poem to an audience in the anthology release party?

Well, I was the first one to go! I wasn't at all shy because they set it all up for us. I just fell into it. I loved every single other piece that was read; they all came from such different perspectives. I listened intently to every one of them. I didn't whisper to anybody.

What did the workshop give you?

It gave me confidence. I knew I could write in the past, but I hadn't had any experience recently. The workshop told me, you're still there and you haven't lost anything along the way. You can contribute to your life, to everybody's life.

I notice that even my jewelry making has changed since I started writing again. I see a largeness in it. People have started telling me that my jewelry is inspirational or inspired; that makes me want to cry. I needed that experience of writing to give me the confidence so I could go on and do these other things.

Did your writing change because of the workshop experience?

Yes, because I didn't expect poetry to come out of me. I thought it was going to be a longer story about building cabins in the middle of Alaska or something like that out of my past. Instead, it was something much closer to me.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland workshops to other people?

Absolutely! Oh yes! I don't care who you are or where you start from. I think that there's a place for you in Write Around Portland. There really is.

I so loved that class. There was the big reading; there was seeing my poem in print for the first time. Oh my gosh. I'm a journalist, I've been in print lots of times. I would write big, two-page articles in the newspaper, but I still found it very moving to see my poem in the anthology. I needed that experience.

What do you want to do with your writing going forward?

Well, I want to finish my autobiography. I've written about 15 chapters so far. I want to continue writing poetry, too. That's my next step.