

Below, I have posted my recent interview with her.

1. You mention your father and your memories with him in a few of your poems. Was your father one of, if not the greatest, influencer in your life both as an individual and as a poet?

While my father was very influential in my life, he was not a poetic influence in a direct way. His life certainly was. My first serious poetic influence was my high school English teacher, Virginia Weare Parsons, now in her 90s and in a nursing home, nearly devoid of language from a stroke. I recently visited her and it was heartbreaking for me to see her this way. Of course I have written about it.

2. Which of your poems do you hold dearest to your heart and why? (If it is more than one, that's okay too!) Please explain the writing and thought process behind their creation.

Two poems come to mind: Polaris which is a "love" poem written to honor the relationship I have with my husband of 32 years. I wanted to write about him in a way that would illuminate our relationship and his support of me (In all things) with our getting sappy or sentimental. I did this by using the metaphor of a lighthouse at the end. The other poem is We Speak the White Man's Language, a poem that decries how Native women are treated and/or viewed by the dominant culture here. I think a lot about language and where it begins and what happens if we use language of contact to be a bit subversive. I think we do (and ought to). The poem is an important mirror of that in my own thinking and my own relationship with white culture.

3. What are some things/aspects of Native American culture that so many non-Natives appear to demonstrate ignorance toward?

Our spirituality is very misunderstood. I am both Native and Catholic and that has been a work in progress since I was 40 years old. I think I am settled in on how both work together in me. I would say that for other native people, that might not be any kind of a fit or a blend, but for me it works well. Generally, I think non-natives just do not understand that we live every day in a spirit world view, a space between the visible and the felt.

The other thing that is missing in understanding of native culture is that we are not a dead or dying people. I feel invisible as a native woman much of the time because I do not look "like" what the world thinks an "Indian" should. But that invisibility is a cloak of safety sometimes, keeping away all manner of disparagements. I suppose native people of the Plains do not get that, rather get the outright ugliness that is also a problem for many.

4. Was it easy beginning as a poet? What has been your greatest obstacle throughout your career thus far?

May Sarton says (and I might well agree) that poets are chosen, not made. I think there is a certain truth there. I have been a poet as long as I can remember, though I never referred to myself as such until much later in life. Before I was ready to admit the label, I was a person who wrote poems. My greatest obstacle is the notion that poets are somehow so magically altruistic that they need not be compensated for the very difficult work they do. I refer to how hard it is to get work out there in wide circulation. I very much dislike the "business" of poetry, while LOVING the writing and reading and sharing of same. I would like to have an agent to promote my work and get that work accepted a bit higher up the food chain. But it is up to me. So I slog along sending work all over the place. When publishers reject a manuscript saying how "lovely" or "wonderful" it is, I don't even know how to think of that. Perhaps my pet peeve though would be doing readings where people rave on and on about the poems and yet do not buy a book at the end. Some of these people have actually asked if I might email them a few of the poems so they don't "have to get the book."

5. Has the majority of the responses you've received in terms of your writing been positive?

I have seen it all, from one professor in grad school telling me that a particular poem ought to be burned (it was later published by a prestigious journal) all the way to people using my poems in their teaching. It is mostly good news though. My poems always seem to get good reviews.

6. Are there any future endeavors outside of the poetry realm that you wish to pursue in the future?

Well, being Poet Laureate of my city has been a plus, and I would like to hold the post of Maine State Poet Laureate some day. I would like to finish the book I am writing on Richard Wilbur and get my two newest manuscript sod poetry published. I am always writing so of course I hope to continue to do that.

7. Lastly, not a great deal of information about your biography is located on the Internet or anywhere that I am able to find it. Could you provide some insight on what your childhood and family life was like, and how growing up as a Native American teenager in school was as well?

I was born in New Hampshire and lived in Maine entirely until I married. After that, I lived abroad and in California, returning to Maine in 2006. I divorced in 1977 and married again in 1980. I have 4 children, 2 step children, and 14 grandchildren. My childhood was a good one, with a loving father and an efficient and caring mother (not a very warm person but she did a good job of being there for me and my 3 siblings). I have a sister and two brothers. We are not close. Both of my parents are deceased.

I attended public schools in Kittery and York (Maine) and I must say this was a wonderful experience for me. I had great and inspirational teachers and felt very happy at school. Our family was not identified as native and did not talk about it much. It was, I think, a source of shame to my mother. She didn't see any point in people knowing and we did not live a life where native ways were a focus. My great-grandmother did pass on what she knew about our culture as best she could, behind my mother's back so to speak. My mother was a rather simple and private person whose view of the world was live and be quiet.

My struggles had mostly to do with shyness, which I forced myself to overcome. I did this by becoming involved in extra-curricular activities, especially public speaking, newspaper, and debate. Of course my writing was always there and I was a voracious reader.

I graduated with a degree in Creative Writing from California State University San Bernardino in 2002 and received my MFA in Poetry from Vermont College in 2004. I did this work later in life after having raised my children.