

October 24th, 2016

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter as it's been brought to my attention by Naomi Wakan that Nanaimo is electing their first Youth Poet Laureate. I first met Naomi when she came to speak to my poetry class at V.I.U. last spring. Her words encouraged me to submit my work to Nanaimo's Poetry in Transit program as well as the poetry map. This led to my participation in multiple public reading opportunities and workshops, all encouraged by Naomi. Having this kind of mentorship has opened up the world of poetry to me further, a world I've been longing to be a part of since I was eleven years old and wrote my own first poem, but never had the means of knowing how. If I were to be chosen as Nanaimo's Youth Poet Laureate I would take great pleasure in continuing to learn from the new Poet Laureate, working closely with him or her to continue the cultural growth of our harbour city. It would also be a great honour to be able to extend my hand to other young poets within Nanaimo's community, to give them a place and a person to come to for some guidance.

When I was a teenager, poetry saved me in a way, from myself. It was a way of healing, reaching out, telling others they aren't alone in their feelings and making sense of it all in my own head. To be honest, it still acts as that vice for me. I do it because I have to, because it comes naturally, and for a long time I didn't even know it was poetry that I was writing. Eventually I started a blog to share my poems, back when they were raw and unedited, just the word vomit of an anxious fifteen year old girl. I was surprised by how many of my readers reached out to me, to tell me that reading my work had actually changed something inside of them, made them feel less alone. It started as something I did for me, a way of combating my own loneliness, but I never imagined it would actually help someone else, and bring people together.

As the Youth Poet Laureate it would be my personal goal to extend this feeling to other young poets within the community, to help them find or rediscover a voice that matters: their own. Poetry has a tendency to be undervalued, and I think that young poets like myself have a hard time sometimes even admitting in today's world how much we love and appreciate this ancient form of communication. And maybe that's because poetry makes us vulnerable when it comes from the heart. In writing, it offers sanctuary, but in sharing, it exposes you. Everyone wants to be a rock star or an athlete; form bands and sports teams, and as a result there are plenty of ways to connect through those things, but not so much for painters, sculptors, or poets. It would be my hope to bring the young poets together, not to become the best or the most brilliant but just to share, for the fun of it. Just to get the things on our chests out there because all art forms are beautiful, as are the people who make them.

I've spent some time this week wondering how, as the youth poet laureate, I would do that. How I would create a safe space for youth to write, read and share poetry, and get them a

little more comfortable with putting the word vomit out there, even when it's messy. My ideas so far include a youth poetry writing group. I would call it something catchy like "The Writer's Block" and once a month have a meeting at a library or coffee shop. It could be a place for members to bounce ideas off one another, discuss and get advice from me. I could talk about how to write different types of poems and have them each try a new format every month. It would be an easy thing to make a Facebook group or website for so we could all stay connected.

My second idea was inspired by the Nanaimo Poetry Anthology. I would like to gather a collection of poems written by high school students, not necessarily any particular theme, and create a Youth Poetry Anthology. We could publish anonymously for anyone feeling a bit shy, but it would be a great way to share and read what other young writers are thinking and feeling. This anthology could come in physical form, or be created as an e-book.

My third idea is a little less developed, but something like a poetry tree or a poetry wall. It could be at the harbour front library, and young poets could submit their work to be hung on the tree. Poems on the tree could be changed every three months.

Thank you for taking the time to read my application. It's nice to know we can all feel fortunate to live in a city that takes the time and resources to embrace art and culture, and reach out to young people. I look forward to hearing your decision.

Sincerely,

Kailey DeFehr

Nanaimo, B.C.

Life on a Rock

There's a calm, a simplicity
in the air we breathe,
fresh off the ocean breeze.
It's what makes a home out of this town,
from the rocky shores
to the rockiest mountains in the background.
It's the smell of the rain,
it's the cry of a seagull,
it's the way the lighthouses stand tall
under shadows of soaring eagles.
It's the waves that quietly whisper
as an old boat is gently rocked.
It's the arbutus leaves that rustle
down by the harbour where lovers walk.
There's just something about it,
being tucked among mountains and trees,
bound by the tides of the ocean
like a sailor, his heart impelled by the sea.
It's the thrill of children's laughter
as they play make believe.
It's the pirate hats they wear,
it's the colour of Fall leaves.
And it's the quiet of reading a book,
your feet in the water, hanging over a dock,
when you know your heart is anchored to this town,
to life on a rock.

Coming Home

I kissed him first
in the full moonlight
under a canopy of evergreens,
dusted with stars and crystalized
raindrops. He was leaning against

the mud-splattered tire of his
faded red quad in dirty work boots,
ankles crossed, his friend's
amber truck lights casting long
shadows of our bodies
out toward the still water's edge
of Barsby Lake.

He tasted of Lucky and cherry
Blackstones, his rough, tan hands
coming to rest on my too-wide hips,
pulling himself into the warmth beneath
his own green and black plaid jacket,
draped like a blanket over my
now unwinding shoulders.

We were practically kids,
new-found freedom hanging over
our heads like a ball of yarn for a kitten;
not a clue what to do with a happy ending
if we ever did manage to snag one.

And yet I knew even then
what coming home was supposed
to feel like. And he was all wind chimes
on the front porch, steak, potatoes,
and a pair of old, paint-splattered,
faded blue jeans.

Van Island Proud

All my friends, they want a taste;
a chance to feed the urge to abandon ship or sail away.
They'll trade mountains for skyscrapers,
and ferries for sky trains.
They see me, just an island girl, content in the rain
and they wonder
why I'd choose such a stranded, sheltered life,
like the Georgia Straight is a jacket I wear on my life.
They laugh, Nanaimo,
the harbour "city" that's mostly a town.
They puzzle over my loyalty,
try their damndest to break me down.
Move away for my own good, they tell me,
as they wave the white flag.
Well, this island girl is hoisting the cross bones
and strapping on the peg leg.
Not everyone needs to have a big city dream.
Not everyone needs to leave to know that they're lucky.
Here we are the mountain climbers,
the dream chasers, the pioneers.
We eat the best damn fish n' chips and drink imported beer.
We paint our crosswalks like rainbows,
race bathtubs and eat Nanaimo Bars;
and every damn one of us looks like a fucking movie star.
And we've raised some good ones,
or at least that's what I've heard,
and they still come for poutine and the best B.C. herb.
I'll take it from my grandfather, who was a merchant marine.
He once sailed here from Norway and never wanted to leave.
So I'll shout it out from the West Coast,
I'll scream it out loud;
I'm blessed and I'm happy,
and I'm Van Island proud.

KAILEY DEFEHR

Nanaimo BC

OBJECTIVES

To become the City of Nanaimo's first youth poet laureate.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Publication of short story in online literary magazine, *Literary Juice*.
- Nanaimo's 2016 Poetry in Transit participant.
- Nanaimo's poetry map participant.
- Two publications in Nanaimo's Poetry Anthology edited by Jonathan Bigelow.
- Reading at the 2016 Hazelwood Literary Festival.
- Portfolio of over 120 poems.
- Excellent English and Creative Writing student.

EDUCATION

Vancouver Island University

Current | Bachelor of Arts, Creative Writing

Vancouver Island University

2013 | Dental Assisting Certificate

Dover Bay Secondary

2007-2012 | Dogwood Diploma

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Volunteer Work | Nanaimo BC

Peer Tutor 2010 – 2011