

Uttered chaos

*AN INTERVIEW WITH SHARON LASK MUNSON
11/15/11*

UC: Who are you? Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

SLM: I am a retired teacher, always a bit on the adventurous side. After college, I taught overseas for five years; in England, Germany, Okinawa, and Puerto Rico. Following that, I drove up the Alcan Highway to Alaska where I put down new roots, taught, married, and lived for the next twenty years. I retired to Eugene, Oregon.

UC: What do you do when you are not writing?

SLM: When I'm not writing I'm reading. Still, I'm always writing, so they go together. I travel. France is coming up next spring. I play a little golf in the summer. In winter, I make pots and pots of soup. I meet friends for coffee or breakfast, my favorite meal out. It's that first cup of coffee, I'm sure.

UC: What is your writing process? Do you follow a regular routine?

SLM: I have a regular routine in the morning. I write from around eight in the morning until ten-thirty or eleven. Then I head to a local coffee shop with my laptop or a book to read. Sometimes I take my fountain pen and a box of stationary. I write on and off throughout the day, but from noon on there is no routine. I wrote a favorite poem riding my bicycle from Eugene to Harrisburg. I always have a small notebook and the stub of a pencil with me.

UC: What are the most important elements of good writing? According to you, what tools are must-haves for writers?

SLM: The most important thing for me is having my own writing room. I took over a spare bedroom, emptied it of bed and dresser, and moved in the essentials; a desk for my computer, a comfortable hardback desk chair, a bookshelf, a file cabinet, and an old cushioned chair of my mother's that goes back to my childhood. Plus, I need good lighting. When I write I like silence and I need to be alone.

UC: What motivates you to write?

SLM: Different things motivate me to write. A mood. A memory. The smell of cooking. Burning leaves. A windy day. Rain. Fog. Music. Someone or something I observe. An event. I think all of my senses are involved in putting pen to paper. I can't write on call. I never know what will be coming next. I can't write for a specific purpose. It's all attuned to memory and emotion. From my upstairs office window, I look out on tall oaks. The trees and the changing seasons create a kind of peace that makes writing possible.

UC: Do you ever suffer from writer's block? If so, what do you do about it?

SLM: Writer's block happens. I don't worry. I find there's nothing I can do. I simply continue on with life...and the words will flow again.

UC: Do you have any advice for other writers?

SLM: The most important thing for me is to have a weekly writing group. Find one that is supportive. Have the other poets sitting at a table. A serious atmosphere is important. Get oral and written feedback. Find a group that encourages the poet in you. Take workshops. Don't try and make your voice like others. Be yourself.

UC: What is the message in your book? What are your readers' reactions to it?

SLM: My poems inform, recount, evolve. I write narratives about what I see, remember, and feel. I write stories of life. I write about the world around me. The letters, emails, and calls I receive give me pause. They make me appreciative of the audience I have. I try to be objective in my writing. I write from the heart.

UC: What are your current / future projects?

SLM: My chapbook, "Stillness Settles Down the Lane," was published in 2010 by Uttered Chaos. It's huge success gave me the pluck to send out a full-length collection of poetry to Blue Light Press. Things build upon each other. My full-length book of poems will be out shortly. I continue to write daily. I love what I do. Whatever happens next will be what's supposed to happen. I keep all options open. To contact Sharon: www.sharonlaskmunson.com.