

OCTOBER AGAIN

Early October, it begins. Down the round brown hills
of Paso Robles, off balmy beaches at Santa Cruz, out of San Francisco
fog, over Mendocino hills and Sonoma vineyards, ghosts
trudge up the coast to this green valley where fir boughs fly
in gusty wind and slant rain.

Ghosts glide by: mother, sisters, husbands, friend after friend,
too many to count this cruel October, and here comes death
like the year before and the year before that, toehold in the door
all month and into November. So what do you want to know,
Mr. Death? Whether I still believe in something?

People exist and then they do not. This day yellow and brown leaves rattle
to the hard ground: no crimson, bronze, gold to behold. A red
button mushroom sprouts from a small hollow in the vine maple.
Warblers return to harvest insects from gray lichen.
This night a lunar eclipse.

~Karen Locke

The following publications have included poems by Karen Locke: *Calyx*, *13th Moon*, *Luckiamute Four*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Eugene Anthology of Writers #1* (Northwest Review Books), *Ploughshares*, *Fireweed*, *The Absence of Something Specified*, and others. After a long hiatus devoted to teaching and family, she is writing poetry again and is honored to be included in the 1st & 3rd Thursday Poetry Group.

Karen Locke: I imagine my writing process is similar to that of many others. I keep extensive notebooks filled with ideas: something someone said, something I read, a news item, a quotation, an encounter, the view outside the kitchen window, a dream, word lists, images. I try to keep regular writing times throughout the week. Once I have a draft of a poem, I revise and revise some more, keeping in mind a quotation attributed to Charles Dickens: “Writers don’t write, they rewrite.”

Sometimes I write from prompts provided in Toni Hanner’s Jump Start group, a place to explore and experiment with ideas and forms. Some poems simply arrive almost complete. Others take years to finally evolve to a place that feels finished enough for now. It’s not uncommon for a poem to change substantially after some years have passed. A poem that took years to feel ready for an audience is “Learning to Love Dandelions” in this anthology. I had complained to the young man working in my yard about the multitude of dandelions taking over. His philosophy was not to fight them but to accept some of them. “You must learn to love dandelions,” he wisely stated.

Soon after, thinking of a poem, I listed what I knew about dandelion virtues. Several years later, I wrote eight short lines containing details a poem might reveal. Even later, I saw goldfinches feeding on dandelion seeds; that experience gave me a way to both end the poem and to see how the tone and images in the poem could connect. At least four drafts after that, I took the poem to the 1st & 3rd Thursday Poetry Group where seven smart, talented, Karen Locke generous, and good-humored women gave excellent advice, some of which I incorporated into the version in this anthology.



bio from the anthology *Penumbra* (Uttered Chaos) 2017