VoiceCatcher event promises poetry, prose on June 11

A group of writers will present their poetry and prose June 11 as a part of a series of readings being staged by VoiceCatcher, a journal promoting female writers and artists in the greater Portland/Vancouver area. This is the fourth of seven such readings VoiceCatcher has promoted this year, along with three art exhibits, according to Carolyn Martin, VoiceCatcher's president and website managing editor.

“We are not only publishing women, we are run by women and are creating a community of women,” she adds.

The four writers who will stage the upcoming reading are Brandi Katherine Herrera, a poet and editor whose chapbook “the specificity of early spring shadows” will be published this year by Bedouin Books; Trista Cornelius, who teaches writing, literature and food studies at Clackamas Community College; Deb Scott, a published poet and artist who is VoiceCatcher's design manager; and Betsy Fogelman Tighe, a librarian and published poet whose work in Verseweavers earned her third prize by the Oregon Poetry Association in the New Poets category.

The Tribune talked to each of these writers about the following subjects — why she writes and what subjects concern her; whether or not there’s such a thing as “women's literature”; and why she’s publicly reading her work.

**Why she writes and what she writes**

Cornelius addresses “every day things that have a lot of significance once you take time to look at them, things like food, running, brief interactions with strangers.”

Fogelman Tighe says, “I write because I read — because poetry whispers straight to my soul,” adding: "Lately I’ve discovered that what I want to do is write the poetry of witness. To write other people's stories in poems.”

Herrera says she's written poems “mostly as an attempt to connect with something much larger than myself. It's the best tool I have to help make sense of the world I live in and the people who inhabit it, to process challenges associated with the human condition, and as a means to preserve my family's cultural narratives.”

Scott says she started writing to “think more clearly. And because I love words — their sounds, meanings, history.”

**Women's literature**

Cornelius doesn't believe literature has to be gender-specific to be worth reading.

“**I think these labels and divisions are arbitrary,” she adds. “There are stories that entertain us, stories that transform us, and stories that help us understand the puzzling experience of being human.”**

Fogelman Tighe says: “I am interested in hearing the world described from the feminine perspective. And I want domestic themes to have merit. I think women's work is equally, if not more, important than men's. It saddens me that the way we want to change the world is to bring women into the masculine arena, rather than men into the feminine. But, really, all good writing is the same. It uses the personal experience to describe the universal. It transcends differences.”

Herrera says: “female poets, especially those who write narrative poetry, are still so readily categorized as 'confessional,' that as a woman you really do have to consider the first person 'I' as a risky choice. It's
definitely something I work to avoid when I can for this very reason.”

She adds that “if a poet does their job well, they are able to tell stories that both men and women connect with by tapping into the most fundamental human experiences, or providing them a space to become wholly absorbed in.”

Scott acknowledges mixed feelings about the topic.

“I believe the cloister of any kind allows a freedom to reveal and learn,” she says. “But I don't want to live in a cloister. And I don't always relate to women as easily as I do to beings of all sorts.”

For one thing, she says, she's not a mother.

“That said, many of my friends are moms and grandmothers, so it's part of life,” she adds.

She says that “I will not read a certain type of so-called feminine work, and I stay far away from books and websites with flowers and woo-woo music and pictures of goddesses. Not my thing.”

**Why read in public?**

Cornelius says reading in public helps her develop a more critical ear for her own writing.

“Pieces I thought were polished reveal their flaws,” she says. “Having a real audience right in front of you raises the bar.”

Fogelman Tighe has a background in theater and says reading poetry aloud is less forgiving than reading it on the page.

“I don't think you can pawn off a bad poem with a good reading, but I do think you can make a written poem come way alive by reading it aloud.”

Herrera says she tries to sound as natural as possible when she reads.

“I try not to deviate too much from my own natural speech, but also realize that reading poetry is something entirely special, as its lyricism and musicality naturally lend itself to something quite different than prose when read out loud,” she says.

Scott echoes the other writers' contention that a piece that doesn't sound good aloud probably needs improving.

“Some of my poems don't work very well aloud — a sign they are not very good — and some do,” she says. “My personal goal is to not get in the way of the words, to give enough space so the listener is comfortable with the pace, for me to be very much in the moment and grounded.

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**VoiceCatcher**

**WHAT:** VoiceCatcher: a journal of women’s voices & visions reading

**WHEN:** 7-9 p.m. June 11

**WHERE:** Milepost 5, 900 N.E. 81st Ave.

**INFO:** 503-729-3223, [www.voicecatcher.org](http://www.voicecatcher.org)

**Writer's excerpts:**

"Kids in street-clothes careen down the gritty-white slope, grab boards' edges. Graffitied fealty-marks transform their full-face respirators into the maws and eyes of other-world insects. The tall teenagers are especially formidable: mechanical praying mantises with full-grown wings. They free fall, then swarm the tented hut like Mad Max Bedouin princes, ordering Red Bulls and nachos. That's my business plan anyway."

— From "Tailings Pond Bitter" by Deb Scott

**...**

"we thought of the absence
we could not describe
and listened
for another whale fall —
the arc
of its enormous body
like the tail
of a dying comet
the farthest
reaches
of a star lit universe
somewhere
above us
shadowing the mirror
of our tiniest movements."
— From "Whale Fall" by Brandi Katherine Herrera

• • •
"A silver haze curtains the wide, empty avenues. A jogger dressed in black comes into focus, running toward you down the middle of the street, only the second person you’ve seen in this post-apocalyptic rain. You prepare a smile, consider leaping out from the sidewalk to embrace her, to acknowledge: ’We’re here! You and me, out in this! No one else.’ Obviously you’re sisters.
— From "Running with Dragons" by Trista Cornelius

• • •
In the broad field behind Merion Elementary, where the heavy-soled shoes of boys playing ball had knocked up all the grass, leaving dirt puddles we bathed in during recess, Sally, freckles sprinkling her face like the cinnamon sugar
— From "In 4th Grade, Sally Teaches Me the Bases" by Betsy Fogelman Tighe