

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

San Mateo County Poet Laureate Caroline Goodwin

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

About this poem:

At the last Board of Supervisors' meeting that included a poetry reading, Supervisor Dave Pine was presented with a gift that included a photograph from San Bruno Mountain. I had never visited the park, so I decided that I would make a trip and respond with a poem. Imagine my delight when the first words I saw on the informational sign by the parking lot were "Mission Blue." Perfect for a title!

I learned about the endangered Mission Blue butterfly and other species that live on the mountain, and I researched the history of the park. As I composed the poem, I was thinking about the concept of "the mountaintop" in our collective imagination, the idea that Joy Harjo writes about in her memoir *Crazy Brave*, that "When beloved Sun rises, it is an entrance, a door to fresh knowledge" and the memory of my grandfather Les Yaw, who worked as a missionary in Alaska for sixty years.

I have enjoyed April's *Poetry Is Heritage* campaign and I want to thank everyone who helped highlight the many poetic traditions, languages and voices that make our County such a vibrant place.

MISSION BLUE

(for San Bruno Mountain State and County Park)

I go up before sunrise, before the light
finds the promenade and salt flats
and marina, the baylands and lagoon
alive with willows and goldeneye

and before the door opens in the east
and the night shift clocks out
and the parents and older brothers and sisters
come home to the younger ones

to wake them and prepare the first
meal of the day, my own heart
opening into the familiar, into the old
grief blue as a glacier

I go up. And when the light reaches
the water at the center
of every lupine, when the blue wings come
like a blessing to cover my eyes,

there is my grandfather
leaving the garden, offering
bright lettuce and the formula
for a good crop -- *one starfish under every*

potato and a layer of herring eggs in March --
hand over his heart, hand
placing the last rose, the sun opening
over the bay, into the stonecrop,

into the blue wings we all hold onto there.