

# SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



## Poetry Reading *by*

**San Mateo County Poet Laureate Caroline Goodwin**

**Tuesday, October 20, 2015**

### **About this poem:**

My mother was born in Sitka, Alaska in 1936. Sitka is the former Russian capital of the state and the traditional home of the Tlingit nation. It's a very special place, with a complicated history and a vibrant contemporary arts community. In the fall of 2011, I was invited to share the stage with the poet Ishmael Hope, at a reading in honor of his late father, Andrew Hope III. Andrew was an Alaska Native civil rights leader and a fine poet himself.

The reading was held in the historic Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall on Katlian Street. For more than a hundred years, this hall as served as a place for ceremonies, community dinners, arts and educations programs, and much more. I was thrilled to be included in this event, and I was very moved by Ishmael Hope's poem entitled "Storyteller" which I would like to read now.

Reflecting on my experiences as your poet laureate and giving readings here and there, I am reminded of the vital role a meeting hall plays in fostering community. I think about our beautiful libraries and community centers here in San Mateo County, and I am grateful for the opportunity to experience these different places. When I was preparing my poem for today, I was in a coffee shop in Half Moon Bay at sunset, and I overheard some teenagers working on their homework. The poem is about missing home, my friends who are involved in the arts in Alaska, how important it is to keep asking questions, and how connections can arise at times out of the blue. I hope you enjoy it.

## AFTERNOON AT THE COFFEE SHOP, HALF MOON BAY

for Lily & Ishmael Hope

by Caroline Goodwin

a keychain, a length of thread  
and the sourdough

bread and pancakes  
at the hall

where i caught these  
edges of dreams

torn yarn goat wool  
seed beads and otter

kids around the kitchen  
split wood

woman at the loom  
how far away you seem

flounder hill and the shape  
of the inlet

where the man in flannel  
the late sun

and the blackbirds hold light  
in their eyes

like they always do  
like you've taught me

to listen when  
the girl tells her friend:

*explain how you can see your breath  
on a cold morning and not  
on a warm day...*

ah! the sound of the rain the blue  
forest, green glacier

crashing down into  
my hands