

BlazeVOX Interview with Cornelia Veenendaal

Tell me about your book.

These poems are like bag of letters to various readers, and myself, about my life in Dorchester, a neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts.

What influenced this book?

Walking, public transportation, wonder and awe, the encouragement of my workshop friends.

Where does this book fit into your career as a writer?

The book covers a long middle part, culled from what could become more collections, still unpublished.

If you had to convince a friend or colleague to read this book, what might you tell them?

I hope the poems will speak to you, and that you'll find me growing.

Tell me about the last literary reading you attended.

I live in the North Country now and don't get to readings as easily as I did when I lived in Boston. Last summer I went to some of the readings of the Frost Festival, in and around Franconia, N H.



When did you realize you were a writer?

In college I wrote poems and sent them to the student magazine. The students said, "You're a poet." Writing poems helped shape my career as a teacher; it brought me friends and colleagues, peer workshops and the cooperative press, Alice James Books.

Tell us about your process: Pen and Paper, computer, notebooks ... how do you write?

A poem begins in my head and locates itself in distance; has its own way on a page of my notebook; sooner or later gets typed on Olivetti or laptop. Risks being read in a writers' group, where it is met with silence, useful suggestions, sometimes with celebration. Back to the keyboard. For some poems, years of revisions go by. Then, to my surprise, I find some first drafts are not so bad!

How do you handle a bad review of your work?

My friend Jean Pedrick used to say that there is no bad review. I remind myself that the attention can be good.

Which writer would you most like to have a drink with, and why?

Chekhov. Janet Malcolm, for her book on him. Ian Frazier and Elif Batumen, for their New Yorker pieces I've saved.

What's the biggest mistake you've made as a writer?

Not risking enough, among all the other mistakes.

What's the worst advice you hear authors give writers?

I draw a blank on this one.

What scares you the most?

Most scary things are pretty bad; speaking in public is probably at the top of the list.

Where do you buy your books?

I buy books on line, or at library sales, but I'd rather buy them in independent book stores if they're nearby or available.

Who are you reading now?

Essays by Joseph Brodsky. My Life as a Foreign Country, a Memoir by Brian Turner. A Village Life, by Louise Gluck.

What is your favorite TV show at the moment?

Charlie Rose's conversations, especially with actors and (some) politicians.

What do you want the world to know about you?

I believe the world will get it right.