

# A Poet's Voice

Kim Goldberg

Kim Goldberg is a poet, journalist and author of six books. Her articles on politics, social justice and environment have appeared in *Maclean's*, *Canadian Geographic*, *New Internationalist*, *The Progressive*, *Columbia Journalism Review* and numerous other magazines. Her first poetry collection, *Ride Backwards on Dragon*, was short-listed for Canada's Lampert Memorial Award for poetry. Her latest book, *RED ZONE*, is a photo-illustrated verse map of Nanaimo's homeless population. It went into its second printing after just seven weeks and has been adopted as a literature course text at Vancouver Island University. Visit: [www.pigsquashpress.com](http://www.pigsquashpress.com)

*Author's Statement* I have long harboured a fantasy about what the world would be like if the nightly news were a poemcast. Or if poetry were the language of the street corner, the bus stop, the coffee shop. I believe that poetry has, in its own covert way, already become the new journalism, supplanting the siftings of corporate media with a more authentic rendering of the modern world. However, I am suspicious of any poem that sets out on a pre-determined mission. The poet who tries to steer her poem toward a worthy cause or message betrays the essence of poetry and its potential for magic.

## Fallow Deer on Sidney Spit

Their browse line tortures the island  
like a Victorian corset, cinching  
spill of green to trim waist  
rising four feet from ground. Every  
leaf and blade ripped clean  
away, native plantscape stripped naked  
from navel down. Neither their breeding  
success nor the subsequent botanical  
undressing were anticipated  
when they were shipped from England  
all the way to James Island in the early  
nineteen hundreds to be hunted (if one  
can call it that) by Canadians –  
and I suppose Yanks too – craving a taste  
of the old country, longing to blast away  
at those spotted hides. So they swam  
to Sidney Island (and who can blame them?)  
where they have no predators  
and are further protected by the island  
now being a provincial park  
(which was really quite a smart play  
on their part if you think about  
it). But when prey become aggressors,  
what's left for the rest of us?

## Sunset Undone (ghazal\*)

(\* an ancient form of Arabic verse involving  
repetition and internal rhyme)

I tilt my way down melting streets, each slippery step undone  
by icy wind and gutter slush. Winter's snowy heft undone.  
Numb fingers grump inside wool gloves, lamenting that  
abandoned mug of steamy tea—by necessity left undone.  
Yet these small miseries they shame me when laid beside the truth  
of blistered moonscape and blockades, a city's breath undone.  
I hurry to the crossroads of colliding worlds, terminal avenue  
cleaving commercial like a severed worm, soft flesh undone.  
We hoist our placards high against wet gusts, chins tucked,  
firm grip on simple message of life's ravelling weft undone.  
I grab an "O" as we form a curbside row of alphabet-teeth, an urgent  
mouth pleading "CEASEFIRE NOW," leave some shred undone.  
People pass, barely glance, stretch to press the "Walk" button,  
don't even know Gaza is the topic or ragged tourniquets undone.  
Cars and trucks shoot by, some honk, some shout "fucking faggots!"  
(Is this war's buckled root? A faulty proof of manhood best undone?)  
A furtive man approaches, suggests we protest something huge  
like government mind control via toaster ovens, our behest undone.  
And whether it made a difference, raised awareness, sowed a seed  
or two of restless thought, is anybody's educated guess undone.  
All you can do is your best and then post it to facebook. If I knew  
how to drop poems not bombs on Gaza, I would know regret undone.  
I will start with this poem, stuffed in some kind of bottle transformed  
from its mini-mart origins and tossed toward a sunset undone.

## Desoto Love

The summer I was seventeen, my boyfriend (the first one I really loved) snuck me into the drive-in in the trunk of his 1960 Desoto that I helped him paint the week before (abalone blue like his eyes). And looking back, I'm not sure why I'm the one who had to go in the trunk, or why I said "yes," or why he couldn't just pay the extra buck seventy-five. But I only weighed a hundred and ten pounds, and trunks were really spacious in those days (even with four dead batteries stuffed alongside me). Besides, he was just back from Vietnam and I was glad to see him still in one piece. Eighteen years later he lost his right hand in a sawmill blade. But at the drive-in, he was all there and all mine (once I got out of the trunk, that is). The flick was *Easy Rider*, but don't ask me for a recap since we were having sex in the back seat till the credits, which didn't feel as good as I thought it would (the sex, I mean) 'cause there was a socket set or a beer bottle or something grinding into my hip bone the whole time. And some gear lube I must have picked up in the trunk was smeared on my bangs, which kept slapping my eyes like wet spaghetti. Next week, when we were at a keg party up the river, it started to rain and my bell-bottom jeans that I'd spent about a hundred hours sewing patches and leather-strapped beads onto for the last half-year began to disintegrate until they fell right off my legs, which everyone thought was a gas (except me). And when my boyfriend stopped laughing, he said it was the battery acid from the trunk of the Desoto. But he found me some coveralls, and we smoked a big fattie. Love is like that.

from *Ride Backwards on Dragon* (Leaf Press, 2007)

## Urban Planning

Train tracks scrape past the sun-hammered miners' shacks left over from the last century. The front side is tarted up as the Historic Old Quarter. But the backside holds the story. Just ask the crumbling sunflower sentries guarding the ass-end of the Women's Center. Or the weather-stripped shiplap on the Bride's Closet next door luffing like a beaten flag while some gunk the color of old blood drips from a rusty pipe. I know this stuff because I am now at a sufficiently advanced stage in my daily rail-walking to support a head-up gaze at my surroundings without tumbling into the thorns. Beyond the bridal store the shaling Occidental Hotel and Bar prevails like an asylum for the criminally insane. While across the tracks a torn quilt pocked with bodily stains lies splayed on a weedy patch behind the Thrift Shop – a cardboard box nightstand totters beside. She will sleep here again tonight unless chance finds her at the copshop on the corner or perhaps in the bed of someone she meets in the Oxy. And if he's not too bad, maybe they'll get hitched and pay a visit to the Bride's Closet (except that's likely where her problems started – it's all so cyclotronic). He'll probably keep spending his nights at the Oxy, coming home mean, talking fist-speak, till she ducks out, goes to the Women's Center, which will be closed due to funding cuts, so she'll do some dumpster diving in the donation box outside the Thrift Shop till she finds another quilt and a spot to lie.

from *Red Zone* (Pig Squash Press, 2009)