

LOOKING FOR WATER STORIES

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ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION:

As an immigrant settler, I contemplate my role as witness and participant in relation to water and First Nations people, who, for many generations, have been guardians of the ecosystems where I live. The poem I offer here is a reflection and response to my experience of witnessing a First Nations community during a consultation on the topic of water treatment systems with the engineering initiative *Res' Eau*. My poem, *Looking for Water Stories*, contemplates a relationship to water and humanity through physical, socio-cultural, historical and spiritual perceptions. The poem is the form which my field notes took on spontaneously whilst listening to community members share their stories about water. My intent with this contribution is to offer insights about the experience of witnessing in role as an artist-researcher within an interdisciplinary research project. Through the back and forth of listening and writing

in the present moment as stories were shared, this poem expresses the rhythm of present moments captured and the memory of them revisited. My observations took on a poetic responsiveness that I would not have otherwise been able to express as a silent witness, and this expression of my witnessing holds in its creative process a deep contemplative practice with community.

BIO:

Janice was born in the Philippines and grew up in Kitimat, British Columbia, Canada. As a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Education at UBC and a new mom, Janice's research is exploring what it means to witness stories as an artist-researcher with a Filipino-Canadian lens. The heart of her dissertation will take form as an auto-ethnographic performance in response to an arts-based creation process with migrants in Metro Vancouver.

Looking for Water Stories

I have to go pee
We're here. There it is.
No, it's locked.
Gas. Coffee. Shop.
Do you have a toilet I can use?
5 bucks! Oh, I don't have that.
You'll have to work it off.
Okay, I can work.

Sprinklers dancing upon peaceful green
Longhouse door, heavy
Opens to a hum of quiet
Sweet smell of cedar
embraces, warms me
Each breath in,
air of sacred

Air of ancestry,
air of anticipation
What might we discover today, together?
Together. Nothing is too big.
Tubig - "water" in Tagalog
language of a land cradled and

broken
by water
the mother tongue of the Philippines
my birthplace, the motherland of our family and
not a place I know well, but one I come from

Not a name I wanted, but one I got
a trickster teaching transformations
My mother passed away talking about water.

She had a stroke. Our Mother.
Stroke of wisdom – “Why are you asking me?
Water is important for everyone.”
And people are still fighting.

Six months to get a bucket of paint
Get support
A purpose to lead
Mothers and children and their children
Like the picture you took of the family
That doesn't capture you
You were operating the instrument of care.

Three rivers and a song of universal purpose
used by every Nation
no singular ownership
Water – given by Creator
For universal purpose
Used by everyone, in everyone,
Everyone brought into this world by water.

Opening a new door to sacred water
Treat it with respect
We are sacred water
Listen with respect
Pick an elder
 Ask them what they want
 Ask them what they know
 What they wonder about, for the wonderment of childhood

Prayers. Water. Prayers. Water
 Be in a spiritual way
Say prayers to the water
Water is spiritual
We are spiritual
 We are water
 A poem as prayer
 to the water in you and me.

The World
 Water.
 We want
 Water
to
 Be

