

Denise Low

Distinguished Kansas Poet

- [E-mail Denise](mailto:Denise@deniselow.net)
- www.deniselow.net



Denise (Dotson) Low, Ph.D., is chair of the English Department at Haskell Indian Nations University, where she also teaches creative writing and American Indian Studies courses.

Her book, *Words of a Prairie Alchemist*, a collection of essays, was published by Ice Cube Press (2006). A poem collection, *Thailand Journal*, was named a notable book of 2003 by the *Kansas City Star*, and her book, *New & Selected Poems, 1980-1999*, was published by Penthe Press. She also edited *Wakarusa Wetlands in Word & Image* for the Lawrence Arts Center's Imagination & Place Committee (2005).

Low was guest co-editor of Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, a special issue of *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, UCLA, 28.1 (2004). Her articles, essays, and reviews of American Indian literature appear in *Studies in American Indian Literature*, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *American Indian Quarterly*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Kansas City Star*, and others.

She is a 5th generation Kansan of mixed German, Scots, Lenape (Delaware), English, French, and Cherokee heritage. She is a member of the Prairie Writers Circle of The Land Institute.

Kene: Bald Eagle

For Buddy Weso
"O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!"
Horatio (Hamlet)

My grandmother said we travel to stars
when we die. This dawn a bonfire hisses
blue flames against banked snow
guiding Uncle's journey from life
into unknown sky. Clouds obscure
heaven's embers. Around us white pines
collect tears from the driving wind.

Across the Wolf River a faint cry
and someone says "*kene*" just as softly
so I barely pick out both the bird's sound
and the spoken Algonquin word
from the burning, breaking splinters
and explosion of popping orange sparks—
familiar fireplace sounds I recognize—

but just as quickly I doubt soft voices
until again, in full daylight, the sound "*kene*."

Originally published in *Connecticut Review*

Mornings I Never Leave You

Mornings a misted road opens
its slow arc through floodplain.
The Wakarusa River tosses
somewhere south in the midst
of willows and osage orange.
To the east, Blue Mound rests
from its slow erosion as air
filters over it. The sun illumines
each hill, each piece of stone.

These mornings I rise from bed
and leave the solid shape of your back.
I leave the warm skin you fold
over me against cold
and the blotting of night.
Sun consumes the tail-end
of darkness. I leave your eyes
and drive into small changes—

grackles ornamenting a tree,
grass winnowing the wind.
White dew sifts back into sky.
Traced by distant branches
the Wakarusa,
a small river I never see,
loops through wet silt,
holding Earth in place.

Originally published in *Helicon 9 Anthology*



Denise Low

Distinguished Kansas Poet

- [E-mail Denise](mailto:denise@deniselow.net)
- www.deniselow.net

Two Gates

I look through glass and see a young woman
of about twenty, washing dishes, and the window
turns into a painting. She is myself thirty years ago.
She holds the same blue bowls and brass teapot
I still own. I see her outline against lamplight,
but she knows only her side of the pane. The porch
where I stand looks empty. Sunlight fades. I hear
water run in the sink and she lowers her head,
blind to the future. She does not imagine I exist.

I step forward for a better look and she dissolves
into lumber and paint. A gate I passed through
to the next life loses shape, and once more I stand
squared into the present, among mango trees
and scissor-tailed birds, in a Thai garden, almost
a mother to that faint, distant woman.

From A Thailand Journal

American Robin

Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.
Theodore Roethke

Cold sun brings this mourning season to an end—
year of my mother's death. Last winter thaw
my brother shoveled clay-dirt, she called it gumbo,
over what the crematorium sent back—not her,

but fine powdery substance, lightened, all else
rendered into invisible elements. That handful
of a pouch, un-boxed, was tucked into plotted soil,
the churchyard columbarium, a brass plaque the only

permanence, and brick retaining wall. So finally
my mother is a garden, day lilies and chrysanthemums
feeding from that slight, dampened, decomposing ash.
Her voice stilled. One ruddy robin in the grass,
dipping.

*All poetry on this page
Copyright © by Denise Low, 2006*