

DENISE LEA (DOTSON) LOW (1949 -)



As a fifth-generation Kansan, Denise Low writes verse that references the history and environmental concerns of this region. She grew up at the edge of Emporia, where the Flint Hills and town meet. Early experiences were with wildlife, grasslands plants, weather, and home gardens of the area. She learned to plant tomatoes every summer, and nothing bought in stores can compare to their flavor. From William Allen White, William Stafford, and William S. Burroughs, she learned the variety of Midwestern experiences and the idioms of that literary tradition.

Like Stafford, Low is conscious of time as another dimension, which has its own cycles, more recursive than linear. Transformation, rather than static grief, characterizes this elegy to her mother. A "columbarium" is a cemetery for people who have been cremated. The poem is a study in contrasts: cold and sun; brick and ash; organic and mineral; sky and earth; animate and inanimate; grief and joy. These oppositions constantly shift.

COLUMBARIUM GARDEN

**Cold sun brings this mourning season to an end,
one year since my mother's death. Last winter thaw
my brother shoveled clay-dirt, she called it "gumbo,"
over powdery substance the crematorium sent us,**

**not her, but fine, lightened granules—all else
rendered into invisible elements. That handful
from the pouch, un-boxed, was tucked into plotted soil,
the churchyard columbarium, under a brass plaque**

**and brick retaining wall, as semblance of permanence.
Now my mother is a garden—lilies and chrysanthemums
feeding from that slight, dampened, decomposing ash.
Her voice stilled. One ruddy robin in the grass, dipping.**

Education: Denise Low earned BA and MA degrees in English (University of Kansas 1971, 1974) and an MFA in Creative Writing from Wichita State University (1984). In 1997 she completed a PhD at the University of Kansas in English.

Career: Low has taught and been an administrator at Haskell Indian Nations University for 25 years. She also has been visiting Professor at the University of Richmond and KU. She has written and edited more than 20 books of poetry and prose. From 2007-2009 she served as Kansas Poet Laureate. She is on the national board of the Associated Writers and Writing Programs. Her awards include NEH, Lannan, KAC, and Poetry Society of America recognition. Her websites are www.deniselow.com and <http://deniselow.blogspot.com>. Books are available through www.mammothpublications.com and www.amazon.com