

<< POET POPULIST JOURDAN KEITH

# the people's poet

SEATTLE'S POET HOPES TO LINK PEOPLE AND VERSE IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

**LOCAL POET JOURDAN KEITH** may not be one of the royalty-appointed poet laureates of the past, but she still sees herself filling a role in the tradition of Chaucer and Wordsworth. Chosen as Seattle Poet Populist by city residents following an annual competition that culminates at Bumbershoot, Keith hopes to use her position to get poetry into unexpected places. She already leads "Haiku Hikes," re-creating for others a poetry-inspiring mountaintop experience through the Urban Wilderness Project, an organization she founded in 2004. She'd also like to see poetry lines etched on stones in the parks, readings in domestic violence shelters and more workshops to help others write their own poetry. Students at Cleveland High School, where she teaches as part of the Writers in the Schools program (run by Seattle Arts and Lectures), have already benefited from her teaching. "She showed me how to express myself without violence," said one student. ¶ The fifth person to hold the Poet Populist position since it was created in 1999 by Seattle City Council

member Nick Licata (one poet won twice), Keith was inspired to write her first poem after climbing a mountain in her youth; since then, the relationship between poetry and nature has always been inextricable. She pursued poetry at Temple University in Philadelphia, where she was an English major, and took workshops run by published poets. She's since published her poetry in an anthology and has read her work on the radio and TV. Her topics are diverse and sometimes polemical. "Maybe we will be too tired for war; / Maybe enough of us will remember out loud, / Vietnam / and the other stories our fathers did not tell," wrote the polite yet forceful Keith in "Enough of Us." ¶ "I believe poetry is required on a personal level," says Keith. "It's an integral part of people's days. Slowing down to realize it will help you survive and thrive." And if more people notice literal poetry on stones or the figurative poetic moments of each day, Keith knows she will have lived up to her role as the praised poet of the people. *Lindsey Rowe*