

Portland City Hall November 30, 2011

What words from me might be appropriate, might possibly be adequate here today?  
Words of gratitude, words of praise—those would come closest.

I begin with gratitude for Commissioner Randy Leonard, Randy Leonard and his wife Katie Whalen. I start here, with a Portland City Commissioner who cares enough about the life of arts and culture in our city to sponsor this resolution.

*Commissioner*—that word has a sturdy, reassuring sound. And it should. A commissioner is someone who has made a commitment, someone entrusted to meet an obligation. And in addition to his myriad duties on City Council, his responsibilities to the Water Bureau, to Fire and Rescue, Commissioner Leonard has taken his time, has entrusted the time of his staff members Sara and Ty, to celebrate the place of the arts in our lives.

For Randy Leonard, for Katie Whalen, I am grateful.

I begin with praise and gratitude for the Oregon Cultural Trust, for the Cultural Partners. I begin with the simple and—in my estimation—inarguable fact that without the sponsorship of the Cultural Trust and Partners, Oregon would not have a Poet Laureate.

When, in 1989, Bill Stafford resigned after 15 years as our Poet Laureate, he did so with considerable discouragement and disappointment, saying the appointment should be passed on to a different poet more frequently—he said after 15 years it was getting to be more like an aristocracy than a democracy! He pleaded for financial support for a Poet Laureate. After Bill resigned, Oregon went for 17 years without a Poet Laureate. And then, in 2006, Oregon Cultural Trust and the Cultural Partners stepped in to remedy that omission.

Last month, the Cultural trust celebrated its 9th birthday. 9 years of supporting arts and culture in every corner, valley, plateau and hillside of this state. 9 years of being one of the most remarkable arts and culture support organizations in America's history.

Do you think that's hyperbole? You think that's exaggeration? Then let me counter with another question. How many other states in these United States of America have a Cultural Trust?

The answer is none. None. Zip. Zilch. Oregon is the one and only. Our Cultural trust is unique.

For Oregon Cultural Trust, for Chris D'Arcy, for Commissioner Nick Fish and every other OCT board member, I am grateful.

I begin with praise and gratitude for Oregon Humanities, for Cara Ungar-Gutierrez, for Kristy Athens who serves as the liaison between the public and the Oregon Poet Laureate—maintaining an OPL web site, relaying requests to me.

For Oregon Humanities, for Cara, for Kristy, I am grateful.

I begin yet again with gratitude for.....

and at this point you might reasonably ask how in the world I can say I'm beginning in yet another place, how can I possibly have so many starting spots?

How? Because this gathering here today, this Resolution, is a consequence of community. Community: something with many beginnings, many starting places.

A consequence of community. Of joined forces, shared passions, mutual dreams. This resolution may say “Oregon Poet Laureate Paulann Petersen Day,”

but it’s about confluence, about community.

The result of the efforts of many.

Thus, I can begin again, this time with gratitude for Tavern Books, a small press founded by two of Oregon’s young literary lions, Carl Adamshick and Mike McGriff.

I’m on the board of advisors for Tavern Books, and when Carl and Mike announced the Tavern Books’ Community Project to place poetry collections on the shelves of rural and tribal libraries in Oregon, they gave me a gift. They gave me the chance, as OPL, to appeal to people throughout Oregon to donate books to the drive.

For Tavern Books, for Carl and Mike, I am grateful.

I’m grateful to my State Representative, Carolyn Tomei, who several years ago, began inviting poets to give convocations, to open legislative sessions by reading a poem. Carolyn, who more than once invited me to open sessions with a poem, who has supported my work as OPL whole-heartedly.

For Carolyn Tomei, I am grateful.

I am full of gratitude and admiration for Oregon’s libraries and librarians, for Jim Scheppke, our stellar State Librarian, for Jim Carmin, the Wilson Special Collections Librarian at that temple a few blocks from here, a.k.a. Central Library, For Sharon Bart, the director of my own neighborhood library, Sellwood Library.

I’m quite aware that I would most likely never have had the privilege and delight of making visits to spots such as Sheridan and Christmas Valley and Garden Home if it hadn’t been for the invitations from all those librarians.

OPL and Oregon Libraries, now that’s a partnership.

I’m grateful to Joy Bottinelli and Bill Howe, who made a special contribution to OCT, a contribution dedicated to helping with the expenses of OPL visits to spots in Oregon far, far from my Sellwood home.

To Joy and Bill, for their generosity, I’m grateful.

For my family—my son, Chris Petersen, daughter-in-law Maya, grandson Dylan, granddaughter Elena—for their support, I’m grateful.

For you dear friends who made the effort to be here today, who join me in celebrating this confluence, this community, I’m grateful.

For the dearest of friends, she who is light in our lives, source of wisdom and wit, fountain of inspiration, for Dorothy Stafford I am grateful.

I’m grateful for the man who, over a year ago, re-named himself. Who now calls himself

The Poet Laureate Delivery Service.

My husband Ken Pallack, who has been the driver in virtually all those 12,500+ miles on Oregon roads.

One evening earlier this fall, we pulled into the small parking lot in front of the Creswell Library, where I was due for a reading and presentation. We walked into the library, up to the check-out counter, behind which two young men, librarians, were standing. Ken announced to them, "This is the Poet Laureate Delivery Service. Are you ready to take delivery?"

For Ken's lively companionship, for his steadfast love and support, I am grateful.

I'm a native Oregonian. I'm a native Portlander. I love Portland. I'm irrationally biased in Portland's favor.

Commissioner Leonard, City of Portland, City of my birth, you do me great honor here today. And I am thankful. Truly thankful.

But I call on you, all of you, to note this: there is no way, none at all, to honor me, to honor Oregon's Poet Laureate, without honoring, without celebrating the confluence of remarkable people and remarkable organizations whose praises I sing—

the people and organizations for whom I say Hosannah.