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Jourdan Keith | Words are just part of her natural calling

By Jack Broom

Seattle Times staff reporter

Google "Jourdan Keith" and you face this choice:

Do you want the writer? The storyteller who's currently Seattle's "Poet Populist?"

Or do you want the outdoor enthusiast? The hike leader who founded the Urban Wilderness Project?

We caught up with both, who — conveniently — happen to be the same person, someone who's happiest when she's sharing her twin loves of language and the outdoors, whether in a writing workshop in a park, a short "Haiku Hike" or a 17-day backpacking trip.

On being a Philadelphia native who fell for Seattle: "I had a friend here and I came out in 1995 to see whether it was livable.

At the time, there were jobs falling off trees and it was just beautiful ... the mountains, the water. I came in the summer. It wasn't raining."

Biggest surprise here: "People were very friendly, but never really invited you to their homes. Someone said they're the nicest people that you'll never get to know."

Why she created the Urban Wilderness Project: "There's a cultural gap that keeps a lot of people of African and Latino descent out of the wilderness. I wanted to address that gap."

Favorite outdoor spot in Seattle: "Genesee Park [where she does volunteer work]. It's a little wilderness because it has this big meadow. You can see the lake and you can walk quietly around. Or you can just disappear into the side of a hill."

Favorite indoor spot: "My living room, looking into our backyard. Our yard is a wildlife habitat, which means we don't do a lot of gardening. We get all kinds of birds — a little symphony the last couple of weeks."



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Her "Haiku Hike" philosophy: "It's not: 'We're going to conquer this hill.' Instead, we're going to step into a different experience of the natural world ... slowing down enough to reflect and to notice and to write."

One of her hike-inspired haikus:

sorry moves like wind

across the face of the land

intending no change

Why she won't tell her age: "It's my secret. I work with kids a lot. I can tell them the same thing their parents tell them, but they will listen because they think I'm younger."

The rotating position of Seattle Poet Populist, chosen by an online vote prior to Bumbershoot, was created in 1999 by Seattle City Councilman Nick Licata.

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