



IN ORBIT WITH: ZOE FARRIS



A POET EXPLORING HOPE AND RESILIENCE IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL SPHERE

About Zoe Farris

Zoe Farris is a senior at Duke University studying marine science and Spanish. She is passionate about the ability of poetry and art in advancing environmental justice efforts worldwide. As a Presidential National Environment Leadership Fellow with the Rachel Carson Council and an Executive Board Member of the Duke Sustainable Oceans Alliance, she has developed platforms to engage communities and advocate for ocean conservation. Her current research examines the impacts of noise pollution on cetaceans. After graduating, Zoe aims to pursue a Ph.D. in marine biology and conduct research that informs equitable ocean policy.

Spotlight Piece: *I'm Angry, aren't you?*

This piece seeks to capture how the existential threat of the climate crisis exerts an ever-growing influence over our everyday lives in subtle and mundane ways. Written from the perspective of an adolescent, it examines the internal tension between a desperate desire to alleviate environmental suffering and the knowledge that we are, by virtue of our existence, perpetrators of it. This poem also serves as a critique of environmental movements that solely aim to alter individual behavior without taking into account the societal structures that subvert meaningful change.

In Conversation with Zoe Farris

What first drew you to storytelling, and how did your journey begin?

“I’ve always been a book fanatic, but my journey into storytelling really began in middle school when I started volunteering at my local library in Crozet, Virginia. As a member, and later a leader, of the library’s Teen Advisory Board, I was surrounded by other passionate young people who encouraged me to write my own stories. I quickly developed a love of poetry and the fact that it can convey so much meaning in so few words.

I began collecting poetry books and writing verses wherever I could—journals, scratch pieces of paper, and even birthday cards. In high school, the creative writing and literature courses that I took exposed me to a range of styles and allowed me to grow as a writer. Having my poetry published in two school-wide literary journals gave me the confidence to share my work more openly. In college, I hope to continue using poetry as a creative outlet, a means of self-expression, and a catalyst for change.”

How would you describe your work and the themes you keep returning to?

“My work explores a range of themes, but those I most often return to are the climate crisis, personal resilience, the tension between courage and helplessness, and the human connection to nature. Growing up alongside the emergence of iPhones, ChatGPT, and other revolutionary technologies, I’ve witnessed firsthand how digital reliance has intensified and blurred the lines between science fiction and reality. At the same time, there is a growing desire to step away from the screen and reconnect with the natural world—whether through unplugging, living “off the grid,” or rethinking our dependence on technology. As someone from a generation that has been fundamentally shaped by this tension, environmental justice appears in both subtle and overt ways in my everyday life. Poetry is a form of self-expression that forces me to step away from the screen while encouraging intentional, creative reflection.”

How does the environment or climate shape your work?

“The environment is always a character in my stories, and is often the protagonist. This is mostly a reflection of how I personify nature in my mind, attributing thoughts and emotions to nonhuman organisms and objects. However, there is also intention behind this style of writing. Personifying the natural world allows us to empathize with it, which in turn encourages

environmental stewardship. This is critical in changing our relationship with the environment from one of indifference and exploitation to care and responsibility. In doing so, we begin to recognize its inherent value rather than just its economic worth.”

What does your creative process look like from idea to finished piece?

“I am most inspired to write when immersed in nature, whether in the forest surrounded by soft ferns and rushing creeks, or on the beach, watching the wind create patterns in the sand. I initially jot down ideas on a piece of scrap paper or the notes app in my phone. Later, I sit down with those fragments and untangle my thoughts. It takes multiple iterations to find the rhythm and word choice that I am satisfied with. Once I have a complete draft of the poem, I set it aside for a week or so before returning to it with fresh eyes. Revisiting the poem later allows me to refine the language and improve the flow. By the end of the process, the final product often only bears a faint semblance of the initial idea.”

What are you working on right now?

“I was recently rewriting and editing *I’m Angry, aren’t you?*, a piece that I originally wrote for a school assignment two years ago. I find that revisiting my work a few years later allows me to refine and add greater meaning to it. I also crafted a Mother’s Day poem that uses Mother Earth as a metaphor for the nurturing love of my own mom. Although the presiding theme is somewhat cliché, it is composed of a conglomeration of unique and highly specific metaphors.”

Why do you think storytelling matters in shaping the future?

“Research and data are essential in providing a logical basis for the policies that are implemented, but stories are what truly inspire change. Whether we like it or not, humans are fundamentally emotional beings. Statistics alone have never motivated me to enact change—stories have. Reaching people on an emotional level is profoundly impactful. The data is the supporting evidence rather than the driving factor. Oral traditions have shaped history for centuries and will continue to do so far into the future. The question is not whether stories will matter but which stories will resonate most.”

What advice would you give to other emerging creatives?

“Don’t be afraid! Writing should be a fun, stress-relieving process—it doesn’t need to be “good” or even make sense. It is okay to start a piece and never finish

it. Writing is an opportunity for you to express yourself in a thoughtful and meaningful way, without pressure or expectation. Don't write for an audience—write for yourself. I've found that my strongest pieces are those in which I'm the most authentic."

If you could live in any fictional, sci-fi universe, where would you go and why?

"Although I'm not sure I would want to live in District 13, my favorite dystopian world is *The Hunger Games*. Aside from having a major girl crush on Jenifer Lawrence, I'm drawn to the blend of action and wilderness survival. When foraging for morels and wild berries on backpacking trips, I like to imagine I'm a part of that world.

Another reason I find this series so compelling is that, like many dystopian stories, it centers on a repressed population that rises up against a hegemonic government that exploits them. This theme resonates with many underserved and historically marginalized communities, and closely aligns with the ideas behind the environmental justice movement."