ZOKA: LOOKING FOR OVERLOOKED NATURE

IN THE SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE OF HEALDSBURG PLAZA

A NATURE WRITING WORKSHOP

*LED BY DAVE SETER, SONOMA COUNTY POET LAUREATE*

*SPONSORED BY THE 222 OF HEALDSBURG, CA*

1. Introductory Lecture and Video (at The 222) (30 min)
2. Field Exercise (at Healdsburg Plaza) (30 min)
3. Healdsburg Plaza is part of the suburban landscape, but still contains nature. For example, there are many species of trees, including: redwood; magnolia; date palm; holly; cedar; oak; orange; gingko; crepe myrtle; etc. You may find lizards and birds. And you will certainly find people. Aren’t we part of nature, too?
4. The first step is to go into nature to look for nature. Or as Basho put it: go to the pine to learn about the pine. Many of us go to the plaza, but many times we’re distracted by our phones, by the ice cream cones we eat, et cetera.
5. The next step, to make your writing stand out, is to choose a subject overlooked by others. You may want to choose a tree and spend time with it. You may see a weed growing in a sidewalk crack, wonder how it got there and how it survives. If you see a bird you may want to closely follow their movements. Or you may choose an abstract aspect of nature, for example, the water in the fountain: where does it come from, and who drinks from the fountain? Take careful notes, sketch your subject or use your phone to take photographs
6. The next step is to spend time with your subject. Study your subject so intently that you try to “become one” with the subject. If you weren’t human, what would it feel like to inhabit your chosen subject?
7. While you’re studying your chosen subject, remember to use all of your senses.

In the case of touch or taste, use your judgment and only use those senses if it’s safe to do so. Plants are easier to touch without harming them, but for birds and lizards, for example, please use your imagination on how their feathers or scales might feel to the touch—in other words—please honor the space of other beings.

1. Finally, ask yourself: what is the “zoka” or energy of your chosen subject? What led you to choose your subject? How does the subject make you feel? Is it something our society considers beautiful or not so beautiful? Does the subject “transform” you in some way, make you feel differently about the subject now that you’ve had time to study it?
2. Writing Exercise (back at The 22) (30 min)
3. Sharing (back at The 222) (30 min)