



## Walking into a Poem

One day I was walking with my friend, Sue, along the Nashwaak River near Fredericton. I was breaking in a new pair of hiking boots. Stiff, clumpy, grumpy, hard leather boots.

“I really miss my old boots,” I said. “They felt like slippers. For fourteen years they carried me places. We hiked the Fundy coastline, climbed Katahdin and Saga-”

“Oh for heaven’s sake,” said Sue, “why don’t you just write a poem about your old boots?”

### For My Hiking Boots

We always kept walking  
up Katahdin and Sagamook.  
Distant blue  
misty hills from the top.  
Knee-ache and water-envy  
on the way down. Plural  
descent. Even with you, boots,  
I’ve never been as deft  
on wet rocks as the dipper  
we saw stride in and under  
the Similkameen’s flow,  
out again.

Boots, I could count on you  
when trekking over beaches  
giving way to my feet  
and every storm that pummels  
the coast. On the way out  
of a cove, I’ve passed  
myself walking in. I say *ocean*,  
my Finnish friend says *valtameri*.  
Is a name a rest in a fluid world?  
Matthew’s Head. Kouchibouguac.

Even when we sleep, our planet’s  
in motion. Stillness impossible,  
although blue herons  
are so convincing. You understood that,  
the way you gravitated to my feet  
eighteen years ago. Now thin-soled  
and a minor constellation of holes.  
Airy. Buoyant in the world

like the red salamander I saw  
on the bottom back porch  
step disappear into weeds  
on delicate, three-toed feet.

from *Where Sound Pools* (Goose Lane Editions, 2005)



### Questions to Ponder

- 1) In line five, why does the poet say “knee-ache and water-envy/ on the way down.”?
- 2) Why is the speaker so impressed with the dipper?
- 3) How many times is water mentioned in this poem? Why?
- 4) What do you think of the question, “Is a name a rest in a fluid world?”
- 5) Why are blue herons so convincing?
- 6) Where do the following words come from and what do they mean: Similkameen, Sagamook, Kouchibouguac.
- 7) Why does the poem end with a red salamander?

### Poetry Projects

- 1) Write a poem to an old favourite piece of clothing.
- 2) Or what if you became the old boots or shirt, and wrote a poem to yourself? All the places you went together, how you did or didn't take care of the shirt, all the things you could've done but didn't.
- 3) We've all seen the sneakers tied by their laces, hanging over power lines. What could you say to them? What might they say to us?
- 4) Go to a second hand clothing shop and purchase a hat or shirt or whatever. Do all the past owners speak through a piece of clothing? Can you give them voices in a poem?
- 5) Write a poem to a new piece of clothing. What do you hope for in this new hoodie, new shoes, new jeans?
- 6) Take a series of photographs or sketch your piece of clothing. What does your favourite sweater look like on someone else, on the floor, in a tree, in a puddle, on a dog? Do the photographs or drawings make it easier to write about the sweater, the hat, the shoes?