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### Heaven Right Over the Threshold

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## Heaven Right Over the Threshold

My outdoor version of heaven would be rolling prairie all directions cusped by a panorama of bluebird-blue sky, thunderstorm, mammatus clouds at sunset, and a double rainbow. My indoor version would simply be a bookstore, at least three stories high, punctuated by hidey-holes for reading and writing, and filled with that intoxicating smell of both old and new books. There would be especially large and vibrant sections for poetry, memoir and non-fiction, fiction, and spirituality. There would also be many charming blank journals to pick up and hold for a moment, sussing out whether this one or another is the right journal for this moment in my life.

When I first entered Eighth Day Books I knew this was heaven. I immediately wanted to tether myself to one of the wooden rocking chairs, open my laptop, and write something....or maybe curl up in a big, padded chair with an old memoir by Kathleen Norris and just read for a while, only getting up to down a bit more coffee, visit the facilities or peruse the blank books some more. Never mind that I'm Jewish with a Buddhist twist and that I practice yoga: a Christian Orthodox bookstore stole my heart at first glance. Eighth Day, you had me at hello.

Since that time, I've dropped into Eight Day every time I go to Wichita, and I've gone to Wichita many more times than I would have because of the bookstore. I've had the great pleasure of being part of three readings at Eight Day because I'm so Wichita- and Eighth-Day-bound. I read here from my memoir about cancer, community and living in the body, *The Sky Begins At Your Feet*, and in more recent years from my non-fiction book, *Needle in the Bone: How a Holocaust Survivor and Polish Resistance Fighter Beat the Odds and Found Each Other*. More recently, I joined others at the bookstore to read from our collective renga, a conversational poem about 150 poets wrote about Kansas for the book I edited, *To the Stars Through Difficulties: A Kansas Renga in 150 Voices*. At every

reading, I found an intimacy lit from within, whether discussing questions related to the nature of good and evil with audience members or reading a poem aloud to people who listened fully.

There's something about the spirit of Eighth Day that simply brings out the best in any one reading, writing or listening. Maybe it's the energy coalesced from thousands of meaningful moments of recognition that happen here, whether part of a conversation with a person or a book. Certainly, it has something to do with the actual space of the place, a home filled with delights and mysteries. Of course, this spirit is also recharged regularly by Warren Farha, owner and founder of this wonderland, as well as the wonderful and welcoming staff. Altogether, though, Eighth Day is more than a sum of its parts: it's a whole place that helps us cultivate our own wholeness. The blend of joys de vie, comfort, insight, art and many spaces to meet with others or commune alone makes Eighth Day more refuge from business, more oasis than building, more commons for community to find itself than address on a map.

The prairie does actually roll all directions, and there are moments when the sky holds equal parts blueness, storm, clouds and rainbow. Heaven, outside and within, is alive and well, and we can find our way home by looking at the shifting beauty encasing our lives, or by simply climbing the steps to Eighth Day Books and stepping over the threshold.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg is the 2009-2013 Poet Laureate of Kansas, and the author of 16 books, including poetry, memoir, non-fiction, fiction and anthologies. Founder of Transformative Language Arts at Goddard College, where she teaches, she leads community writing workshops widely.

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