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We Live in Weather

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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We Live in Weather

We Kansas live in weather. We know what it is to experience four seasons in a day, and we have pockets full of stories about tornado-prone farms, stormy picnics, and blizzard-buried front doors.

While some might race across I-70 to get to what they deem scenery, we understand what it means to live in the sky as well as on the land. Whether we're from the short grass prairie out west or the rolling bodies of the Flint Hills, we have front-row seats to a skyscape of infinite color, wind, temperature, light, and the most astonishing mountains of clouds on the planet.

This hasn't changed in the last 75 years, yet so much else has. Today many might see the weather as the backdrop rather than the most valuable player and superstar rock-and-roller it is, and if not now, just wait a few hours until the next cold front or thunder storm parades through. With air-conditioning during the dog days of summer, thermostat-summoned heat, and more of us indoors at a constant 70 degrees, it's easy to forget who's in charge. But farmers, ranchers, highway workers, gardeners, and any of us paying attention know how much a storm can change lives and how much there is to behold all the time.

Our grandparents and parents also know it means to shelter from storms, including those of their day. In 1945, the world was coming out of World War II, the deadliest war in history that left an estimated 70-85 million people dead and millions more without home, communities, livelihoods, and bearings.

Now we face our own storm: the coronavirus pandemic which, as of October, has impacted over 70,000 Kansans and their families. We also endure the high winds of an increasingly polarized state and world.

Yet when it comes to weathering the microbursts or floods of our time, we have a lot to show the world. We know how to gather lightning-fast to carefully lift branches off a collapsed house in case someone is trapped. We can whip together a casserole on a dime to leave at the neighbor's door. We're

good at waiting for the electricity to come back, hauling a chain-saw, and making due with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. After all, we've been taught well by living where a blizzard can dump six feet of snow, a summer rain can flood our basement, or a tornado can take our house.

We've become good farmers of patience, compassion, resilience, and tolerance. Despite our differences, no Kansan will ask someone in need if she's a Democrat or Republican, Moslem or Jew, gay or straight before rushing over with a shovel or a cherry pie.

We also know the hard-won grace and beauty of the sky, even more apparent these days when the pandemic keeps us closer to home and more apt to wander our own backyards where, like Dorothy, we can find our heart's desire all around us in the sky where we live.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg is the 2009-13 Kansas Poet Laureate and the author of two dozen books, most recently *How Time Moves: New and Selected Poems*, which is full of poetry about time, place, and especially weather. <http://carynmirriamgoldberg.com>