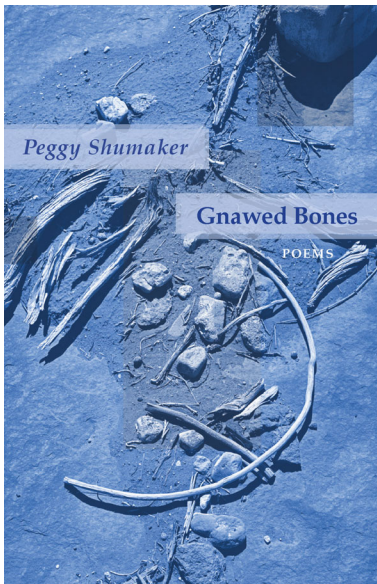


Gnawed Bones

POETRY BY
Peggy Shumaker



From wildfire and war to bleached reefs and human frailty, Peggy Shumaker's new poems meditate on mortality. Her poems speak with elegiac force for lost languages, lost ancestors, lost ways of being. This work sharpens the edges of our perception, drawing on the inner life, on secrets that keep us alive. With language as lyrical as the natural world, the poems in *Gnawed Bones* nourish us.

Good heavens, what a book. No, rather good earth, good sad mortal body, what a book. Shumaker writes without blame, but with utter clarity and precision and storytelling skill about places on earth and our place among them—Alaska, Hawaii, the saguaro-studded desert—and about foxes, deer, swallows, who co-inhabit with us “under a sun / more agitated / this year than the last,” then about the father who wanted to fly, the mother who wanted to die. Finally she comes to her own brush with death. I couldn't stop reading, sometimes weeping, always awed. Whatever Shumaker touches is thick with life, death, and the blessing of her words.

—Alicia Ostriker, author of *No Heaven* and *The Book of Seventy*

Gnawed Bones

Poetry by Peggy Shumaker

ISBN: 978-1-59709-156-5

Binding: Trade paper

Size: 6 x 9; Pages: 120

Pub Date: April 2010

Price: US \$19.95

Red Hen Press • P.O. Box 3537 • Granada Hills, CA 91394 • www.redhen.org



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Author Biography



Two deserts shape Peggy Shumaker's work—the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona, where she grew up, and the subarctic desert of Interior Alaska, where she lives now. Professor emerita from University of Alaska Fairbanks, she teaches in the Rainier Writing Workshop MFA Program and for many writing conferences and festivals. She is founding editor of Boreal Books, www.borealbooks.org.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE APRIL 2010

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Study Guide

Peggy Shumaker would be glad to talk with your class or book club in person or by audio conference. You may contact her at peggyzoe@gmail.com.

Gnawed Bones

1. What's mortal in this world?
2. Can you find in this collection poems that look at the deaths of coral reefs, deserts, koa trees, fire-ravaged forests, migratory birds, languages, ancestors, parents, ourselves? What else gets away from us?
3. Given that so much of what we love will change or die, how should we live?
4. How does war enter this book?
5. At certain times of our lives, we cannot take for granted good health. Looking at "Pheasant" and the last section of "Dive, Three Definitions," consider what it means to live with long illness. (The woman mentioned in "Pheasant" is the wife in the third part of "Dive.")
6. What does mindful observation of the natural world mean to our emotional lives? What does it mean to our spiritual lives? What does it mean to our bodily health?
7. How do the landscapes of Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii form this book? Does it make a difference where a poem takes place?
8. What's the relationship of art (poetry, dance, drama, painting, photography, music, cooking) to our deepest feelings and thoughts?
9. Parents and children. Those bonds are never simple. Choose one poem that deals with a parent and child. What does it bring up in your life?
10. Facing a long recovery from a bad wreck can alter a person's perspective. Discuss the poems in part IV Naming What We Hold In Our Hand. How do we deal with trauma? How does it shape our imaginations?
11. Life-giving laughter. Where do you find it in this book?
12. What remains? What's immortal? What within us is immortal?