

Ponca Lunch Hour Poems. Cliff Taylor



Ponca Lunch Hour Poems © Cliff Taylor

Unforgettable characters, enlightened by random revelations, cross the coffeeshop, the sidewalk, the freeway while Cliff Taylor records them through narrative-verses and laughter in his *Ponca Lunch Hour Poems* zine. In the first page of this zine, hand written, we read:

I wrote these poems in the Spring of 2019, after my girlfriends and I moved to Astoria, Oregon. Some I wrote at work, some at the coffee shop before work, some in Tokyo, some while traveling back. I am a Ponca Indian so a lot of them are about my tribe, our people, how we see and experience the world. I am also into comic books, horror movies, and just everything to do with art: so expect to find some of that in here too. I would love for some of these poems to become your friends on an unexpected day or night as you're busy doing your thing or taking a well-deserved break. I hope you like them. Thanks, Cliff.

Busu

It took us three months and a total of two cars to drive across the country and move from New Orleans to Astoria, Oregon, a city neither of us had ever actually been before. It was epic, unforgettable, exhausting. Our second day here, while I was on the sidewalk outside the coffee shop smoking, a big tattooed dude walked up to me and asked, surprising me like birdshit in my eye, "Your name wouldn't happen to be Cliff would it?" i rocked back; how could anyone here know me, let alone this guy? Then I flashed: I remembered this guy from high school, he was a classmate, a punker and skateboarder, 20 years ago back in Columbus, Nebraska. "Ken?" I asked back. "Ken ---?" It was him; he owned the three stool walk-up noodle shop two doors down from the coffee shop. Having not crossed paths in 20 years, he recognized me. I pointed to our packed car and told him that we'd just moved here, yesterday. "Welcome to Astoria," he said, friendly as I remembered, "This is maybe one of the most beautiful places in the country. Glad you're Here." We talked and smoked and I was kind of stunned, dazed, transported into the surreal nature of the mystery of why we'd come here, to Astoria, this place we'd never been before. My ancient past had sent a messenger to welcome us to our freshest chapter, to shake our hand in the middle of this great unknown. For the rest of the day I was speechless with the magic of it all, a cheetah wandering a woodsy wonderland, an Indian in full regalia on Ray Bradbury's sweet Mars. We'd been delivered to the right stretch of earth; We were drinking our coffee right where we were meant to. Miraculously, we'd arrived.

Cliff Senior

I wish I remembered more stories
from my grandpa (who doesn't, I guess).
My mom would often comment on how
he talked so quietly you could barely
hear him. My little brother spent
more time with him that I did, as he lived with him for awhile when
he got out of juvenile detention; he
has some good stories and they're
all new to me. Sometimes at my
gas station Indians I didn't know
would come in, learn who I was,
and tell me stories about my
grandpa's house back in the day;
"There was always a big pot of
soup on," they'd say; "He was
always feeding everyone who stopped
in". I remember visiting him on
my way up to Sundance, hanging
out with him in his bedroom
when he was on oxygen. He sat
up and lit himself a cigarette,
handed me one when I asked for
One. He was on his way out; this
was the kind of smoke you couldn't
regret. "So what are they gonna
do, pierce your nipples?" he asked.
Yeah, something like that," I
said, smiling. I wonder what
story my grandpa would share
if he heard me read this poem.
I wonder what he would share
if he could only share just
one. Grandpa? You're up.

Relic-worker

I talk with this elder who has diagrammed, mapped, and database every earth-mound in America. It's staggering. There are shapes of every imaginable variety. It's been his life's work. He hands me the zip drive with everything on it. "It's yours now," he says. "When I was young I was told that this was my calling. When I got old they told me that it would be the next person's calling to know what to do with it." I drive along the coast with my two dogs, heading towards a thunderbird's mound in Oregon; its eye is a somewhat well-known mountaintop. "I guess it's our turn now," I tell the dogs, ocean visible through the open window. "Let's go see what this thunderbird has to say."

Signals and cages in the Seattle Art Museum

I had just hopped off the Greyhound
and, walking around, I bumped into
the Seattle Art Museum and saw that
there was Indigenous exhibit.
I wandered in, began to ascend the
Stairs. Then, like an out-of-the-
blue gunshot in the YMCA, I was
hit by this grief of the spirits, brought
to the verge of tears. I kept it
together, proceeded forward, went
into the exhibit. A few minutes
in I heard the spirits tell me to
sing a song for all the spirits that
were boxed inside this place,
enmeshed with the displayed objects
and unseen. I was young, too nervous
to upset all of the interested browsing
that was going on; I was asked but
not strong enough to do so. I saw
the living shamans' rattles, ornate
paraphernalia and utensils, big hides
and pots that were so potently
not inanimate. Half of me was a museum-goer,
half of me was a Sundancer seeing everything
with ceremony eyes. When I left
I thought, Someday I'll write about this.
Wandering aimlessly down the street,
I thought, People should know what
Indians experience when they encounter
their stuff still being held hostage.

We took him back to our place so he could shower

This was in Standing Rock when all the shit was going on. He tells us about all sorts of stuff that I don't think most anybody would believe. Prophecy. A multi-dimensional coded mythology. What he was told on the hill. His grandma feeding little people who came to her windowsill. A cave in the Andes where leaders from all over the Western Hemisphere deposited objects for a future Age which is taking place right now; the objects he saw in the cave, what he came back with. Unbelievable stuff; but there are spirits in the car with us as we drive him to the casino and so I'm paying real close attention to everything he says. We drop him off and the night is cinematic, hyper-real; everything on fire with meaning; tomorrow we're going to ceremony and I can only imagine what the spirits are going to say about all this. I get out of the car and shake his hand, give him a copy of my little book. "I'll pray you find those things you're looking for," I say. "I'll see you around, brother."

100 years of visionary memories

I remember literally staggering out from behind my gas station's counter and falling to my knees after having finished Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It was almost 4 AM, my morning customers were about to start coming in. The masterpiece had slayed me, had rocked me; this was what literature's true greatness and power felt like. 10 years later I still find myself thinking what I thought when I rose from my knees and just stood there looking out into the mystical Nebraska dark: now all I need to do is write a Native book like that, a world-changer like that, and that shouldn't be too hard, should it? It's doable, right?

Myron

I helped this old man, Myron Longsoldier, with his sweat for 13 years; from age 22 to 35. I'd get off work at 7 AM, go home and sleep for an hour, and then drive out to the sweat and get the fire started. I learned what humility was from him; it was a quality of the heart; it had a palpable, tangible texture. Myron grew up speaking Lakota, had gone to prison, was an ex-alcoholic, a Sundancer, a leader in the community. He's retired now, is on oxygen, can no longer pour sweats. When I post about going to Tokio he comments that I better wear my best Indian clothes that I got and to give em' hell, whatever that means. Once as he was praying with the first seven stones I saw all of his prayers coming out of him, like a big twisting smoke coming out of his face and front; animated energy traveling up. I think of him while facing the shelves on a quiet Thursday evening, turning and stacking the cans to get them just right. All these ones I've known, I think; May I please never forget them.

My Tokyo Lightning Book

I picture myself writing a book about everything that happened in Tokyo. I'll illustrate it with drawings of the city, the people I met, the beings I saw; and all the images will crackle and shimmer. Every full moon the book will grow hair and transport you into a real single moment for as long as you'd like; you, Liv, and the Bigfoot who came with me; dancing joyfully for Nipsey; the romance of standing on the train with your partner on the other side of the planet. Cool older folks will give it away on Halloween. Daring souls who wander into caves will find it mysteriously on their person when they reemerge. It will spread the word on how to equip and prepare oneself for participating in large-scale ceremonial work purposed towards the healing of countries, cultures, and time; with a detailed account of Fukushima, WWII, and what happened with the 40 or so of us during our ritual. It will fit in your pocket, like The Little Prince. It will function as the perfect leveling-up gift between friends transitioning into lovers, or allies, or mates for life. It will be code in Japan for someone who travels with the medicine that the Gods and Goddesses wish to see flower again. It will be a shrine for the little people, the Other World. And When people read for a second time another copy will appear on a swan's back and right before that swan dives a child will see it and know that somehow they have to save it.