

This Valley, Our Cradle City Poem of Ellensburg, WA

How long must you live in a place before the place
speaks back? How long before it reveals the secrets of
its people—myth and truth witnessed by earth and sky?

History buffs rattle off dates like preachers do passages
but let me tell you about the wind. How the valley zephyr
carries stories down the Blue Ribbon stretch of the Yakima
across seven square miles on kestrels' wings in flight.
And how the funneling air of the Cascade rain shadow
swoops down Mount Stuart's granite cliffs and couloirs
to bless us with its aliveness, rippling over this
pastoral landscape where every season has its habits
and rugged cattle survive to see the alfalfa bloom.

Veins of coveted agate run through basalt bowls
and lava beds like furtive paths on a treasure map.
During the spring thaw, buried outside the Timothy fields,
is discovered the Ellensburg blue—a lively stone
hidden behind a rough façade.
If only each human being could be known for
their sparkling inner gem, beyond their protective shell.
Let us look for that in each other.
Let us look for and see the precious inner jewel.

Winters make us tough here; summers make us free.
The Kittitas and Wanapum bands of the Yakama,
original people of this land since time immemorial,
prepared dried cakes of blue camas and couc root
to make it through the spartan winters.
One hot and windy summer, 1889,
proved the resilience of our forebears
who rebuilt in just four months the city
that took four hours to burn that 4th of July.
Making us a city of fours, a city of fire,
a city of people who rise from the ashes.

From fierce suffragettes to Screaming Trees
our streaming sun illuminates creative minds.
Barge Hall, with its iconic tower and cupola,
still stands as a doorway to enlightenment.
Our beloved CWU prepares teachers, musicians,
pilots, and more on a quest to better the world.

Gather up your untamed broncs and bulls for
a piece of the Old West at the Ellensburg Rodeo!
Honor a centennial of goodwill with the ride
down Craig's Hill and the Friendship Dance.
Tens of thousands of spectators cheer for riders
and royalty in the open air arena underneath the stars.

The land is lush in this valley, our cradle,
surrounded by sage and lupine swaying in the
corybantic wind. In Washington's first Tree City USA,
larch and linden meet Eighth Avenue Ginkgo,
our gleaming silver-apricot, medicinal historian.

Like morning sun over the snow-laden hills,
our light of resilience shines through time.
Let us look for that light in each other.
Let us look for and see the inner radiance
that none of life's hardships can diminish or disturb.

Once we realize our connectedness, we are never alone.
History and heritage intertwine with the present,
but our belonging runs even deeper than that.
Each of us is bound to this land and bound to one another.
Let us nurture these bonds as the earth nourishes us—
with generosity and grace, so that those who follow
may reap a harvest of kindness and of love.

Poem by Marie Marchand. Art by Linnea Tobias.

