

Open Windows

Poet Holly Iglesias finds her 'sturdy child'



Photo by Candice Maliska

Poet Holly Iglesias has returned to the saints.

"It's a huge relief after writing about pipe bombs and Uzis in laundromats," she says (see *Fruita Bomba*, her 2012 chapbook on CIA-financed violence in Miami). Spirituality is not new territory for the UNC Asheville professor. In an earlier chapbook, *Hands-on Saints*, Iglesias explored real and imagined religious figures, like the patron saint of confusion or the saint of cheese puffs.

This year, through a practice of writing a poem each day during Lent, she focused on her Catholic upbringing in St. Louis during the Cold War. A section of Winston Churchill's 1955 farewell address to Parliament caught her eye: "Safety will have to be the sturdy child of terror and the twin brother of annihilation." That phrase, "sturdy child" is an idea Iglesias is pinning her next work around.

Iglesias tells big stories in short, captured narratives called prose poems. The recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 2010, Iglesias finds peepholes into history, like an exhibit of recovered suitcases from the early 20th century from the attic of a closed New York mental hospital. Rather than write a diatribe on mental health, Iglesias writes about a patient's pair of abandoned shoes, a window into the patient's imperiled life.

Iglesias calls her prose poetry "pressurized containers" that help her be poetic by being prosaic. It is kind of a paradox, she says: "A lot of our best American writers are people who find what is poetic in everyday life."

Iglesias says she always knew she wanted to write. After getting out of a bad marriage in the mid-90s, she was on her own and ready to express a viewpoint she had been distilling for a long time. "I was on fire," she says. She studied for law school exams, tried acting and standup and found a doctoral program that fit, in interdisciplinary humanities. Then prose poems came along, which she calls "intellectual standup." Creative writing became a way to express scholarly ideas.

She had found her way.

"If you are blessed as a writer, there will be these luminous moments that are windows into everything that matters to you. And that was such an experience for me. I finally found my window."

— Katy Nelson

Holly Iglesias is the associate director of the Master of Liberal Arts program at UNC Asheville. She will read on October 21 at 7pm at the Altamont Theatre in Asheville and on November 2nd at 7pm for the Vandercooked Poetry Night reading series at Asheville BookWorks.