

Nature in Words:

Nature, Global Justice, and the Creative Writer

Carrie Jacob

Dr. Kirk Hendershott-Kraetzer, Mentor

Olivet College

October 1, 2013

Introduction

My goal for this project was to create poems and essays that offer people the opportunity to become aware of the happiness that could be waiting for them in nature. At the beginning, I wasn't certain that I would narrow my topic down to a more focused subject. However, I arrived at Pierce Cedar Creek and started writing and reflecting, my topic started to taper in towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and feminist themes. My poems and essay suggest that if humans related to nature more, they would be less judgmental and much happier. Nature doesn't care whether an individual is black, white, straight, queer, rich, poor or anything in between. I believe that humans should be more like that, and it's shown through my writing.

Methods

I focused on three main activities while I stayed at the Institute: reading, writing and exploring. I read for inspiration and to learn about nature. I wrote about many things other than nature, like music I would listen to and missing home. I think that it is important to write about whatever you can, and eventually what you are trying to get out will escape onto the page. I explored so I could learn the beauty of nature and feel accepted wherever I strolled.

I read three novels while I stayed in Meadow Lodge. First, I read *The Forest Unseen* by David George Haskell. This was a great book to start with because each chapter focused on one aspect of nature, like lichens. Before I started this project, I didn't know what lichens were. After reading the novel, I went out and actually found lichens. Haskell observed the same meter of forest floor for one year. This encouraged me to look much more closely at my surroundings.

I observed nature with much more intimacy. Haskell wasn't scared to get close to anything and really take it in, and I knew that I would have to observe with more of his style to try to understand what was going on in nature. The second book I read was *No Impact Man* by Colin Beavan. He and his wife, along with their small child, lived for a year creating the smallest carbon footprint that they possibly could. They created basically no trash. They weren't adding to the already overflowing landfills that litter Earth. This novel taught me how wasteful people are. It made me appreciate nature much more than I ever have. After reading this, I realized that nature not only accepts us for who we are, but allows us to be who we are. I finished my time by reading *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson. It was about Bryson and his friend Katz who walk part of the Appalachian Trail. This novel offered plenty of comic relief, as well as the realization that nature isn't always as lovely as I believe it to be. Many people wouldn't know what to do if they were stuck in the woods for weeks and weeks; a bear could eat them, or they could eat something poisonous. Also, it can be exhausting being in nature. He and Katz are constantly on the move, and even though it's beautiful, it really takes a toll on them. It was important to have this realization, because I felt like I could take on the world at this point. Now I understand that nature is as complex as it is beautiful. I couldn't just wander off into it without having any knowledge of everything that could happen while I was in nature, good or bad. The Supreme Court rulings that the Defense of Marriage Act and Proposal 8 were unconstitutional reinforced my LGBT theme. It was a victory for the community that I belong to, and I celebrated with nature.

I carried a notebook around with me wherever I went. For the first couple of weeks I tried to write while I was out on the trails, but I would get distracted with new ideas, so I just

took notes while I was out. I would jot down things that I saw like black-winged dragonflies. I would write down ideas for poems I had, like comparing deforestation to the bombing of the World Trade Center. Anything, really, that I thought of that could possibly be beneficial, would get scratched into my little orange notebook.

In the afternoons when the temperatures soared I would sit in my room with the window open and look through my notebook. I would write about whatever I saw that struck me. Sometimes I wouldn't even need to look in my notebook. I always explored in the morning, even if I already had an idea for a poem. By the time I got back to my room I would be itching to start writing. The first few poems that I wrote weren't the happiest poems, which scared me because my theme was happiness. But after going over them, I realized that they fit into my theme because they compared the way society viewed individuals as opposed to the way nature viewed them.

After I realized that most of my poems were about feminist and LGBT ideas, I decided to narrow my theme towards that. My writing came to me more clearly with a narrower topic. I wouldn't sit down every morning and think to myself, "Write a poem about a lesbian;" those were just the types of poems that I naturally wrote. It's better for a writer to write about something that he or she knows. I know what it's like to be a female in a man's world, and what it's like to be queer. I took these concepts that I already had some sort of grasp on and compared them to nature, which is a topic that I was just beginning to explore.

Most mornings after breakfast and at some point in the afternoons I went out and explored the trails. I wasn't sure what was poisonous or where the animals were that might have frightened me, so my exploring stuck to the trails. It was a simple process: I walked until I

saw something that I just couldn't pass up. When something captured my eye, like a flower, tree, or raccoon, I stopped and observed it until I was ready to move on. I made a rule for myself to not damage or disrupt anything anymore than I absolutely had to. I wasn't trying to change anything about nature, but only observe it.

The blue trail was my absolute favorite. I loved walking through the canopy of beeches. There was one particular beech that I would stop and see every time I walked passed. I would observe the life on it, whether it be ants, caterpillars or fungi. I would trace the scars on its bark with my fingertips to try to understand it. It was that tree that helped me understand that nature didn't care about any flaws that society might label me as having. It was blind to my imperfections and perfections, which was humbling and rewarding.

Summary

This was an experience that I am so thankful for. I was able to write about what made me happy and express and share those emotions with others through my presentations. I didn't know how powerful my words could really be until I read a poem out loud during my presentation in June and received such a positive response. My words brought tears to some eyes in the room, and that was one of the most rewarding feelings I have ever experienced. I read books that were inspirational and enhanced my experiences and writing. In the future, I plan on finding magazines that publish poetry similar to mine and submitting some of my work.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Pierce Cedar Creek Institute for funding this project through the Nature in Words Fellowship, which is supported by Diane Herbruck.

Table of Contents

Homosapien

Beech Bark

Calling

Just the Two of Us

Cherry

Dancer

Bench

Foreclosed

Grandma

I'm So Sorry

Believe

Lamb's Ear

Loud Birds

Musclewood

Each Other

Prairie

Rabbits

Stroll

Curvy Girls

Cosmetology

Wait for Replies

Twin Towers

Waxy

Beech Tree

Savior

Homicide

We Are Going Home

Words Hurt

Homosapien

No such insult says
“Why, you are an animal!”
Because we all are.

People are not only
Homosapiens, we are
Homosexual,

Heterosexual,
Asexual, anti-sex
Whatever you are.

But you will always
Be a homosapien,
My animal friend.

Beech Bark

Smooth bark of the beech,
Home of the slug and my heart—
But I can't live here.

Calling

A lone daisy sings,
Alone, a daisy pleads to
Be picked for my hair.

Just the Two of Us

To bond with two beings is all I ask.
To be granted the courage to tell either
What I'm thinking, seeing, hearing,
Smelling, tasting, feeling
Is the simplest form of your mother's six a.m.
Coffee after she's sent father off to work.
Pure elation.
And salvation from the ones who
Just don't get it.

My tongue can't taste their lips.
My ears can't hug their drums.
My fingertips can't traverse the mountains
That his, hers or its do daily.

So I just won't get it:
The lameness he felt as he laid
In the bed of grasses behind his home
While his friends were at
The sci-fi film convention
That he couldn't afford.
Or the joy in her teary eyes when
That red SUV rolled into her driveway
On her only seventeenth birthday.

And they won't get it either:
The tears that slip from my eyes
When the morning sky is bluer
Than any crayon, marker, paint
Or pen I've ever seen.

Because I don't even get it.
So I ask to bond with myself,
A being unknown to everyone.

I want to know why my heart skips a beat
When the dragonflies choose to land on me
Instead of the girl who is
A size smaller than average.
Why do I make room on my pillow
For the inchworm who rode in
On my green sleeve when it's
Time for sleep?

The other being isn't one who
Will speak the language I speak
Or know the things that I know.
She won't get distracted by
Any phone calls, text messages,
Facebook or Twitter accounts.
She can't count or recite her ABC's,
But she sings the sweetest melodies
My ears have ever heard or
My heart has ever felt.

I want to ask her, "Mother Nature,
When will I finally be able to get married?"
And I know that she won't give me
A date to remember card
For the happiest day of my life.
She won't throw wedding bells at me,
Or even respond with, "Soon, dear."

But at least she won't say never.
She won't tell me to
Read the Scripture and stop
Preaching death
Like the men and women tell me
Who don't understand that the love
Within my bones is greater than
The hate speech leaping from their
Wagging, blaming tongues.

I want to tell her that my days
Haven't been the greatest since
I've gone out on my own.
She won't tell me to get over it,
Or that's just too bad. She won't
Hold my hand, but she might

Send me a hug from the
Gusty wind that wraps around the
Entities that need love the most.

Cherry

The cherry tree says:
Don't identify me, I'm
Not one for labels.

Dancer

The nameless bush – she
Dances for me, shaking her
Self generously.

Bench

There is a bench
Exactly where it needs to be:
In the farthest corner of the woods
Away from the spot where she
Was kissed on the lips
For the first time.
Away from the sounds of her
Widowed father's silent sorrows
Swirling around their dusty home.
Away from everything,
Because solitude is what
She really needed.

Sassafras's fruity leaves
Wave her a grateful hello.
Beeches calmly, happily
Look down on her.
The oaks, red and white,
Cradle the birds
Above her head.

She hasn't found solitude,
What she thought she needed.
She has found living, breathing friends
Who understand her losses
And her accomplishments
And her core.

Her mother is gone,
But she speaks from the
Dirt, trees, grass and bees
Telling her daughter
To help her father
Gather the crops.

Foreclosed

Birds – are they struggling?
Their houses are empty like
Houses in cities.

Grandma

Bright green duck foot— you,
You will never waddle the
Way grandma does.

I'm so Sorry

My apologies
Go to the ant hill my
Foot stumbled upon

Believe

What I believe aren't my beliefs,
but they are becoming that.
What I say isn't always truth,
But have you caught me yet?

This is a test, and I've made mistakes.
I'm barely twenty-one,
What did you expect?

Hello, I don't drink,
Smoke, think, blink,
Talk or shit. Is that
What you wanted
From a nice young girl?

Because you can find it.
Those girls are out there,
But you won't find it here.

I drink; not too much.
I smoke; probably too much.
I think; not enough.
I blink; I have a problem with that.
I talk; only when I want.

We are expected to do
As we are told: love and obey
Our men, but I don't have a man.

Lamb's ear

Lamb's ear – as soft as
Your skin on the coldest
Of winter nights, dear.

Loud Birds

The bird that sounds like
Two small sticks echoing thuds,
Who is your call for?

Musclewood

Musclewood – the all
Star quarter back of nature's
Ever winning team.

Each Other

My glass of tea
Ticks on my lip ring.
A round piece of metal
Looping through my vulnerable skin;
So unnatural.

And all of your forks
And knives and spoons
Smack your glass plates
And carry the processed food that you love
So much to your mouth;
So unnatural.

You look at my hair
Thrown about my head
Without a hat or bandana
To cover up the mess I've made.
So natural.

And my tattoos.
The ink is set deep in my skin
In the shapes of waves
And words and feathers
And birds.
We can disagree.

But who are we to say what is natural
And what isn't?
We've never seen anything
As natural as ourselves,
But we look over that
And under that
Searching for something real
While we should just be admiring
Each other.

Prairies

Wind-blown prairies sway,
Even when the rain crushes
All their sun-kissed dreams.

Rabbits

An ocean of grass
For the rabbits to swim in—
This field for you.

Stroll

Pebbles crunch under
My feet – what is it that
I must kill to stroll.

Curvy Girls

Pick up that *Seventeen*, *Cosmo*
Or *Redbook*, whatever.
Will you believe
The lies it tells you?
295 beauty tips
For this summer.
What about last summer,
Or the summer before that.
Times are a-changing
And I'm a-growing
From petite to curvy.
If I'm lucky a magazine will
Tell me I'm an hourglass.

But aren't we all,
With sand slipping from
Our brains to our bottoms?

Dear God, you'd better
Hope you aren't a pear.
An exaggerated hourglass,
Blown up, out, and larger
Than life. Or an apple,
Round as can be. Not even
A McIntosh. "Poor thing," it
Will say, but wouldn't you
Rather be a fruit: juicy, meaty
And sweet as can be?

I can find out what looks
Best on a curvy girl,
Athletic, slim or slender.
And I can look up
What color eye
Shadow matches my
Irises, lash length, or
Anything else.

I'll get exercise and dietary
Instructions that can guarantee me
The beach body I want by the
Summer months. Don't eat.

Run those suicides, suicides,
Suicides, suicides, yoga, suicides.
Supermans, not superwomans,
Because why would a woman
Be as super as a man?
Walk the side planks,
But don't launch yourself into
The waters of self-loathing
Because according to the mag
You only have to do 12 more
Suicides today.

And when you finally turn
Your pear into an hourglass,
Or become that delicious McIntosh,
You can start working on
Turning your build into slender
And your fashion sense to sleek,
The thought of running those
Suicides will never leave your mind,
So just get used to it.

Cosmetology

I don't want to shave my legs.
I don't want to comb my hair.
And I'm not the only one.
There are girls who don't do these tasks
And they have thick skin.
They can handle
The messy dreads
And dreaded comments
And accusation
And comparisons
And all of the bullshit
That comes along with being
A little more natural than
What society deems excusable.

But why is it excusable?
Does natural need an excuse?
How about:
I don't fucking want to
Rub a sharp slice of metal
On my soft skin.
How about:
Isn't it more than a little sexist
That a hairy man is fine,
But a hairy woman
Is not?

My femininity is questioned
Because of the strands
On my skin.
I'm a lake, filled with
Cattails and mermaid weed,
And every stream that feeds into me
Is a stereotype.
She's a lesbian,
She's a tree-hugger,
Maybe she's French,
She definitely doesn't have
A boyfriend.

A woman can
Tweeze, wax, shave,

Rip off the top layer of epidermis,
But if it's growing it's growing.
A woman can
Spend her mornings
Preparing, pampering, presenting
Her body as a hairless haven,
Blemish free and beech-bark smooth.
But we are not hairless
And we have blemishes
And I don't like wasting time.

Other animals deal with our
Cosmeto-logic blunders
We shave our furry companions
And we put them in sweaters.
We clip the feathers of
Flightful birds so they
Love us forever.
We don't understand the
Barks, meows, chirps and squeaks,
But they are probably saying
Leave me the hell alone.
Society ignores my
Cries, kicks, pleas and protests
So most of the time my legs
Are covered in knicks
And razor burns,
Because that shit can burn.

Grooming ourselves
And our pets doesn't seem
To be enough.
We've moved on to our mother
Called Earth.
Her sweet curves are groomed
With blades and toxins.
We buzz cut her soft strands,
But she isn't in the Military.
We chop off her tree dreads
That have taken years
To thicken and mature.
We get rid of weeds,
But what if dandelions
Are her favorite accessory?

Wait for Replies

I whisper to the petals
My fears and doubts
And wait for an answer.
I know their little ears
Heard my soft tones.
I waited so long for
A reply that I forgot
What I had told them
And danced away,
A smile on my face.

Twin Towers

Where were you when
They fell, definitely making
A sound for all to hear,
Because why would two
Strong structures fall in
Silence,
Even though everyone around
Watched with little breaths.

They weren't empty.
Families lived there, individuals
Worked like dogs, making
Their meaningless lives
Mean more than we
Could ever guess.

What evil men could do such
Damage without flinching,
Without ever thinking about
The beings they were demolishing.
Terrorists, the answer comes
Up in heads, and hate begins
To swarm in hives and homes.

It happened on 9/11,
And 12, 13, 14, 15,
And every single day since,
And most days before.
The terrorists keep striking,
The animals keep protesting,
But the towers will keep falling.

Waxy

It can never be
Captured in a candle – the
Smell of fresh cut grass.

Beech Tree

What a friend to me it was that day
When I didn't know what nature was,
Or how it wept the way I did
The day she said yes,
Or the day of my first pet's last breath.

First a stare, I gave to it.
It stared back, but not
Just at me; at everything.
It kept up with the whispers
I couldn't hear and
The creaks I could.
It sang
And I swear the notes swirled
An invisible melody around my head.
Its leaves danced like people,
Its arms were strong.
The most impressive infrastructure
I've seen, and it even
Offered me a stare.

It's a mother holding the lives
Of smaller beings – or a father,
Or maybe just a caregiver letting
Others breathe upon its shell.
Ants lock their strong feet
Onto its smooth bark
And it never bites.

It's part of a community,
And I'm sure they speak in
Tongues I don't understand,
But the elders communicate
And the youth listen,
Reaching for the light,
Doing as they are told
But branching off on their own.

This was the summer of death.
Twisty, turning, toppling death.
Thunder storms, wind blasts
And lightening shots have murdered

A handful of elders and warned
The young adults to be prepared
For anything,
Because even the strongest
Are vulnerable to a bad day.

There are plenty of survivors
With wounds, streaks and tears.
Tears of sorrow for their fallen
Families and friends, for the lack
Of sunshine they receive, for. Of hope
That they'll die of old age
And nothing else.

My words won't penetrate their
Bark. I will not carve them onto
Their skin, but I will speak them
And hope that they hear, if tree's
Can, that my thoughts are with
Them, every single one.

Savior

I will get on my hands and knees
And prey.
I will beg for forgiveness
From my Goddess,
Mother Earth
For eating the greens she's grown.
But I will never bow down
And pray
To your Lord and Savior
Because I have saved myself,

And I will save others.
Animals, hated and loved.
Homosexuals, heterosexuals, asexuals, pansexuals,
And even the anti-sexuals until the knot
Is tied as tightly as your shoelaces,
Which sometimes come untied,
Because unless you are saved....

You will eventually pass away
From either natural or inflicted causes
And your body will rot in its casket,
Just like my homosexual body.
So why do any of us need saving?

Homicide

What if every single step you took was a homicide?
Sticks don't snap, but bones crack.
Dry dirt doesn't crumble, blood clots burst.
It's not the leaves crunching that you hear,
But hoarse screams.

And every single time
Your foot touches the soft path
Or the hard cement,
Pain is inflicted

Upon your heart,
Because you never intended
To harm.

We are Going Home

We are going home
But not to the yellow house
That my brother and sister lived in.
Not to the house with the
Backyard playground:
Swing set, sand box,
Playhouse party with
All of my friends,
Mostly imagined, partly real.

The food there was the best.
Grasses and dandelions and chalk.
I could never get enough,
So I'm going back to that.

Not the house, but the time.
And maybe I won't eat
The chalk and dandelions,
But I'll stick with the grasses
And add some more ingredients
From my parents garden,
So mostly tomatoes.

And time will welcome me
With open clock arms
Like the grandfather I lost
To cancer. He will sit me on
His lap and call me Carebear,
With a tick-tock voice, counting
Down the seconds until

Someone takes the time
To remember me,
And all of my chalky,
Grassy smiles.

I'm going back,
Before we went away
For school, and my best
Friend lived next door.
Text messages weren't real,
Phone calls were daily,
And sleepovers nightly.

When I went to Kalamazoo
To stay the night with my sister
And pretended I was the coolest
Ten year old in the world. When
My brother was a mother dog,
And I was a puppy, aimlessly
Stumbling in his footsteps,
Tattoos, taste and all,
But I don't like my beer as strong.

Before I was out on the
Streets holding a girl's hand,
Ignoring the reactions of
People who haven't been
Fortunate enough to see
Young love. True love.
Not forbidden love.

When my family ate grilled
Burgers and fries at the
Smallest dinner table together
And told stories that made us laugh
Until we cried, but I was really crying
Because I helped my mother make
The salad: lettuce, tomatoes and cheese,
And I knew one day I would have to
Make entire meals on my own.

I'm going home,
To make a salad for dinner.
My fiancé already made the black
Bean burgers. We will tell stories and
Laugh so hard we cry. I'll really be crying
Because I want us to be at the yellow
House, and she will be crying because
Her parents won't come to our wedding.

Words Hurt

It was 1997 and I was five years old. I learned to write my name, tie my shoes, color inside the lines and deal with hurt feelings.

So there was this boy, and he was my kindergarten knockout: shaggy hair, front teeth, played tag with me at recess, the total package. I wanted to declare my like to him with a beautiful picture that I had colored. I told a few friends about this, trusting that they wouldn't say a word to him about the picture. I colored it and brought it into school, but when the time came to give it to him I chickened out. What had I been thinking? Boys had cooties.

I decided to keep the picture for myself. After all, it was probably the best one I had colored so far, and I needed to give it to someone important, like my mom, or maybe my dog. When it was time to sit in a circle on the floor and do kindergarten things, I sat next to my not-really-crush. I had no choice; we had to sit in alphabetical order and his name started with a B. Out of the blue, a shout came from the K's: "Hey Carrie, where's Brandon's picture?"

"Shut up, Kenny! What picture?" was my response, as Brandon guffawed around the room like his name hadn't just been the topic of conversation, and the dialogue ended for the time being. Before my mother came to pick me up I asked my friend why she would say such a thing right in front of him. The conversation got as heated as a five year old conversation can really get, and we parted on untruthful words that seemed to end the situation, but my feelings were still hurt.

In elementary school, there was a saying that I picked up. I think that we all picked up this saying in order to boost our confidence or something. It's easy for children to bring each other down by accident, or on purpose. Let's face it, kids can be brutally honest sometimes. If one hair on your head is falling the wrong way, prepare to be informed. Adults had to have known that this saying wasn't true, but they never stopped us from saying it. The sad thing is I believed it. When I realized it wasn't true, which wasn't until I was well out of elementary school, it was like an anvil fell on my chest.

I couldn't have been the only one who realized that this saying was a sack. It was so untrue; it started to work in opposite ways. I don't particularly care for lying, so when I figured out that it wasn't all it was cracked up to be, I bailed on it. I would hear others say it and feel mixed emotions. I felt sorry for them for believing it, and envious at the same time because I wish I still did believe it.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

As a youngster, I could throw that out onto the table when anyone called me a butt-head, moron, dweeb, or whatever else were the popular insults at the time. But when I realized that what other kids were telling me couldn't just be brushed off with a saying that was false, it was scary. Lucky for me, I was quiet and kept to myself. I didn't talk to everyone and their brother. By not associating with so many people, there were fewer people around to call me names, at least to my face.

But that didn't mean it didn't happen.

In high school things changed. Everyone seemed so nice. There was no need to even think about sticks and stones and breaking bones. At least if people weren't actively being nice, they weren't actively being mean to me. It was even easier to slide by as the quiet girl because there were more people; I could just blend into the shadows like I wanted to and no one really questioned it.

And then social media exploded. It's true that an individual's confidence is boosted about a million percent when he or she is sitting safely behind a computer screen. One can say whatever with no immediate consequences. You could call everyone you know a dweeb and you would never know how they reacted because you weren't there. Since everyone had a jolt to their confidence, the insults started appearing and progressively getting worse. At first the jabs weren't so bad. I would see someone say that they plainly didn't like someone. That wasn't such a big deal. Then insults like "slut" and "whore" started getting tossed around. One time a girl started talking about how bad a girlfriend I was, but that was something I could get over. I mean, she was probably just jealous, right? Then I started seeing racist, sexist and homophobic slurs being thrown around by people on my social media sites, and it infuriated me.

Words don't hurt, but when I hear someone get called a dyke or a faggot, my blood pressure soars. So maybe I'm not getting punched in the stomach literally when those words find their way into my ears, but I would much rather have the most muscular person who is available punch me as hard as he or she can square in the gut every time I hear those hateful words jump off of an individual's tongue. I've always felt this way, even before I came out. I got a confidence boost, like the rest of the youth sitting behind a protective screen. But instead of calling people names, I tried to be a hero: I took on the job of calling out the bullies on the Internet and knew all too well that my emotions would get the best of me, but I had to do something. I started telling all of the bullies that they were being rude. Tell a bully that he or she is rude and listen to their reaction. There were countless Facebook fights and tears shed because, put bluntly, people can be real big jackasses, and it was hard for me to be a jackass back. Besides, that wouldn't have fixed the issue. That would have just turned me into a bully as well.

Then I joined a second minority group. I'm a woman, so that was already working against me. When I came out as queer, I had my second strike. Because I was now actually part of the gay community, I was even more defensive towards the online trash talkers. When I tell someone "Hey, I'm queer and that offends me," I usually get a response like, "I'm okay with gays." Well, mister or miss, those words aren't reflecting what you say you believe. When people use any queer-related word in any negative context, it's offensive. "I don't like that, because I'm not gay." People say that about all sorts of things, and none of it makes sense. I was recently hanging out with a friend from high school and he said that he didn't want ice cubes in his drink because he wasn't gay. Apparently, only queers like ice. People think that they can say anything that they want, which is correct because of the First Amendment, but they don't understand that there will be repercussions for their words. If someone says something is gay, he is probably going to piss off a couple of queers. Having a gay friend doesn't make up for the gay bashing. Someone could say that all black women are angry, but think that it's ok that she said that because she knows a black woman. The racist comment isn't ok, no matter how many black friends she has.

People can tell you that it shouldn't hurt. "Words are just words, and if they hurt then you are just letting them get into your head." Well, I've got news for you: words get into people's heads. All of the time. We think about words.

The thing is, people know better than this. Accidents happen though, and we all call people names that we don't really mean. But after you've accidentally called someone a faggot, don't get defensive about it. That's what we tend to do: get defensive, especially when we're to blame. Nobody likes to be wrong, and apologizing can be pretty awkward. Instead of fixing the problem that has just been caused by a lack of knowledgeable word choice, people start saying more hurtful words like they meant to say the first one. Of course, there are the people who actually meant to say the first rude word. Some people are just genuine jackasses who truly don't care about other people's feelings. Other than those individuals who enjoy calling a handful of lesbians a group of dykes, I think that people are basically good. Name calling isn't something that we enjoy, but something that can be too awkward for us to fix.

Humans are part of the natural world. We're animals, after all. But we don't act like most things in nature act. When a bear gnaws into a deer, he isn't doing it because he doesn't like the way the deer is walking; he does it because he is hungry and he needs to eat to survive. If we could ask the bear "What was wrong with that deer? Why did you kill it?" I'm guessing that the bear would say, "What are you talking about? I was just hungry. Did I just hurt that his feelings? I'm just doing what I have to do to survive."

Another thing: people aren't bears. We aren't living in a survival of the fittest, kill or be killed world. Unlike bears, we should consider the feelings of others. We're not White-faced Meadowhawks catching mosquitos or Red-tailed Hawks dive-bombing Meadowlarks. We're human beings who ought to know better than to be casually insulting about others' lives and others' selves. Nature is doing what it has to, while we are just being jerks who are too scared to correct our mistakes.

So when someone says to you "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," I first hope that this individual is a child. Second, I hope that some light can be shed on you. Realize that this individual is probably saying it because you have hurt his feelings. Then apologize. After all, you aren't a bear.