

'Top of My Lungs' shows soul in detail

In her new book of poetry and artwork, Natalie Goldberg uses intimate detail to convey soulful significance

Book review

Jacquelyn Lewis
Pulse Editor

Natalie Goldberg's new poetry and painting collection, "Top of My Lungs," manages to be earthy and ethereal simultaneously. Goldberg's poems sparkle with the sheen of life; they reek with the stench of being human.

Poems like "Into This World" and "I Want to Say" are diamonds — cool and shiny, with crystalline, dream-like images — juxtaposed with works such as "New York Body" and "Coke and Chickens," which explore the baser aspects of existence. "Coke and Chickens" describes a Texas heat wave, and the reader feels the heat coming off the page — the unpleasant notion of dead chickens in the sun.

Goldberg's paintings, displayed alongside her writings, sometimes seem to melt into the poems; other times their stark differences are shocking. However, the paintings are al-

ways intriguing. "Self Portrait" stands alone on the last page, and this makes it more memorable than the others.

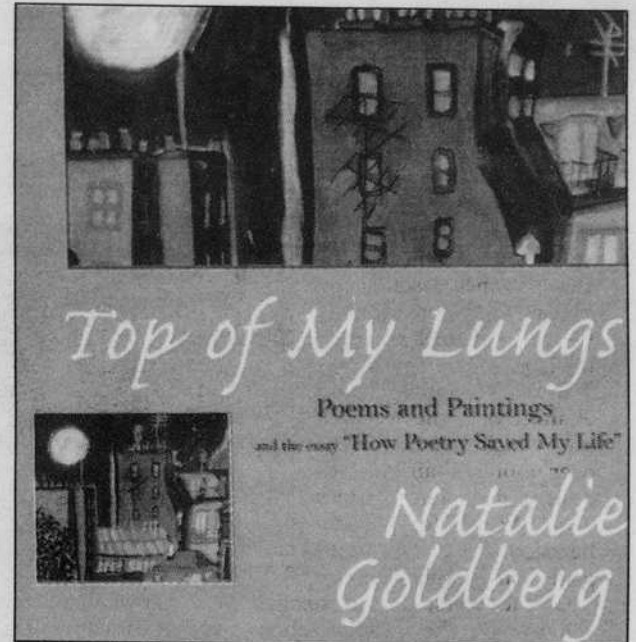
Goldberg is able to capture a soul's paradoxical love/hate relationship with life by employing a single tactic: Details, details, details. She turns breakfast into a significant ritual. Licking an envelope becomes earth-shattering. It is only through these details that readers see what Goldberg is getting at. The grit of life, these small, seemingly insignificant snippets are what make up the vast, intricate painting of humanity.

The poet discusses her penchant for detail in her essay, "How Poetry Saved My Life," which is included in the book. The essay explores Goldberg's life and travels — everywhere from Chicago to Israel — and the writing is as soulful and engaging as any of her poetry.

Goldberg has also written several other books, including "Writing Down the Bones," "Long Quiet Highway" and "Living Color: A Writer Paints Her World." Her work is infused with shades of her life as a Jewish woman and student of Zen Buddhism living in New Mexico, but the themes remain universal.

Infinitely recommended, "Top of My Lungs" will grace bookstore shelves in November.

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Kerensa made enemies but left few clear routes to finding her

Chapter 3

On a ship without a captain.

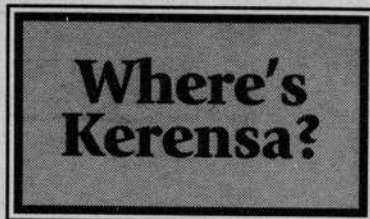
Last week, we went back in time and watched Sarah and Michael find Kerensa's goodbye notes that said they would never see her again.

The Emerald is printing "And the Dew is Our National Treasure" in serial form, with an installment every Tuesday in the Pulse Relax section. Earlier installments can be found at www.dailyemerald.com.

Sarah and I found no comfort in my cold house. Most of the night we sat against opposite ends of the sofa, one blanket between us, and argued: I wanted facts about events before Kerensa's disappearance; she gave me mystical abstractions. At 3 p.m., we went outside. The cool textures seduced us and we wandered through silent, car-less streets.

"Clouds appear before it rains, Sarah. A lion stalks before it pounces. Volcanoes tremble before erupting! Can you really tell me there were no signs?"

"I had premonitions, Michael. After all, Kerensa and I were close. But close only because we were different. We were as alike as the wind and



the grass. Kerensa was large and encompassing. I'm small and supple. I don't know what produced her."

I responded involuntarily: "And the wind said to the grass, 'I can make you dance.' And the grass said to the wind, 'I can make you sing.'" My unconsciousness embarrassed me, and I walked ahead quickly into the tunnel of trees that led through the park.

Sarah stayed close. Small moon circles lit the trail, and boughs creaked in the canopy. She kept her hand on my back, and I proceeded carefully.

"Kerensa made enemies," I said. "She once said to a room full of mayors: 'Child molesters at least have the decency to let most victims live. Developers always strip the innocent, crush them and bury the crime beneath concrete.'"

We approached the creek, and animals fell silent in the brush.

"But Kerensa had a presence,

Sarah. No one would hurt her."

We exited the park at the law school and climbed to the top of Taylor's Ferry Road. In the graveyard, phantoms of mist drifted among the turning maples and the headstones. The grass threw dew at our soles until they squeaked. "There, you see, Sarah? It's an omen." I stepped around a freshly mangled rat. "It's rudimentary, my dear: a squeak and a rat equals a villain. She's been murdered."

"Oh, Michael, Michael, Michael, Michael!" Sarah leaned her head against my shoulder.

We crossed the Sellwood Bridge; a "V" of geese flew overhead. "Maybe the developers threatened her," Sarah suggested.

"Kerensa wouldn't run," I said. "If she left, it was by choice. Which means either she has a lover, or she did what many people only talk about doing, which is to suddenly drop all responsibilities and vanish."

"But we really don't know," Sarah said. "It's as if the wind carried her off." We walked past antique stores and expensive restaurants. "The only way to find her is to let the wind carry us."

"You're saying I shouldn't call her friends and colleagues, shouldn't file a Missing Persons Report — that I

should just wait for the answer? I'll tell you, Sarah, a captain arrives at his chosen port through use of charts and seamanship. Not by drifting."

"But there is no chosen port, Michael. We don't know where Kerensa is. The only port that's certain is the one we're all going to in the end."

"More metaphysical bullshit, Sarah!"

"How many people truly experience the journey, Michael? I let my

heart lead, and it guides me to the people who complete me, to the circumstances that fulfill me."

We arrive at Marsee's coffee shop just as the waitress wipes the dew from the tables.

Peter Wright is a printer living in Portland. He received his bachelor's degrees from UC Berkeley, served in the U.S. Navy, worked as a stock broker and taught at Stanford University. © Peter Wright, 2002. All rights reserved.

Ask Nat

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special treatment if he catches you breaking the rules. This would be unfair to the other residents and could cause your honey to lose his job. Think of it as dating the manager of your apartment building or your boss. Romance with folks in authority over you is just plain awkward.

I'm not saying you shouldn't fol-

low your heart. Ask yourself if you would date your "Noel" even if he wasn't your RA. Is it really him you want, or the prestige he carries? Also, is this guy for real, or is he just charming to every little freshman girl he sees?

If you're positive about this stud muffin and want to begin courting, it is essential to move. Transferring to another hall in the same complex is fine, but since your RA will be going on rounds in the whole

building, it's best to move to another complex. After you've settled in at a comfortable distance, enjoy your straight-from-a-television-show fantasy college life. Just think twice before chopping off all your hair like Felicity did.


Contact the columnist at natashachilingerian@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. Send questions to advice@dailyemerald.com.

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