

in the fishing industry your whole life. What does this life mean to you and how does it inspire your work?

SG: My dad is a commercial fisherman, and so I did grow up around fishing. When I was in college, I started working summers on my dad's boat as a deckhand. I worked my way through college and grad school and then a little longer, eight summers in total. When I was a kid, I liked fishing, but I didn't realize it was special. When I did it in college, I think I sort of fell in love with it. It felt like the most real thing I could do. I liked the physical sensations of fishing: the exhaustion, waking up to sunlight streaming onto my bunk, the heat of the diesel stove on a cold day, savoring a bad meal that tastes good because you're so hungry, the way jellies jiggle in your hand ... and I liked the sense of contentment I felt living simply on a boat.

Fishing gave me a lens through which to see the world, and it felt a little different than what most people see, so I guess it inspired me to try to share a sliver of what I experienced with other people, though it wasn't so conscious as that. Mostly, I enjoyed writing and what I seemed to write about was fishing.

If I was, at one point, in love with fishing, we've since gone through a difficult breakup. I quit working on the boat in 2013 and was, at first, pretty pleased to be taking a break. Now I miss it in my bones. I'm not yet sure if I'll fish again or not, but either way fishing was and always will be a profoundly formative part of my life.

CW: Many of your poems, like "Gracias," seem to follow the path from the external — physical labor, the elements, especially the mercurial nature of the sea — to the internal, a personal revelation, like the last lines from that same poem:

*I wish on milky scales stuck like stars
to their neoprene green pants
that I never have to leave here, never
have to weave a home in some far-
flung place,*

*dreaming my family together while
I work a job no one wants.*

How does the physical toll of the fishing industry lead you to introspection?

SG: The thing people often say is that physical work gives you a lot of time to think, which is true to an extent, but I wasn't usually thinking of poems while I worked. I think more so what led me to introspection was feeling completely absorbed in a way of working and living that I loved. Loving something made me want to ask how and why and look at it from different angles and challenge it and test it to make sure it was true.



Tyler Jones

In Southeast Alaska, Sierra Golden holds a king salmon on her father's boat, the F/V Challenger, a commercial salmon seiner. Golden spent eight summers working on the boat as a deckhand and many more weeks "vacationing" as a kid and as an adult (which pretty much means she worked, she said).

CW: Where do you do most of your writing? On land or on sea?

SG: Writing is a long process, so it's hard to say exactly where I do my writing, but the simplified answer is that for this book, I collected my images and stories on water and I did the pen-to-paper writing on land.

CW: How are the poems arranged in the book? Linearly? Thematically? What would you say is the organizational principle of dividing the book into three parts?

SG: I think I rearranged this book at least 50 times! There's no intentional chronology or plot to the poems, as I wrote most of them as discreet entities with lots of different voices and characters. Yet, as I arranged them, I also wanted them to somehow grow or build on each other thematically. I spent a few years arranging poems around the wrong theme — then I realized what the book was actually about. Sometimes, I would get the first half of the book right. Always, though, the second half would just fall apart. When I arrived to the book as it is now, I was relieved to find that it has some kind of ending, and I just went with it.

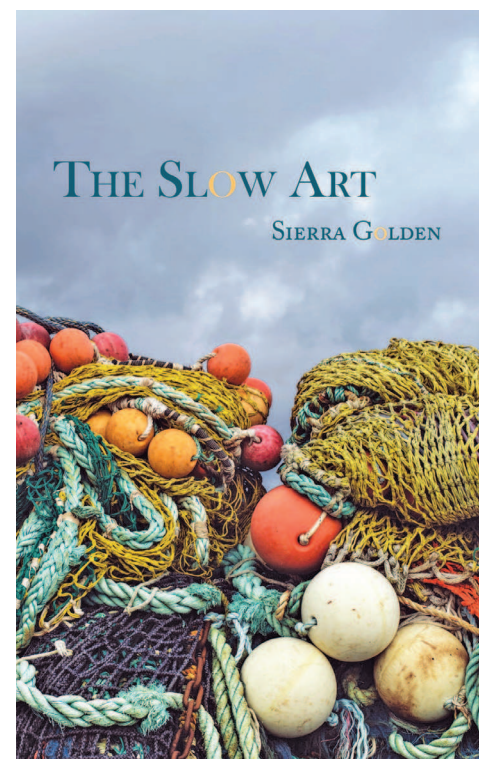
The way I was thinking about it while

arranging poems, the first section introduces the reader to the themes of the book and then troubles those themes, raising questions. The second section then picks up on that troubling. It's the darkest section, and the poems deal with hard issues. The third section is a relief from that — and also shows, hopefully, some growth or change in the way the speakers talk about love.

CW: Having participated in the FisherPoets Gathering before, what is your favorite thing about it?

SG: My favorite thing about the FisherPoets Gathering is the clear sense I get that poetry matters. It's a fun weekend — full of friends and food and beer — but the thing that keeps me coming back is the little web of magic we spin each February. It's a way to create meaning out of our lives, celebrate the good parts and challenge the rough parts.

Golden will be reading her work at the Liberty Theatre at 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 22, and at the Voodoo Room at 9 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 23, where she will be the emcee all evening. "The Slow Art" will be for sale at the FisherPoets' Gearshack at 1312 Commercial St. and is also available for purchase online at bearstarpress.com and Amazon. CW



Sierra Golden

The cover of Sierra Golden's 'The Slow Art' features a photo of trawl nets in Western Alaska taken by Corey Arnold and titled 'Entrapment.'