

Plymouth Cordage

Help weave this heart-rope, this cordage
of wordage,
woven
memories, imagination
image and nation
individuals' dreams
400 years
12,614,400,000 seconds
we weave the cordage
of wordage,
a rope across horizon gathering
every moment we find
and write and tell the stories,
we take the rope in dinghies
and set off toward Europe
others stay in Plymouth
weaving the rope we carry back
eastward around the world
the words the wars the bombs
the tragedies and joys the people the love the syllables make
lifelines that keep us from drifting into the empty
whirlpool of what's forgotten.
A story: shivering pilgrims
all aboard over a month
13 years from home
one birth one death at sea,
desperation their daily ration
water water water waves
then Cape Cod cupped hand,
a continent still big enough for everyone,
for now an etching in black and white,
ink and paper,
the contrast colors of their pauper clothes.
When white men first came ashore
and Wampanoag braves
watched from shadowy pine patches
there was a mirror between them
each saw the limits of their imagination
reflected in the other
Protestants and the People of Dawn
a mirror between them
no attack could shatter

only understanding to clarify
for 400 years we must still try
to clarify. We must find
and learn and tell the stories.

A story: We stand knee-deep on Brown's Bank
and stare into the gaping
jaws of autumn—

That summer fog swallowed the fireworks.
That winter they dredged
and dredged the harbor depths.

We sledded Burial Hill.

That spring was Ziggy's strawberry-dipped.
Stories woven into history.

Here:

Paul Tosi started picking empty nips
off roadsides and parking lots and uncapped
a positive movement that makes a difference.

We shape and are shaped by our location.

Plymouth, pliant mouth
always telling stories,
the lips of language kiss
the limits of recollection.

Pumpkin comes from Pohpukun,
meaning, grows forth round.

Wampanoag words.

Massachusetts place of the foothill.

Plymouth from Plymouth, England
meaning "mouth of the River Plym."

A story: I was born on a coast's crooked shoulder,
where gauze-white waves sling
shore and sand dunes frame dreams.

Where fishermen with missing thumbs
used to huddle in fragrant fog from coffee mugs
and briar pipes.

Night floats the diving
bell moon above a wooden flower
docked in the harbor.

Just now I am lying
down to find sleep. Reading
the braille

of stars over Plymouth.

Who doesn't want the night sometimes
to last forever

so dawn's thumb never
swipes sky's screen?

Who doesn't want to become
the place where they are from?
And so these words are stories, strands
in the cordage we are
weaving we
learn everything we can and share it
we are gathering
and carrying this rope around
the world we set out back eastwards from Plymouth MA to UK
zigzag across all continents
collecting stories and sending them back to be woven
to keep us together and everyone
helps as we carry the rope
under the Golden Gate, over the Rockies,
eastward across Ohio and here we are at Exit 6
coming back into town to tie the knot
where everything started,
where this community
is still telling its story.
So,
where should
we tie the knot?
Where is the heart
of your Plymouth?

Stephan Delbos