

Sharon Wood Wortman

LaPine Middle Schoolers Encounter Portland Sidewalk Weather

The population there worried
about forest fires, but here
we sweat not the hurricanes
plaguing Florida,
earthquakes unsettling Anchorage,
or the twisters unscrewing Kansas fields.
Our natural worry is flood,
the rain lately slumping the earth
to her knees like the converted
come to Jesus.

Current predictions call
for coastal tsunamis to rise
fast as the heron—the bird
we spot today paddling
its ocean-blue wings between
the balconies of office buildings
at the corner of Southwest Third and Taylor,
long legs forming a single rudder
under which seven students,
one parent, two teachers,
and their guide navigate
these lower eddies—
all eleven of us holding our noses
against the smell of what floats
past us in the wake of today's lost
and displaced: human excrement,
condoms, half-digested spaghetti

and meatballs hurled up the stairs
and along Morrison's west end railing—
But not for the moment we look up
and point at the fragile heron
surviving this low-bottom city.

