

What I Take (An Exercise)

According to the U.N, as of April 5, 2022 4.3 million refugees have fled Ukraine, most to Poland. While the chances are slim that anyplace in North America will suffer a similar fate, the age of climate catastrophe is upon us and unlikely to change for decades. Bhakti bought a carrier for our pet rabbit Bugs and, based on his refusal after our maiden walk of an apple slice, the carrier's something Bugs will need to get used to.

This exercise can be seen as preparation for your own life, or to develop empathy for those leaving Ukraine, or both. Based on the List Poem exercise, imagine you have to flee your home with very short notice and may not be allowed to come back. You have a suitcase and a backpack. Make a list poem of what you would bring. You may find it necessary to include the rationale, but tell it slant. In the case of our rabbit, one of us can wear the carrier on the front while also using a backpack.

If you REALLY want to experience the exercise, you can actually pack the backpack and see what you can take. A second poem might be based on what you leave behind. I am thinking of Sharon Thesen's poem "The Fire":

I want the house clean
for the fire: to the greater
scourging I offer the lesser.

Windex, floor mop
sink stopper polished with
the whole nine yards,
the whole ball of wax.

Last week we'd twirled
Mars to clarity inside
binoculars, discussed
its proximity, its palpable
redness. The likelihood
of "life," what some weirdlooking
worm or germ.

And this morning
the vacuum cleaner is travelling
along behind. I apologize

to a pillow, I can't take you
dear, like throwing a maiden
off a cliff, well, not quite

But the sense of propitiation
was there: Fire, here is a clean floor.
Fire, here is an innocent cushion...

It's ok to go on a tangent and not just make the poem a dry list of
belongings. Poetry is a tangent.

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