Open Book:
Can you describe an experience that you believe contributed to your becoming a poet?

Pearl Pirie:
There was no moment. It derives I think from insecurity and sense of short mortality that has ridden me like a cruel horseman since at least grade 3 when convicted and contrite, in an Amelie sort of way, I was sure Armegeddon was upon us. All because of my terribly sinful nature as the last straw. Child guilt is a heat stronger than carburizing steel. So, in other words, birth chemistry trying to self-medicate. That I was initially writing of toboganning wheeee could not occlude the root.

OB:
What is the first poem you remember being affected by?

PP:
Grade 1, I Think Mice are Rather Nice because I knew it and no one around me could agree and this total stranger seeing it too, the basic misunderstood mouse and the hatred aimed at it. I memorized it for class recital.

OB:
What one poem — from any time period — do you wish you had been the one to write?

PP:
That's like asking which alternate life would I want. Would it be something that I could keep and be myself as well as Picard living as Kamin? I'm sure poetry was pre-dating our species, just as other elegant art forms are not unique to humans. I'd write a poem that could infuse me with Naledi or Denisovan culture, or better yet ones informed by the lives of our living cousins and counterparts of octopus, bonobos, on their terms.

OB:
What has been your most unlikely source of inspiration?

PP:
Dunno. What do people expect? We write from whatever we are curious about, sure of, unsure of, want to carry forward, or want to drop.

OB:
What do you do with a poem that just isn't working?

PP:
Depends on why I want it to work. If it is communication to a friend, maybe conversation can bridge the river. Talk out the impasse. Or lob it as is to see if it resonates as is.

If it's for a manuscript, drop it. Not enough time to get that to fit at this point. Wrong piece.

If its for the poem's own development, aka mine, to see what it can become, when I've edited and analyzed and am killing it, set is aside. Maybe I don't have the skills I

need yet, or the living, or the element that will take it to the nth place. Or maybe I'm in a bad mood and satisfaction isn't possible. Come at it again later. Probably if my brain can't resolve it, it will try again spontaneously in coming months or years. Unclenching and refusing to cling let's systems work sometimes. Go for a walk or do something palable and useful.

OB:

What was the last book of poetry you read that really knocked your socks off?

PP:

Oh..., of poetry. Science, memoirs and local histories have been doing that. Selected Poems: Alden Nowlan (House of Anansi, 2011) did. Made me wonder what is everyone else fooling at. One can tell stories and not be unpoetic. He's ticking almost all the boxes. Maybe not so much humour but room for audience to come towards the poems and having a cadence that isn't lockstepped or awkward.

OB:

What is the best thing about being a poet…and what is the worst?

PP:

I'd mirror Czaga's answer: "I get to do my favourite things — reading and writing poems — practically every day". To mirror her properly I guess that'd be: "yad yreve yllacitcarp — smeop gnitirw dna gnidaer — sgniht etiruovaf ym od ot teg I"

Worst? Not having the societal validation of value as living wages. And not knowing hardly anyone who does. Trade economy would be fine if I had farmer fans I suppose to pay in apples and eclairs and the occasional car rental, massage, and tailor.