**Instructions for the 8 Billion**

*A Participatory Poem*

Be still and breathe in.

Pull the silky air into your abdomen.

Feel yourself fill, from your knees

to your shoulders. Shut your eyes, or

keep them halfway open.

Allow your mind to empty.

Allow your mind to still.

Be no more than the air you breathe.

Acknowledge your thoughts

as though they are strangers

passing by on the street.

On each in-breath, feel the last century

pour into you. It is your inheritance,

from flapper girls to the Korean War,

from the Model-T to moon landings,

from the parched corn fields of the ‘30s

to AA meetings, from New Orleans jazz

to Mister Rogers to AIDS. *All* its moments,

all its inhabitants, are alive in you.

They reside in your lungs:

each restless commuter

each stalled snow plow driver

each tired biology professor in her lab,

seeking a new cure

each elementary school nurse, doing

throat cultures, watching the clock.

Let them *all* float away.

Cradle your left hand in your right,

touching your index fingers

at the middle knuckle. Touch the tips

of your thumbs together and hold them still.

Continue to breathe deeply.

Slowly, silently count “one” as you breathe in.

“One” – breathe out. “Two” – breathe in.

“Two” – breathe out.

“Three.” “Three.” “Four.” “Four.”

Each breath is your legacy for this century:

your hope for rain forests.

your gift of lessons learned about wars.

your anguish for the warming planet.

This present moment is all that we have.

Breathe it in. Fill your abdomen, your ribs,

with the roundness of the blue, shrouded globe,

with 14-billion-year-old stars

still traveling away from the big bang,

still a long way from wherever they are going,

stars still searching for meaning

and finding it only in the journey.

Now concentrate on your left hand.

Let the center of your being be in your left hand.

All your power, all your compassion,

all your energy is in your left hand.

Let that energy radiate to the ends of your toes

and to each follicle, where 100,000 hairs

grow from your scalp.

These breaths belong to you alone,

powerful and whole, without compromise.

This legacy is yours alone,

in the package of your genes,

in the wholeness of this moment,

in your breath, in your abdomen,

in your light.

**Marjorie Ryerson**