

## Three Poems by Kari Wergeland

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### Midlife

It's not exactly a barren  
landscape.  
More like the front yard,  
where the desert hibiscus has died  
and the blooming groundcover  
isn't fulfilling its promise;  
where the weeds keep coming back  
too fast,  
shooting their tenacious roots  
beneath the mulch,  
and the bougainvillea,  
meant to stop erosion  
in the steep bank,  
refuses to spread quickly—  
refuses to go into full bushy burst  
of brilliant fuchsia blossom.

### Highway One

At fourteen I packed up and left  
my mother shaking her fists  
in front of our neglected house.  
That world where kids played tennis  
  
in parks with vast greenbelts,  
swam in rectangular swimming pools,  
traveled to Disneyland—turned foreign.  
I felt cast out. And when I visited,

it was a strange country.  
In another state I somehow rejoined  
those kids, all grown up. They worked  
where I worked, played where I played—

couldn't see how I once lived.  
Becca returned from the past  
to visit my new land. Another time  
we drove down Highway One,

stopping at sites our parents loved.  
We talked of the writers  
who blessed their courting days,  
Jeffers, Steinbeck, Twain...

In Big Sur we discovered Nepenthe,  
where they sat high above the sea.  
Mom wore a gauzy scarf—  
kept her hair out of the wind.

## **Remnants**

*As in all national parks, do not feed,  
collect, disturb, or harm park wildlife,  
plant life, or other natural and cultural features.*

*-Channel Islands National Park: The Island Guide*

What I will not take away:

Spiky shell of the purple sea urchin  
alone on the pier

looking like a hat for an old lady.

A white quill.

Pumice and sandstone. Petrified wood.

One vertebrae washed clean by the sea, the sand—  
dried out by the sun.

Bits of shell and rock. Driftwood.

A California poppy.

Bark of the Eucalyptus. Acorns.

A dead seagull, wings  
wide and open, unbroken,  
but no innards. No head.

**Kari Wergeland** wrote *The Ballad of the New Carissa and Other Poems*, as well as *Voice Break*. She works as a librarian in El Cajon, CA, and lives part-time on the Oregon Coast. Website: [kariwergeland.wordpress.com](http://kariwergeland.wordpress.com).