

Hi, I'm Karen Jung, Music Librarian and Coordinator of Research and Instruction Services at Bowdoin College Library.

Today, for the "Read To Me" series, I'll be reading a poem by a poet, novelist, critic, activist, scholar and professor of literature, Native studies, English and creative writing at UCLA for over 20 years, Paula Gunn Allen.

She lived from 1939 and passed away in 2008. Paula grew up on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico and was the daughter of a Laguna Pueblo-Metis-Scot mother a Lebanese American father. She's one of the founding mothers of contemporary women's spirituality movement and was the recipient of numerous literary and Native American awards and honors over her lifetime.

Her work, "The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions," was a groundbreaking work on the study of Native American culture and gender.

The poem is titled "Kopis'taya, a Gathering of Spirits." It was first published in 1983 in "A Gathering of Spirit," a collection of writing and art by North American Indian women, a special issue of the journal "Sinister Wisdom." I first discovered this poem in a wonderful anthology, "Oxford Book of Women's Writing in the United States," which was published in 1995.

The poem begins with a sense of spiritual loss, when living is only survival and at the end, encourages the reader to celebrate and experience the natural and spiritual world.

Kopis'taya, a Gathering of Spirits by Paula Gunn Allen.

Because we live in the browning season, the heavy air blocking our breath, and in this time when living is only survival, we doubt the voices that come shadowed on the air that weave within our brains certain thoughts, a motion that is soft, imperceptible, a twilight rain soft feather's fall, a small body dropping into its nest, rustling, murmuring, settling in for the night.

Because we live in the hard edged season where plastic brittle and gleaming shines and in this space that is cornered and angled, we do not notice wet, moist, the significant drops falling in perfect spheres that are the certain measures of our minds; almost invincible, those tears, soft as dew, fragile, that cling to leaves, petals, roots, gentle and sure every morning.

We are the women of daylight, of clocks and steel foundries, of drugstores and streetlights, of superhighways that slice our days in two. Wrapped around in glass and steel we ride our lives; behind dark glasses we hide our eyes, our thoughts, shaded, seem obscure, smoke fills our minds, whiskey husks our songs, polyester cuts our bodies from our breath, our feet from the welcoming stones of Earth.

Our dreams are pale memories of themselves, and nagging doubt is the false measure of our days. Even so, the spirit voices are singing, their thoughts are dancing in the

dirty air. Their feet touched the cement, the asphalt delighting, still they weave dreams upon our shadowed skulls, if we could listen. If we could hear.

Let's go then. Let's find them. Let's listen for the water, the careful gleaming drops that glisten on the leaves, the flowers. Let's ride the midnight, the early dawn, feel the wind striding through our hair. Let's dance the dance of feathers, the dance of birds.

Paula Gunn Allen.

Transcript by [Rev.com](https://www.rev.com)