

12 Questions

Teresa Jordan

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by Spencer K.

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[HTTP://12QUESTIONS.US/2011/06/27/TERESA-JORDAN/](http://12questions.us/2011/06/27/teresa-jordan/)



When my co-editor describes the project at the heart of **12 Questions**, she likes to say that it's about up-and-coming artists and professionals, and that truly creative people are *always* up-and-coming because they're always trying something new, always testing the boundaries of their art and work. **Teresa Jordan** embodies this spirit perhaps better than anyone else we've featured thus far. An acclaimed (and, judging from the number of nominations and recommendations we've received to profile her, beloved) author, storyteller, radio talent, and artist, Teresa brings a sense of discovery, wonder and joy to everything she touches.

Teresa has written or edited seven books about about Western rural life, culture, and the environment, including the memoir *Riding the White Horse Home* and the classic study of women on ranches and in the rodeo, *Cowgirls: Women of the American West*. Teresa has been honored with the

Western Heritage Award from the Cowboy Hall of Fame for scriptwriting and a literary fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts as well as many other literary awards. Her most recent book is *Fieldnotes from Yosemite*, the second volume in her series of Sketchbook Expeditions.

With her husband, folklorist and public radio producer Hal Cannon, she created *The Open Road*, a series of radio features for Public Radio International's *The Savvy Traveler*. Her current writing project is the blog *The Year of Living Virtuously (Weekends Off)*, inspired by Benjamin Franklin's list of thirteen virtues and the seven deadly sins. It will culminate in a book in 2012.

As part of what she describes as "mid-life expansion," Teresa turned to visual art and earned her BFA in Fine Art, from the University of Utah in 2002. From landscapes to whimsical studies of cows and chickens, the same spirit that animates her writing enlivens her visual art, and you can sense a story in every line.

With an artist as accomplished as Teresa Jordan it's easy to go on and on about her. But I'd rather let her take over. Teresa found a story in every Question.

1. What is your hometown?

Iron Mountain, Wyoming, 43 miles northwest of Cheyenne, was, by the time I was old enough to remember, not much more than a one-room school, a couple of deserted buildings, and a post office in half a boxcar. (The other half of the boxcar served as a tool shop for the railroad.) Our family ranch was seven dirt-road miles further on. The post office is gone now and I don't think there is a single building standing at the place that is still identified as Iron Mountain on the map. (Some maps list it as Farthing, which was the name of the one-room school, also now gone.)

2. With what fictional character do you most identify?

It's easier for me to answer this from my teenage sense-of-self than from the present. My rancher father hoped I would grow up to be Dagny Taggart, the beautiful industrialist heroine of Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged," and have a future freed from a dependence on agriculture. I, on the other hand, aspired to be Alexandra Bergson in Willa Cather's "O Pioneers" and save the family farm.

3. In the movie of your life, cast an actor to play you.

This is even harder for me to answer than the last question. I asked a friend for help on this one. When she suggested Katherine Hepburn, I remembered why she is my friend.

4. What work of art speaks to your soul?

Two works of the German Expressionist Franz Marc make me weep every time I come across them: "The Red Horses" and "The Little Yellow Horses." It's hard to articulate just why they move me so, but Linda Hogan touches upon it in her poem, "The Other Voices": "How did we come to be/ so unlike the chickens clucking their hearts out/ openly in the rain,/ the horses just being horses/ on the hillside...." I'm a great admirer of Rembrandt, inspired particularly by how his work gained power throughout his life as he learned to do more with less, using fewer strokes and more abstraction. Mark Rothko, too, entrances me.

5. What books are you currently reading or recommending?

All of Dierdre McNamer's novels. She is such a powerful contemporary voice in the American West that I don't understand why there are still people who haven't read her. Right this minute I'm reading Haven Kimmel's "She Got Up Off the Couch" and love the protagonist's voice, so perky, melancholic, surprising, and wise. I've just reread Victor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning" and suspect we'd all do well to revisit it every couple of years.

6. What song or album is currently in heavy rotation on your iPod?

"Hal Cannon," by my eponymous husband. I also love an earlier album of his, "Cluck Cluck," with the Secondhand Band. I've recently reawakened to Leonard Cohen and can't get enough of him.

7. What's the last movie that made you cry?

Of Gods and Men, the story of the Cistercian Trappist monks in Algeria who were killed by extremists in 1996.

8. Cat person or dog person?

Yes.

9. What is more important, truth or kindness?

Once I gave my husband a card that still makes me smile: On the cover, a woman looks in the mirror and asks, "Do I look fat in this dress?" Inside, the husband answers, "Do I look stupid?"

We negotiate between truth and kindness all the time, especially in our closest relationships. I think the bottom line is trust. The more we trust each other — which means, the more we act in trustworthy ways toward each other — the more we are able to ask for what we really want, and respond to requests from others honestly.

10. How do you define sin?

I liked my husband's answer (<http://12questions.us/2011/05/31/hal-cannon/>) to this: Making the world go backwards through human actions.

11. How do you define virtue?

How about the opposite of the last answer: making the world go forward through human actions. Righteousness scares me to death and seems to underlie most of the really horrifying atrocities throughout history. I'm inspired by my mother's take on things: she was a good-enough housekeeper, a good-enough mom, a good-enough friend. She had a strong sense of right and wrong, took responsibility for her transgressions, and had a generous and forgiving nature. It always felt comfortable to come into her presence. Her husband and friends adored her, and so did I. I'd like to follow in her footsteps, but I get dogmatic at times.

12. Design your headstone: What does it say? What does it look like?

Many of my friends want to be cremated but that has always seemed to me like a waste of fossil fuel and good fertilizer. I want to be buried chemical-free in a wooden box and go back to the ground. Or a sky burial would be nice. But I do want a headstone: I've moved around too much and want a permanent address.

I love the old hand-cut stones, especially the Celtic crosses or anything with a lamb or a bird (even though I know the lambs are reserved for infants.) The deepest peace I know is when I am fully present and listening, and I'd love to live in such a way that my survivors would feel moved to inscribe, "She listened well." Unfortunately, as you can tell from the length of my answers, I'm loquacious by nature. I fear they'll be tempted to write, "Finally, she shut up."

Bonus Question: Who would you like to see answer these questions?

Judith Freeman

Deirdre McNamer

Tom Russell

Connections:

@treejordan (<https://twitter.com/#!/treejordan>)

Teresa Jordan (<http://www.teresajordan.com/>)

The Year of Living Virtuously (<http://www.yearoflivingvirtuously.com/>)

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