

## A Piece of Stillness

*Des Moines Woman's Project Chronicles Daily Scenes at Water Works Park*

Missy Keenan|, Special to the Register 9:17 p.m. CST November 9, 2014



**Every workday for eight years, Amanda Royce-Hale's commute took her through Water Works Park. Every day she saw something through her windshield that caught her eye and thought, "I should stop and take a picture of that."**

Late this summer, Royce-Hale finally followed through on that long-term notion. She started "The Water Works Park Project," challenging herself to take and post a picture online from the park every day for a year. The first post was Aug. 10, and so far she's been true to her commitment to post every day.

"Almost every time I drive through this park, I see something beautiful," Royce-Hale said on a recent chilly Saturday morning at Water Works. "Like the ducks flying by, or the light, or the clouds, or the sunlight in the morning coming up or in the evening going down. Stopping to take a picture or two is a way that I can get out in the air for a few minutes before I go to work, and then hopefully bring that little piece of stillness into my daily life."

Royce-Hale uses her cellphone or iPad to take several pictures in the morning on her way to work, and usually several more in the late afternoon.

"I do the morning because of the great light then, and I also do it when I'm coming home from work because the late afternoon light is wonderful as well," Royce-Hale said. "I have the feeling that in February I'm going to be coming over at lunchtime because it's going to be dark in the morning and dark at night.

"I'm probably going to regret this in the middle of February," she continued. "But I think no matter how many iron-gray days there are with no snow and icy cold nasty weather, there is still something beautiful. ... Wherever you are, if you really take the time to look, you can see different things."

Royce-Hale's husband, David, has offered her the use of his good Nikon camera for the project, but she likes sticking with her iPad or cellphone.

"I don't really consider myself a photographer," she said. "I'm more a chronicler of what I see. Using the iPad I can just hop out of the car and point and shoot. It takes a pretty nice picture. I do a lot of cropping and I do some tweaking of lights and darks and things, but I don't put filters on.

"I pretty much try to make it as close to the real thing as possible."

Throughout a conversation over coffee and croissants at the park, Royce-Hale frequently stops to point out her favorite heron flying by or the way the sun made it look like the trees were on fire, or to apologize that she needed to take "just one more" picture. She has become intimate with the park's particular details.

Royce-Hale brings this same knack for noticing to her many other creative endeavors. She also keeps a blog for her haiku and essays, makes jewelry that she sells on her Etsy shop and at From Our Hands in the East Village, and has made dozens of intricately beaded ID badge holders for co-workers.

Royce-Hale is equal parts soulful and self-deprecating, and likes to lighten the mood when conversation gets too heavy. When first asked how she manages to be so prolifically creative she casually quipped, "Well, it keeps me out of the bars."

Probe a little deeper. There's a bit more to it.

Royce-Hale, who turned 60 this year, has always dabbled in creative hobbies, but only in the last few years have they begun to consume the bulk of her leisure time.

Recently, Royce-Hale has become more introspective, and said she wants to use her abilities to look more closely at her life and the beautiful things in it. Royce-Hale has Parkinson's disease, and has read that a lot of Parkinson's patients have a burst of creativity similar to hers. This change may be due to the medications commonly prescribed, or it may be inherent in the disease itself.

"I have this disease and it's a pain in the butt," Royce-Hale said. "But all of the sudden I have the energy and interest to do a lot of creative things like this. This is the silver lining for me.

"My world is growing smaller, so you have to start going inward," she continued. "When you have a chronic disease like Parkinson's, it's hard to get around, it's hard to live as large as you might have done before. I think that this project is kind of a touchstone for me to remind myself that everyday life is not what's really important. It's what you find when you look around you and how you react to it that's important.

"That and a chocolate croissant are two of the important things in life."

### **The Waterworks Park Project**

You can follow Amanda-Royce Hale's daily photos from Waterworks Park at [www.waterworksparkproject.com](http://www.waterworksparkproject.com).

The following are her self-imposed rules for the project:

1. I use my cell phone or iPad camera. I have a point-and-shoot mentality.
2. Make it quick. I'm always running late.
3. Don't overthink it. It's hard for me to see when I'm thinking.
4. Don't stray far from the road. Time, mud, geese, ticks, snakes...
5. Don't try to make art. If I'm trying, I'm not succeeding.
6. Don't complain about getting wet, hot, cold, stuck, bored. This was my idea.
7. Don't give up.
8. See no. 7.
9. If I have to miss a day (accepting the Nobel Peace Prize or such), store up a few good shots, post them and fess up.