

Before We Call the Bellevue Police Bomb Squad

“oh yeah, it’s definitely live.”

-Joint Base Lewis-McChord Bomb Unit

My sister pulls a white silk wad
from the box she seemed to conjure
from behind the shabby resin bench.
Under that his Marine Corps cap.

So this is where Dad kept the war
folded flat as a #10 envelope,
USMC buckle, inlaid boxes fallen
open, apart, handwriting on envelopes

that must have been his mother’s.
These boxes must have been
his mother’s. A wine-red watch box
with a fancy women’s watch inside.

Red sun Japanese flag with bullet hole,
yellow hand grenade, very small gun.
I reach my hand towards a book spine,
flinch from a second small gun.

“Let’s put this away,” Lyn panics,
stuffs back ripped shroud or parachute,
disintegrating boxes, letters from home.
I’ll tell our brother, he’ll want the guns.

Glove

For handling dry ice; for glass cutting, sheet metal work, etc.
-from Dictionary of Discards

I try on a right hand leather glove
It is buttery and barely too big,
pull on the left, but can't. I'm confused.
Stare at it like a stubborn child.

The left glove has a thumb, and
three fingers, like my mother's dad,
who chopped off his pointer
with an axe, not careful enough
steading wood on the stump.

He waggled that knob with the skin
stitched white-knuckle tight in our faces,
cautioned us cousins with his tale,
left behind this unwearable glove.

Carpe Diem

for my sister Lyn

At my kitchen counter
with tablespoons and Sharpies,
we divided our parents' ashes
into labelled Ziplock bags.
I couldn't do that alone,
seeing those bits of bone.

I laid out my father's sand dollars
beside my Japanese ash-fired bowl.
They are smaller than I imagined.
Some are broken. Have I broken them?
I want more and bigger beach tender.
I want another chance.

Our parents are gone from the big rooms
of their enclosed lives,
their bitter squabbles,
their small and large sorrows and regrets.
Their shoes do not need them anymore.

Dad's Carpe Diem sweatshirt remains
on its hanger on his open bathroom door.
I drove his bathrobe through the tunnel
and down the chute into the finality
of the Children's Hospital donation bin.

No message echoes back
from the planet the dead flutter towards,
as they abandon us
to our pettiness and postcards,
the boxes neat beneath a rubble
of sticky dust and dread.

Do not ask for whom the wood curls
have been left across the work bench.
They are not mine, nor are the workings
of my brother's thoughts, the voices
above and either side of him that lead him
into the caves of their improbable conclusions.

Carpe Diem, page two, new stanza

Blood stains the indent where skin curls
to nail on my thumb. I tear at myself
in this quiet way to not cry out,

my mother no longer complaining,
my father not walking away from me down the hall.

Outing

*Within these covers, you may
find some use for your discard
far removed from its original purpose.
-from Dictionary of Discards*

My brother, sister and I station ourselves
in front of the bunker slits on the faces
of the recycling dumpsters in Houghton.

Steve from the Boeing Wine Club
already took empty wine bottle cases
but here we are with two cars-full more.

“I’m Zeus,” I say, after Dave Letterman
who flung fluorescent tubes
off a tall building in New York City.

I’m aiming for humorous, for light,
but the bottle misses and shatters.
Shards skitter across our feet.

Notre Dame

for Virginia Quinn

We rode the RER to Saint Michel-Notre Dame –
same stop Bill surfaced from the first time he'd come,
American GI, World War II, a Catholic.

That view across the Seine to Notre Dame
was the same, walk across the bridge to Ile de la Cité,
this time with cane. After he stumbled, fell,

I held Virginia's hand, our own grande-dame,
Bill her ten-year's spouse, après-omelets
and croissant at the corner café near our apartment,
Rue St. Charles, Arrondissement Quinze, our first
full day in Paris. Après rose windows and candles
lit for loved ones gone, Navigo Decouverte passes
useful even for the funicular up to Sacré-Coeur.

Three mornings we boarded the Metro to Musée
D'Orsay to find it closed due to strike, Virginia
And Bill game for seat-of-pants plans. At Musée
Marmottan Monet beside the Bois de Boulogne
I led Virginia to what water lilies were there. Bill
spent, leaned against a wall, but here he came.

Jim and I explored: Musée Cluny, Foucault's pendulum,
Paul Klee at the Musée de la Musique. Rue de Mozart
chocolate shop compact as a sonatina. Macaron at Maison
Ladurée. Falafel pita at the Israeli deli opposite
the Palestinian deli in Le Marais, where a man
pulled me back from a car careening around the corner.

Every evening, Bill and Virginia took the elevator
to the alley beside the apartment to watch la Tour Eiffel's
9 pm display. Every decade, Virginia tells me,
"You'll love being fifty, seventy, ninety,..." a feather dance
where in the end no pretense is what we display.
Some year and soon I won't have her, but for now
she's here, and as she stoops, more dear.