

Each Day More  
for Alexander Standiford

How do we negotiate  
this one  
the utter fragility  
between here  
and gone  
the thinnest filament  
an eighteen-year-old  
your youngest  
the baby boy you carried  
fed with your mother fingers  
your father hands  
the boy you photographed to capture  
and keep still  
present

How you fussed  
and worried  
driving him to games  
movies so many lessons  
then to college  
away from home  
into the world

How do we carry on  
how do we look  
into your mother eyes  
your father face  
the sibling hearts

His life loomed large with yours  
buoyed by books art food drink  
by the laughter  
we gathered each August of his life  
to welcome new students  
with the old

Then we entered your home  
not in summer  
December  
a space suspended  
between the ache of the gravel  
driveway and the cool  
blades of grass  
in the backyard

the chill  
of the pool water  
and the shade  
on the rooftop patio

leaving us poised  
with pain  
in air  
we're made  
to breathe  
untethered  
as if the gravity  
that holds each child  
to the earth  
has lost some of its force  
and there is  
too much sky  
each day more

## Artie

Accountant. A startled bird, the word  
escaped three times the next day,  
flit from the radio, dropped out  
of the mouth of a salesman, then  
from a stranger in the street. I didn't  
want to hear it. I didn't want to know  
of numbers—bills, taxes. His age: 46.  
Three, his children: 16, 12, 9. The date,  
the last day of Passover, forever  
marked in the Blackberry mind  
like birthdays on or near deaths—  
my sister's next to my grandmother's,  
my daughter's on my cousins'—  
or like the ages one holds one's breath  
to pass over, those regular doves,  
because my grandfather didn't and  
my uncle didn't and my cousins  
who flew suddenly, their skin still  
smooth. I don't want to hear of numbers,  
calculators, balances. A moth taps  
on my bathroom window, trapped  
when I closed it earlier. Debit, credit.  
If I crank it open, I'll wake the sleeping.  
If I don't, it will die, sooner. Too soon.  
The last time I saw Artie was at our nephew's  
bar mitzvah, November 17<sup>th</sup>. Thirteen.  
Three times that weekend—Saturday  
morning service, evening celebration,  
Sunday brunch. He and I stood in  
my brother's living room, spoke of his  
daughter, 12. Her three black belts.  
She played with my daughter, 5.  
I don't want to know of numbers,  
parties, food, though I made a cake  
to take to his house, their house  
minus one. To make the cake,  
separate four eggs, measure a cup  
of sugar, a half cup of cocoa, set the oven  
temperature, the timer, for... how long?

## Hurricane Sandy, 2012

Perhaps she dreams they are swimming,  
propelled by waves that collected them

from her arms, small legs kicking to stay  
afloat now that they've learned to swim

the waters of Staten Island. They are thrilled,  
as children are when they learn to swim,

to read, to ride a bike. Holding hands,  
the four-year-old protective of the two-year-old—

that's how she sees them when she wakes,  
when she walks through the neatness

of emptiness. She half expects to find  
small forms on their big boy beds, blankets

kicked off, so that she'll enter quietly, navigate  
toys strewn on the floor, cover their bodies.

She used to run her hand across the forehead  
of one, the curly hair of the other, and smile,

thinking, They're beautiful when they sleep.  
With their births, she became a light sleeper,

listening for a cry, a cough, for her name.  
At the grocery store, she reaches for cereal,

moves past apple juice boxes. Driving home,  
she sees neighbors still cleaning up after

the storm, clearing debris, repairing homes.  
For many, the lights have come back on.

Inside her house, she rests her head against  
a window frame. Where are the small, bright

faces that so resemble hers? She waits for  
a faint knock on the door, to open it, to find them

before her, a little taller, wet, so happy to see her.

*The Pianist, Final Scene*

Once again, he sits at the piano in the Polish radio station, the studio wood shiny and intact, no bombs exploding, no plaster dust falling, young men diving for cover. Once again,

he's sitting at the piano, tall and elegant, clean shaven and healthy. The waterfalls and rustling leaves of Bach fly from his fingers, filling the air with their light, the sound

engineer behind glass, smiling, rapt. Once again, he is playing the piano. When a friend he hasn't seen since before the war enters, the pianist, still playing, looks over, smiles

a joyful greeting that, unlike the notes, fades, gradually saddens to include the face of his mother, his father, brother, two sisters who listened each day of his life

when he played and practiced, who perished in the camps while he ran, hid, froze, starved nearly to death and once again plays on the radio and in concert halls for survivors.

Terezin

1997

The camp sits empty now. Knots of tour groups peer into dusty barracks, glance at communal toilets, over stone walls rising from a dry moat that never defended a thing or being. Along the paths between buildings,

gravel cracks, crunches. The noise wrecks the air, my ears, the inner barracks of my heart each time I step like stepping on bones, graves—who knows in this dust what remains? Ushered into a low building we scurry

through a long, narrow passage and abruptly out to, the guide informs, *the very spot where people were shot*. I look down to my feet. I want to rise above the ground, to not step anywhere. During the war,

did Red Cross workers who visited this *model* camp an hour east of Prague believe the Nazi propaganda film, makeshift stores, soccer games and cheering crowds were real? Stopping at a memorial that holds

a fistful of soil from other camps, Sara, a young woman from New York, bends down for a stone to place on the marble and in a parallel gesture, I bend with her, as I've done at my grandmother's grave, to remember...

*yisgadal, v'yisgadash, sh' may rabo...* the Kaddish spills from my lips, first lines, all I recall of the Hebrew prayer for the dead. I rush out of the compound—past rows of bright white crosses, Stars of David,

bunches of red carnations like thousands of small explosions or individual burning bushes in front of each unnamed marker—into the parking lot past food stands, tourists eating candy and rapidly

dissolving ice cream, cameras strung from their necks. The floor in the Terezin Museum is carpeted, voices hushed. Galleries split with partitions display pictures and papers—an edict, a warning, several orders, plans,

charts, drawings, photographs, records, so many careful records naming victims, giving them faces, people who passed through trains to Belzec, Chelmo, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, and *Osvetim*, Czech for Auschwitz,

everything typed up, written down, catalogued, thoroughly documented, as if someone someday would need to know exactly to whom, precisely when, where, how many...why? On a monitor in several galleries, an elderly woman recounts

her days in Terezin, her words close captioned in English for the multitudes of foreign tourists, many of whom sigh, having had enough of death and despair for one day. But the videotape is on a loop—she cannot stop telling her story.