

## For Fred

I miss coffee with honey in bed  
you brought in my favorite mug  
(though my favorite changed every day).

I miss counting on you to remember I meant “The Last Run”  
when I forgot the movie’s title  
(though you hadn’t seen it).

I miss you knowing whether it was De Niro or Pacino  
who was on my mind  
(though they’re little alike).

I miss you imagining what Uncle Dominick would do  
when we needed avenging  
(though he was imaginary too).

I miss the convoluted negotiations among our stuffed animals  
to determine who would be in charge  
(Snoopy the first present I gave you).

I miss your sharp sense of fraud  
that I never actually read all the Faulkner on my shelves  
(gathered for a long-ago class).

I miss your groans and eyerolls  
when I insisted on hearing Short Shorts  
(you preferred New Music for car rides).

I miss your saying “It’s a short drive”  
when I cried that you drove me crazy  
(who could fail to laugh?).

I miss your denial our son had a problem.  
Made me lonesome but gave him a shot  
(we were a good team).

I miss enjoying your daily inhaled Jack Daniels  
so masculine and un-Jewish  
(until I didn’t).

I miss how you were the one they all saw  
as the far better half  
(and hated when you fell in their view).

I thought  
I always thought we'd be together again  
(but then you goddamn died).

## Hallowe'en

Most Hallowe'ens I ignore.  
But last night my friend Patty and I  
tried not to trip as we wound through crowds  
of not only baby princesses and dragons,  
but their dressed-up parents as well,  
and so many anxious dogs.  
Upper East Side 92<sup>nd</sup> Street,  
closed between Lexington and Park.  
A live dance party shook a several-house stretch.  
*We Are Family*  
Those prepubescents sure can dance.

Another Hallowe'en, in New Paltz.  
My niece won the costume contest in some bar.  
I forget what she wore.  
My friend Irene and I sported football smudges.  
We went to a Dunkin Donuts so Shaundra  
could have more fun without us.  
Irene and I bought bagels,  
the most oxymoronic move I made that Hallowe'en.  
A bagel from Dunkin Donuts.

The year I was maybe ten  
my father and I had an argument.  
We were all in the car, the ugly Falcon.  
He said trick or treating  
is begging.  
I disagreed,  
just possibly without respect.  
He said if I didn't call it begging,  
I couldn't go.

If you know me you know I didn't go.

My mother deferred to my father.  
It is she I blame more.  
She knew better.

## Crossing

The driver ahead of me stopped.  
I, shamefully, honked.  
(In my almost defense, I was almost late.)  
What I supposed a graceful cat had already reached the sidewalk.

But then I witnessed: a handsome grey-brown fox.  
I'd never seen a fox cross Park or any other Montclair NJ street.  
Almost missed this one.  
I blew right by the turnoff.

Was it the fox?  
That would be enough to distract.  
But something less poetic caught me up.  
NPR reported McDonald's pulling out of Russia.

What a statement.  
What a blow! No more Big Macs for Putin and his capitalist pals.  
Okay, so thousands of employees will lose their jobs,  
farmers unable to sell tons of potatoes they grew for fries,

working class families sacrifice quick cheapish bites –  
fuck 'em.  
Fuck 'em all.  
McDonald's and all the other profiteers

pull out of Russia supposedly to oppose  
Moscow's war against Ukraine.  
Really to juggle a bottom line that says  
don't piss off consumers in America or France.

Can I tie the lovely fox to the unlovely sanctions  
against a people whose government savages another country?  
I cannot.  
Both just happened to cross my mind.

## A Nice Day at Work

It was my day to be happy.  
Every other day  
Unless something interferes.

(Like when I had my period,  
Every other month I got cramps,  
Every other month I got depression.)

A customer was mean  
And I kept my dignity and cool  
Waited patiently while she drew each item from her cart slowly, slowly, and dropped it at the  
way way end of the belt. And wished her a good, safe weekend.

Another woman, with a small cropped head,  
Well, this is what happened.  
She bought among other items six iced teas

I accidentally hit 66 on the register. \$163 something.  
So I took out 60, \$142 something.  
But she went nuts.

Not immediately. I was already on another next in line  
When this woman returned, waving the receipt like a torch.  
Why hadn't I taken out the whole \$163?

I explained she was charged for the six iced teas she'd actually bought.  
In one step instead of two.  
"Well, you should have done two steps.

The amount you took out should match the amount you put in.  
Where's a manager!"  
The manager, Q, told her exactly what I'd told her and eventually she walked away.

When Ylamy, whose break I was covering, returned to the register,  
Another coworker told her what happened in Spanish  
And we all agreed this register 14 attracted the crazies today.

The fun part was on my break  
I got to act out this woman's stupidity  
To the twins, Maria and Kira, and their friend Anderson, also from Equador.

"How can someone that stupid be allowed to leave the house?" I said.  
"How does she cross the street by herself?"

Nothing like meanness to crack up a table of coworkers.

Then my friend Jessica joined us and we talked about

Going to the bathroom only on the clock.

The twins bumped fists with me when I said this. But Jessica has IBT and has to go during  
her unpaid lunch hour.

At lunch time I shopped. Half gallons of Poland Spring, two white vinegars, 3 chocolate bars,

A triple chocolate pint of ice cream and blue corn chips. Nova lox, Irish reserve cheddar

And the marshmallow fluff I've been craving since seen in a customer's cart.

The only kind of more fun day at work

Is to join a struggle with coworkers

Against bosses' particular or general egregiousness.

## Spent Money

Just today –  
Not counting depreciation  
Such as my car.  
Do 8 year old Fiestas bought used depreciate?  
Not counting 1/30 of November rent  
Or car insurance  
Or veterinarian insurance  
Or heat, electricity and phone.  
Not counting therapy bills.  
All of which you could say I paid *for* today.

But actually today the groomer got her 65 plus 20 dollars tip.  
The bar where I hung out waiting got 9 for the greasy pirogi and 5 dollar tip for letting me spend time before the kitchen opened and not drink.  
Then \$134.60 for the xmas tree  
I got spontaneously on the way home, squealing my tires to turn in.

That is, 80 for the Douglas fir,  
said to be most fragrant.  
32 for the stand.  
4.99 for the tree-trash bag, thinking ahead.  
& 30 for the young woman with two green thread tattoos on her very lovely face named Nova to deliver and set up the fir.

Big achievement.  
I've deprived myself of a tree for some years.

I must be feeling better.