

## **At Bay**

On a good day, a clear winter one,  
you can see from Vicente to Dume,  
and point at both, as both stay at bay  
and admit to being a bit protected  
by the view: Palos Verdes to Malibu.

With our toes close to what was once  
thought downright infinite, I'd hope  
for contemplation, deep thinking, in  
the rise and fall, back and forth of breath  
heaving, an attempt to embody heaven.

Now it's just tanked, a glass enclosed  
aquarium where we fish farm, shepherd  
them from net to net until full grown or dead.  
We swim in three-piece suits, surf from  
board rooms, but when will we admit

that we are as unassailable, with thinning  
sails, and yet as frail as the open ocean.

## **Bound**

Bald baby at my chest.  
Little pink knit cap over  
her little big pink head.

A 5 am swim practice.  
I'm standing; heated  
steam clouds surround.

Bald baby at my chest.  
But in thick parka fur  
like an otter pup awash.

Swimmers milling in lanes.  
I cannot yell, I cannot  
berate. Bald baby is best.

Swimmers aghast when  
they see pink at my chest.  
I'm a heated steam cloud.

Little ghost, she's not heavy  
yet. I'm a standing raft,  
holding off the cold for her.

She brings buoyancy, lifts.  
When awake, she's loud;  
I rock her soft like water.

I'm still, now, still  
standing tall, until  
bald baby's at rest.

## Phranc

We would rush  
to the lifeguard office  
to talk to her,  
she was such a rush:  
*All-American,*  
*Jewish, lesbian*  
*punk rock folk singer.*

She watched over  
us while we  
swam, in her leather  
jacket and crew cut.  
We were her crew.  
She was kind,  
before she was kind-  
of, almost famous.

This was the decline.  
We saw how our parents  
looked hard at her,  
with downcast, vapid eyes  
like they were trying  
to deject her,  
flatten her like the clear surface

but then our dive in move  
that toppled the pool,  
that sent water all over,  
that waved, made hard paths  
sop, snapping the lines  
between lanes, making  
them an older shade of blue,  
us a little more liquid.

## To the boys who stole my Honda

They didn't get far,  
just down the block,  
but the empty space  
where the grey Civic  
had been was a shock

It was a team sport.  
Being on their team  
was a moving feast,  
but where not one  
delicacy was passed.

I was passed over.  
Attempting to score,  
their sharp eyes set so  
narrow, like they looked  
through straws at the goal.

At the team party,  
they offered me shots,  
not on a social path,  
but as sociopaths who  
wanted me passed out.

But I could drink hard,  
hardy har har whether  
Kool Aid or lemonade.  
They had the lemons.  
I was bitter about it.

So the sky got hazier.  
Pranksters: me on them,  
them on me, finally  
with them carrying  
my car in their arms.

(To the boys cont'd, pg. 2. New stanza)

Imagine the awed neighbors  
watching these movers  
with pockmarked cheeks,  
knees jerking, faces straining  
up, down a crowded street.

And then me coming out,  
looking everywhere,  
shaking, while the movers  
giggled, squealed behind  
parked cars like cruel girls.

## **Broke**

At a two-way stop, I had the right of way.  
Our eyes met, or so I thought.

He felled me, curled a broken back  
wheel, peeled his gold Beemer away.

It felt like I fell out of a tree.  
I carried the hurt, the shock, the bike home.

I was sore, but feeling unbroken, until  
Peter pulled my hand at water polo.

(That weird sport where ponies splash  
around in swimming pools, horseplay.)

My wrist felt separated from the hand,  
in the X-ray floating in a wary, harmed

space, darkneses in the little bones,  
splayed, like cracks in good veined wood.

I told the doctor nope, no way Jose,  
no plaster, no fiberglass cast, no how,

no snow plow, put him behind me,  
gave the Heisman go away stiff-arm.

He said I was risking mobility. I had no  
ability to be flexible. The wrist might fuse.

I fumed. Our eyes met, or so I thought.  
My way seemed the only get straightaway.

But I gave in, stooped to his expertise.  
He wrapped it soft like a gift.

And then it hardened, like my psyche.  
It fit like a suit of armor, a heavy,

(Broke cont'd, pg. 2. New stanza)

hard, arcane glove. *Don't move until  
it stops hurting*, he said. I went off,

went straight to the swimming pool.  
*Then ease back into it.* Ease up on this.

I found a top-heavy, tipsy football coach.  
Asked him to pad and tape it up.

He agreed. I played a water polo game.  
Then got banned by the CIF.

The governing body of young, sporty  
high-school bodies said it wasn't safe.

Then I noticed, when I ran or swam,  
that my wrist had its own heartbeat,

a whack beat that blocked my heart's feat.  
So I stopped, my wrist had beaten me.

When I stopped, my life became about  
who I was, not what I did, or maybe that

what I did could no longer cover up for  
the person I wasn't. I wasn't good

for anyone, a wanna-be Hercules  
with godlike focus set on his labors,

trials, and not a Cyclops eye out for anybody  
on dirt trails full of rockfalls, travails.

I was so driven I couldn't see the signs:  
red signs, yellow dead-end signs.

Only when I stopped did I find the right  
way, and now my eyes meet on everyone.