

I Remember Sunday Mornings

I remember Sunday mornings on Quaker Church Road
 awakened to the sound of percolations.
The scent of Maxwell House flowed into the bedroom.

The radio played the station of the sisters
 with their prayer of Saint Frances,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

My grandfather sat in his chair
 between the white-painted radiator
and the gray Formica dinette table,

his right arm rested on his right thigh
 as the smoke from that hand drifts
past his face toward the ceiling.

At the grocery store, I was two,
 sitting in the cart. Grandpa went away
for almost a year of a minute.

I cried until he brought himself back
 to save me
with that red-striped carton of Luckies.

He taught me the use of power saw and other tools,
 made our bows and arrows with his pen knife,
and drove us to the P.A. relatives in coal country.

My grandfather taught me a few new words,
 emphysema, cyanotic, hypoxia,
but only after he could no longer use words.

My mother drove over to check
 and found him sprawled
across that clean linoleum kitchen floor.

Weeks later, I came into his hospital room
 and peeked through the curtains surrounding his bed.
Behind the screen, a scene of nursing neglect.

In the quiet, Grandfather balanced himself,
 naked, struggling above the used bedpan,
large dark pink scrotal sack hung slack.

His eyes asked my 19-year-old almost a man,
to take the burden from beneath him;
No shame between us, as I comply.

And last,

Grandmother asked me, oldest, her favorite,
to help her pull the soft burial blanket
over those coffin-closed blue eyes.

The Fires This Time

Nature notices paradox.

Haven't we been faithful enough?

Idling against the noon heat
of the August parking lot asphalt,
driver in the post office, mailing something,
the big diesel pumping out the hot exhaust,
the cab kept cool,
the engine measuring drops of fuel.
Wet black on the ground
as the diesel oil fumes spill into the air,
rising in carbon freedom
to reflect molecular heat back to the earth.

Are we not good enough servants of the land?
Husbands of the earth?

Closed windows capture sun rays.

But the heated engine cools the interior with the fan,
blowing cold into hot.

The comfort of the empty truck cab awaits the driver,
driving the heavens into the hot punishment purgatory
and on to hell.

How many joules in a kilowatt hour? 3,600,000.

Wasn't the knowledge of good and evil
gained from the apple
enough to save the Earth?

1.94 megajoules brews a cup on my Keurig.

I let it cool through neglect and heat it in the microwave,
only 24,000 joules a second.

In the sixties, from Trenton, we watched the most beautiful sunsets,
created across the river in Morrisville, P. A., courtesy of U.S. Steel.

What price the beauty of metals for General Motors?

The heat of the engines goes off into air.

Doesn't hot air rise into the cold sky and cool off?

If we don't pay attention to the science,
can we pray our way out of this?

A British Thermal Unit equals 1055.0585 joules.
 One Kilowatt Hour is equal to 3,412.141633 BTUs.

In our house, from June 13 to August 14, we used 1,584.000 KWHs.
 Good thing we were in Vancouver using Canadian Energy for two of those weeks.
 Not driving, not using air conditioning much.

Well, except during the night.
 Can we get credit at the end for that bit less?

Mother nature disagrees with a heat hammer.

On British Thermal Units:
 Therm =100,000 BTUs All you need is about 96.7 cubic feet of natural gas to produce a
 therm.

But didn't some good father know the science
 and teach it to us as we left Eden?

Was it the fire next time that burned the Hell out of Paradise, California?
 Or the fire last time?

If we get off the grid,
 can we get out of the zone?
 Off the grid, without a footprint?

Can the sins of the heat be left behind,
 behind to save us from the future?
 If I give myself to the transfer of energy
 can we form a thermodynamic system to save us
 or even our grandchildren?

The human exhales at 91.76 F.

This morning, I inhaled 42 degrees and exhaled 91.76 degrees.

Inhale air—21 % O₂, 78 % N

Exhale air—16% O₂, 4 % CO₂. 78% N

Greenhouse effect?

Hothouse effect?

Madhouse effect?

I breathe as the world heats, burning.

How long can we hold our breaths?

There He Is

At the sound of the leash,
remembering,
as paws once leaped
from side to side
in lively anticipation.

He reminds us
of that time of puppy pleasures.
The dreams make his old body
move more willingly
than his master's love now can.
Are there new tricks
worth walking
past the food bowl?

The sun rests
with warm comfort
on the carpet or the grass,
He still seeks the pleasure
of that space behind the ear
when scratched.

The trick is
to rise to the occasion.

Today,
it seems not worth the effort.
Let sleeping memory suffice.

T'Was the Night Before Open-Heart Surgery

Fifty years ago, three boys sat with their dad
around the kitchen table, playing cards.
They all hoped her mother's heart would be fixed.
Dad hated to lose, hated to be wrong.
All were in danger of losing the woman,
gone from the house that night.

They could've been playing
rummy, canasta or hearts, but thinking,
"Mother (even he called her that),
lying in the hospital awaiting a procedure
still dangerous in those early days."

It could have been the heart that flew
across the room when his anger grew.
And brother number two, high school senior
about to spring free of this place forever,
was not taking the blame again for nothing
this night.

Both rose in the moment,
with the man came a beer bottle
dripping down his upraised arm.

The oldest, a sophomore college kid
rises from the father's right,
stands calmly nose to nose.
The forgotten self of the father
begins to return, and he lowers the arm
the bottle drops to the cluttered floor.

Dad orders the boy across the table
to the bedroom. As the stairs creak,
the older males gradually descend
to their chairs, still face to face.
The younger brother sits in the midst,
just collateral to the conflict.

"Dad, you have to go up to apologize."
And to his credit, he does..

As She Left It

When the widowed neighbor's son cut down
the huge blue spruce at the fence,
we could see the yard had grown old,
but reminders of its youth are still present,

The life-size doe in repose, adorned by the once-red
Christmasy ribbon around her neck
looks over the fence toward us.

The remains of the garden flowers
now dried with grown-up weeds
overtaking the walkways.

The peach tree is loaded to the ground
with tired branches breaking under the weight
of the neglected crop.

The far side of the tree is dead, with dried gray brittle branches
woven among the green ones, long ready
for the rusted pruning shears lying against the house.

The love she put into the yard faded with her ability to move
through her gardener's tasks,

Now lawn chairs and garden gnomes vie for viewing
above the cheat grass crowds the space,
where evening drinks were once
served to husband and friends.

Artificial flowers set in the decorative bucket
weren't replaced last Spring or
perhaps the year before,
The sun has long beaten the color from their faux pedals.

during the year we were getting to know her.
She talked about her decades here,

Do echoes of her husband's laughter gently shake memories free?

The hands that cared for the growing things
slowed over the widowed years.
Her brain branches dying like the peach limbs,
leaving weak, misshapen fruit among dried stems.

Her son tells us she lives in a different present than the rest of us,
thinking strangers haunt the bodies of loved ones,
perhaps able to remember some life in the garden she loved,

dying its parallel death without her.