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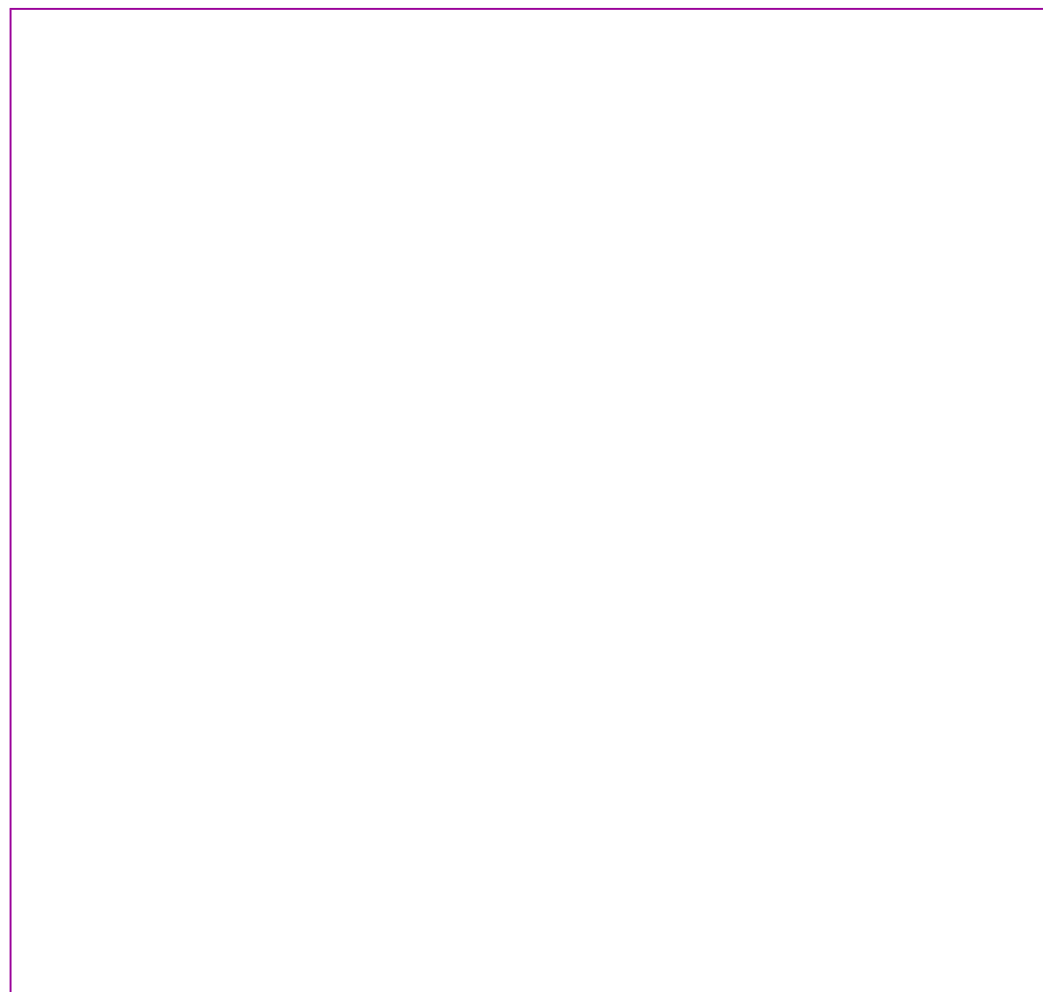
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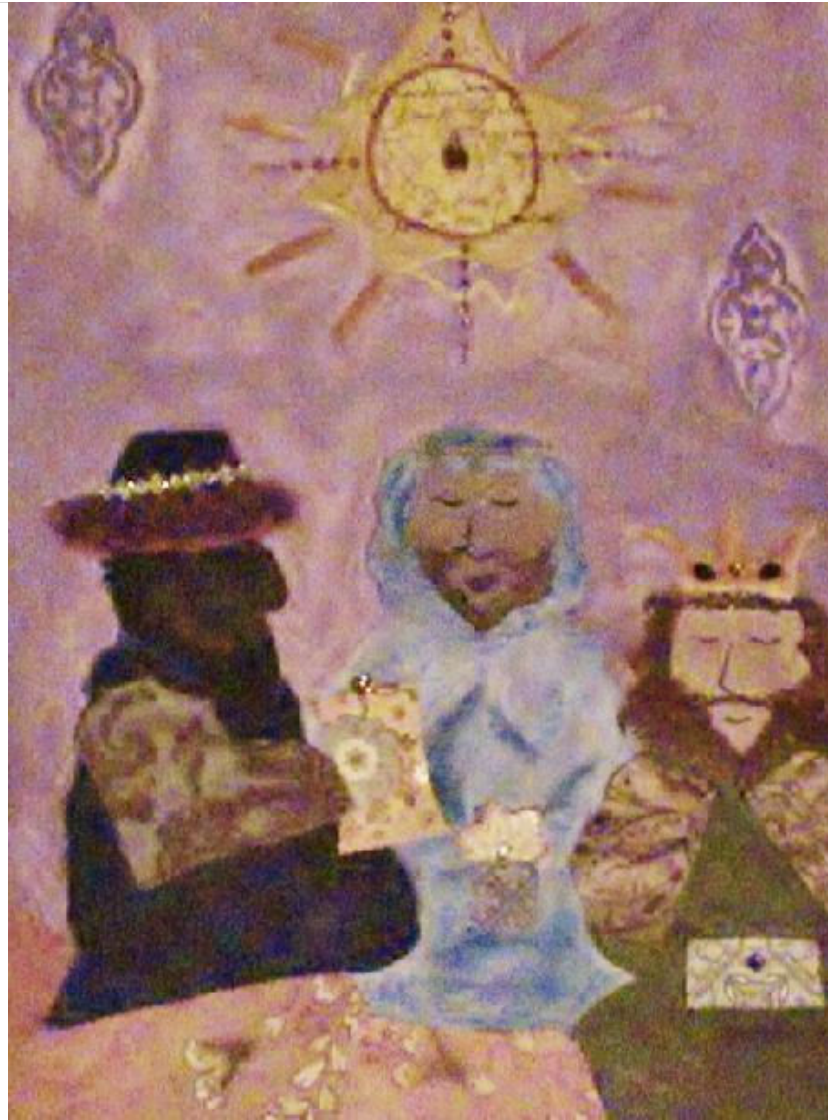
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Come in...and be captivated...

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"The Three Wisemen Under the Star at Bethlehem" by N.M.B; Copyright 2011

**Lost**

by Nicole M. Bouchard

When all is said and done,  
the rituals and rites have been performed,  
everyone's gone home and the doors are closed,  
I will wonder where you are...  
if you're safe and happy tonight,  
if everything on this earthly plane was enough-  
did I give you what you needed?

I held those hands, so warm with a fast heartbeat  
pulsing into my palm, for just a single, clear moment  
one of them on my back in a half embrace before falling back  
to the bed  
Only to touch them less than a week later, folded, cold, unfamiliar...

Every detail torments me-  
did I remember to kiss you goodbye on both sides of your face, your  
forehead  
before I left that night, not knowing it would be the last time?  
And later, when I saw you again, stilled but beautiful and regal, did it shock  
my childhood senses that for the first time I couldn't feel your comforting  
presence?

You gave me my name; I remember seeing the best  
of what I could be in the mirror of your eyes  
I wish I knew what you knew  
I wish I could keep that reflection  
or is it just the shine of your eyes that I need  
to confirm some part of my identity or embrace it?  
Perhaps I just need to see my perception of you  
in that reflection for a point of reference,  
that light, a guiding star full of hopes and dreams,  
all of which I wish I could have shown to you so that  
you'd know I'll be alright.

I've said to people that I lost you,  
but really, in heaven with your family and one true love,

free of a weakened body, you are found.  
I'm the one feeling lost.

I'm terrified of closed doors and cold stones.  
I'd rather think of warm breezes that lifted your curtains to the ceilings  
like ship sails pregnant with hope and better days.  
Or the light unique to your homes, unassuming gold, gentle but powerful  
enough  
to chase darkness from the souls touched by it.  
What of the rose blossom smells in every drawer, on all the garments, even  
the thread  
from the sewing box which I often use.  
If I can still pick up the scent on your gloves and  
scarves, is this real?  
Can I not run and see you to tell you everything I've wanted to?

Will I dream of you? Will it ever again be remotely close to what we had?  
I need your comfort and happiness more than I need your nurturing for  
myself,  
though I'll never stop wanting it,  
reaching out for it from a child's broken heart in a woman's body.  
But then, you loved me enough to last this lifetime and tie us beyond.

As a young girl, I could never stay asleep if you were awake the times I  
stayed at your house.  
You had an energy like a party no one ever wanted to miss.  
Tip-toeing quietly in the hall so as not to wake me, I'd sense you in my  
sleep.  
Seeing me, you'd worry that I wasn't getting my rest.  
We'd talk until I was weary, sliding down from a seated position on your  
couch,  
you in your chair.  
Just as my body would give in to sleep, calmed by your nearness, I'd feel a  
blanket  
tossed over me, neatly tucked in.

When I can't sleep because I can't sense you or know

where you are, just think of me  
and the thought alone will be the blanket that envelopes me  
as I get weary, give in and let go.

### **A Sparrow**

by Michelle Kennedy

There was a sparrow hovering  
over pooled water  
casting reflections  
on pieces of my memories  
scattered along the surface

The tiny bird seeing the  
garish light and cold shadow  
play upon its wings  
wisely and graciously  
decided to fly away  
to safe, placid places

But I ran my fingertips  
calmly through each image  
careful not to cut myself  
on any of the sharper edges  
painfully aware of Serendipity  
and how her brother, Fate  
could leave me stranded  
bleeding on the shore

Yet I could not move  
from the swirling smoky images  
First to greet me was  
a man with cedar sawdust  
in his pepper hair  
he smiled and pointed to  
the distinguished lady

drinking Earl Grey tea  
wearing a peacock feathered hat

She beckoned me to come closer  
whispered to me  
like wind floating in the air  
about sparrows and love  
regret and mistakes  
Most of all she reminded me  
of second chances and forgiveness

As if in an alchemist's palm  
the shattered glass transformed  
became a luminous mirror  
a palette of bursting colors  
revealing me, to me

### **Belle la France**

by Cheryl Sommese

Beauty is your form and  
Charm your name.

For your beauty greeted me at every corner  
like an affectionate mother tidying wispy  
hairs straying in her daughter's face.  
And your charm captivated my spirit  
as my feet traversed the enchanting cobblestones  
winding about  
the romantic pathways.

Yes, your energy cradled  
my innards with fondness  
as each location I bid a melancholy farewell  
grew even more preferred  
than the one before.

But how can I

endure such loss  
now that a frigid ocean  
separates our love?

It's somewhat serendipitous to explain.  
But the smell of baking breads  
infusing your neighborhood shops, and  
melody of chimes  
resounding from your gothic cathedrals, and  
vision of masterworks  
adorning your alluring landscape  
enacted a pact with my core:  
and now they're one with  
my heart.

### **Towards Dawn**

by Katie O'Sullivan

I dream  
a beach, a tidal wave coming.  
I gather three sons,  
look for the fourth  
I stumble through sand  
dragging the others with me  
I call his name  
begin to awake  
resist opening my eyes  
for I need to hold them  
see their little boy faces  
their voices clear,  
in ways I had forgotten.  
their images fade.  
I want them back,  
their arms around my neck  
small hands in mine  
loving me with no disguise.

I turn over  
ask my husband, "Have I been crying?"  
"No," he answers  
but doesn't ask why.

---

### **Promenade**

by Katie O'Sullivan

I placed my small sons into  
the hands of French nuns  
while my mother lay dying  
a thousand miles away.  
See their suitcases  
on candy colored quilts  
at the foot of white iron beds  
in a room of many beds.

my heart tore in two  
for my mother  
for my sons  
those ragamuffins who raced  
for the first dip  
into the sea  
who elbowed one another  
for a window in the car  
wrestled for the last candy bar.

heart composed I returned  
hours early  
from a thousand miles away  
to retrieve my sons  
anticipating what I could not guess  
of their strange holiday.  
in the care of others.

Sister said the children  
were on a promenade.  
from a window



I could see them returning  
singing French songs,  
hand in hand, two by two,  
up the path leading  
from the village below.  
a nun in front to lead  
a nun in back  
to herd the stragglers.

they saw me, broke ranks  
ran to my arms  
Oh Mama, the eldest said  
we get to go to the piscine  
or to the village on promenades.  
if we are good  
Le Pere will give us  
a bon bon.

### **Reflections On a Window in Lan'tien**

by Geoffrey Heptonstall

The cricket in her cage  
Speaks sadly of life.  
Living through many seasons,  
She seeks the springs of paradise.

Once there were forests  
Where leaves fell gently.  
Now there is carved ivory  
Encompassing her dreams.

Strangely those human eyes  
Stare with idle minds  
Amused by their captive  
In natural beauty.

The rain runs down the window pane.  
In the kingdom of glass  
The river has many streams  
Flowing from ancestral mountains,

Higher than the fireflies,  
As distant as the moon.  
The luminous river  
Is an image of heaven.

---

### **A Day's Work Far From the City**

by Geoffrey Heptonstall

At dawn the sky is sea.  
The grass we barefoot tread  
Moves also like the sea.  
And the sun is a ship with sails  
Graciously swelling in fortune,  
Seeking its familiar course with calm.

We wake in the deeps where, drowning,  
We rise toward first light.  
All embers of evening ashen,  
Our vermilion dreams vanish.  
Dust in the dawn breeze makes mist  
Of our company leaving for the day.

Working will mock the song  
I heard by night of she  
Who flew with white wings,  
Plumed in unforgiving innocence  
Of the walls enclosing the world,  
Of the wilderness no-one has seen.

**Tis the season...**

by Peter Franklin

Eggnog thoughts were sparked today,  
Perhaps a bit sentimental  
As I listened to an old Benny Goodman tune...  
And late afternoon  
Raindrops danced on the hot asphalt.  
I squeezed my eyes and tried to put a chill in the air...  
But the steamy rain prints pockmarking the dust  
Would not allow me that one escape.  
Capriciously,  
I cajoled myself into taking the seasonal readings:  
Windspeed, moisture, temperature variation.  
Collated, they were awry...  
Weather: hot.  
Humidity: yes. And very.  
Snowfall: don't make me laugh.  
A shudder pulsed through my reverie,  
The realization that after all these years,  
Opposites had struck.  
Truth is that even if I did have a chimney  
Santa Claus would probably fall out of it,  
Rather than into it.  
Just a bit close to the sash...  
Equatorial blues.  
Yet, I don't think I was intentionally lied to as a child.

The palms are swaying,  
My palms are sweating,  
And my holiday-worn stocking...  
Nailed to the right of a postcard just received from home...just may lie  
empty this time around.  
Silly, even I know  
That reindeer don't wear seersucker suits...and can't stand the heat.

As a child, I loathed the cold  
For with it came the slow drift of mottled leaves...  
Always relegated to raking them into cute little piles.  
But how I now long to have the curtains teased...  
Breezed...by a sturdy arctic breath...  
Cold blasts sending stragglers to the hearth.  
The Amana air-conditioner lacks the true effect.

'Tis the season to be jolly.  
Then tell me, how does one make a snowman out of coconuts?  
At least they won't melt at the first  
B-R-E-A-K in the storm.

The puddles are steaming larger now...  
Somehow just a bit perverse.  
And they seem to reign here daily.

### **Seraph's Song**

by Colin Griffin

Sweetly singing seraph, seemingly silent  
Alone, amidst the emptiness of eternal night  
Nothing to do but sing, softly swooning  
Amidst her isolation, longing. reaching.  
Her back to the endless depths of sea  
Waves of black crash against her rocky perch  
Jagged, worn, unwelcoming  
One day he will come, she confides  
Counting the days  
But all the while she sits, softly singing  
Sinning in the safety of her sanctum  
Leading those who pursue her heavenly herald  
to the void of a grave unknown

She remains, somber, atop the stone  
Lest she join them

### Untitled

by Simon Perchik

When this clock holds back  
its scent has meaning  
--even dogs are trained

for lies or no lies --truth  
has a calm to it, by instinct  
soothes this kitchen wall

flows underneath as bone  
and sleeplessness --you wait  
for night to reset the hands

teach them honesty  
practice till the weak one  
hardens solid, smells

the way an invisible stone  
can be trusted  
lets you lower your head

against this darkness  
seeping out your skin  
as silence and the nights sure to come.

**Winter's Thaw**

by Shelby Thomas

Oh, lonesome fox  
wandering,  
zigzagging

through the bush and  
fifty foot trees

At winter's end,  
the ground, it  
thaws  
Her roughened paws  
hit dirt and

long gone  
leaves

Her whiskered face searches  
the ground, with nose  
to soil

she breathes...

she breathes in  
a scent, the scent of life

She is alive, she knows this now  
with air in the lungs and  
a sight of the world  
A conscious being of  
depth, of feeling.

With this,  
she runs  
feeling the Earth below  
Her,  
the air surrounds Her.

This moment, this  
molecule of time

She is alone

She is alive!

---

### **Atlantis**

by Spiros Kitsinelis

Demeter, reveal the blossomed land,  
the cold has lasted far too long,  
and Persephone is never coming back.  
Clear the skies almighty Zeus,  
you promised light and music to your son.  
Tame the waves Poseidon,  
make them sparkle in the sun.  
Aeolus calm the winds,  
help me find my way Hermes,  
for they are taking me away from Atlantis.

---

### **Sweet Worldly Nothings**

by Spiros Kitsinelis

Saturday night dreams and fantasies,  
sweet as wine on my lips.  
Smells of summer evenings,  
smells that numb my senses.  
Intoxicating sips of worldly pleasures  
that drown my thoughts and purpose.  
How sweet the nights become,  
how much I need the smells and wine,  
the more I have them, the more I taste them.  
And soon enough I get addicted  
on tastes of wine and sensual nights  
and I have lost all thoughts and purpose.  
And I am left  
with empty days that wait for nights.  
And I am left  
with empty heart that waits for doses  
of shallow feelings.  
And I am left  
with empty head that throbs with pain  
and longs for words I can't recall  
and settles for sweet worldly nothings.

### **Average Snowfall in Boise**

by Vince Corvaia

I want to know everything there is  
to know about Boise.

I'm curious by nature, but  
it's Boise I want to know about.

How much snowfall does it get?  
Why is the football field blue?



Where can a man go to be alone  
and forget an unrequited love?

It's she I once wanted to know  
everything about, but now

I just want to forget.  
Fall is here and the beautiful

leaves are dying.  
Tell me about Boise.

### **Justification for My Writer's Block #3**

by Holly Day

somewhere in the Amazon  
an old man with a pointed stick  
is writing the second chapter of a novel  
scrawling it into the dirt.

the first chapter is on my computer screen  
cursor blinking steadily as I  
admit defeat. I have only  
this first chapter in me.

I wonder  
if the old man in the jungle is as angry as I am  
that this unfinished novel, no beginning  
no end  
came to him as this first chapter came to me

I wonder who will end up  
with Chapter 3.

### **The Idea Of Me**

by Teresita Garcia

I realize I tend to surround myself  
around fears and self-protection,  
an emotionally tough lesson I learned  
from very early on; the women in my  
life, my teachers. I get like this  
sometimes, insecure, scared, anything  
but confident. I feel so drained, yet  
at the same time, I feel a strong sense  
of emotional balance. I've learned  
to trust my instincts, they're not always  
wrong.

Last night I dreamt of wax, paraffin wax,  
the kind you make candles with. I watched  
it melt gradually over a burner, feeling a  
symbolic alignment to it, not so much on  
a physical level but on an intellectual level;  
the way I arrange thoughts around in my  
head, the way they come out of me a certain  
way. It doesn't take long for me to find a  
rhythm, there's great power in the weaving of  
change, great ways to gently start over, with  
growth, choice of direction and wholeness.

I feel like I've been blindsided again, there's  
that negative energy that always manages to  
make itself known when you're at your most

vulnerable. It seeps in, like the coloring and fragrance you add to wax after it has melted, when it calls you to the past, beckoning you to connect A with B, through issues that must be molded and resolved. It's the same sense I had when I held my sister's favorite bracelet, the Mexican silver one bought in Taxco with the red onyx stones, the one that remains

scented by her. The patterns of colors are the same, but the texture of the stones is so different, one from the other. I pass my fingers over it, and I get the odd sense of years moving backward in time, and I am joined by the remains that are still very much a part of my life and my heart. If there ever was a foolish notion of happily ever after, I am not consciously aware of it. I think that kind of role requires trust; faith and support, in sync with soul-expansion; natural, healthy that doesn't make you question your own sanity.

It's funny how the layers formed on her bracelet. I wonder if they always felt abrasive-like, when Jose first presented it to her as an engagement gift, a promise of true love. I'm sure at one time it needed some fine tuning, some adjustment made because it was too big for her wrist. There must have been reassurances, good, exciting, and worthwhile; something special that made her feel genuine about expressing her experience with all; something awesome before it went scary, before everything liquefied and slipped away.

I can visualize myself out on the ledge of our high rise threatening to jump just as she did, when Jose left her for that Japanese girl, the one he said was sexier than She, the one who wasn't carrying his baby. I don't know what qualifies full grounding, but I do know

it doesn't come in the form of loss, and certainly not in the form of a miscarriage. When the rug has been pulled out from under you, you tend to fall before you even know what has happened and I've learned that sometimes you can't even shake that feeling of apprehension, that will always be a part of you,

waiting for the crash, the fall. It's about the same time where you stop talking, when you no longer feel the need to keep anything from anyone nor to tell everyone everything. My mom was the same way. She had all these vague frustrations that often found their way to a leather belt, onto my bare skin. It was called discipline back then, but I knew better. It was in the way she held that ring. Not her wedding ring, the other one. All her hopes and desires just exuded from that ring. It was strange and intense to witness, especially when she didn't know I was looking.

My brother, now, he was unique. He was the epitome of the necessary strength and courage one needs to go on, intuitive, but dismissive of it. I never saw him show any sign of emotion other than the one time when dad passed away from cancer; my brother held my father's eyeglasses in his hands and cried, there were no words, and he cried for less than a minute, but I remember. And I remember he never showed weakness again. Did you know that some candles hold their sense of peace, even when there are corresponding physical changes? I'm not so inclined to color or scent those candles;

I just let them be. I've got a better insight now, I think. Some conversations are best left for later, some, never. I wonder if all men are like my brother, all women like my sister and mother, particularly within the family structure; esoteric. I find it curious what we base knowledge of another on. For most people, it's in what is said, you know, that kind of inherent activity that spills out of their mouths. But, me,

I know better. Individuality is like the dynamics of melting wax, like the dynamics of most women, who hold deep secrets within their essence. It's not always what they say but what they don't say that defines them.

### **An Anniversary**

by Michael Ceraolo

August 9, 2011

Thirty-three days

before the tenth anniversary of the great crime

(said anniversary has already begun  
to be commemorated,  
and  
need not be added to in this poem)

and  
the exact date of the tenth anniversary  
of a more private,  
more important,  
event in my life:  
my dad's death

A Tuesday now,  
a Thursday then  
Going  
to the hospital early in the morning to say goodbye,  
after  
my mom made the difficult decision to have no more surgeries done

(he had had a stroke a few months earlier  
and was unable to say that his feeding tube  
had been dangerously and painfully misplaced;  
when it was discovered,  
one surgery was done  
to try to clean up the problem,

to no avail)

I said goodbye

(though he was in a coma I believe he heard me),

but  
though the prognosis was that  
it was only going to be a matter of time,  
I couldn't wait by his deathbed until the end came  
(which it did, about 12 hours later)

We had a difficult relationship,  
and,  
as in all such situations,  
neither of us was blameless,  
both of us being extremely stubborn,  
though  
as time passed it became less difficult

(and who knows where it might have been today;  
that's a subject for a different poem)

But  
today none of that matters:  
his faults  
are buried with him in the Veterans' Cemetery in Rittman  
fifty-some miles away,  
too far  
for someone without a car and with everyone else working,  
so  
I will honor his memory  
by visiting the three houses we lived in

Superior Avenue,  
where it was  
he and mom and then me and then my brother,  
a store which my parents owned and ran,  
with the house behind and over the store;  
the entire building was destroyed by a fire

in the fall of 1962 at a time  
when we were away at my cousin's christening  
We returned home to see the fire engines  
in front of the house fighting the fire,  
to no avail

Today  
almost fifty years later the small lot  
is still vacant,  
paved over,  
yet  
protected by a fence topped with barbed wire,  
its neighbors now storefront churches  
The high school just down the street where I would have gone  
had we not been part of the massive flight  
that changed the ethnic composition of the neighborhood  
from ninety-ten one way to ninety-ten the other way  
in the space of a decade,  
is now closed,  
its sign  
the victim of vandalism and time,  
and  
cleaning up its littered ground and mowing its grass  
have been moved way down the list of priorities

Biltmore Road,  
where we moved to  
in the spring of 1963,  
after  
a six-month stay in an unremembered apartment  
while we waited for the insurance claim to be settled  
A sister and another brother would be added to the family  
during the ten years we lived there  
Today  
the hedges along the sidewalk have been removed  
by one of the subsequent owners,  
and  
so have  
the apple tree in the backyard where I first learned to climb trees  
and the brick and stone barbecue in the backyard

that we almost never used  
and the big maple tree in the front yard  
and the bush next to that tree that hid  
the yellowjackets' nest we once accidentally broke  
(The tree on the treelawn,  
and  
many trees on the other treelawns on the street  
have grown considerably since we moved away  
and now provide a great amount of shade  
when full-leaved, as well as being a pretty picture,  
and  
many of the bluestone slabs used for sidewalks remain too)  
The lawn where you first taught us  
how to use a lawn mower has been leveled a bit,  
the asphalt driveway where we learned to shovel snow  
has not yet been reborn in concrete  
I wonder if the basement has been finished,  
if the crawl spaces are still there and still needing  
to be checked for the occasional critter  
Other memories from inside the house  
are contained in photographs

Homestead Road,  
where we moved to  
in July 1973,  
needing  
a larger space for the six of us,  
but  
staying in the same school district  
(I,  
entering high school,  
and Frank,  
entering kindergarten,  
would not even have to change schools;  
Ross and Patty,  
entering eighth and fourth grades,  
respectively,  
would)  
A brick-facade bungalow on a corner lot,  
with



a garage large enough to put three cars in  
and have another car space for storage  
The place where the four of us kids  
lived until we each got married,  
the place  
where we grew,  
and were accepted,  
sometimes grudgingly,  
into adulthood  
Bureaucratic arrogance had the house demolished  
in January of this year  
(you were born during the Great Depression  
and died before this millennium's first version,  
when our house and countless others couldn't be sold  
because of the greed and stupidity of those  
who nevertheless persist in believing themselves elite),  
and  
in a little over six months the grass has reclaimed  
where the house,  
the driveway,  
the garage,  
the patio,  
and  
the arbor vitae and the small brick wall were;  
the only sign visible to an outside  
that a house was ever here is the driveway apron  
But  
I look on your pioneering,  
almost alone  
in the neighborhood, if not in a much wider area:  
the half-dozen re-planted Christmas trees  
now grown to height greater than the neighboring houses  
(if memory serves, only one re-planting failed to take)

I know the general area,  
but  
I often wish I had asked you the locations  
of the houses you lived in as a child

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