

CHUCK TAYLOR, WRITER

I liked the one about the broken shouldered dad shoot the squirrel (“My Father, Shooting an Animal”). She did it right, and avoided too much politically correct moralizing.

ELWARGO

I read your poem regarding your first brush with death, and it happened to be Lennon’s, one which, no matter how many times we have faced it, was horrible. I like the way you wrote about it. The way it effected you. Your ending was on the whole superb...it put it all together...wonderful job !!

I thought Lennon’s was your first until I read the next poem, how intense, how masked the death of that woman was, no one spoke of it! As if it was unspeakable, so sad is the way of the world in respect to what we feel and what we say we feel, or don’t say....

DAN LANDRUM, EDITOR, TAGGERZINE (ON “RAPE EDUCATION” POEMS)

Those pieces for me have a personal-social realism that is very poignant, very powerful (and unfortunately, seemingly timeless).

JOHN FREUDEMAN, EDITOR, GEORGIAN BLUE POETRY SOCIETY

Just read “Childhood Memories six” on the Poetry Exchange. It struck a very responsive chord. Well put together - congratulations!

THE REMAINS
the Window

THE WINDOW



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Fourth Edition

E

this is the window I was looking through

A CHILD IN THE PARK

this was no ordinary park, mind you: there
were no swings or children laughing; there were
different children there. There was recreation:

tennis, the pool, and a maze of streets for bicycles
and long walks; surrounded by rows of prefabricated
homes each with one little palm tree by the driveway.

People drove golf carts around in the park, or large
tricycles, or older couples would walk together just as
it was beginning to turn to dusk and long shadows from

tree-tops cris-crossed over the streets. In the afternoons,
the women in the pool would wear hats and sunglasses,
lean against the sides, swing legs in the warm water.

I remember the summer afternoons when it rained in
Florida, and after the rain I would go out in the puddles
in my roller skates, skate through them, feet soaking wet.

There was even a street named after me in the park,
and at the end of Jan Drive there was a pond.
I spent hours there, playing imaginary games,

pretending I was grown-up, feeding the ducks,
watching the fish swim around the rocks at my
feet, looking for the turtles, listening to the wind.

Oh, I remember Mr. Whorall, how he would walk
onto his driveway every time I was playing tennis
across the street. He would watch me, tell me how

I was getting better at the game every time he saw me.
And there was also Mrs. Rogers, who lived up the
street from me. She saw me riding my bicycle by one day

just before Halloween. She invited me in to help carve a pumpkin. Every year she bought me a Christmas present. The sweetest woman. The most beautiful woman.

And there was Ira and Betty Wiggins, who lived on the next street, Sand Drive, with a sign in front of their house that said, "The Wiggins' Wigwam."

They had a hammock on their porch, and art so beautiful, so colorful on their walls. They lived in Panama for years, he used to be a doctor. So

many things collected from all their travel. They both knew so much, they both loved life. Once they saw me and asked if I wanted to catch a lion. They then

went to the side of the road, and with a spoon pulled an ant lion from the top of a sand hill. So many secrets. Every night Ira could be found with cue holder,

decorated with Panamanian art, at the pool table, playing my father, or another man who died years ago. I remember that man telling me that when I was younger he would

watch me on Easter Sunday, me in my pastel dress, by myself, spinning, dancing in the streets. He remembered me dancing. This is his memory, how he thought of me.

And I remember the McKinleys, Pete and Lindy, another beautiful pair who talked of Mexico, of all the places they'd gone, all the things they had seen. So many times I

would visit them just to hear them talk. And Pete would try to stump me with an intellectual riddle every time I sat with him; he would ask me about astronomy, what I had learned in my

classes since the last time I visited the park. Sometimes they would take me to their country club, play on tennis courts made of clay, how strange it felt on my feet through my tennis shoes.

It was like another world there. The park was
where I spent my Christmases, my Easters. I
remember swimming in the pool, a week shy of

thirteen, when my parents told me I was an aunt.
Now I talk to my sister on the phone, she asks me
if I remember so-and-so from Palos Avenue,

from Blue Skys Drive. The couple that had the ornate
rock garden in their front yard, or the snow shovel
against their light post with the words “rust in

peace” painted in white on the metal. Yes, I say, I
remember them. Well, so-and-so passed away last week,
she says. Heart attack. This is what it comes down

to, I think, all these memories are slowly disappearing.
So many memories. Where there are palm trees everywhere.
It was my other world, my other life, another

lifestyle, another everything. This was not an ordinary
park, but the children were so much smarter, and
still so full of life. So much to teach. So little time.

A STAND-OFF

Too many things bombard us
we scan from channel to channel
eyes darting, first war, destruction,
then a weight loss commercial.
I know you're thinking society is
ludicrous - and it is - but don't you see
that when I watch that t.v. screen
all I see is that I'm not thin enough?
I've tried to make things right with
us. I've tried to bring us one glimmer
of happiness, I've tried to turn off
that media mudslinging
tried to make things a little better
even if it is only in our bedroom
and even if it is only for one night.
And you, you look away
and think I'm hopeless. I'm grasping
at whatever straws are left.



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES ONE

I was in the basement, the playroom
that's where all my toys were, you see
and I had just run in there
after yelling at my family
sitting in the living room
"I hate you"
now, I've never said that before to
my family, nor would I ever say
it again I knew better
and I had just run into the playroom
slammed the door shut
I couldn't have been more than five
and I ran in, and I looked for things
to put in front of the door so they
couldn't open it and find me
I took one of my chairs
from my little play set
and dragged it over to the door
then I took the little schoolhouse for
Fischer-Price toys, the side opened
up, it had a blackboard and everything
I took that little schoolhouse, put it
on the chair guarding the door
patiently obeying my orders
I was running around looking for
something else I could carry
to the door
when I heard the door knob turn
and my sister, with one arm
pushed all of my toys away
and opened the door
I knew I had been defeated

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES FOUR

I was in the first grade, in Mrs.
Lindstrom's class
and every morning, probably
around ten-thirty, we would have
snack-time. And everyone would
get their snacks that their mommies
made for them, and we'd all
sit and eat. But me and Lori
Zlotow, we would take our math
books, hold them up like a tray,
throw a napkin over our arms,
put all of our snacks on our books,
and walk around the room
bartering for better snacks. "I'll
give you this apple for your
candy bar." We'd finish trading,
come back with a quarter of an
orange, an extra piece of gum.
We'd put the orange quarter in
our mouths, peel and all, and
act like monkeys. And laugh.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES SIX

It was Sunday night, I was
put to bed for school
the next day at around noon,
but by now it was already
eleven-thirty,
after a weekend of fun I
could relax enough to go to sleep.
So it was late, and I was in
bed, listening to my clock-radio,
like I always did. And suddenly
there was a news report
and John Lennon was shot.
A few minutes later
and the reports were
that he was dead.
And the next morning I walked
downstairs and my mother
was reading the paper.
And the news was there, it
wasn't a dream, I knew
the news before my parents did.
After he died I remember
in school one of my teachers wrote in
calligraphy on a piece of paper
and put it on their bulletin board,
"You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us
and the world will live as one." *
and my seat, the chair with the little
basket under the seat
for my books, the chair
attached to the desk,
my seat was in the front to the side,
right in front of that bulletin
board.
And every day I would look up
and see it there, my first
brush with death.

CHRISTMAS EVE

we made dinner
fettuccini alfredo
with chicken and duck

vegetables
bread

we ate
couldn't finish everything

we were putting on our coats
getting ready to go
to midnight mass

i decided to pack up
our leftovers
give them
to some homeless people
on the main street

we got in the car
and drove
to broadway and berwyn

i got out of the car
walked over to a man there

asked him if he was hungry

i got the bowl of noodles
and the gallon of milk
out of the car
another man walked over to me

i told them to promise
that they would share

i got in the car
we were just driving

and all i could think of
was these two men
in the cold
eating pasta with their fingers

on Christmas Eve



CONVERSATIONS
A DAY OF GRIEVING, 1/22/94

II

the first death i remember
was a friend of the family

i was five
and i always played with her daughter

our families used to go on picnics together
we were never apart

then one day
they told me
the mother was murdered

no one ever talked about it
to this day
i still don't even know why
she was killed

or who did it

but after that day everything changed
we never spoke of her
like she never existed

we never spoke of our fear
of our pain
and we didn't go on picnics anymore

CONVERSATIONS
A DAY OF GRIEVING, 1/22/94

III

my father spoke polish
and so did we
until one day
he decided

“we’re in america now,
they should speak english”

so when he wanted
to tell us something
he would speak in polish
and my mother
would translate

i’m thirty now,
and my father is sick
and dying

and he can’t understand me

he’s here before my eyes
and i can’t tell him
all the things
i wanted to

like i love you

looking back
it seems obvious

we never talked
like a family

we never asked
each other
how was our day

so now when i see him
all i can do
is hold his hand
and show him
the emotions
on my face

i think he still understands

CONVERSATIONS
A DAY OF GRIEVING, 1/22/94

IV

i was ten
when my grandfather died

we visited him the week before
and his last words to me
were,

“you’re the most beautiful girl
in the world”

i went to the funeral
his eyes closed
dressed in a suit
hands folded

he never wore a suit

and everyone
brothers, sisters,
cousins, uncles
talked about past weddings
other times together

i wanted to tell them
to pay him some respect

don’t laugh
don’t be happy

he’s in that coffin
up there
in the front of the room
he’s dead

they’re going to bury him tomorrow

but this is how things were
and i was only ten

DEATH

when he was a child, a little boy, he
would walk through the living room

over and over again
he would see the book on the shelf

a science book, a volume
from a set: a book about

how the world works

once he looked through the pages
found a drawing about the life

of planet earth, how it was
formed, how eventually the

temperature would rise, all life
on earth would eventually die

and reading that it was
millions of years away didn't help

with the fear, the instant panic:
so he took the book, hid the

one volume from the rest,
so he wouldn't have to see it

when he walked through his
own living room



HE TOLD ME HIS DREAMS

I

he was walking by the
white hen pantry
on sixth and green

and they turned around the
corner in the car
opened fire on him

he was hit over and over
again; his teeth were
shattered by bullets

he said he died then
and he saw from up above
his bloody body

he even saw his obituary

but then he went back, did it
over again: this time
he was in the doctor's

office. It's always like this,
he thinks, always
running away from death

HE TOLD ME HIS DREAMS

IV

as he wakes up less
rested than the night before.
I had a dream my teeth

fell out again, he said.
This time they fell out one by
one, first slowly, then faster.

Sometimes they all fall out
at once, sometimes they fall
one row at a time. I try to

stuff them back into my mouth.
What is this supposed to
mean? I don't understand.

I just don't understand these
dreams. What does it mean
when you dream your teeth

fall out, when you dream it
regularly? I think it means
I'm afraid of commitment.

No, I said, it means
you're pregnant. That didn't
go over well with him. And he

walked to the washroom,
brushed his teeth, made sure to
floss, like he would four

more times that day

HE TOLD ME HIS DREAMS

IX

She said: Do you know that feeling
you get when you're starting
to fall asleep and then suddenly

you feel like you're falling
very quickly and you instantly
wake yourself up? Everyone

gets that feeling sometimes
when they sleep. Did you know
your body does that on purpose?

You see, it happens when you're
very tired and your body starts
to fall into a sleep state at too

fast a speed. Your heart rate,
your breathing shouldn't slow
down that fast. So your body

makes you feel like you fall
so you'll wake up, feel a little
tense, and fall asleep more

slowly. He said: No, no, that's
not what I'm talking about.
I know that feeling, but

what I'm talking about is
being in a dream and going
to the edge of a cliff and jumping.

She said: Well, what happens?
Do you land? He said: Sometimes
I wake up before I land,

sometimes I land gently and
live. You've never had a dream
like that before? She said:

No. He said: Why do I have
dreams like this? Why this cliff?
Why do I fall? How do I land?

MY FATHER, SHOOTING AN ANIMAL

we sat in our
dining room, looking out
the sliding glass doors

onto the patio, the
expanse of concrete that
led to the pool, fenced

away from the ravine.
Father had a dislocated
shoulder, his arm was

in a sling. He had
a friend's shotgun, some
sort of instrument

and he looked out
the window, sister and I
behind him, looking

over his shoulder.
And then he saw a small
squirrel, walking

along the edge of the
patio, and father opened the
sliding glass doors

propped his gun
over his dislocated shoulder,
tried to look

through the sight and
keep the gun balanced. He
usually didn't use

guns, he seldom
borrowed them. And here he
stood, in his own

house, aiming at the
animal at the edge of our
property, with one

good arm. And then
he shot. We all looked; the
animal, hit, stumbled

into a nearby hole.
He hit the animal, despite all
his trouble, all his pain.

People wonder why
he shot the animal. I wonder
how. Could I do it, even

with two good arms.
Could I see through the sight,
could I aim well, strike.

POAM: A CONVERSATION WITH JIMBO BREEN

dedicated to Steve, a marine

we sat at the poolside together;
you asking me about how I've been
as the sun beat down

and we talked about nuclear war.
You said you didn't believe in it,
and I strained to understand

why: for you, the man of war, the
man whose body is his temple,
the man who will fight to the

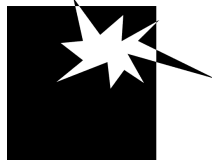
death. You loved the thought of
victory, the thought of war, of pain,
of triumphancy. And I sat there

in the swimming pool while you sat
on the edge. I paused. Then it
occurred to me: you would want

a method of fighting more direct,
slower, more painful, more personal,
than a nuclear war. You'd want to

fight them one on one, man to
man, with your fists. And your eyes
lit up. I was beginning to understand,

now, only years later. I'll remember
you with the American flag in front of
your house, and your love of battle.



PRIVATE LIVES I
THE ELEVATED TRAIN, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

why do these chairs
have to face
each other?

They say Americans
need their space
need their privacy
and here I sit
briefcase in lap
while he sits right
across from me
staring

I can't look I can't
he has to see
my eyes darting
my tension
my privacy

in the edge of my vision
I see his dirty clothes
his dirty hair
dirty mind

will he watch me
get off
note the stop I take
watch me walk too

PRIVATE LIVES II
THE ELEVATED TRAIN,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

the people you see

he was running his hands along the pages
of his large magazine
like petting his cat
slowly, gently
caressing the skin of the animal

back and forth

his eyes staring off into space
was he staring at me

I wasn't afraid to look at him
I knew he couldn't see me

his hands sliding over the braille
page after page

his eyes
fixed
in my direction

I think he knew I was looking

PRIVATE LIVES IV
THE ELEVATED TRAIN,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

you can hear the gears
speeding up
slowing down

I have seen into other's lives

a woman with two children
one sitting in a stroller
one standing
get on the train

she pulls the scarf
from around her neck
the gloves off

she reaches into her bag
finds a square of folded tin foil
carefully opens
pulls out a tissue

folds the tin foil
puts it away
wipes the children's noses

the standing child sees writing
on the back of her Batman doll

"What does it say?" "Made in China."
"Is that his name?"

this was the window
I was looking through

TWIN

they tell me i was born
two months premature

the first of twins

they tell me it was difficult
my birth
i still can't hear in one ear

i have an indentation in my chest
on the right side
where they had to run a tube
in me
to keep me alive

they tell me they kept Douglas alive
for three weeks
but he just couldn't survive

i wonder what it would have been like
to have someone look just like me

we could switch places
fool everyone

we'd be inseparable

my family doesn't talk about
him much
but sometimes
i still think of him

maybe with the medical world
today
he would be alive

sometimes i feel
like i'm not whole



RAPE EDUCATION THREE

I told a friend
that I worked for
acquaintance rape action groups

she told me she tried
to start a group of her own
at her college

her catholic college

and they told her she wasn't allowed
to do it
because acquaintance rape
is not a problem
here

she tried to write an article
about it for her paper
they wouldn't print it

what else was she supposed to do

RAPE EDUCATION ONE

I sat in on a seminar
being held at a university
about acquaintance rape

when the woman behind the podium
asked if there were any other questions,
a woman raised her hand

she was a pretty woman

she asked what a woman
could do through the university
to prosecute the man

she sounded tough
she sounded professional

and the woman behind the podium
asked if this woman was raped

and she said yes

and the woman behind the podium
empathized with her,
told her she was raped
when she was thirteen

told her that she could tell this
certain department at the university
and they would bring a hearing on him

and then the woman behind the podium
asked, well, if you don't mind my asking,
when did this happen to you

and by the tone of the woman's voice
she was so calm so collected
I expected her to say
a few years ago

and her response was
six days ago

now, I know the healing process for rape
I've studied it in books
first there's denial, then anger, fear
some of these steps last for years

and here was this woman
so calm, so collected
so tough, so professional
and I just knew
that one day

all of her defenses would fall
and it would all hit her
and she would fall
apart

I felt like her mother

she was my baby
and I wanted to deliver her
from the pain
but there was nothing I could do
I felt so helpless

nothing I could have taught her
would prepare her for this



TRANSCRIBING DREAMS

III

I was walking into your living room and there was a ten-gallon fish tank there. You just bought it. You were looking at the fish, that's when I walked over. And I saw a shark fish in the tank, one about eight inches long, and he was at the bottom, killing and eating a four-inch fish. There were other one-inch fish swimming at the top, neon tetras, small things. And I walked over and the shark was just eating the four-inch fish, and soon he was completely gone. And you were just looking, you could do nothing to save the fish. And then another four-inch fish came out of hiding from behind a plant on the left side of the tank, and he darted around. It looked like he was in a state of panic, maybe he breathed the blood of the other four-inch fish, his ally, his family. And he started darting around the tank, and the shark was just sitting at the bottom of the tank, and the other four-inch fish darted more. And then the shark opened his mouth, and in a darting panic, the four-inch fish

swim straight into the shark's mouth. All he had to do was close his mouth and swallow the fish whole. There was no fight, like with the first one. There was no struggle. And I looked over at you, and you were amazed that this shark just ate your two fish, which were probably over ten dollars each, and that they didn't just get along in the tank together. And I looked at the tank, and I saw the one-inch neon tetras darting around along the top of the water. They knew they would be victims later, trapped in this little cage, and that the shark would just wait until he was bored until he administered his punishment. I wanted to ask you why you bought all of these different-sized fish and expected them to live together peacefully. Maybe you didn't even realize that the shark would need more food than he was prepared to buy him. Besides, a shark that size shouldn't even be alone in a tank as small as ten gallons. He needs room to grow. But before I could say anything, I saw the shark swim to the top of the water, push his head and nose out of the water, open the lid to the top of the aquarium. You weren't looking, so I told you to look to the top, and not to get too close. And the shark just sat there, looking at you, and it looked as if he wanted to show you what a good eater he was. It was almost as if he was looking to you for approval.

THE MARTYR AND THE SAINT

they gave their daughter the name
of the Patron Saint of television

and the television's always been
one thing she hated about him

or was it the drinking that he needed
more than her

the business has gone bad
I'm a failure I'm not a man

he said he respected her
then he'd call her

a twenty dollar whore from Vegas

and the mother would hold
the child, the saint, the pure angel

hold her ears and hope she
couldn't hear

WHITE KNUCKLED

The hot air was sticking
to her skin almost pulling
tugging at her very
flesh as she walked
outside down the
stairs from the train
station. Just then a
breeze hot and
sticky hit her
in just the wrong
way, brushed against her
lower neck, and she
felt his breath again,
not his breath
when he raped
her, but his stench
hot rank
when he was
just close to her.
Her breath quickened,
like the catch of her
breath when she has
just stopped

crying. All the emotion
is still there not
going away. She
walks to the bottom
of the stairs, railing
white-knuckled by her
small tender hands,
the hands of a child,
and that ninety degree
breeze suddenly
gives her a
chill. They say when
you get a chill it means
a goose walked
over your grave.
She knows better. She knows
that it is him
walking, and that
he trapped that child in
that grave

WALKING HOME FROM SCHOOL

once when I was little

I was walking home from school
filled with fear, like I always was

the other kids made fun of me
they called me names
sometimes they threw rocks at me
once they pushed me to the ground
went home, bleeding knees and tears

but once, I'll never forget, Patti
from 121st street was
walking behind me and threw
her gym shoes at me

they landed right next to me
as I was walking down
that first big hill

I don't know if I stopped
but I remember for a brief moment
looking up at the tall tree branches
next to the road

all the entangled dead branches

and I thought
that all I had to do
was pick up her shoes
and throw them

as hard as I could

and she would never
get her shoes back

I looked at the trees
for only a moment
and I continued walking
as fast as I could
as I always did
and suddenly the shoes
were long behind me

and the others were laughing

I look back now
and wonder why I didn't
do it

was I scared of them
was I scared of myself

I still keep asking myself that