



poetry
for the masses

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1997 chapbook, scars publications

an outline to the apex of rites of passage

It was one of those rites of passage. A Bah Mitzvah of sorts. But this was bigger, much bigger than shaving for the first time or getting your period. This was the chance for all young high school men to lose their virginity and a chance for all young high school women to dress up, feel like adults, look pretty. Everyone felt the driving need to go through this rite of passage, to not be left out, to be a part of the group. Either way, you got to take a day off of school.

But like every rite of passage, the high school prom is probably more traumatic than fun, because no matter what, you feel like you have to go, and the entire time you have to look like you're having fun. Especially for the photographers. You have to have a perfect record of your perfect life so you can upstage everyone else.

With every aspect of prom, there was always a conflict, an expense, or an irony. I mean, this is supposed to be one of the best times in your life, and it's wrought with confusion. First, find a date. Has to be someone socially acceptable, otherwise it would be less embarrassing to just not go. Then, go through the trauma of asking your prospective date to actually go with you, or if you're a woman, wait to be asked, which is almost more cruel. Then, see which of your friends are going, organize what group you'll go with to your prom.

Then you have to start working on the details. For men, this meant transportation, the cheapest tuxedo, what kind of corsage to buy, something that pins on, something they wear on their wrist, or something they carry, like a bouquet. Oh, and don't forget the most important part: enough liquor and/or condoms. Note how suddenly the prospect of multiple hookers performing anything you'd ever want is both less expensive and less of a hassle than this quote-unquote "date." For women, the details meant picking out the right dress, the right shoes, the right purse, the right jewelry, the right perfume, the right make-up, the right hair style. Note how you have to then coordinate your clothing with your date. So much like real life.

Then, beg your parents to let you wear the dress you picked out, or keep the make-up and hair style the way you wanted it. Beg your parents to let you borrow their sports car. Beg your parents for enough money to pay for the limo, the flowers, the clothes, the film for the camera. Beg your parents to let you stay out past curfew, how about 6 a.m., just this once. But, come on, it's prom.

Then the Big Day arrives. Ditch school, because you know, getting you hair done can take hours, and you want to spend some time in the sun, so you don't look as pale as a ghost for the pictures. Then, after getting ready for an inordinate amount of time, meet up and take the pictures. Urgh. This usually entails the man picking up the woman, taking pictures at the woman's parent's house, then going back to the man's parent's house and taking more pictures there. It's almost worse than a wedding.

Then finally arrive at Prom. Take more pictures. Talk to as many friends as you can there, compliment their dresses and tuxedos. Find out what everyone else is doing after prom, see if anyone is doing anything better than you. Note how many women are repeatedly pulling up their strapless dresses so they don't fall out of them. Note how many men are already

drunk, and look, it's not even dinner yet. Take lots of pictures with your instamatic camera. Let's do a group shot. Oh, let me take a picture with so-and-so.

Then eat. Try to figure out how to eat your salad without using your knife. Check to see how little all the women are actually eating. Note how many women go to the bathroom in groups. In any case, whatever you do, don't stop feeling awkward. But keep smiling.

Then the dancing. Try to remember what your father taught you. Try not to look stiff. Try not to sweat. Dance in a box. Right foot forward, feet together, left foot left, feet together, right foot backward, feet together, right foot right, feet together. Or go for the high school standby; wrap your arms around each other and sway, occasionally making out in the middle of the dance floor. Note how many women have their lipstick smeared across their cheek, or on their date's collar. Note how many bow ties have loosened.

Then collect your things, say your good-byes, take a few more photos and head out for the after-prom activities. Possible options include a late dinner, a four-hour boat cruise, a walk along the lake, a bonfire, bowling, a hotel party, or the back of dad's sports car. Note how disheveled you look by six a.m.; try to clean yourself up in the car before you get to your driveway, in case your parents are waiting for you. Don't make out for too long as you say your good-byes in front of your house.

Then, get in the house as quietly as possible, drop all your clothes into a pile in the middle of your bedroom floor, and collapse on your bed. Here's a helpful hint: drink a glass of water and take a vitamin and some aspirin before crashing; it will help with the hangover. Try to get some sleep before the day-after-prom amusement park trip, and keep in mind that even though prom is over, your friends will be rehashing it for at least a week. This is the ritual. Now go to sleep.

And I'm Wondering

I'm wondering if there's something
chemical that brings people together,
something that brings people to their
knees, somethings that sucks them in

And I'm wondering if you're sensing what I'm
sensing, is it just me, am I making this up
in my head, or when I glance up and catch your
eyes, well, are you actually staring at me

And I'm wondering if it could work out this
time, if we'd have one of those relationships
that no one ever doubts, especially us,
because we know we'll always be in love

And I'm wondering if you'd find
my neurotic pet-peeves charming
like how I hate it when someone touches
my belly because I'm so self conscious

And I'm wondering why you had to tell me
when we happened to be sitting next to each
other that the fact that our legs were almost
touching was making your heart race

And I'm wondering why I felt the need
to take your cigarette and inhale, exhale
while the filter was still warm from
your lips, there just seconds before

And I'm wondering if a year or two from now,
after we've been going out and should have
gotten to the point where we are bored with
each other and sink into a comfortable rut

if you saw me making macaroni and cheese
in the kitchen using margarine and water
because I'm out of milk and I've got my hair
pulled back and strands are falling into my

eyes and I'm wearing an oversized button-down
denim shirt and nothing else, well, what
I'm wondering is if you would see me
like this and still think I was sexy

When I glance up and catch your eyes from
across the room, when I see your eyes dart
away, when I feel this chemical reaction, well,
what I'm wondering is, can you feel it too

And what I want to know

I've been dreaming of you lately.
Usually, in my dreams, I see you
for just a short while,
then you have to leave.
Maybe you tell me you miss me.
Maybe you kiss me.
Last night, when you left me once again
I drove after you
to the airport so I could say
goodbye to you one more time.

In my dreams you're always with me.
In my dreams you're always leaving me.
In my dreams I run after you.
Just to say goodbye again.

And what I want to know is
when are these dreams going to stop.

And what I want to know is
are you dreaming of me too.

I daydream about you in the mornings
while my legs are still tangled in my sheets.
I close my eyes, so I can feel you there,
curled up against me. Why -

why do I have to get out of this bed.

And what I want to know is
if you saw me hit by a car
my lifeless body lying in the street
would you hold me up against you,
would you hold my limp arms
in your coarse hands.
Would you rock me to sleep.
Would you cry.
Would you not want to say goodbye.

And what I want to know is
if you saw the car speeding toward me
would you instantly run to me
because life is no longer life
without the one you love.

I know what I would say.
I know my answers.

And what I want to know is
if I will live like this forever.
And what I want to know is
if I'm going to suffer this alone.

And what I want to know is
are you dreaming of me too.

because this what we do

we arrive to our parties and hour after they start
we know full well when we are supposed to be there
but we show up late anyway
we don't have any prior engagements
but we act like we do

and we make sure we're dressed well,
but not too well
enough to impress,
but not enough to be over-dressed
you can't overdo it
you have to look good, you know
but not like you tried to

and we don't talk to anyone we don't know
and we make sure our gaze
doesn't wander for too long
because we have enough friends and lovers
and we don't need you

and as soon as the party is starting to decline
we make our way to a bar,
bring a few friends with us
because we can't stay in one place too long
because we have other places to go
we must move on to bigger and better things
we must get out of here

this is how we keep our friends
and this is how we keep our social standing
because this is the way it is
because this what we do

Burn It In

Once I was at a beach
off the west coast of Florida
it was New Year's eve
and the yellow moon hung over the gulf
like a swaying lantern.
And I was watching the waves crash in front of me
with a friend
and the wind picked up
and my friend just stared at that moon for a while
and then closed his eyes.
I asked him what he was thinking.
He said, "I wanted to look at this scene,
and memorize it, burn it into my brain,
record it in my mind, so I can call it up when I want to.
So I can have it with me always."

I too have my recorders.
I burn these things into my brain,
I burn these things onto pages.
I pick and choose what needs to be said,
what needs to be remembered.

Every year, at the end of the year
I used to write in a journal
recall the things that happened to me
log in all of the memories I needed to keep
because that was what kept me sane
that was what kept me alive.

When I first went to college
I was studying to be a computer science
engineer, I wanted to make a lot of money
I wanted to beat everyone else
because burned in my brain were the taunts
of kids who were in cliques
so others could do the thinking for them

because burned in my brain were the evenings
of the high school dances I never went to
because burned in my brain were the people
I knew I was better than
who thought they were better than me.
Well, yes, I wanted to make a lot of money
I wanted to beat everyone else
but I hated what I was doing
I hated what I saw around me
hated all the pain people put each other through
and all of these memories just kept flooding me
so in my spare time
to keep me sane, to keep me alive
I wrote down the things I could not say
that was how I recorded things.

When I looked around me, and saw friends
raping my friends
I wrote, I burned into these nightmares with a pen
and yes, I have this recorded
I have all of this recorded.

What did you think I was doing
when I was stuffing hand-written notes into my pockets
or typing long hours into the night?
In college, I had two roommates
who in their spare time would watch movies in our living
room
and cross-stitch. I never understood this.
In my spare time, I was not watching other's stories
or weaving thread to keep my hands busy
I was sitting in the corner of a cafe
scribbling into my notebook.
I was sitting in the university computer lab
slamming my hands, my fingers against the keyboard
because there were too many atrocities in the world
too many injustices that I had witnessed
too many people who had wronged me

and I had a lot of work to do.
There had to be a record of what you've done.

Did you think your crimes would go unpunished?
And did you think that you could come back, years later,
slap me on the back with a friendly hello
and think I wouldn't remember?
You see, that's what I have my poems for
so there will always be a record
of what you have done
I have defiled many pages
in your honor, you who swung
your battle ax high above your head
and thought no one would remember in the end.
Well, I made a point to remember.
Yes, I have defiled many pages
and have you defiled many women?
You, the man who rapes my friends?
You, the man who rapes my sisters?
You, the man who rapes me?
Is this what makes you a strong man?

you want to know why I do the things I do

I had to record these things
that is what kept me together
when people were dying
that is what kept me together
when my friends went off to war
that is what kept me together
when my friends were raped
and left for dead
that is what kept me together
when no one bothered to notice this
or change this
or care about this
these recordings kept me together

I need to record these things
to remind myself
of where I came from
I need to record these things
to remind myself

that there are things to value
and things to hate
I need to record these things
to remind myself
that there are things worth fighting for
worth dying for
I need to record these things
to remind myself
that I am alive

I never took a life until I took my own

three poems

I
“the leader”

until I took my own

because you see, I
never took my own life
in my own hands before

And how can you really
control someone else
if you can't control
yourself? and when I
figured that much out,
well, then, taking the
rest of them was easy

Everyone loved me
everyone wanted to follow
me, and everyone thought
I was something great
I must be a god

How does she have
it all together
how does she know
what to do
why does she seem so happy
what's her secret

No one understood

that they have to take
their lives
from the people
who try to run them
for them

And if they understood
this little fact
then no one would have
understood how to
take their lives back

and how do you explain
the color blue
to a blind man?

II
“the martyr?”

I never took a life
until I took my own

I never had the power
to pull people in
to make people react
but when I decided
it was my time
boy, I left a legacy
behind, I became
a hero, and oh, the
masses loved me then

They scratched my name
into their arm
with a pin, a knife
or a fountain pen,
they cried in my honor,
they went to my gravesite
and left roses, scratched
crosses on my
tombstone, drank with

me and left half-empty
flasks on saturday nights

But it's funny how
they only loved me,
held me as their idol
after I slain myself,
after I was gone

III
"the lost?"

I never took a life
until I took my own

I never wanted
to be on this earth
I never wanted
any part of it

I never had the courage
to kill the killers
I never wanted
to play their game

but I guess I have

I never wanted to
take a life
but I should have
control over my
own destiny and if
I don't want to be
here, well, I should
have that right

and this one thing
I've done
is the first thing
I've ever done for
myself in my life

The line "I never took a life until I took my own" was a title of a poem by Ray Young. "How do you explain the color blue to a blind man" is from the poem "Doctor" by Janet Kuypers.

Scratching my name into their arms with a fountain pen is a reference to "The Headmaster Ritual" by Steven Morrissey. Scratching crosses on tombstones refers to a ceremony often conducted on Marie LeVeau's tombstone in New Orleans.

in the projects

I saw a woman in the projects, by the apartments you were looking at. I was driving toward the lake, stuck at the intersection in traffic, and she walked across the street, in front of my car. She was wearing a blackjacket, falling off of one shoulder. She was wearing a black and white striped shirt. She was carrying a clear plastic cup in her left hand, like the kind you get in a bar. It was filled a quarter of the way with beer. And she walked across the street, holding her beer at the end of her straight left arm, and the sleeve of her jacket almost covered her hand. And her eyes darted back and forth, as if she knew she wasn't supposed to have open alcohol in public but she'd do it anyway, not caring for the law, but still being cautious. And I thought: I've done that before. We both have things we're running from. What makes her, in the projects, living off the government, any different from me, in the ugly new houses, living off someone else's ideals.

Love Has Tendrils

love has tendrils
long, fluid, arcing, curling, pulling
but under the water
I have slipped away
one too many times

escaped the pull

never strong enough
to pull me in
were you

i keep searching
for those endless arms
to wrap themselves around me

to choke me
to kill me

until I rise yet again
gasping for air

Lessons from the Simpsons

I will not bribe principal Skinner.
I will not send lard in the mail.
I will not hide the teacher's prozac.
I will not hang donuts on my person.
I will not aim for the head.
I will not barf unless I'm sick.
I will not conduct my own fire drills.
I will not snap bras.
I will not fake seizures.

I will not prescribe medication.
I will not bury the new kid.
I will not sell school property.
I will not trade pants with others.
I will not drive the principal's car.
I will not pledge allegiance to Bart.
I will not belch the National Anthem.

I do not have diplomatic immunity.
I am not deliciously saucy.
I will not torment the emotionally frail.

I will not sell land in Florida.
I will not grease the monkey bars.
I will not hide behind the Fifth Amendment.
I will not sleep through my education.
I will not teach others to fly.
I will not bring sheep to class.
I will not eat things for money.
I will not instigate a revolution.

I will not call my teacher "Hot Cakes."
I will not yell, "Fire" in a crowded classroom.
I will not Xerox my butt.
I will not yell "She's Dead" at roll call.
I will not call the principal "spud head."
I will not charge admission to the bathroom.

A burp is not an answer.
“Bag Man” is not a legitamate career choice.
Coffee is not for kids.
The principal’s toupee is not a Frisbee.
Goldfish don’t bounce.
Five days is not too long to wait for a gun.
Tar is not a plaything.
Spitwads are not free speech.
Mud is not one of the 4 food groups.
No one is interested in my underpants.
The cafeteria deep fat fryer is not a toy.
The Pledge of Allegiance does not end with "Hail Satan!"
Organ transplants are best left to professionals.
Underwear should be worn on the inside.

I will not expose the ignorance of the faculty.
I saw nothing unusual in the teacher’s lounge.
This punishment is not boring and pointless.

At the beginning of each episode of “The Simpsons,” Bart is serving detention and writing a message on the black board over and over. The message changes from episode to episode. This is a collection of some of the messages he has written.

Pioneer

It amazes me
that the the first definition of pioneer
is a person or group that originates
or helps open up a new line
of thought or activity
or a new method of technical development

and that the second definition of pioneer
is merely
one of the first
to settle in a territory

To pioneer is to open or prepare for others to follow

You said you all were pioneers.
What did you know of these uncharted lands?
And more importantly,
why did you bring your old and tired
ideas with you?
How, with all of that spiritual baggage,
could you plan to start anew?
And what were you running from?

Yes, pioneers, you were all so brave.
So bold. Running away to a land
that promised not to give you more
but promised to not be where you were
running from. Running away, taking all
of your old edicts with you, all of your
old theories, hoping a change of scenery
was all you needed to make everything better.

How can you start anew
when all you do
is move your problems to a different place?

Yes, pioneers, you were all so brave.
So bold. But you, Laura, you were only
a little girl, what could you be
crusading for? Were you following
your heart, your mind, were you searching
for the truth, did you know what it was
you were looking for? Or were you even
looking for something at all? Were you merely
trying to survive it all, blindly following
your powerful father, your powerful god?

What were you a pioneer of?
Did you feel the cold slap of wind
from the barren plains
and think that this was freedom?
When you ran outside and played make-believe
wearing your little dress, little ribbons in your hair
did that cold gust of wind on your calves
circling around and above your knees
make you feel free from the journey
your edlers forced you to take?

When slaves were bought and sold
when women were purchased for harems
they had no say over where their masters roamed
they merely had to follow
and keep their mouths shut
and did you feel that way too?

To pioneer is to open or prepare for others to follow

To you, your daddy was a pioneer
but think about it again
think about how alone you felt
in the plains, making up stories
to pass the time
how sometimes you would go out to the fields
and run, and run, and run
hurdling forward until you couldn't
see your little house anymore
and was this your moment of sanity?

Was this what kept you alive?

I know we've all felt that feeling before
after being on vacation
or just being somewhere else
and knowing you have to leave
you have to go home
and be the person everyone expects you to be

be the fearful little girl
instead of the alive little girl

And I know each and every one of us
has felt that feeling while going home once
wondering if it was possible
to just never come back

And you would run, and run, and run
hurdlng forward until you couldn't
see your little house anymore
looking for something new
then always finding
only more and more plains

You were too young to create something new
to truly be a pioneer
so you knew you'd have to go back
you couldn't keep running
and you'd have to accept
the world that was handed down to you

And after running through those endless fields
I'm sure that slow walk back to the house
because you knew your mother
would be calling you back for dinner
I'm sure that slow walk back
was all the more painful

When I was little I would save up all my change
and tell my mother I was going for a bike ride
in the neighborhood

And I would sneak over to the local ice cream parlor,
even though I shouldn't eat sweets before dinner

And did you sneak off to the general store
for penny candy

Was this your freedom, was this your rebellion?
Was this your decision to accept your own ideas
and not those of your mother, your father, your god?
Was this your attempt to get away from following?
Was this your moment of sanity?
Was this what kept you alive?

To pioneer is to open or prepare for others to follow

Was this what made you a pioneer?

prom '97

... or doing things right

My mother just gave me a bunch of her cocktail and formal dresses that she wore when she was young. Floor length dresses, usually with some beadwork, all really spectacular, unique formal dresses, and I thought, wow, these are really great, I'd love to wear these dresses, and then I thought, wait, I have nowhere to wear these dresses, and then I thought, wait, no one I know of would have any place to wear these dresses, these are dresses that look like they should be worn to award ceremonies in southern California and there's nothing like that going on around here in Chicago and if there was, I'm sure I couldn't afford to go to it. So then the thought struck me, like a sequin that caught the light and glared into my eye from the shoulder of a floor-length one-shoulder satin dress with matching stole: I could have a formal party. Host it in my living room. Decorate the whole place. Well, then, since it was mid-May and I couldn't get a limo rented for a friend's birthday because they were being used by a bunch of sleazy seventeen-year-olds wasting their parents' money, it occurred to me that ten years ago this year I went to my own prom, and then the vision struck me with even more clarity. I was to have a prom party.

Prom '97, it was, I had to decorate and make it prom, except more fun, because we're older now and probably have a better idea of how to actually have fun. So, where to start, where to start. Needed streamers, hanging down from door frame to floor in every door way. Needed lighting... Got my white christmas lights out from storage in the basement and strung lights all around my living room and dining room, on the tables, on the walls. Needed balloons, so I got 75 large silver balloons, blew them all up and let them cover the floor. Bought a crystal punch bowl, made a punch that would force people to eventually have fun, got a ton of food for the buffet, sprinkled glitter and streamers and confetti all over the place, even got a disco ball.

Needed to make favors, remember at formal dances you'd get little booklets with the name of the prom and the location and the theme song and the class president? Well, had to make those, and they should match the invitations, and come to think of it, there's usually a photographer with a backdrop in the corner of the dance floor so you could get your portrait taken...

Hmmm... I'd have to borrow the grey portrait backdrop my sister made by painting over one of those maps they have in elementary schools, that roll down over the chalkboard like a projection screen and put it in one of the bedrooms so my friends could have their portrait taken.

And my friend Brian was even coming into town for this party, because in high school nine years ago I asked him to prom and he turned me down and we've always sworn that if we could do it over again, we'd go together. So I thought I'd surprise him, and since I sing I got my four-track recorder out and taped my voice over a slow George Michael song, kissing a fool, because we were both dorks in high school and both loved George Michael, and anyway, I sang over this song and was going to have us dance to it together.

So people start showing up for my party, and I'm playing big band and swing music, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Harry Connick Jr., The Glenn Miller Orchestra, because you see, I have taste now and wouldn't play the kind of crap you'd hear at say, your prom or a wedding, like "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Michael Bolton or "At This Moment" by Billy Vera and the Beaters or "Truly" by Lionel Richie or Mariah Carey or Whitney Houston or Natalie Cole without her dead dad's voice in the background. And people are complimenting me on my punch, that it tastes really good, but I don't dare tell them that it's absolut vodka and absolute citron and rum and banana liqueur and a little whiskey and some left over red wine from my last party, all with a splash of orange juice and Ne-Hi fruit punch soda. And Scott is already starting to spill his drink on the floor and bump into people and it's only like eight o'clock so I'm thinking, this is going to be a good party.

And then Helen comes in with Steve, her fiancee, and she's got a new eyebrow ring, and I say, wow, did that hurt, and she said no, it hurt more to look in the mirror and see this big metal circle piercing through the flesh above my eyebrow, but no, when I got it done it didn't hurt at all. And minutes later I hear my roommate talking to her, saying that there's a theory among psychologists and such that if someone gets into multiple piercings or piercings in unconventional places or tattoos, that's a sign that they were abused when they were a child. So my roommate is asking Helen, "So, were you abused as a child?", and I try to cut in to halt this social faux pas, and Helen responds with "No, not really." So I think, okay, I need to know what that means, so I ask, "What do you mean, not really?" and she answers, "Well, my parents were Columbian and I went to a Catholic school. It's a wonder I'm not a serial killer." And I think, okay, maybe Helen's fiancee won't try to start a fight with my roommate after all, maybe things are actu-

ally going to be okay.

And more people start showing up, Rachel strolls in wearing her old prom dress, and her and her friend made wrist corsages out of broccoli and spinach leaves. And Dave shows up, that sweet thing, with corsages that match a few of my dresses for me, and I decide to change into dress number two, I mean, there are only so many occasions where I'd have the chance to wear more than one formal dress to a function, I might as well take advantage of it, and everyone seems to be having a grand ol' time, and we start taking pictures and then I decide that Brian, the prom date that never was, should dance with me.

So I turn off all the Christmas lights so that all that's going is the disco ball and I play this goofy George Michael song and start dancing with Brian, and he's laughing hysterically that I remembered that he liked George Michael all those years ago and that I actually sung over this song, and we're dancing together, and then he says, "Oh, wait a minute. If this is supposed to be prom, I better act like I did at prom," and then he pushed me away and acted all stiff and started doing the box step and stepping on my feet, and it just made me laugh harder and harder.

And then I decided I needed to have everyone vote for a king and queen of prom, so everyone whispered in my ear who they thought should win, and I picked two women and two men so it wouldn't be such an elitist thing, and one of the kings won only because he got nearly as many votes for queen as he did for king. So when I tallied it all up in my very drunk head, all while wearing dress number four, I picked up the Burger King crowns I picked up last week just for this occasion and crowned the winners, and told everyone we should all dance.

So by the end of the evening we changed the music in the stereo so we were listening to the Bee Gees and Abba and Duran Duran and old early eighties crap that we could just thrash around to, and we were singing to all the songs and jumping around, and it was two in the morning, but we didn't care, because we were all at prom and having a perfectly good time.

And I thought about Brian dancing the box step and stepping on my feet, acting all stiff and scared because the high school prom was a time for awkwardness and uncomfortableness, and I thought, yeah, we really are more comfortable now. Everyone should have a prom when they're old enough to enjoy it.

Scars 1997

I wear my scars like badges.
These deep marks show through from under my skin
like war paint on an Apache chief.
Decorated with feathers, the skins of his prey.

I have a scar over my left knee.
It's left over from a bout with poison ivy
I had after climbing a mountainside.
The four-inch long slice curves around my leg,
almost perfectly defining the muscles in my thigh.

I have a scar on my right shin.
I slipped on a patch of rocks and cut up the lower
half of my leg and filled it with gravel and dirt.
Joe poured hydrogen peroxide on my leg
and wrapped my wounds with paper towels
because the cuts were so wide spread.
An hour later I was on a plane home,
so I could tend to my wounds in greater detail.
Tend to my wounds in depth.
Now all that is left is a two-inch line down
the side of my leg. Although it wasn't a very
deep cut, it looks like it went straight to the bone.

I have a circular scar on my left calf,
from getting off a motorcycle and sliding
my leg over the scalding hot exhaust pipe.
It has been seven years since I gained that scar,
and with each year I see it fade away just a little.
I can still see it, but the memory is slowly slipping away.

My cat scratched me on my wrist once
when we had to give her medication.
Cats don't like taking pills, or having ointment
dabbed on and liquid poured over their wounds.
When giving her pills, we'd grab all her paws,

pull her head back by the nape of her neck,
pry her jaws wide open so the pill will fall back
and she is forced to swallow it.
But sometimes she'd move too much
and a paw would slip out of our grasp.
And now, over the bone on my left wrist,
a long thin scar stares at me defiantly.

I tell people that if they wake up
with bruises and cuts they don't remember,
then they must have had fun the night before.
But each marking, each scar is a story,
is a memory. It is a way to remember how you lived.
And it is with these marks that I gauge my living.
It is with these marks that I feel decorated.

poetry for the masses

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Freedom & Strength Press



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