

# Years in Poetry

Janet Kuypers poetry  
(with years in the titles)

collected for the  
18 years of Beach Poets  
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cctd chapbook

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## Childhood Memories two

I was in the basement, the playroom  
that's where all my toys were, you see

and Sheri was with me  
and we were playing house  
or maybe it was office, we did that

instead a lot of the times. I had old forms  
that businesses were throwing away,  
we had two desks, dead calculators  
my sister even made a switchboard for me

well, we were playing grown-up, whatever  
the specifics were, I don't remember. Why  
do children want to grow up anyway?  
Because it's a different kind of pain, I think.

Well, we were playing this make-believe,  
when I proceeded to go to the toy chest,  
pull out my sister's old communion veil,  
and walk around the pool table in the center  
of the room, take a step, feet together,  
take a step, feet together.

What are you doing? she asked. Getting  
married, I answered. Chris Caravette and I  
were getting married, I said. Chris was a friend  
of my sister's, you see, an older man, in high  
school, unlike us poor slobs who were still  
children.

and she attended the wedding, and I threw her  
the bouquet, and she caught it, just like  
she was supposed to do, and when the  
whole thing was over I walked my imaginary  
groom to the corner of the room and  
put away the veil, and that's when she  
took the veil, put it on, and acted like she was  
getting married, too.

What are you doing? I asked. Getting married, she answered. To who? I asked. To Chris Caravette, she answered. And we argued and argued, but I just married him, you're not supposed to do that, and before you knew it we were in a shouting match.

Why did we want to grow up anyway? Because we wanted a different kind of pain, I think.

## the burning

I take the final swig of vodka  
feel it burn it's way down my throat  
hiss at it scorching my tongue  
and reach for the bottle to pour myself another.  
I think of how my tonsils scream  
every time I let the alcohol rape me.  
Then I look down at my hands --  
shaking -- holding the glass of poison --  
and think of how these were the hands  
that should have pushed you away from me.  
But didn't. And I keep wondering  
why I took your hell, took your poison.  
I remember how you burned your way  
through me. You corrupted me  
from the inside out, and I kept coming back.  
I let you infect me, and now you've  
burned a hole through me. I hated it.  
Now I have to rid myself of you,  
and my escape is flowing between the  
ice cubes in the glass nestled in my palm.  
But I have to drink more. The burning  
doesn't last as long as you do.

# Conversations a day of grieving, 1/22/94

■

my father was a good man  
gentle kind  
never raised his voice

he was an architect

one day i went with him on career day  
he put me in front of a drafting table  
with paper and crayons

i drew all day

i thought he had  
the best job in the world  
he could sit and draw all day  
he had everything

they say it was  
a heart attack  
i say it was  
a broken heart

and he never raised his voice

i wish i could have said goodbye

he died when i was fifteen  
of a heart attack

i took classes later in architecture  
i wanted to understand  
his love his passion

i wanted everything

he smoked and ate poorly when he was younger  
i guess it caught up to him

he was going through a divorce then  
mom wanted it  
she never even went to his funeral

## 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 a 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 word 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.

## 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.



**Conversations**  
**a day of grieving,**  
**1/22/94 two**

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 four**

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

## Conversations, a day of grieving, 1/22/94 six

i sit in my house  
i've been so tired

i can't take being alone

i'm too scared  
too many things  
weighing on my mind

one day  
the child from next door  
came over

i was working in my kitchen  
he told me to look  
outside my front window

i didn't want to stop my work

he begged me to look  
so i got up  
walked over to  
my living room

and outside  
the picture window  
in my front lawn  
was a row of little  
snowmen

"those are little children  
out there  
to make you  
happy"

he said

and they did

## **Conversations** **a day of grieving, 1/22/94 seven**

there has been a lot of  
death  
in my family

my brother died  
when he was three  
i was seven

his appendix exploded  
they operated  
then they realized  
a sponge was missing

it was inside of him

they gave him  
some extra penicillin  
opened him up again

there was an infection  
they removed  
the sponge  
closed him up

gave him more  
penicillin  
but they didn't know  
he was allergic

he died within two weeks

my other brother  
overdosed on drugs  
when he was twenty-seven  
i was twenty-six

then a year ago  
my son died  
he was hit by a car  
he was thirteen

at my brother's funerals  
everyone ended up  
going to a restaurant  
and getting drunk  
for hours

i didn't want that for my son

i made sandwiches and coffee  
at my house

in the church it was  
standing room only  
everyone from the seventh  
and eighth grade was there

everyone from every  
fire department my  
husband ever worked for  
was there

there was even a fire truck  
for a bed of flowers

there were lines out the door  
to the church  
there wasn't any drinking

and people flooded me  
at my house

all in all  
it was a  
very nice funeral

**Conversations,  
a day of grieving,  
1/22/94 eight**

when their mother died  
they asked me to  
deliver the sermon

i make it a policy  
to meet with the family  
try to understand the deceased  
before i give a sermon

they met with me  
told me how she made  
ceramic nativity scenes  
for all of her grandchildren

i asked if a grandson  
could bring me a set to see

i kept them in my office  
for two days

when i first picked them up  
and looked at them  
i noticed there were  
no brush strokes

then i looked more closely  
and saw fingerprints

at the service  
i placed the figurines  
on pillars  
each with one candle

and said her prints are on  
these figures  
and her mark has been made  
on all of us

two weeks later  
they gave me a madonna  
with her prints on it

it is a work of art

**hancock suicide,  
chicago, december 1994**

so me and the guys  
were just taking a break  
from the construction

on the hancock building.  
you know they've been  
doing construction work

there, right? they put  
that big wall up around  
the block, the tall

fence, and they've been  
doing remodeling stuff.  
well, i had been working

on some tile work and  
we were just walking  
around the building, me

and three other guys,  
walking kind of like a  
square, in formation,

sort of, and i'm at the  
back and i stop and step  
back to check some of

the grout work, so i just  
kind of lean back while  
standing still. well, one

of the guys says he heard  
it coming, like a big rush  
of air, like a whistling

sound, but much heavier.  
i didn't even get a chance  
to look up, though one of

the other guys did and  
saw it coming a split second  
before it happened. and the

next thing i knew there was  
this loud cracking sound  
and i felt all of this stuff

hit me, like wet concrete  
thrown at me, but i didn't  
know what the hell it was.

and i opened my eyes and looked  
down and i was just completely  
covered in blood

and there was just this  
heap of mass right in front of  
me. it took a while for me

to realize that a woman jumped.  
she hit the fence, her head  
and spinal cord were still

stuck on the fence and the  
rest of her was just this red  
pile right in front of me.

the police had to take all of  
my clothes. every inch.  
they say she broke through the

glass at the fiftieth floor, i don't  
know how, that glass is supposed  
to be bullet proof or something.



and the one thing i noticed was  
that she covered her head with  
panty hose, in an effort to keep

her face together. funny, she  
was so willing to die, but she  
wanted to be kept in tact. i know

i won't hear about this on the  
news, they try to down play suicides,  
but other violence is fine for them.

and they say she was handi-  
capped, but then how badly, and  
how did she get the strength

to break the window and throw  
herself out of the john hancock  
building? she must have really

wanted to die.

it really hasn't sunk in quite yet,  
seeing her fall apart in front  
of me like that. i don't think i'm

ready to think about it yet.

# Years in Poetry

Janet Kuypers

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