

RICHARD HUGO NIGHT



**FEBRUARY 28, 2008
CAFÉ ROZELLA
WHITE CENTER, WASHINGTON**

ROZELLA WRITERS GROUP

The **Rozella Writers Group** is a collaboration of Seattle area residents who strive to improve their writing by sharing it with each other and with the community at large. The group meets on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month at Café Rozella, 9434 Delridge Way SW, Seattle. You can find out more about the group by contacting Ricardo Guarnero at Guarnero@caferozella.com or by calling 206-763-5805.



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Dedicated

to the memory

of a river

a town

a time

and a man.

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Scott Walter

Ricardo Guarnero

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The text of all poems included in this program was taken from the book *Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo*, (Norton, 1984). Other works that may be of interest to Richard Hugo enthusiasts include the books: *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*, by Richard Hugo (Norton, 1979), *The Real West Marginal Way: A Poet's Autobiography* (Norton, 1986), and the film *Richard Hugo: Kicking the Loose Gravel Home* (University of Montana and PBS, 1976).

There is also a wealth of Richard Hugo-related material on the Internet, including scholarly articles, bibliographies, and poetry extracts.

Richard Hugo was born in 1923 in White Center, Washington—a place he later described as "just outside the boundary of the civilized world"—and was raised by his grandparents, who ran a silent and religious household.



"When I was a little boy I had to go [to church] because they threatened to beat me if I didn't," he once told interviewer Irv Broughton. "I was frightened and I went."

His childhood passions—baseball and fishing—stayed with him throughout his life. In the autobiographical collection of essays entitled *The Real West Marginal Way*, he says, "The dignity and self-sufficiency I longed for I found on the baseball and softball fields, or when I was alone." Throughout high school Hugo played baseball and softball and also played in the semiprofessional city leagues. He went into the military in 1942 and served as bombardier on thirty-five missions with the U.S. Army Air Corps based in Italy.

After his discharge in 1945, Hugo returned to White Center and to the semipro leagues. During this time he went to college under the GI Bill (studying creative writing under Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington) and eventually receiving both a BA and MA in creative writing. He also worked menial jobs during this period.

In 1951 Hugo began working for Boeing, first in the slag pile and then as a technical writer, but left in 1961 to travel to Italy with his first wife, Barbara. Upon his return he was offered a professorship at the University of Montana in Missoula, where he joined the faculty in 1963. Later, he went on to direct the creative writing program there. Hugo's first book of poetry was published in 1961; his last in 1980. He has also published chapbooks and a mystery novel

Richard Hugo died of leukemia in September of 1982, between the sixth and seventh games of the World Series. The last sentence of this stanza from Hugo's poem "Glen Uig" appears on his gravestone in the St. Mary's Cemetery in Missoula:

*Believe the couple who have finished their picnic
and make wet love in the grass, the wise tiny creatures
cheering them on. Believe in milestones, the day
you left home forever and the cold open way
a world wouldn't let you come in. Believe you
and I are that couple. Believe you and I sing tiny
and wise and could if we had to eat stone and go on.*

-Adapted from the website *Famous Poets and Poems*

THE READERS



Frances McCue is a Seattle-based poet, essayist, reviewer, and arts instigator. From 1996–2006 she was the founding director of Richard Hugo House and is currently finishing a book of essays—featuring photos by Mary Randlett—entitled: *The Northwest Towns of Richard Hugo*. You can more info at: www.francesmccue.com

David R. Fitton was born in Belleville, New Jersey in 1962, “—a year before they killed JFK,” and began reading compulsively in adolescence. Inspired by his love of the written word, he decided to major in English at Rutgers University, where he graduated in 1985. David has lived in Seattle since 2003, but has not lost his East Coast accent or outlook on life.

“I lie awake in bed at night, awaiting sleep; fearing sleep. Sometimes thinking about bike paths—the ones back in Jersey—and seeing them changing. I can only imagine that much more has changed back there than here. Sometimes this brings up larger fears, but eventually I always seem to drift off.”

Laura González is a Mexican poet and writer who has worked to promote social justice and to preserve the indigenous dances, music, and storytelling of her homeland. In 1985, she migrated to the U.S. Since then she has raised a family, taught herself English, and earned a couple of university degrees.

Laura is currently a full-time social worker. She is a resilient woman who resists burnout by writing, enjoying time with friends and family, and meditating.



THIS PLACE NOW

By David Preston

For Richard Hugo

When it comes to money we're on the dry side here.
It trickles in from somewhere though, like a lost creek
groping its way under a parking lot; pooling up
in holes where tall trees and small houses
have been sucked out.

That mansion over there, breathing
a brighter shade of meanness,
swelling the street dry with pride.
What was there before that, and before that?
Soon even old settlers won't know.
Just something else, they'll say.

A scum-colored cracker box slumps against the hill.
Once it poured a family with work on their hands
and honest hope in their pockets
onto the street each morning.
You couldn't squeeze out enough pity to save it now.

It's all rotten. Still,
it takes more than rot to turn a man against his own way.
Maybe it was that sharpie on the sidewalk
slicing thin air even thinner with his palm; chatting up a ghost.
Or the iron bars grinning at an old settler
from across a street he's suddenly on the wrong side of.

I didn't care when there was nothing here,
the settler mutters crookedly.
Why should I care now?

But he cares all right.
He was headed someplace too, once,
but settled here instead. Here. In this place.
The place where the money ran out.

David Preston is the world's busiest unemployed person. When he's not organizing literary events he can often be found staring at his computer screen, waiting for his inbox to fill up with job offers. After a hard day's unemployment, David is apt to relax by composing short fiction, offering constructive criticism to fellow writers, or wandering the streets of White Center, looking for lost stories.

Kelly Riggle Hower loves her work as a kindergarten teacher at West Seattle's Pathfinder school. She is married to fellow teacher Mark Hower and is the mother of famed Metro bus poet Roslyn Hower. Kelly's and Roslyn's bus poems once rode the same route.

Kelly grew up in Richland, Washington, where she was a cheerleader for approximately one minute, long enough to have her name stitched onto a little emblem of Richland's hometown nuclear industry. After graduating from Richland High School and Whitman College, Kelly served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone and Tonga.

Whenever Kelly is inclined to feel too pleased with herself or her poetry, she pauses to remember that somewhere out there is a mushroom cloud with her name on it.



THE POEMS

Read by Frances McCue

DUWAMISH NO. 2

Mudhens, cormorants and teals take
legal sanctuary in the reeds,
birds and reeds one grey. The river
when the backed-up tide lets go
flows the only north the birds believe.
North is easy. North is never love.

On the west hill, rich with a million
alders and five hundred modern homes,
birds, deep in black, insist the wind
will find the sea. The river points
the wrong way on the in-tide
and the alders lean to the arid south.

Take away all water. Men are oiling
guns beside ripped cows. Wrens have claws
and clouds cascade with poison down
a cliff mapped badly by an Indian.
Tumbleweeds are plotting to stampede.
Where there is no river, pregnant
twice a day with tide, and twice each day
released by a stroking moon,
animals are dangerous as men.

When the world hurts, I come back alone
along the river, certain the salt
of vague eyes makes me ready for the sea.
And the river says: you're not unique—
learn now there is one direction only—
north, and, though terror to believe,
quickly found by river and never love.

WHAT THOU LOVEST WELL REMAINS AMERICAN

You remember the name was Jensen. She seemed old
always alone inside, face pasted gray to the window,
and mail never came. Two blocks down, the Grubskis
went insane. George played rotten trombone
Easter when they flew the flag. Wild roses
remind you the roads were gravel and vacant lots
the rule. Poverty was real, wallet and spirit,
and each day slow as church. You remember threadbare
church groups on the corner howling their faith
at stars, and the violent Holy Rollers
renting that barn for their annual violent sing
and the barn burned down when you came back from war.
Knowing the people you knew then are dead,
you try to believe these roads paved are improved,
the neighbors, moved in while you were away, good-looking,
their dogs well fed. You still have need
to remember lots empty and fern.
Lawns well trimmed remind you of the train
your wife took one day forever, some far empty town,
the odd name you never recall. The time: 6:23.
The day: October 9. The year remains a blur.
You blame the neighborhood for your failure.
In some vague way, the Grubskis degraded you
beyond repair. And you know you must play again
and again Mrs. Jensen pale at her window, must hear
the foul music over the good slide of traffic.
You loved them well and they remain, still with nothing
to do, no money and no will. Loved them, and the gray
that was their disease you carry for extra food
in case you're stranded in some odd empty town
and need hungry lovers for friends, and need feel
you are welcome in the secret club they have formed.

Whatever the name of the river,
we both had two women to love,
One to love us enough we left behind
a town that abuses the day.
The other to love the river we brought with us,
the shack we lived and still live in,
the birds, the towns that return to us for names
and we give them names knowing the river
murders them away.

WHITE CENTER

Town or poem, I don't care how it looks. Old woman
take my hand and we'll walk once more time these streets
I believed marked me weak beneath catcalling clouds.
Long ago, the swamp behind the single row of stores
was filled and seeded. Roses today where Toughy Hassin
slapped my face to the grinning delight of his gang.
I didn't cry or run. Had I fought him
I'd have been beaten and come home bloody in tears
And you'd have told me I shouldn't be fighting.

Wasn't it all degrading, mean Mr. Kyte sweeping
the streets for no pay, believing what he'd learned
as a boy in England: 'This is your community'?
I taunted him to rage, then ran. Is this the day
we call bad mothers out of taverns and point them
sobbing for home, or issue costumes to posturing clowns
in the streets, make fun of drunk barbers, and hope
someone who left and made it returns, vowed to
buy some more neon and give these people some class?

The Dugans aren't worth a dim, dirty Irish, not days
you offered a penny for every fly I killed.
You were blind to my cheating. I saw my future certain—
that drunk who lived across the street and fell
in our garden reaching for the hoe you dropped.
All he got was our laughter. I helped him often home
when you weren't looking. I loved some terrible way
he lived in his mind and tried to be decent to others.
I loved the way we loved him behind our disdain.

Clouds. What glorious floating. They always move on like I should have early. But your odd love and a war taught me the world's gone evil past the first check point and that's First Avenue South. I fell asleep each night safe in love with murder. The neighbor girl plotted to tease every tomorrow and watch me turn again to the woods and games too young for my age. We never could account for the python cousin Warren found half starved in the basement of Safeway.

It all comes back but in bites. I am the man you beat to perversion. This was the drugstore MacCameron flipped out in early one morning, waltzing on his soda fountain. The siren married his shrieking. His wife said, "We'll try again, in Des Moines." You drove a better man into himself where he found tunes he had no need to share. It's all beginning to blur as it forms. Men cracking up or retreating. Resolute women deep in hard prayer.

And it isn't the same this time. I hoped forty years I'd write and would not write this poem. This town would die and your grave never reopen. Or mine. Because I'm married and happy, and across the street a foster child from a cruel past is safe and need no longer crawl for his meals, I walk this past with you, ghost in any field of good crops, certain I remember everything wrong. If not, why is this road lined thick with fern And why do I feel no shame kicking the loose gravel home?

Without a river a town abuses the air.
The river is there to forgive what I did.
The river birds hate what I did
until I name them.
Your river or mine—
it is much the same.
A murdering man lived on the bank.

Here's the trick;
We had to stay drunk
to welcome the river
to live in a shack
to die on the bank
beneath the bigoted sky
under the river birds
day after day
to murder away
all water that might die.

A murdering man is dead on the bank
of your new river, The East,
on mine, The Clark Fork.
It is much the same.
Your river has gulls and tugs.
Mine has eagles and sky.
I rub last night from my eyes.
I ask bright water what's happened.

The river, I am not sure which one,
says water has no special power.
What should I do?
Or you?
Now water has no need to forgive
what shall become of murder?
How shall we live
when we killed, when we died by the word?

THE TOWNS WE KNOW AND LEAVE BEHIND, THE RIVERS WE CARRY WITH US

for James Wright

I forget the names of towns without rivers.
A town needs a river to forgive the town.
Whatever river, whatever town—
it is much the same.
The cruel things I did I took to the river.
I begged the current: make me better.

Your town, your river, or mine—
it is much the same.
A murdering man lives on the land
in a shack the river birds hate.
He rules the red shriek of night from his eyes.
He prays to water: don't let me do that again.

Let's name your river: Ohio.
Let's name all rivers one in the blood,
red steam and debris in the blood.
Say George Doty had a wrong head.
Say the Ohio forgives what George did
and river birds loved his shack.
Let's name the birds: heron and sweat.
Let's get away from the mud.

The river is there to forgive the town
and without a river a town abuses the sky.
The river is there to forgive what I did.
Let's name my river: Duwamish.
And let's admit
the river birds don't hate my home.
That's a recent development, really
like mercury in the cod.

THE POEMS

Read by David R. Fitton

DEGREES OF GRAY IN PHILIPSBURG

You might come here Sunday on a whim.
Say your life broke down. The last good kiss
you had was years ago. You walk these streets
laid out by the insane, past hotels
that didn't last, bars that did, the tortured try
of local drivers to accelerate their lives.
Only churches are kept up. The jail
turned 70 this year. The only prisoner
is always in, not knowing what he's done.

The principal supporting business now
is rage. Hatred of the various grays
the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
The Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls
who leave each year for Butte. One good
restaurant and bars can't wipe the boredom out.
The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines,
a dance floor built on springs—
all memory resolves itself in gaze,
in panoramic green you know the cattle eat
or two stacks high above the town,
two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse
for fifty years that won't fall finally down.

Isn't this your life? That ancient kiss
still burning out your eyes? Isn't this defeat
so accurate, the church bell simply seems
a pure announcement: ring and no one comes?

Don't empty houses ring? Are magnesium
and scorn sufficient to support a town,
not just Philipsburg, but towns
of towering blondes, good jazz and booze
the world will never let you have
until the town you came from dies inside?

Say no to yourself. The old man, twenty
when the jail was built, still laughs
although his lips collapse. Someday soon,
he says, I'll go to sleep and not wake up.
You tell him no. You're talking to yourself.
The car that brought you here still runs.
The money you buy lunch with,
no matter where it's mined, is silver
and the girl who serves your food
is slender and her red hair lights the wall.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

One way of going is to bang the door your last time
out of the house, your rage hanging like dangerous gas
on the sun porch where your wife and children are crying.
You send them a postcard from Sweden saying you're sorry
you took all the money out of the bank and you hope
they're not going hungry. You meet a blonde someone
you saw once in a movie and boy is she lovey.
You've taken up painting and already have a dealer
in New York, another in London. Five of your oils
are in European collections and a new museum
in Amsterdam has signed you to a five-year contract.
If it wasn't for one reviewer, a man whose name
sounds a little like the name of your favorite river,
who calls your best shots amateur and once in the *Times*
said you paint like some retarded spastic, you'd really
be happy. You keep his reviews in a scrapbook
and each night sit there reading them over and over
planning his murder. Naturally, you no longer paint.
The museum is suing you. The blonde is having an affair
with Burt Lancaster. Tired and broke you go back home,
the one you slammed out of when this poem began.
You sit there contrite in your rocker and watch TV.
Your wife is cooking your favorite clam *fettucine*.
The children say you watch too many crime shows,
you ought to take more walks.

MARATEA PORTO: THE BITTER MAN

He boots a cat, ass over claws, and laughs.
He lost the arm at Tobruk. His hatred
of *casa speranza*, home of the Count
imported from the north, is laughter too
nasty over the sea. The sea has been deserted
by the moon so long, tide is always out.
With sea this clear, even far offshore
underwater life is clearly bleak.

Late in the day, he sits on the wall and waits
for sea to trap the sun. His memory
may blur at night. His dreams
are always clear—violent tides and a sun
locked high, two arms around
a one-armed moon, praying he'll enjoy
a muddy future and, deep in mud,
a creature, part lady and part home.

Non c'è speranza, I told him.
He laughed at my Italian. Others say
he lives alone and so is what he is.
Please understand. He has to kick cats
and hate Counts and laugh at Italian,
anyone's really, Italian over the sea.

THE POEMS

Read by David Preston

TIME TO REMEMBER SANGSTER

One of us would spot his horse, same white
as his mustache, and word traveled on warm air.
When he solicited orders at doors
we stole pears from his cart, that battered
gray board flatbed held together by luck.
He was obsolete as promise. His apples
felt firm green and his cherries were loaded
with black exploding sun. Those days
seemed ripe as women we expected to meet
under flowering trees when we grew up.

Summer and summer he came, he, the horse
and the cart beyond aging, all three
frozen ninety-two. To children
he was old as tears. We asked him what caused weather.
We asked him about future wars. He sat mute
as orchards abandoned to the heat.
Summer on summer our delighted thieving
went on until he died and summer went void.

They took me to his funeral. Open casket.
I exploded when I saw him, his mustache
touched up blue not looking like it looked,
his eyes shut tight as a canyon wall
of sand. They dragged me into the light.
Days I walked alone our street that empty summer
telling dogs, it's wrong. Thirty-five years later
in England, a place called Enfield, I saw
three white horses in a field so close to town
they seemed not to belong. I decided then
I liked the English. I never thought of him.

SOUTH ITALY, REMOTE AND STONE

The enemy's not poverty. It's wind.
Morning it beats you awake to the need
for hoeing and hoeing rock. The priest proclaims
it's not a futile wind. This air moves
with undercurrents of hope five stunted
olive trees pick up. You live all year
on the gallon of olives you sell
and hope the stone will be soil
enough to grow something in. Your hoe and wind
have fought this stone forever and lost.

Up north, the kind have issued your name:
paese abbandonato. It rings now
in this wind that clears my eyes. Your hands
are not abandoned, and the harsh length
of each day forces you to love whatever is—
a screaming wife, a child who has stared
from birth. The road I came on must be old
or some state accident. In heat, this place
is African. In cold, a second moon.

Even your tongue is hard. Syllables whip
and demons, always deposited cruel
in the prettiest unmarried girl,
must be whipped by the priest into air
where bells can drive them to rivers. Or
she will be sent out forever, alone on the roads
with her madness, no chance to be saved
by a prince or kind ox. And so on, a test
of your love. Only the ugly survive.

I'm still alive. My love was tested and passed
something like this. Much better soil.
A more favorable chance at the world.
I sent myself out forever on roads.
I'll never be home except here, dirt poor
in abandoned country. My enemy, wind,
helps me hack each morning again at the rock.

A MAP OF MONTANA IN ITALY

for Marjorie Carrier

On this map white. A state thick as a fist
or blunt instrument. Long roads weave and cross
red veins full of rage. Big Canada, map maker's
pink, squats on our backs, planning bad winters
for years, and Glacier Park's green with my envy
of Grizzly Bears. On the right, antelope sail
between strands of barbed wire and never
get hurt, west, I think, of Plevna, say near
Sumatra, or more west, say Shawmut,
anyway, on the right, east on the plains.
The two biggest towns are dull deposits
of men getting along, making money, driving
to church every Sunday, censoring movies and books.
The two most interesting towns, Helena, Butte,
have the good sense to fail. There's too much
schoolboy in bars—I'm tougher than you—
and too much talk about money.
Jails and police are how you dream Poland—
odd charges, bad food and forms you must fill
stating your religion. In Poland say none.
With so few Negroes and Jews we've been reduced
to hating each other, dumping our crud
in our rivers, mistreating the Indians.
Each year, 4000 move, most to the west
where ocean currents keep winter in check.
This map is white, meaning winter, ice
where you are, helping children who may be
already frozen. It's white here too
but back of me, up in the mountains where
the most ferocious animals
are obsequious wolves. No one fights
in the bars filled with pastry. There's no
prison for miles. But last night the Italians
cheered the violence in one of our westerns.

LOST BOYS IN ALMOST TOWN

by Kelly Riggle Hower

August 1998

The car is open-topped but old, *convertible*
a misleading word for a car open more like a rusty can
in the parking lot at White Center Public Health.

Inside the oxidized red of the car,
two dark-haired boys sleep, flush-cheeked,
mouths tilted ajar, their faces gathering the pattern

of beaded seat covers. They are sixteen, maybe
seventeen, waiting for a girl inside
to get her Depo shot or magic pack of pills.

The blackberry-wild-rose-city-edge hills break through
the tarmac, adding their slashes of color to murals splashed
at the clinic doorway, Native-American inspired, funded

by King County one summer to occupy the local
rambling youth in wishful summer camp efforts
to beautify White Center, Tukwila, SeaTac, Des Moines.

The girl leaves the clinic, joins them, they laugh
and nestle in the car. She's the sister of one,
the girlfriend of the other. Thistle-voiced, husky-toned,

she begins to tell them the story of her visit.
They listen as if to a bedtime tale. Dusk leans in
close to the three of them, Wendy talking the lost boys

into sleep. They could be waiting for Peter Pan.
Will he claim them, raise them in their wreck of a car,
stuck like a barnacle with all the little, delinquent

near-towns clinging to the sides of I-5?
The Interstate flies like a Pirate Ship into the sky.

HOUSES

The house you're moving from is not this house
in the sketch, nor the one over there,
your furniture on the porch and your nameplate
weathered fast to the door. The picture's
too idyllic, shade trees rooted strategic and firm,
roses crawling ivy crawling the walls,
leaded windows that double the sadness of rain.
And the real one's too run down. The van
moves off with everything, even the girl
you could not find the courage to ask home.

Some say, 'where I hang my hat.' Some say, 'where
The heart is beating through hurt.' Whatever
You say, make sure it's alone in a cold garage,
the mechanic's hammer banging you mute.
Make sure only you can hear the address.
Make sure your car when fixed
will not break down between the home in the sketch
and the home you deny, the boy with your mouth
who shouts goodbye from the roof.

Sail easy on the freeway. Your next home
Has never been photoed. Your next home town's where
so little goes on, the hum of your refrigerator
joins the slow river leaving for home.
Isn't it familiar? Rain hitting the south window first?
Dark corner where the warm light can cringe?
If you go with rivers, not roads, the trip
takes longer and you weave and see a lot more.
When you say, 'I live here,' animals
you hadn't thought of in years live on your lawn.
They insist you remember their names.

DEATH OF THE KAPOWSIN TAVERN

I can't ridge it back again from char.
Not one board left. Only ash a cat explores
and shattered glass smoked black and strung
about from the explosion I believe
in the reports. The white school up for sale
for years, most homes abandoned to the rocks
of passing boys—the fire, helped by wind
that blew the neon out six years before,
simply ended lots of ending.

A damn shame. Now, when the night chill
of the lake gets in a troller's bones
where can the troller go for bad wine
washed down frantically with beer?
And when wise men are in style again
will one recount the two-mile glide of cranes
from dead pines or the nameless yellow
flowers thriving in the useless logs,
or dots of light all night about the far end
of the lake, the dawn arrival of the idiot
with catfish—most of all, above the lake
the temple and our sanctuary there?
Nothing dies as slowly as a scene.
The dusty jukebox cracking through
the cackle of a beered-up crone—
wagered wine—sudden need to dance—
these remain in the black debris.
Although I know in time the lake will send
wind black enough to blow it all away.

STEALING GAS WITH HUGO

by David R. Fitton

February 20, 2008

I had a dream last night, a visit from the poet I'd been studying. I was in a community space of some kind, like the church where the peace people meet, or maybe it was a large frat house filled with young people: the kind who like to discuss ideas but who also like to party. I remember a discussion about an old refrigerator door, I held it up for them—the white enameled metal door with the black border and the heavy brass hardware. Appropriate technology at the turn of the century, o.k., the *previous* century. Talking about this got me a little hungry, and I remembered the chocolate cake that I had sliced up and put in the fridge earlier. I opened the fridge door and inspected the cake to see if there had been any other takers, and if not, I felt a little gluttony would be justified.

Then the poet walked by, and I followed him outside to the sunshine. I don't know where it was he led me, but I suppose it was a local tavern. Don't know if we actually drank, though I doubt that he would have, even in a dream.

We went back to the church/frat house and I watched, embarrassed, as the poet hobbled slowly down the stairs, clutching the handrail, I could see he was in rough shape, so I sort of quickly shuffle/skipped down the stairs, trying to pass him quickly in order to allow him the least possible time in which to be embarrassed, but when I reached the step he was on, just five or six from the bottom, he said, "Lets race!" So we did. I foolishly figured my momentum would easily carry me ahead of him, but stepping onto the last step I saw him already waiting for me at the bottom smiling victoriously.

"There's still more cake, Richard. Any for you?" He shook his head. I says, "I'll just eat the humble pie then . . . dick."

Later we were sitting in his car—a big, broken-down Buick—getting ready to go on a trip. I remember him saying that we needed gas, and that he knew a place that was famously easy to steal from. I thought of the ten dollars in my wallet and offered to buy gas, since he had driven me places before, but he would have none of it. I think it was another contest: that it was more important for me to take risks than for him to take my money. Besides, I might need that cash at the next tavern. I decided that it was easier to steal the gas than have the poet beholden to me.

I was still a little uncomfortable, but figured he knew where we were going, and to get there we didn't need chocolate cake or money. Just determination.

On short days, looking for a word,
knowing the smoke from the small homes
turns me colder than wind from
the cold river, knowing this poverty
is not a lack of money but of friends,
I come here to be cold. Not silver cold
like ice, for ice has glitter. Gray
cold like the river. Cold like 4 p.m.
on Sunday. Cold like a decaying porgy.

But cold is a word. There is no word along
this river I can understand or say.
Not Greek threats to a fishless moon
nor Slavic chants. All words are Indian.
Love is Indian for water, and madness
means, to Redmen, I am going home.

HIGH GRASS PRAIRIE

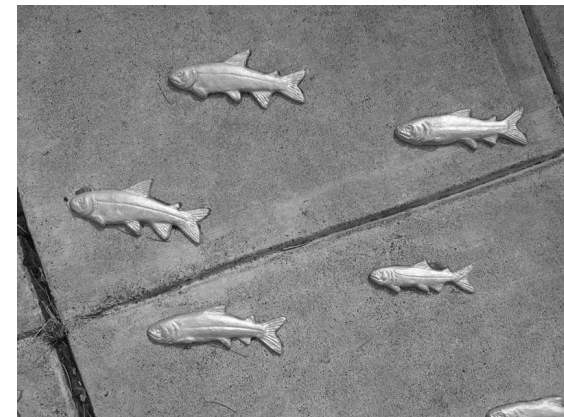
Say something warm. Hello. The world
was full of harm until this wind
placated grass and put the fish to rest.
And wave hello. Someone may be out there
riding undulating light our way.
Wherever we live, we sleep here
where cattle sleep beside the full canal.
We slept here young in poems.
The canal runs on without us east
a long flow into Fairfield. The grass flows
ever to us, ever away, the way it did
that war we dreamed this land alive.
The man we hoped was out there
saw our signal and is on the way.
Say something warm. Hello. You can sleep
forever in this grass and not be cold.

DUWAMISH

Midwestern in the heat, this river's
curves are slow and sick. Water knocks
at mills and concrete plants, and crud
compounds the gray. On the out-tide,
water, half salt water from the sea,
rambles by a barrel of molded nails,
gray lumber piles, moss on ovens
in the brickyard no one owns.
Boys are snapping tom cod spines
and jeering at the Greek who bribes
the river with his sailing coins.

Because the name is Indian, Indians
ignore the river as it cruises
past the tavern. Gulls are diving crazy
where boys nail porgies to the pile.
No Indian would interrupt his beer
to tell the story of the snipe
who dove to steal the nailed girl
late one autumn, with the final salmon in.

This river colors day. On bright days
Here, the sun is always setting or obscured
by one cloud. Or the shade extended
to the far bank just before you came.
And what should flare, the Chinese red
of a searun's-fin, the futile roses,
unkept cherry trees in spring, is muted.
For the river, there is late November
only, and the color of a slow winter.



THE POEMS

Read by David Preston and Laura González

NEIGHBOR

The drunk who lives across the street from us
fell in our garden, on the beet patch
yesterday. So polite. Pardon me,
he said. He had to be helped up and held,
steered home and put to bed, declaring
we got to have another drink and smile.

I admit my envy. I've found him in salad
and flat on his face in lettuce, and bent
and snoring by that thick stump full of rain
we used to sail destroyers on.
And I've carried him home so often
stone to the rain and me, and cheerful.

I try to guess what's in that dim warm mind.
Does he think about horizoned firs
black against the light, thirty years
ago, and the good girl—what's her name—
believing, or think about the dog
he beat to death that day in Carbonado?

I hear he's dead, and wait now on my porch.
He must be in his shack. The wagon's
due to come and take him where they take
late alcoholics, probably called Farm's End.
I plan my frown, certain he'll be carried out
bleeding from the corners of his grin.

My brothers dipped circles of pork into
pale, searing mustard only once, then clung to
ketchup-y red sauce and left the white-hot mustard
to mother and me. We dragged our pork rounds through it,
covered them with sesame spread evenly as nuclear seeds,
before laying each bite on our tongues to lift our heads
in a great roiling cloud
invisible, possibly
lethal.

The air carried her rage like the scent of sagebrush
across fenced desert,
foretelling
a coming storm.

THE POEMS

Read by Kelly Riggle Hower

TAKE OUT FOOD & SHARP SHOES: SINGLE MOTHER IN A NUCLEAR FAMILY

by Kelly Riggle Hower
June 1998 / February 2008

My mother was not sweet
but as she was. A little dangerous.

Eyes like whiskey and Coke,
strong straight nose,
a mouth whose lines
shouted
"love me."

My hands unsheathed her
feet, long and slim, thin-skinned as dry weather irises,
blue-veined. Elegant toes a little raw
from being shoved into regulation
Come fuck me shoes
10 hours tending bar
at the European Health spa

where old men leered
behind tall carrot juices,
winked between flaccid celery sticks and tiny
drink umbrellas.

Take out barbecue pork
was her comfort those nights,
her source Lee's Tahitian—Richland's favorite spot
for greasy Chinese and flammable drinks
in dirty bar glasses.
Plastic swords and three cherries.

VECINO

El borracho que vive frente a nosotros
se cayó en nuestro jardín, sobre el sembrado de betabeles
ayer. Tan cortés. Discúlpenme,
dijo. Tuvo que ser ayudado a levantarse y sostenerse,
ser conducido a casa y puesto a dormir, dice
tenemos que tener otro trago y sonrío.

Admito mi envidia. Lo encontré entre salal
y tendido de cara en la lechuga, y doblado
y roncando por el grueso tronco lleno de lluvia
nosotros solíamos jugar caza torpedos.
Y lo he cargado a casa tan frecuentemente
ebrio de la lluvia y yo, y alegre.

Trato de adivinar que hay en esa mente confusa y nublada.
¿Esta pensando en el horizonte de abetos
negros contra la luz, treinta años
atrás? y en aquella chica—¿cual es su nombre?—
creyendo, ó ¿piensa acerca del perro
que golpeó a morir aquel día en Carbonado?

Oigo que está muerto, y espero hoy en mi pórtico.
El puede estar en su choza. El vagón
está por llegar y llevárselo adonde se llevan
alcohólicos terminales, probablemente llamado Rancho Final.
Yo planéo mi mueca, seguro el será cargado fuera
desangrándose de las esquinas de su sonrisa maliciosa.

(Translated by / Traducción por Laura González)

HOLY FAMILY

Here, the nuns are rumored cruel. Beat
in the name of Jesus. Scratch the voices
of the choir with those poison thorns.
The Dugans know theatrics, clip at least
four inches from the ruler's stroke. Wince
and clown and say yes ma'am enough,
hail a hundred Marys and your safe.

Money buys a secondary Christ. Blood
and pain, the best. Rap me, Sister,
I have violated eels. All you kids
be kind to mother, do as daddy grunts.
You should be grateful for this day-old bread
and for the birds and trees. All the saints
who died for us take beads on what we say.

Hey, there's Jesus coming down the road.
Look, no whip. No terrifying word.
I swear it Sister, swear—He's dancing
in the dust with Dugan's worst, and dressed
in corduroy and silk. When visions break,
what remains in summer? Melted nuns,
a clown not quite eternal in the heat.

SAGRADA FAMILIA

Aquí, se rumora las monjas son crueles. Golpean
en el nombre de Jesús. Rasguñan las voces
en el coro con esas espinas envenenadas.
Los Dugans conocen el teatrero, cortan al menos
cuatro pulgadas del golpe de la regla. Encógete
y payasea y di si señora lo suficiente,
recita cien aves Marías y estas salvado.

Dinero compra al Cristo secundario. Sangre
y dolor, al mejor. Golpéenme, Hermana,
he violado anguilas. Niños
sean amables con la madre, hagan lo que papá gruñe.
Deben estar agradecidos por este pan viejo
y por las aves y los árboles. Todos los santos
que murieron para que nosotros pudiéramos contar lo que decimos.

Hey, ahí viene Jesús por ese camino cercano.
Vean, no látigo. No palabras terribles.
Lo juro, Hermana, lo juro—El esta danzando
en el polvo con los peores Dugan, y vestido
en pana y seda. ¿Cuando las visiones se quiebran,
que es lo que queda del verano? Monjas fundidas,
un payaso no muy eterno en el calor.

(Translated by / Traducción por Laura González)