

## James M. Croteau – Two Poems

### In the Name of the Mother, the Dog and the Too Strict Nun

Momma's buried. I'm alone  
unearthing years of  
garaged souvenirs. Here's a  
mannequin head. It's Styrofoam,  
a dense weightlessness that  
dulls but never decomposes.

I was too serious as a kid, Momma said.  
So she'd monologue, Johnny Carson wise-  
cracks about the cat next door, Uncle Joe,  
or the habits of the nuns at my school--  
all in the voice of our family dog, part  
Beagle, part Doberman. But

I didn't giggle at the jokes about  
Sister Augustine who was old school  
mean. She slapped a boy for a single stray  
pencil mark on his desk. That nun stole  
my sleep on school nights. So Momma

coached me in stress management,  
the methods were unorthodox--  
a BB gun,  
a place to shoot, and  
a home-made target.

Now my memory's triggered by the magic  
marker facial features, and the five  
embedded BB's scattered around  
the four letters on its forehead--  
*A U G I*, a nickname  
Momma gave Sister Augustine.

Tomorrow, I'll have to take aim  
at what's left in my life. I'll struggle  
to follow Momma's old counsel--  
stock to my shoulder, she stood  
by side with a smirk: *steady now*.

## When a Gay Boy Dreams in 1969

a mother watches as his eyes move  
under lids, and his feet kick beneath  
the worn cotton bedspread. Her brow  
furrows for just a moment. She worries  
about a nightmare but he's quiet  
so she imagines he imagines  
superheroes, home runs, or rock stars  
but he's learned to keep quiet, even

when sleeping and dreaming of the future  
he's assumed from slurs and silences--  
handcuffs, cells, striped jumpsuits, men  
with hairy hands that grab, or the cold  
of a metal table, white coats,  
a rubber mouthpiece, electrodes.

**James M. Croteau** lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan with his partner of 30 years, Darryl, and their two Labrador retrievers. Jim grew up gay and Catholic in the U.S. south in the 60's and 70's and his writing reflects that experience. His poems have appeared in *New Verse News*, *Chelsea Station*, *Queer South: LGBTQ Writers on the American South* and *Assaracus: A Journal of Gay Poetry* among others. His first chapbook will be published by Redbird Chapbooks in 2016. He occasionally blogs about writing at [talkingdogsholymen.blogspot.com](http://talkingdogsholymen.blogspot.com).