

Jeff Bernstein

Elegy or Ode

Great Uncle Jack (“Jeck” to my grandfather)
had named his sleek yacht “Elysium.”
I boarded it just once, summer 1964, slept
overnight in an elegant wood-paneled cabin
and after a breakfast of toast and jam
at a pop-up table in the stern
was outfitted with an orange life preserver
jumped off with my cousins
into the dark, dark water
of the Outer Harbor.

Floating a few yards away, that vessel
looked like the White House
did to tourists gazing from the iron fence
at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue (I’d seen
the real one for my first time
the week after November 22, 1963.)
I thought about what might be
swimming below me in the dark
gray-blue water of the outer harbor
dead-eyed sharks, wanted to be back
on that boat, back on the pier
back in my own landlocked bed
as soon as humanly possible.

A well-meaning “friend” wrote
to tell me that my July “near death experience”
would be the very best thing
that ever happened to me.
I doubt he’s had a similar experience.
I didn’t ask to bleed like that.
Had no idea it was coming.
It populates waking dreams at 3 or 4 a.m.
My eyes are sleepy all the time
my reading glasses might need a boost
but I can see deep into the woods
even after the light fades.

A lifelong New Englander, **Jeff Bernstein** divides his time between Boston and Central Vermont. Except on summer days when his beloved (now bedraggled) Red Sox are at Fenway, he finds back roads preferable to the city. Poetry is his favorite and earliest art form (he can’t draw a whit or hold a tune). Recent poems have appeared or are

forthcoming in *Ballard Street Poetry Journal*, *Birchsong – A Poetry Anthology* (Blueline Press), *Best Indie Lit New England*, *Hobble Creek Review*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *San Pedro River Review* and *riverbabble*. His chapbook, "Interior Music," was published in 2010 by Foothills Publishing. Jeff's writer's blog is www.hurricanelodge.com.