



Joel Moskowitz – Five Poems

Pine

The sky dropped
a branch
through the windshield
of our eight-year-old Ford.
Our car looked sad,
its main eye blind.
We were afraid—
a storm could fell
even such a tree. Imagine
the crushed evergreen scent.
In the muddy season
Punch Tree Service
drove their crane,
carving ruts
into our driveway,
up to the tree,
old Goliath of sticky sap,
compact cones.
Mostly-hidden in the sky,
the team tied a noose
to the tree, divided the
tree with a thundering
power, lowered the top
with thick ropes
as if it were a mobile home
gently onto our lawn,
then severed the trunk
about as high above
as grass flowers.
They returned the next day
and ground the stump down.

Easter Lust

In childhood I coveted,
dreamt of sweet ear tips
of chocolate rabbits melting on my tongue.
Now I long to hide
my skull-cap, crash Easter Vigil,
kiss Jesus' toes as he breaks out
of a stone egg.
A bell probably rang
on the first Easter,
people saw gold leaf skies
behind their neighbors' faces,
they wore garments of lapis lazuli,
anything was possible within
the hinged open wings of an altarpiece.
Is that why we pray
by those images,
animals meditate,
and tender grass sanctifies
spring? Flags waved
colors of milk and platinum
when Jesus' body rose light
as a cricket, exuded musky cologne
mixed with night sweat. It's a leap
but I'll try to inhale the pure evaporate.
I can convert—
the Church would love to have me—
disown my past, my people,
my food, swallow *their* matza.
Picture me on my knees
in the foreground. Paint me.

John Campbell

I confess—
on a vacant lot,
from behind a bush,
I lobbed a hard dirt clod
(or was it a stone?)
striking true at the back
of John Campbell's head,
above his ear as he turned.
I had no reason,
but— that neighbor boy, John,
neither my enemy nor my pal,
was at least a year younger
than I.

Our door bell chimed, and he—
just a shadow
with a frozen smile— appeared
coiled-inward behind his big sister.
And I, standing behind my family
on the cold terrazzo floor of the entranceway, said—
“I was arranging my coin collection all afternoon.”

As usual, evening was loud,
lots of us, our cups spilling over.
Perhaps we ate Mom's great salmon patties.
I was a quiet son.
They thought I was good.

What George Washington Owns

In a dream, I handed him a ballpoint pen.
He showed me his glazed bowl
of glossy cherries
the color of Redcoats.

He stands forever in his rowboat
in that painting,
Crossing the Delaware.
But imagine him stepping off his boat—

a shiny King George falls
out of his vest
into the historical frieze,
so he doesn't own that fat cent anymore.

His soldiers enrich him with honor
for his bravery on the front.
But is he homesick for Mt. Vernon?
Is he my grandmother

who became a citizen of our land?
His legacy shines
on our alabaster cities.
At age eleven, he owned ten people.

In the dream
he wore a girdle.
His wig spilled powder.
I wanted his signature.

When he spoke, I saw his dentures
of hippopotamus bone.
But I don't remember his final words.
I think he wished I were a doctor.

Late Summer Valentine

I love you as a bumpy gourd
bulges out of the compost heap
and begs to be named by the gentle rain.
The gourd is compelling
but it's clownish— ugly and
gorgeous at the same time—
so might as well remain nameless
as the rain's patter turns
quiet; and last night we both didn't
know names of the cosmic lights
in the garden above,
we almost touching
some eclipse or other,
then rushing back into the warmth of the TV,
whatever the program, doesn't matter.

And I love you as tendrils
creep over the mound
of twigs and soil and loam that—
even after I told you it was a bad idea—
you piled higher all that summer
when that stubborn woodpecker,
may his name be erased,
wouldn't fly away;

I love you as the first silence
when that Red-belly stopped
ramming its beak against the cedar shakes
outside our child's bedroom.
But the bird returned with its mate.
I suppose we are inseparable
and without wings
and our love is in the afternoon
and in the common earth,
the smooth stones
which we spread over larger stones

Joel Moskowitz lives in Sudbury, Massachusetts, with his wife and cat. His poems have appeared or will appear in *burntdistrict*, *J Journal*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Midstream*, *The Healing Muse*, and *Whiskey Island Magazine*; and in the websites *MuddyRiverReview.com* and *Soul-Lit.com*. He won First Prize in the Poetry Society of New Hampshire, 2008 National Contest. Two of his poems won Honorable Mention for the Reuben Rose Poetry Prize, 2012. His poems have been helped along by his poetry groups: the Tuesday Wayland Group, Framingham Library Group, and Voices Israel, Boston. Joel is an artist. His art can be seen at JoelMoskowitzFineArt.com.