



## **Cindy Hochman** –Five Poems

### **My Father (In a Nutshell)**

My father loved  
weak tea  
burnt toast  
strawberries and cream  
cherry tomatoes  
tanning his face  
in the sun  
on the corner—  
and justice.

### **Form**

I write couplets  
though I am not a couple  
I write prose because I'm breathless and endless and long-lined and long-winded;  
because I'm afraid to pause and wait for the sky to fall and the planet's green worm to  
turn

and I write haiku  
because my life gets smaller  
with every breath

### **How Did All These Clichés End Up In This Poem?**

I think that I shall never see . . .  
A poet more cliché than me  
I love whistling a happy tune  
Especially at the moon and especially in June

If there's a drift I try to catch it  
If there's a rift I bury the hatchet  
I beat around bushes and I beat a dead horse  
In fact, I applauded when Bush stayed the course  
I try to think outside the box  
And I'm balanced and fair, like those good folks at Fox  
I turn on a dime at the drop of a hat  
And I'm always in favor of getting tit for tat  
I bring home the bacon at the end of each day  
It's mine for the taking  
(is that a cliché?)  
I lie through my teeth  
All my statements ring hollow  
And at poetry readings  
I'm a hard act to follow  
I'll give you a hand and I'll throw you a curve  
It takes two to tango – right on my last nerve  
Give till it hurts, till the piper's been paid  
Don't be a killjoy or rain on my parade  
Keep a good thought and keep a clean nose  
And remember a rose is a rose is a rose  
Don't rest on your laurels and don't take a pass  
Don't speak with forked tongue  
Or talk out your ass  
Don't buy up the farm  
And don't kick the bucket  
Be calm as the Buddha  
Learn to say (f'k it)  
Now the last bell has rung  
And the jury is hung  
This poem must be over  
'Cause the fat lady has sung  
And if you take issue  
At my phrasing and rhyme-ment  
I'll tell you I wrote this  
With the stars in alignment

### **The ABCs of Ailments as We Age (an abecedarian)**

Arterial blockage and advanced arthritis  
Irritable bowel and the beginnings of bursitis  
Cataracts, coronaries, and cholecystitis  
Damn—as we age, how our bodies do fight us  
Ebola, E-coli, and encephalitis  
Fever and fissures and the miserable flu  
Gout and gastritis and gingivitis (God, I feel awful—how about you?)

Hoof-in-mouth disease (oh wait, that's for a horse!)  
Then "h" is for hemorrhoids (I have 'em, of course)  
Insomnia, insanity, and bouts of ileitis  
And when my jejunum acts up, with the world, nothing's right-us  
Keloid scars from going under the knife  
Leprosy, Legionnaire's—never had those in my Life  
Mucous, malaise, and the dreaded Mad Cow  
and my nemesis—neuroses (quite numerous right now!)  
according to my bone scan: osteoporosis  
according to my lung scan: a touch of pleurosis  
Queer symptoms each day (I feel old as Moses)  
Rickets and rabies and that new one, restless legs  
Sciatica—and syphilis (well, I'd had a few kegs)  
When my stomach is aching, I reach for the TUMS  
and I worry it's an ulcer, but it's probably just the runs.  
If you're prone to hives, then you have urticaria  
And if your wife has vaginismus—why the hell did you marry 'er  
Watch out for whooping cough and those big ugly warts  
But if it's whiplash, your lawyer will fight it out in the courts  
If you have X-treme pain, then you may need an X-ray  
(Admit it—you don't feel like you did in your heyday.)  
And I bet you wish that you were still young  
Getting older is really the pits  
But with all of these ailments  
And acute body fail-ments  
At least we no longer have zits.

### **13 Ways Of Looking At My Heritage (Or, I Can See Russia From My DNA)**

1.

Grandma Sophie and Grandpa Frank, a carpenter from Eastern Europe, packed their wild teenage lust in one suitcase (probably not Samsonite) and boarded the boat for America. I have no idea what color the ship was, or whether the rotten food and lack of Dramamine made them vomit along the way, but when they caught their first glimpse of Ellis Island, I know they felt just like Columbus.

2.

My Russian neighborhood in Brooklyn, affectionately known as Little Odessa, was an acquired taste. I used to spit into the harsh and angular faces of my kinsmen, mouthing *nyet* with a cold war stare.

3.

The language resembles the fitful cough  
of death. Can you say *glasnost*,  
boys and girls? Or even worse, *perestroika*.

4.

I get mixed up between the *Bolsheviks* and the *Bolshoi*.  
I picture a revolutionary stage production of *Swan Lake*,  
ending in the overthrow of the prima ballerina (circa 1917).

5.

Do you know the difference between a White Russian  
and a Black Russian?  
Lipstick!

6.

I was just Putin you on.  
It's the cream.

7.

In my 20s, the only thing Russian  
about me was the vodka.

8.

Russian version of *My Fair Lady*:  
The rain in Ukraine stays mainly. . . .

9.

How many Russian writers can you name?  
Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Pasternak.

10.

My body contains the blood of Allen Ginsberg's  
lobotomized Russian mother, especially the madness.

11.

I am a wooden Russian nesting doll, with a Slavic face  
and teasing eyes.  
I write all my poems in little red squares.

12.

What I have learned: How to say *culture*. How to say *embrace*.  
How lovely the word *da* sounds in my Cyrillic soul; on my  
borscht-eating tongue.

13.

If you don't like this poem, I feel very czar-y for you.

**Cindy Hochman**, from Brooklyn, NY, is the president of “100 Proof” Copyediting Services and the editor-in-chief of the online journal *First Literary Review-East*. She is on the book review staff of *Pedestal Magazine*, and writes reviews for *Home Planet News*, *great weather for MEDIA*, and many other publications. Recent poems are published (or forthcoming) in the *New York Quarterly*, *CLWN WR*, *Arsenic Lobster*, *Lips*, *Pirene’s Fountain*, *Monkey Bicycle*, *Levure littéraire*, *Clockwise Cat Glimpse* (Canada), *Unlikely Stories*, and *Kiyi* (Turkey). Her 2011 chapbook, *The Carcinogenic Bride*, has been recommended on *Winning Writers*. Her latest chapbook is *Habeas Corpus*, from Glass Lyre Press.