

Joel Moskowitz – Three Poems

***Kaddish* for My Father's Mother**

On a Thursday Bubbe died
of diabetes or hardening of the arteries.
Grownups raced to bury her before *Shabbes*.
I knew she'd soon fly like a bumble bee
to gather powdery riches
as the righteous do.
My father stumbled toward me,
said something I can't recall.

Perhaps he prayed for his Ma to reach that open city
in the atrium of which everyone knows Yiddish,
they speak in a humble *Galitzianer* accent,
sadness dissolves,
and all the babies survive.

They gathered around her
obese body and bore her quickly
to her grave
on the first day
I've seen Dad's tears.
I still taste salt
kissing his cheek.

Uncle Menachem

The most pious
of all my uncles and aunts at that time,
just a boy in a sanitarium,
consumptive, he was wasting away,
refusing nourishment,
for the food was *traif*.
Above his bed,
a healing crucifix, an idol which he ignored, hung
but perhaps its halo with gold emanations
tempted him or its tangle of thorns cut
into his nightmares
while he wore a skullcap stained by sweat.
Menachem rested. All the Jewish

points of law he knew by heart,
their mystical roots and dense logic
grew even more absolute in his mind
while his body dwindled
until reason saved him—
the brilliant Polish rabbi in Milwaukee
ruled, *Life is holy, the boy must eat.*

Years later, on the communal farm
in the Galilee Valley, I visited my uncle,
listened to the story of his resurrection
from religion to socialism.
I drew closer
to the quietest of all my uncles and aunts
to hear his amplifier,
a gadget he holds against his neck
whenever he speaks.

*When we settled the land,
we rebelled against the sacred laws—
most days we filled ourselves with eggplant, but—
on Passover we ate bread,
and on Yom Kippur, meat.*

Leon, His Wife and Three Sons

My uncle, my Hebrew school teacher
once, in another war, was a sailor.
But now it's evening time, he's high

on weed, sinks in his recliner
as a tired ship blowing O's of smoke
while the TV shows Vietnam burning.

The biggest of cousins, their middle son
knows all the battles,
loves history.

It's also the time of the Doors, Light My Fire,
their oldest son with a beard
and a Jewfro and his walk slowed by polio.

Number three son and I have places to go,
the AZA dance, girls to pick up,

which for me is a long shot,

but just last year was our free time in the front yard,
a patch of lawn, our world
was smaller—

we threw a slobbery tennis ball
to that crazed cocker spaniel Stumper
who never stopped fetching,

the ball eroded to its rubber core,
the sun set, our stomachs rumbled,
but, just in time, the oven opened

to Aunt Edythe's tuna noodle casserole
without the mushy peas, so we, so like kittens,
we licked our lips and found our places
in her kitchen harbor.

Joel Moskowitz has had poems published in *J Journal*, *Midstream*, *The Healing Muse*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Whiskey Island Magazine* and *The New Vilna Review*. He is the first place winner of the Poetry Society of New Hampshire's National Contest, November, 2008. Joel, an artist and picture framer in Sudbury, Massachusetts, is writing *The Peddler's Banquet*, a book of poems exploring themes of history through his paternal grandfather's voice and narrative.