

## 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.