

# Freddy Frankel

## Elephant Grief

After a documentary film

The bones of the matriarch lie untidy  
on a patch of sand – long bones  
like young tree trunks, outsize ribs,  
and the jagged forbidding skull with eye  
sockets large as a baseball.

A family of nine cows slowly  
gathers around like the spokes in a wheel,  
their rear ends toward the hub.  
Each steps back with a hind-leg  
to touch the nearest bone.

They then turn about, explore the remains,  
touch them with the lips of their trunks.  
One glides hers like an eel around  
the skull and lifts it off the ground,  
holds it, passes it on to another.

The progressive passage is steady and gentle –  
fondling the head like turning the page  
of a rare book with a gloved hand.  
The skull is returned to its place. The lead-  
cow sprays sand through her trunk, like water.

**Freddy Frankel** migrated with his family from South Africa to the USA in 1962. He retired from his position as Psychiatrist-in-Chief at Boston's Beth Israel Hospital in 1997. He is also Professor of Psychiatry (Emeritus) at Harvard Medical School. After retirement in 1997 he shifted his focus from psychiatry to poetry and attended courses at the Harvard Extension School and with Barbara Helfgott Hyett's Workshop for Publishing Poets. He published a chapbook *Hottentot Venus* (2003), a first full book of poems *In a Stone's Hollow* (2006), a second full volume, *Wrestling Angel* (2011). In 2003 Frankel won the New England Writers Robert Penn Warren First Award.