

Michael Steffen – Five Poems



Michael Steffen's poems and articles have surfaced in *The Boston Globe*, *Connecticut Review*, *Poem (HLA)*, *ACM (Another Chicago Magazine)*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Taos Journal*, *Poetry Porch* and in the window of the Grolier Poetry Bookshop in Cambridge. He works to develop non-profit and progressive political support, and currently lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.

Sleep Tight

Tonight she's drying pots and pans
after the dishes, having insisted
you couldn't help her.
(Or was that another
scrutiny: Would you do the right thing
anyway? *No, go on to bed.*
I'll finish up here...)

When she crawls
into the covers, she's as good as
not there, shoulder turned. She's got
to be at work early tomorrow morning.
She'll leave some cash and a list
for groceries. Will the man
in the alley between here and there
be drunk again?

The other day they were running him
out of the tool shed
behind the abandoned house

In the Wind

Of themselves chimes jingle
from the neighbors' porch
through the open window

as curtains lift and fall
stirring the dim descent
of the mind's body, the soul,

into sleep, like the last wave
from one boarding an airplane.
Cirrus, cumuli drift, race on

in the river of the sky.
You've seen the maples' limbs bend
as by a hand's insistent

invitation—*Come on! Come on!*—
in an urgency of going along
but rooted here.

As Time Goes By

It isn't Sam at the piano crooning
a kiss is still a kiss in *Casablanca*,
the movie three generations took to heart
and still made smile a fourth, my niece's,
though will be hard to swallow for her son.
He likely will not find an hour away
from the river, his reel and tackle box.
Not for silken Bergman and smoky Bogart.
I know, I'm talking to myself. The light
on the screen is my life, with it the verve
of a time's imagination doomed to act.

Western

The way you used to get into it,
tensing at the gunfights, clutching, wincing
as the actors to their wounds. The whisper of
look out to the sheriff who's being snuck up on
in the abandoned one street of the town—
the shadow flitting from the General Store
to crouch behind an unhitched wagon.
There is the strike of a match
on the boot heel to light the outlaw's cigar,
bringing tension to our breathing
in the wild country of sage brush and rock formations.

In this one they wear two-day
beards with greasy sweat on their faces
holding their pistols, looking out the windows
while ma and pa sit with their arms and legs
tied by ropes to chairs in a sparse décor—
table, wood stove, shelf with books and trinkets
—evoking home on the range.

The strangely good guy is on his way.
From out there in the dark of night his bullet
will report through one of those windows. The bandits
will break the rest of the glass out with their pistols
to shoot back at him. Here in the living room
though the movie's growing close, with those two
bound to surrender, the other two to be freed,
we grip the recliners' cushions, digging in
for the resistance of the shoot-out,
not quite ready to go to bed.