

Neil Silberblatt -- Three Poems

Pastrami

It must be hand carved,
not machine sliced,
by a man whose sweat glistens
like the fat when it emerges naked from its brined bath.

It should not be lean
or trimmed of fat, any more than
Venus de Milo should be armed.

Its well-marbled veins should resemble
Carrara, only smokier
like Johnny Hartman's baritone on Lush Life
or Coltrane's soft tenor reply.

It should be laid, like flesh,
still steaming and moist
between bread with seeds of Persian
cumin and the taste of the diaspora.

When you bite into it, you should know
why Sussman Volk carried this secret with him,
guarded it, on his voyage from Lithuania,
as Fermi guarded the secret of the atom -
as powerful, though less tasty.

Lord, make me one with all things.
Grant me serenity and those other pedestrian virtues.
But first, make me a nice sandwich.
A nice sandwich.

How to Build a Fire

Start slowly,
no, slower
with longing or, perhaps,
a lemon cut along its pregnant midsection and
squeezed over plump scallops seared to a walnut
finish while their flesh recalls the ocean.

Nurse it with desire or, perhaps,
garlic roasted until its sweet pulp emerges
Minerva-like from its parchment skin, like Torah scrolls
whose crowned letters leap from flames.

Only then, add touch or, perhaps,
logs whose air pockets wait to be emptied
by pickpocket flames, releasing ash fireflies
like so many copper pennies scattered onto
the night's floor.

Skip the fire pit.
You don't even need matches.
Just start with kindling or, perhaps,
a poem about kindling.

In the Bullpen at Dana Farber

Waiting in the pen at
Dana Farber, not far from
Fenway, getting ready for his turn
at the Green Monster, he tells me
unprompted
of the woman to whom
he was wed for 70 years.

How she made a home to which
he looked forward to returning
every day
and which he no longer calls home.
How she wanted so badly to make it
to their youngest daughter's wedding,
how she succeeded,
how she slipped away the day after.

Accompanied by his adult daughter,
who squeezes his arm intermittently as
though he were a pump and her hand a blood-pressure cuff,
he tells me of his mother who
raised six children
after his father died, too young, on \$1,400
a month and guile.

Cleaning his thin-framed glasses which
now have become streaked,
and weaving his fingers through his daughter's,
he tells me of the parachute which
saved his life when he was shot down over Australia, and how,
at war's end, he returned home with that silk
from which his wife made a baptismal gown for his
children and their children,
as his daughter extricates her hand from his
and cleans her streaked glasses.

And, somehow, the subject of his advanced pancreatic cancer
never comes up before he is
called to swing for the fences.

Neil Silberblatt's poems have appeared in various journals, including *Poetica Magazine*, *The Otter*, *The Aureorean*, *Two Bridges Review*, *Oddball Magazine*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Chantarelle's Notebook*, *Canopic Jar*, and *The Good Men Project*. His work has been included in the anthology, *Confluencia in the Valley: The First Five Years of Converging with Words* (Naugatuck Valley Community College, 2013); and in University of Connecticut's *Teacher-Writer* magazine. He has published two poetry collections: *So Far, So Good* (2012), and *Present Tense* (2013). He has been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize, and one of his poems received Honorable Mention in the 2nd Annual OuterMost Poetry Contest (2014), judged by Marge Piercy. Neil is the founder of Voices of Poetry - which, since 2012, has presented poetry events, featuring distinguished poets & writers, at various venues throughout CT, NYC and Cape Cod - and the host of Poet's Corner on WOMR/WFMR, for which he has interviewed acclaimed poets on and off of Cape Cod.