

Richard H. Fox

The Dying Poets Society

In memory of Dan Lewis and Marsha Kunin

*It was not the force,
but the sudden clear knowledge
that knocked the wind out of me.*

- Dan Lewis, "Recoil"

Hospice phones, advises me: Marsha
cannot read tomorrow at our dual feature—
she rhyming life, me metering death.
Her voice—*tell him I love him*—
mine *love you too* while thinking
“see you on the other side.” That’s
too penetrating to pass through a visitor,
more suited for a tête-à-tête where Marsha and I
compare evacuation plans as we ingest
BBQ brisket and chili-cheese fries
at the same storefront where we bought
candy and comics as kids.

Omelettes at Altea’s, canes propped on windowsills.
Dan and I exchange cancer sitreps
never wandering past this day.
We share a joke about Foley catheters,
both determined to capture
their tubal cruelty in verse.
Dan shifts painfully on his chair—cheeks pallid,
requests a ride home. We recite poems as I drive,
his voice, catalog deeper. An ambulance screams
towards the corner of Highland & Park.
A Cavalier cuts it off, driver in such a hurry
to get where she doesn’t want to go.

I do the dual feature solo. My poems, cancer poems, start
restrained—until fury, sadness, loss seize my voice.
My wife sits in a booth,
her back to me, sobbing as I read.
Dan gone a week ago. Marsha dying
as I drop each page. A Q&A follows:
Why do I write cancer poems? *Compulsion*.
How can I find pain and treatment amusing? *Fascination*.

When I mock dying, is it denial? *Misdirection*.
I wonder how many more times I will shout
from this stage, whether the poetry we crafted
is destined for dust or anchors.

Richard H. Fox dreams three-decker rainbows encircle The Woo. When not writing about rock 'n roll or youthful transgressions, his poems focus on cancer drawing on hope, humor, and unforeseen gifts. He is the author of three poetry collections: *Time Bomb* (2013), *wandering in puzzle boxes* (2015), *You're my favorite horse* (2017) and a chapbook: *The Complete Uncle Louie Poems* (2017). The winner of the 2017 Frank O'Hara Prize, he seconds Stanley Kunitz' motion that people in Worcester are "provoked to poetry." smallpoetatlarge.com