



Photo by Marc Johnson

Robert K. Johnson – Five Poems

Feature

Bonding

Chris, who did all the readings
teachers assigned, was the only one
in our high school I told my secret.
Who knew that after a week of classes
and a Saturday night party or dance,
I headed home and stayed up for hours
doing what, if my other classmates knew,
would have triggered their disdain:
I read Steinbeck, Wolfe, Flaubert
and, worse, wrote poetry.

So it was to me that Chris, in turn,
revealed his secret. Late on weekend nights
he walked--his parents could not
afford a car--to the spacious home
that Sheila Franklin returned to
after her date with one of the males,
dull as fizzless soda—but from money,
her parents pressured her to see.

Chris would go to the back of the house,
noiselessly open the porch's screen door
and move through moon shadows
to where Sheila, her face uplifted,
sat in a chair waiting for him
while I wrote a poem imagining the scene.

So Many Times

because I always strove
for still more,

my efforts failed--
turned into regrets

like bodies strewn
somewhere below
a mountain peak.

Happy Hours

Starting to read a good novel
is like opening the door of a pub
on a chilling winter night
and being embraced by warm air.
Turning the next pages is like
hearing the clamor of conversations
that inform you the tables are filled
with the village's regular imbibers,
One or two look up and wave hello.
You turn still more pages
and your favorite waitress walks by
carrying a tray of glasses
brimming with beer and says,
"Well, look who's here."
You take a few more steps
and the bartender is already
pouring what you always order
while your best drinking companion shoves
a stool your way and announces
he's got a grand story to tell you.

Siblings

(for Ed)

Like porpoises playing in waves
of rolling blue,
 our first shared years
were full of love and joy

that in later years
you smothered, insisting

we deaden our times together
by talking only of trivia
or silently watching TV.

Oh, why did you let
competitions between us
that you alone created
and then decided you'd lost
lead you to such resentment?
Why did you let
those leaping porpoises
swim farther and farther away.

Van Gogh's Last Paintings

The reeling stars, the cypresses'
green leaves spiraling skyward,
the field of blazing yellow wheat
hurling themselves beyond
the borders of the canvas
explain

how, for Van Gogh,
every day was a torrential river
his rowboat was trapped on
and no matter how frantically
he dipped and tugged the oars
he could not steer the boat
to shore;
the only way
he could keep from drowning
was to pull the trigger himself.

Robert K. Johnson, now retired, was a Professor of English for many years. He was also the Submissions Editor for *Ibbetson Street* for several years. His poems have appeared in many magazines and this led to eight book collections of his work being published. His latest collection is *Choir Of Day*.