

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Five Poems from Alongside We Travel, Autism Anthology

Cultural Daily · Wednesday, June 19th, 2019

Dear Editor of Poetry Journals Named after Famous Cities

by Sean Thomas Dougherty

I am writing to ask, have you ever eaten a cloud? You see my youngest daughter didn't use the toilet till she was after 4 years old. She'd shit in a diaper and didn't seem to mind. She refused to read till she was six though she spent hours flipping the pages of books and speaking out her made-up stories, but then what stories are not made up? Or her speech impediment, and the battery of tests on her brain. But today the sun was warm along the great lake. They call this weather Indian Summer, the red leaves and light. We were out on the back porch when our daughter reached up with her forked fingers as if to pluck the sky and turned and chewed, "I ate a cloud, dada, I ate a cloud!" Have you ever eaten a cloud, dear editor? You don't seem like the type, who has done this, with your Ivy degrees and serious statements on art. And what does a cloud taste like? Well, my daughter says, "Love. A cloud it tastes like love."

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Eighteen

by Rebecca Foust

Maybe I don't have to whisk
the ice smooth ahead of your
curling stone, explain
how you don't always mean

what you say, nor say what
you mean; tell why you don't cry
even though you feel pain,
explain your indifference

to rain. Or sun. How when
you get wet, sometimes
you burn. You're learning
to manage on your own,

how to keep track of taking

your meds, where and when
to get more, how much
and whether you took them

today. You're beginning
to take time from screen time
to eat, brush your teeth
and shave your luxurious beard,

you remember to set your
alarm. Charge your phone
in case your friends call.
Your friends. Your friends call.

*

Good

by Tony Gloeggler

Walking in the neighborhood
Larry twirls like a circus bear
every twenty steps or so, bends
down and pulls up his socks
like Thurman Munson adjusting
his batting gloves before each pitch.
Lee walks down the aisle, sliding
his fingers along the packages
on every shelf, stopping to align
each one perfectly before he keeps
walking. Some kid stares and laughs,
another runs to his mother, eyes
wide with confusion. The mother
smiles at me, her face softens
into an apology and then crumbles,
turns into an *Oh you poor thing*
pitying pose. I look past her, move
closer to Lee, touch his arm, instead
of smacking the nice lady across
her mouth. I hold Robert's hand
as we walk through the park's gate.
He moves like a drunk Pinocchio,
nearly misses the bench as he stops
to sit. Jesse walks down the aisle,
plops down in a window bus seat
smiling widely as cars drive by,
humming his tuneless song, breaking
into loud laughter

and I'm five years old

again. Climbing onto the B55 bus
 with my leg brace clanking, I drag
 my huge booted foot through the crowd
 as the people lean against poles,
 grab hand grips. An old black woman
 gets up, offers her seat to me.
 My mom tells me to thank her,
 but I whisper, *no thanks*, grab hold
 of a pole and hang on, dream
 about flying away, disappearing.
 At home, I sit on the stoop, watch
 some kids play stickball in the street.
 A foul ball bounces my way. I catch it,
 rub the Pennsie Pinkie as one
 of the players runs it down. "*C'mon,*
give it back, you retarded gimp."
 I extend my hand. When he gets near,
 I tackle him, wrestle him to the ground.
 Surprised, he tries to fight back,
 struggle out of my hold. I kick him
 with my brace. Red pours out of his head.
 It felt good. It still feels good.

*

Non Verbal

by Connie Post

People often ask
 "since he can't speak....
 how do you know what he wants?"

which is often followed
 with a moment of my own silence

how do I know when it's dawn

*how do I know when the fog
 rises up over the eastern hill*

*how do I know
 when Orion is stretched out
 across the Autumn sky*

I hear your footsteps
 as you come downstairs
 before I am out of bed
 on Sunday morning

each measured footstep
 like a far away drum beat
 I have become accustomed to
 in a dense forest
 of silent blooms

*

Anything Besides

by Angeline Schellenberg

I will write about something—anything—besides
 this

because my heart can't take
 one more child blistering in shitty pants
 because schools are busy teaching other children to
 count,

one more breaking
 story about a child wandering off
 to drown in a ditch
 fifty feet from home.

I can't spend one more moment on regret
 over the expert advice I should have ignored
 the nights I wept outside your door
 as I held it shut,

one more moment of rage
 over everything they shouldn't have said:
*But he looks so normal. She just needs a good
 spanking. Have you tried
 enemas? I don't know
 how you do it.*

It—by which they mean
get out of bed. As if
 they haven't considered
 the alternative.

I won't repeat
 how tired I am of hearing
 that vegan cheese will
 change everything.

Sean Thomas Dougherty is the author or editor of 17 books including *Alongside We Travel*:

Contemporary Poets on Autism from NYQ Books, and *The Second O of Sorrow* (2018 BOA Editions) winner of the 2019 Paterson Poetry Prize. He works as a care giver and Med Tech for various disabled populations in Erie, PA.

Rebecca Foust's books include *Paradise Drive*, winner of the 2015 Press 53 Award for Poetry and reviewed in venues including the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Huffington Post*, and the *Georgia, Harvard, and Hudson* reviews. Foust is the mother of an adult son on the spectrum and received a California Golden Bell award in 2008 for her work in autism advocacy in the schools.

Tony Gloegger, the author of numerous books of poetry, writes, "I live in NYC and I started working in a group home for the developmentally disabled in 1979 and have been managing it for 35 years. But my real connection to autism is through the son of an ex-girlfriend. I am happy to say that he is a happy 24 year old guy who lives in his own apartment."

Connie Post's first full length book *Floodwater* (Glass Lyre Press 2014) won the Lyrebird Award. She helps parents with challenges during diagnosis and education. She has served as the keynote speaker at special needs conferences and has given presentations for years at local colleges. Her poems about autism appear in many nonfiction books about autism.

Angeline Schellenberg is the mother of two teenagers on the autism spectrum, with whom she shares a love for Star Wars. Her first book *Tell Them It Was Mozart* (Brick Books, 2016)—linked poems about motherhood—won the Lansdowne Prize for Poetry, the Eileen McTavish Sykes Award for Best First Book, the John Hirsch Award for Most Promising Manitoba Writer. Angeline lives in Winnipeg, Canada.

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