Cultural Daily

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Jim Natal: Four Poems

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Jim Natal is the Pushcart Prize-nominated author of *52 Views: The Haibun Variations, Memory and Rain,* and two previous poetry collections. His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *Hayden's Ferry Review, Spillway, Alligator Juniper, San Pedro River Review,* and *New Poets of the American West.* A former NFL creative executive, he directs The Literary Southwest series at Yavapai College and is the publisher and co-founder of Conflux Press.

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Underwater. As if there's been a catastrophic flood. As if we're living in the backfill aftermath of the construction of a massive dam, watching appraised values submerge like towns. We're so deep now we need scuba tanks to view the sunken ruins. At least I've got a roof over my head. My father, who went through the Great Depression, would say something like that. Now I've got a house and a depression of my own. And a roof over my head that leaks when the snowmelt begins. We put pinging pots out to catch the drips like Ma and Pa Kettle. Be thankful you've got a pot to piss in, my father whispers. He's far beyond this. Dad, you can put all the béarnaise sauce you want on a shit sandwich. It's still a shit sandwich.

Oh, Evanescence!
I wrote you a lovely song
except now it's gone.

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My student writes about his last day in Iraq, the one that ends with his getting blown up by an IED. I try to separate form from content the way the insurgent separated my student from much of his blood and nearly his life. His essay needs a lot of work—spelling, punctuation, flow. *Point and support, point and support* I drone to the class. No argument without example. No blast without detonation.

The rules of grammar,
dispassionate as a bomb;
each wire connected.

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An ad on late night TV touts a new “Girls Gone Wild” video: 50 Best Breasts Ever! Despite my poetic admiration for the title’s internal rhyme and alliteration, I mull a question—does the video feature 50 girls or just 25? You know, truth in advertising. Bowing to network proprieties, the sample footage features grayed-out swatches across the chests and pubic regions of the oh-so-perky participants, reminiscent of the black bars across eyes in retro “dirty” magazines. One girl (and these *are* girls) flips up the top of her bikini; her breasts leap at the camera like, you know, they’ve gone wild. Another girl on what appears to be an RV bed declares, “I am the hottest girl in America,” a claim that might be disputed by the other 49 (or 24) subjects. These girls could be my daughter’s college roommates…or my daughter. How many fathers, in the interest of research, have gone so far as to order? Which sets up an interesting premise: suppose the girl gone wild is yours?

Breast fascination—
amazing how it changes:
wife’s radiation.

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Westbound on Interstate 10, crossing the Colorado River on the way to L.A., 107 degrees at 11:00 A.M. On the radio Randy Newman sings about traveling the other direction—he’s “going to Arizona, just a rider in the rain.” He must be coming from Portland because from the looks of the Mojave in the middle of August it hasn’t rained here since there were warm shallow seas. A sign on the south side of the freeway proclaims: “Food Grows Where Water Flows” as if it’s a debatable concept. But if you need confirmation just ask the farmers far downstream in Mexico, where the river thins to a trickle. Or, closer to home, ask the growers and ranchers in Colorado and New Mexico, or anywhere new developments and agribusiness are elbowing aside family fields, pastures, and orchards. In those places, they have close working knowledge of agricultural physics: water, they say, runs uphill toward money.

Poor brown coyote
slinks away thirsty again.
Nothing left but salt.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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