

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lin Nelson Benedek: Two Poems

Lin Nelson Benedek · Tuesday, February 2nd, 2016

Lin Nelson Benedek, a third generation Californian, lives in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains with her husband and son. She works as a psychotherapist and is a recent graduate of the MFA program in poetry at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, where she had the great privilege of being mentored by Anna Journey, Dorianne Laux, Vievee Francis, Kwame Dawes and Sandra Alcosser. She aspires to write generous poetry—ecstatic and meditative, reverent and irreverent—and to speak from her soul about the sorrows and joys that make up our lives.

The First Time I Heard The Doors

After Tess Gallagher

I was the kind of girl who— when *Light My Fire* blazed
in the Cal Tech Auditorium and my date, a Norwegian
science genius, got drunk and broke beer bottles
against the wall until he passed out,
and the music was pure sex—disappeared
with a classmate's boyfriend, told myself it was okay
because she wasn't that good a friend and my
first real love had just broken up with me. Mom
wanted to sit up and talk over Ovaltine when I got home.
I was out of Winston's and so she offered me one of hers.
She couldn't sleep after the divorce. She didn't let on she knew
I'd been drinking. She didn't bother anymore to tell me
that it was best to kiss a boy only if you loved him,
best to wait until you were married to have sex.
Long before, a boy had already reached into my shirt
and stuck his hand into my bathing suit and led me upstairs
to a room with a tufted bedspread. Mom had taken one look at me
the next morning, then took me to the ob-gyn who'd delivered
me. The speculum hurt. He didn't say a word. Just frowned.
Mom made me promise I wouldn't do it again and I didn't
until New Year's Eve, when I lied and saw the same boy.
She said if I was pregnant she and Stevie and I

would go live in San Francisco. But I wasn't and soon I had a boyfriend and she saw us wrestling on the floor after school and there were other boys and we never discussed my sex life again. Desire, defiance, hunger for touch. My father wasn't around to know about it. At the drive-in; on rooftops; in a taxi cab on Avenida Fernandez Juncos on Spring Break in San Juan; in the social hall of the Unitarian Church; in the library stacks and stairwells; in a VW van outside the Shrine Auditorium, after seeing Procol Harem and Country Joe and the Fish; after hours, in the dining hall; in a sleeping bag in the backyard at Mom's house; in my boyfriend's driveway next to an oil spill from his Oldsmobile; at the cast party of the high school play. It felt too good to stop. That boy. The others. The boy with the big freckled hand. Meanwhile at school we were reading Shakespeare, learning that love can restore balance; *Tom Jones* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Fanny Hill*. In my head I was starring in my own book, a bildungsroman, a kuntsleroman because I also loved books about the road and the sea. Road scholar, a sword swallower, a hollerer. Down to the juicy bits. I had already decided which kind of heroine I wanted to be.

Leon Russell at the Ark

About four songs in he said *My wife tells me I need to talk more to you folks* and he told us about growing up in Oklahoma and playing piano in church at fourteen and going home to the crystal radio he'd built himself, only got two stations—church music and rhythm and blues—and when he tried to sneak some of the sounds into his church-playing the Methodists would have none of it and found another fourteen-year-old to play for them and because Oklahoma was a dry state it meant they didn't have whiskey laws and he could play in the bars and he could drink and he said he was pretty much over alcohol by the time he was twenty, and he studied piano—Tchaikovsky and others; but mostly he studied B.B. King, and Leon told us how he'd moved out to L. A. to go into advertising but got his feelings hurt a few times and started playing on other people's records and the Flying Burrito Brothers wanted to meet him and that's when he got his green silk hat, the one Graham Parsons gave him, which he later discovered had Al Jolson's

name inside and he talked about Ivory Joe Hunter from Kansas City and sang from the B sides and played *Tightrope* and *Georgia* and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* and talked about touring with Joe Cocker and about how his manager had called to say B.B. wanted Leon to write a song for him, and B.B. sat with Leon and told him stories, saying a line and then playing it on his guitar and when Leon played the song he'd written—he called it *Hummingbird*—B.B. cried and said *This has never happened to me before* and Leon told us he'd written another song long ago for a friend who'd fallen asleep, deep asleep and snoring, when she'd come to watch him record at Muscle Shoals and he told us he was going to sing this song for her now, for Emily, who had died without warning a few weeks back and at that point in the show he was alone on stage at his big white piano and then he played *Song for You* and I cried and held my husband's knee and he put his hand over mine and I remembered when I'd first heard it back in college and remembered falling in love years later with the Ray Charles cover and when we gave Leon a standing ovation he stood up at the piano and sat right down again and said *Those of you who know me know I'm not a big fan of walking so this is the point in the show where we're supposed to go offstage and act surprised that you want us to come back*, and he said *But I'm just going to play you some good old rock and roll* and he launched into *Great Balls of Fire* and we gave him another ovation and on the way out Taj Mahal was playing over the speaker system—*Tangled up in Blue*—and a homeless man outside the theater said if we wanted an autograph Leon was out back at the bus.

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