

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jennifer Hawk: "Old Men"

Jennifer Hawk · Friday, April 6th, 2012

Jennifer Hawk tells us: “I was born in Long Beach. I had my first 21-year-old drink at the Queen Mary bar, accepted my first marriage proposal by Cherry Park, found out about Michel Foucault in CSULB’s MFA program, held my breath in front of my first college students in CSULB’s Liberal Arts buildings, and made memories with my heroes at Long Beach bars.” You may find “Old Men” in *Beside the City of Angels: An Anthology of Long Beach Poetry*, World Parade Books, 2010.

Old Men

I’m still at my father’s retirement party,
wading through a pond of gray heads, intoxicated
by the grill’s smoky char and uncomfortably
conscious of my father’s stifled tears.
He’s a mummy—a delicate ashen heart wrapped
in a thousand miles of Southland freeways, broken
knuckles, and unfurled self-discipline.
I’m still sitting at the folding card table,
my back to the sand blaster, listening
to Gerry’s molasses voice—a bass complement
to the metered twangs of the hired band.
He kicks off his Birks, and we’re wet lasagna
noodles, breaking up sun-cracked asphalt.
He’s a gray poet lumberjack, a hobo savant,
an infamous disco uncle.
I’m still slow dancing with Ray, his leathered palm
resting on my waist as he tests his patience,
holds me up while I trip over our feet as graceful
as a hobbled guinea pig. So many pipe smoke dusks
rest in our cupped hands, so many graveled laughs,
and countless stolen moments blurred by
my desperate gray daydreams.
I’m still watching these old men, these gray statues.
I’m still embroidering them into my memory,
still writing their faces in books,

still folding them into buttercreamed cake,
eating until I'm nauseated,
and then taking one more bite.

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