

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lori Jakiela: Lives of the Poet

Lori Jakiela · Thursday, January 24th, 2013

Lori Jakiela is the author of the memoir *Miss New York Has Everything* (Hatchette 2006), the poetry collection *Spot the Terrorist* (Turning Point 2012), and three limited-edition collections of poems. Her second memoir, *The Bridge to Take When Things Get Serious* (C&R Press), is forthcoming in Spring 2013. She teaches in the writing programs at The University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg and Chatham University. She lives outside of Pittsburgh, with her husband the writer Dave Newman and their two children.

My Son Ponders The Meaning of The Word Satisfactory

My son, home from school, asks “What’s unsatisfied?”

It’s report-card day.

His report card is perfect, all Satisfactory S’s,
more traditional A’s, but he’s too much like me,
a worrier, always looking for the monster.

I’ve spent the day on bills and dishes,
one broken shower head, one broken
coffee pot, one visit from one
broken neighbor with an oxycontin problem
who wants to talk about his bowels, “Hurts
like a mother,” he says.

I’ve spent the day trying and failing.

I’m sure my son can read
every unhappiness in this house
and take it in like a stray.

“I’ll work this out later
in therapy,” he likes to say.

He’s eight.

He learns things from TV.

What I Do For A Living

I grade student essays
about dogs and dead grandmothers.

Some of the essays are good. Some
 are in the voices of dogs and dead grandmothers.
 Yesterday I had one
 in the voice of a Shakespearean muffin.
 The muffin was blueberry, sad, in crisis.
 A raccoon wanted to eat it.
My life crumbleth, the muffin said.
 Eight years ago, I was a flight attendant.
 I served Cokes to people all over the world.
 I had mini bottles of vodka and Baileys in my purse.
 I lived in New York City.
 Imagine that.
 "I miss it," I tell my friend Paula
 who's tired of teaching, too.
 She's a poet. Like me,
 she lived in New York.
 Now she lives in a townhouse
 in Pennsylvania and wants to work
 the counter at Godiva.
 "Just smile and pass out
 beautiful chocolates all day," she says.
 We're happiest with the lives
 we imagine living.
 My feet would swell after nine hours on a plane.
 If I took my shoes off, I couldn't get them back on.
 My index finger was raw from popping soda cans
 and when I say New York I mean Queens and
 sometimes I'd have to roll change
 to buy toilet paper and milk.
 Most rich people who buy Godiva chocolates
 are douchebags who have never
 read a book of poems.
 Most of my students are sweet people
 who try to write what matters
 and sometimes what matters
 means dogs and dead grandmothers
 or a muffin as a metaphor
 for a lost and broken self.
My berried heart spilleth over,
 the muffin would say.
 "Let that head of yours do the work,"
 my father used to tell me.
 Stooped, calloused, he knew real work
 and didn't want that for his daughter.
 "Just don't be an asshole," he said.
 The best advice I've ever gotten.
 "Are we malcontents or discontent?"
 Paula asks. "Both," I say.

We raise our glasses
and clink our fancy beers.

The Natural World, Queens NY

My landlord's sending the exterminator
but I won't open the door, not yet.
Ladybugs in the house are a blessing
the old wives say, so I let them come
even though there will soon be hundreds
on the ceiling above my bed.
Today I have a favorite – this one
who's ventured alone, wing filaments trailing
a black slip under a party dress.
She drags along the headboard, her masked face all
dreamless nights and ruined mascara.
There's not much we can do
for each other in this life
And so I lift her onto a scrap of paper
and carry her back to the synchronized stream
of pock-marked hearts where she can rest
her body against another's
in a clumsy puzzle of limbs.

We are proud to premiere "My Son Ponders The Meaning of The Word Satisfactory" and "What I Do For A Living." "The Natural World, Queens NY" was originally published in the book, Spot The Terrorist.

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