Cultural Daily

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Tony Gloeggler: Two Poems

Tony Gloeggler · Friday, September 8th, 2023

Then And Now

My mother would often remind me she taught me to read. Sprawled across her lap, I sounded out letters, words she underlined with her finger. Diagnosed with a hip disease, wearing a heavy iron brace strapped to one leg, a thick-heeledjust-below-the-knee-boot on the other foot I clanked like The Tin Man with every step for a year and a half. Other kids stared at me too long, made faces, laughed until Joe Poggi the tough kid upstairs threatened to kick their asses. Mom tried to keep me from the fire escape, watching kids do what I couldn't do: sewer to sewer stickball, Kick the Can, Johnny Ride the Pony. Saturdays, my father stood on one end of the alleyway, pitched whiffle ball. I hit flat footed line drives like his favorite player Joe D. Taking the elevated train to the Stadium instead of Sunday Mass I can still recite the 1961 Yankee line-up, Tony

Kubek leading off, Ford, Turley, or Rollie Sheldon on the mound. The usher always said hello to my father and his crippled kid, steered us to front row, right field box seats when my father slipped a five dollar bill into his hand. I hoped to catch a Mantle, Maris homer between bites of fully loaded Italian heroes. I don't remember the first books we read, probably Disney tales, silly rhyming Seuss ones. Sometimes, mom walked over to the stereo, turned on Elvis. She'd curtsy, extend her hand, pull me up, lead me to the middle of the floor, shimmy and bop, twirl and bounce around me. On my own I later found The Outsiders, that Mockingbird book with Scout and Boo, Grapes of Wrath, read album sleeves, memorizing lyrics, singing along to the best songs, wanting to write words like that.

Dad, Mom, a few of my closest friends are dead and I'm turning 69. Sometimes I feel worn out, lonely, longing for too many lost things, but mostly happy to be breathing, waking up to another morning and sitting at this desk, turning on Rickie Lee, Laura Nyro, Pet Sounds. Today, I'm still pumped from last night Chuck Prophet's show as I check emails, swallow a fistful of pills, wait for the kettle to whistle. Maybe I'll try to write something new, if not, revise some leftover drafts, submit packets of poems. The Yanks play the Rays in a day game. Nestor's on the bump in the boogie down Bronx. He toes the rubber, rocks back, coils and slings his arm from behind his ear. His first cut fast ball, sweeps across the plate, fills the day with whispered promise.

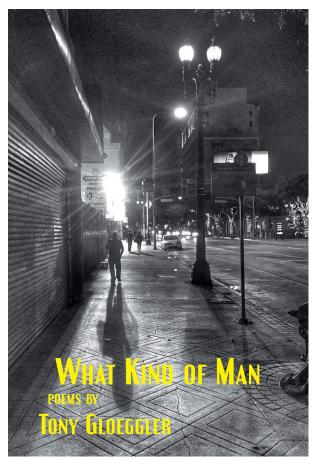
June One

Happy Birthday, Jesse. Will you be 26 or 27 years old? I was expecting to spend the last weekend in May riding the City Bus with you, forgetting fifteen months of Covid separation, our two minute Facetime sessions that felt like hands reaching across guarded borders. Instead, I'm home wondering if I will ever see you again. Like my father dying too young, Like Erica marrying the wrong guy, Ted killing himself. But your mom says if I keep writing, putting you in my poems, I can't visit anymore.

I already sent presents. You'll love the cashews and with me not there you'll get more for yourself, a case of individually wrapped Fruit Smiles, a 6 pack of 12 ounce Blue Gatorade. I was looking forward to watching the way you tilt your head, your face scrunching into that puzzled look of yours, mulling whether you want these new, unexpected things taking up space in your world, remembering when we lived in Brooklyn, waking up the day after Christmas to all your gifts lined along the hallway outside your room. Too much. Too soon. We gave you one present a week until Spring showed up.

I made our traditional Friday night dinner reservations for Waterworks. Saturday, eat at McKee's or Sneakers? Maybe next month. I don't know, your mom can be strong willed, unbending. Did you know we met in a Ntozake Shange workshop? Your mom new to New York City, hell bent on becoming a writer, unconvinced she existed until she started to write her story. We fell in love twice, five years apart, in Brooklyn and in Montpelier, before, after you were born, and now she's trying to stop me from telling parts of my story.

So Jesse, *sshh*, I'm not allowed to write this and you wouldn't sit at a table, take the time to slowly sound out the letters as my forefinger underlined the words. You'll never understand what this means and I'll never know if you feel the same, but please keep this between us: When I don't knock on your door Friday May 28 at 2:45 PM, if we never see each other again, whether you think of me or not, say my name and recite dates for *Tony come back*, I love you all the time.



What Kind of Man by Tony Gloeggler

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