

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

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-heeled-
just-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.

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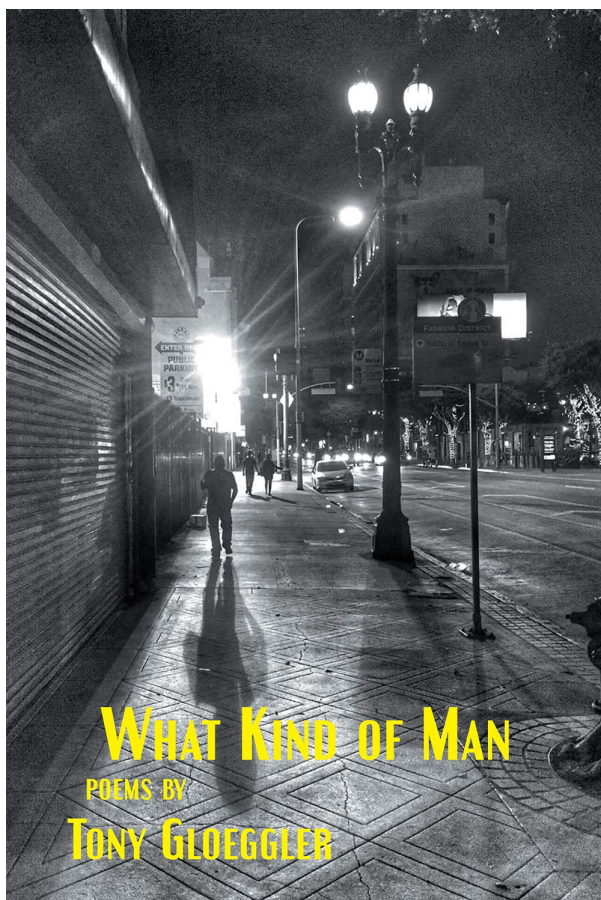
June One

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, *ssh*, 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

Purchase *What Kind of Man* by Tony Gloeggler

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