

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Trish Hopkinson: Three Poems

Trish Hopkinson · Wednesday, August 29th, 2018

### I smoked marijuana for the first time with a 13-year-old boy

He asked to meet me at the abandoned icehouse on his birthday.  
I had never had an admirer, and I was only two years older.  
I walked the four blocks that October day and watched for him.

He asked to meet me at the abandoned icehouse for his birthday.  
That's what he said he wanted. He rode up on his BMX.  
I walked the four blocks that October day and watched for him,  
hands in jacket pockets, eyes ahead. It all seemed harmless.

I knew what he wanted as he rode up on his BMX.  
I watched as he loaded the metal pipe, made just for this purpose.  
My hands in my pockets, eyes on him—he seemed harmless.  
The scent was pungent, but pleasing, like burning autumn.

I watched as he stoked the metal pipe and inhaled with purpose.  
We stood by the concrete loading dock, vandalism décor on the walls.  
The smoke was pungent and rousing, like burning autumn.  
I tried to inhale, but must not have done it right. Nothing happened.

He grinned by the concrete loading dock, vandalism décor on the walls.  
We felt a train coming beneath our soles on the asphalt.  
I tried to exhale, but must not have done it right. Nothing happened.  
The train pulsed by, trailing like thunder, howling to the sky.

We felt the train fade away beneath our soles on the asphalt.  
His grin was my first admirer, and I was just two years older.  
The train pulsed by, trailing like thunder, howling.

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### South Side

Suburban, but where  
100 year-old homes creak

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poor kids from their seams,

flaky paint facades and weedy  
yards wait for stapled food stamps  
to drop into the mailbox.

There should be religion here—  
with a steeple on every corner  
alongside a dime bag or a beggar.

Gospel is a thick fog, but only  
spawns boredom in young people,  
no matter how loud the sermon,

no matter how low parents set  
the thermostat or how long they make  
the bread and milk last,

it won't be enough to keep  
a teen from looking elsewhere  
for something that feels

whiskey in your belly good,  
warm hand on your thigh good.  
Something to squelch envy,

to take notice, to be different.

It's easy to sneak out  
like lean gray mice

squeezing through a crevice,  
pressing against the night—  
go car-hopping, steal beer

and cigarettes from C-stores,  
find glue or paint thinner or  
gasoline to huff,

easy to coax a ride from  
a mullet on a bullet bike,  
easy to wrap legs around

a boy in the vacant lot,  
easy enough that no other body  
flinches when the kid

who lived in the mint-green  
house on the south side  
chokes on his tongue

and dies in his attic room  
from a brain tumor.  
Most of us knew him.

Some of us expect  
to go the same way.

—originally published in *Stirring*

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## A Leveling

He brought us here, to this juniper desert,  
across Midwestern state borders into broken promise,  
sloughing family fragments like tire treads along the way.  
I-80 rose up like Hell's Backbone, egoistic and narrow-

sighted with drops on either side of slight rails.  
We should have been safe in the valleys,

miles away from Boulder Mountain . . .  
And yet I learned to fear altitudes,

the uncertainty of my own feet,  
the distant perspective of abandonment.

Two years gone. Maybe it wasn't long enough.  
The knee-locking dread never subsides.

Instead, vertigo sets in on each downward step,  
handrails clinched each time I try high heels

and the teetering always sets me down bare.  
How can I be bowed into such spinelessness,

faint at the sight of red clay cliffs and sloping pines—  
a grand staircase. Father Escalante would pray for me

to forgive. He would level my landings. He would lead  
me to grace.

—originally published by *Wicked Banshee Press*

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