



Prism *spring 2007*

2007 Provost's Literary Prize, Poetry

Sara Gingrich

Nephew

Baby warm round weight,
buoyant wriggle.
My hand on you homes
my roaming mind.
Breaks the bread
of my heart.

Ten-month-old
boy, in soft blue suit.
Steady my soul's
rash storyline:
Found!
Kind & handsome!
Without addictions!
Too many good
qualities to list!
Must See!

Light to call this man baby.
Ask him for a circlet
of garnets and pearls.
Nephew's mother:
gaunt exhaustion,
fuzzy mind.

Robert Valentine

Sara Gingrich

You had Kris's Travelall filled with high-school seniors,
early morning after campfire beers in Penn's woods.
Up the hill from where the Susquehanna River
waters both sides of the Mason-Dixon line,
I was still sleeping next to your first love's
windy black hair in November's
wide open brittle broken corn field,
our warm bags graced with a little bit of snow,
air vigorous with freeze and exhaust.
And though the engine thundered right above my head,
I slept the limestone sleep of earth and a good pill,
wondering you.

When I discovered your bid for me,
lipstick went on lighter, then away
for two months of instant camaraderie.
Your blonde rich dish-soap-huffing girlfriend
on hold while we affirmed
the need for life outdoors
without slippery trampolines full of drunken teens.
We practiced our fondest dreams
of a harmonic old farmhouse, full of good
friends, tea, folk music, & sleep.
Exploring February's dark frozen gullies
too near these Mennonite's closely held fields
to contain our need for fresh spaces
much longer.

Puckish curly headed boy
who stamped around on horses and hallucinated
troublesome bears. It was a nice
try at it all, but I wasn't quite ready
for Dylan, and you needed to be known
in less depth: with more drugs and all the way
to bury your dad's grossened name.
I kept the best of our friends,
went to prom as to a wake:
no date necessary, wear something black.
Thanked your mother warmly
for coming to graduation,
as if it was an olive branch to me personally,
when what I really meant was thanks
for acknowledging my existence.

It was the standard trial of boy-girl,
with that wisp of dear kinship I understand now,
as we both live on western soil,
no possibility, save for fate, of checking in
with what was cut off so cleanly.
Just as we'd hoped, there are other souls out here
with whom to eat at the speed of snails
and giggle through uptight garden centers,
while loving the plants.

Let the Sunshine In

for Ariane, keystone friend to the Aquarian spirit

Sara Gingrich

We'd muddied along in sullen gloom:
heads down. Condemned
to rain's dark and little sun.
Dumb to the reliability
of the four seasons,
we'd surrendered to serious.

"The sun has been sold off to Kansas
or we've lost it in a divorce,"
Ari reasons from her pressure chamber
within the Golden State's
concrete Ag school.
One never knows.

Jesus got out on Sunday,
but we waited 'til Tuesday
for someone to get around to moving our boulders
and let the ever-lovin' sun
shine in.

Surprise, surprise,
we rose again.
No big fuss. No adoring crowds. (sigh.)
Only the instant ecstasy
of Spring's quick pulse. Fever.

Humming along past
water-logged shrieks from the kindled burn-pile.
18 of your sandaled steps to cover the ground
of one legendary horse's stride.
Open water fight season. Refuel at small shops:
money as vapor and we look sooooo cute.
Reggae music and gut-strengthening laughter
keep our van down by the rivers
holy.

Academics like a raggedy tissue,
deep in winter coat pocket.
I'm mowing the lawn
and keeping my son up
for dinner at seven.
At bedtime,
I quietly agree
to a new kitten.

She Said

Sara Gingrich

But for the tomato that pleased her
on a farm girl's hefty sandwich!
As if the marriage hinged
on one day's proposal,
not their insular youth
of plain Anabaptist roots
in the hazy July corn fields.

Sisters friendly, seven scrubbed
compliant faces
smiling at sleepovers with
dream catcher cakes.
Mothers exchanging small secret gifts
in the farmer pal game.
Mostly they stayed in the kitchens:
covered heads bowed to a hundred pounds
of opera fudge, angel cakes,
tongues, hams, chickens, pig's stomachs.
Seven sweets and seven sours.

Brothers playing basketball in the pole shed
among the detritus of diesel tractors.
Fathers with cow, steer & pig.
Blue ribbons for the doggedly humble
in collarless suit jackets

or shit splattered overalls, fermented feeds,
the mess of birth in gray stone barns.
The wheel of church function:
love feasts, camp meetings, picnics,
the holidays: perfectly full of adoration
and three generations.
The weddings of their peers
who did not wait for college.

In this nest, they pleased each other.
How she first stood
scared stiff
in Dad's old pictures,
a space between them.
And over 12 months,
softened
and allowed his arm around her,
his smile, eclipses eyes, the only thing on his face.
Her smile, bright hot, on watch
for God's soap, groping brother, window sticks.
It never before occurred to me
they had ever been close.

Pan's Poem

Sara Gingrich

Upside down, in my lap,
I write this poem on the bottom
of the Griswold No.8
he scavenged for.

I tagged along, passive as a lollipopped child
through musty filth, junk my grandmas
threw out years ago:
the duck jacket, which I still want,
to keep warm fresh ducks,
in the full back pocket.
The jewelry counters: dimly lit glass boxes,
jumbled dull faux stones,
set in greenish metal on stained grey velveteen.
Real rocks: murky diamond chip,
the size of an eggshell bit jumping in the pan.
Requisite turquoise: exhausted by smoke,
white russians, and arguments.

In every ma & pa joint, between Bozeman and Spokane,
Kalispell and Athol, I took a little peek. Grateful
just to hold a heavy piece of iron: slick, chisel, plane, pan.
Absorbing the bullshitting prowess of George, king of tools,
like my own grandpa's grease-lined hand's
blessing by proxy.
Drifted, shuffling, blowing my treasure mojo towards the boy.
He found the grungy Griswold,
twelve inches of Pennsylvania cast iron
for \$13, just outside Sandpoint.
By then,
I was bored and queasy
with junk stores and ox cart men.

That pan has since become reliable
as the granite gravestones at our family cemetery
where Dad recently reserved me a spot.
The Griswold is the mother of the blackened old orange,
blue, yellow Le Creusets, the square brown-greased griddle,
the smooth baby egg pan.
I worship in cast iron with our ladies of perpetual burnish.
Pans you could jack-up a car on.

Now this pan has slid off
the mountain of clean dishes
clocking our seven-year old, hard
on the ear, leaving a blood blister
and a crack in the handle
which will cleave it off.