

BLACK-TAR NIGHTS

DEANNA EFIRD

BLACK-TAR NIGHTS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

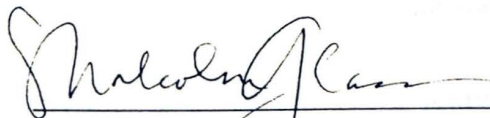
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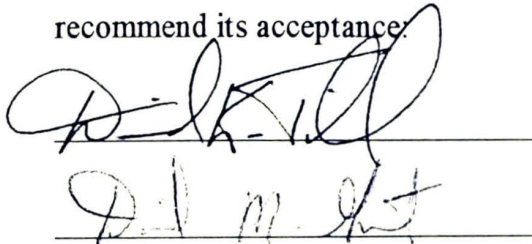
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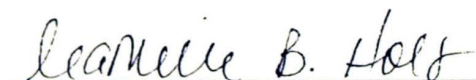


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Date December 14, 1995

to my parents

for all their years of love and patience

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Abstract

The main goal of this thesis is to show personal growth through poetry. It aims to explore this growth through different personae, forms, and imagery. As a whole, the subject matter ranges from light humor to forgiveness, wonder to devastation. The order of the poetry is meant to reflect different phases of life and differing states of mind, from one poem to the next, for there is seldom a logical order to recollection, emotion, and experience. This is a part of the discomfort and the joy of growing.

Every poet, at some point or another, experiences a growth spurt in his or her writing. If one is lucky, one will experience many of these throughout his or her career. Throughout the writing of this thesis, the author experienced at least one growth spurt and, in some places in the poetry, it may be apparent. As the reader should be able to recognize this, the poetry remains consistent with the goal of the thesis.

Preface

This volume takes its title from a poem in the first section entitled "Black-Tar Nights." When I was very small, my mother used to read to me the Uncle Remus stories and, from those readings, she started calling me her "Tar-Baby". As I got older, the name carried on for a different reason. Beginning around age five, the kids in my neighborhood used to get together each summer night and play a game called "Ghost in the Graveyard." Every night, after hours of running around barefoot on the pavement, my mother would take me in the bathroom and make me wash my blackened feet in the tub. They often had dried tar glued to their bottoms.

This is only one of many fond childhood memories I have. I have written about a few others as well, but the nights of playing in the street with the neighborhood kids are the earliest *continuous* memories I have and, therefore, serve as a starting point. These are the nights when, in my recollection, my life began.

I. Black-tar Nights

Moments in the Sand	1
Under the Vein of Time	2
21 Holes	3
Eight Years	4
Night Pond	5
Ellie, Sleeping	6
Black-tar Nights	7
Mama Said Love Sometimes Hurts	8
Ms. Hendrickson's Pucks	10
Someone Took the Angels	11
Wednesdays	13

II. Lights of the Carousel

<i>Don't Lie Down in the Chopper</i>	16
Arrus BT	17
Visiting Rock-Bottom	18
Hiding Star	19
Lights of the Carousel	20
On Reading Emily	21
One Look in My Mother's Eyes, And There I Stand Twenty-Five Years From Now	22
Think Spots	24
Four Davids	25
A Kiss at Flathead Lake	26

Forgiveness	27
The Poetry-Maker	28

III. The Feeling Burns

And to My Children I Will Teach	31
Of Many Miles	32
Our Time	33
You Can't Go to the Bathroom in New Jersey	35
You Say, I Say	36
The Feeling Burns	37
May Dawning	39
Dream Snap	43
Honeysuckle	44
a woman of many boots	46
Bylines	47
A Letter From My Childhood	48
Vita	51

"When we are green, still half-created, we believe that our dreams are rights, that the world is disposed to act in our best interests, and that falling and dying are for quitters. We live on the innocent and monstrous assurance that we alone, of all the people ever born, have a special arrangement whereby we will be allowed to stay green forever."

Tobias Wolff

I

Black-Tar Nights

2

Moments in the Sand

Lunch never crossed our minds
As we left our morning's work,
Taking a dip, the cool water, lapping
Just at our backs, the tide
To soon come in and wash into the moat
More water than it could hold.

Shoulders stung with each hour passed
Though neither noticed the strength
Of the sun as we built,
Sand gathering in the seat of my suit, salt
Scratching at hot crinkles of skin at the eyes,
Natural wave drying through my hair.

A small stream of water trickled from a
Pipe in the embankment, feeding
Into the moat as we worked, into a day's
Creation, tumbling, splashing, building.
And the castle stood taller,
As we spent hours and shells on detail.

Cool evening air fresh against chapped
And dried faces, backs, limbs,
We finished our work in the sand, within
Minutes of the tide taking it away,
Within minutes
Of my mother calling us for supper.

Under the Vein of Time

- for David Swerdlow

Standing among others
with closed lids
a tree in April, ready
and green--
and yet a few leaves, as they turn
to face the rain
reveal a sound to be heard
longing to take

a chance: in Spring,
full with crisp yellows and reds,
the tree swaying, sound
in its limbs, burning orange
in discovery--
with the seasons, a shared
strength
as red fades green.

❧

21 Holes

It was a woman, for I met her
once in this room, though
they never occurred to me, the 21 holes
above her head as we spoke
of water and heat.

Shag brown at her feet,
some spots browner than
others, *toilets, dishwasher,*
and refrigerator all run
fine, she said.

Up the stairs and
to the left, and
here's the master bedroom, she said.
Her bedding across the hall told me
she'd opted for up-the-stairs-and-to-the-
right instead.

On our way
back down, *have you spoken*
to the landlord? she asked, and here
we were, back in this room
and they still never occurred to me,
those 21 holes.

A wall 7 feet
high, 8 through the width, and one
ivory shade from matchable, and
it occurs to me now, boxes unpacked,
what could possibly take
21 holes to hang?

Eight Years

He was protected from the pain by all
the time. Eight years ago this week he found
an empty hospital bed, no nurse around
to ask where his mother was. After all,
he'd waited so long; seven baseball
seasons and graduation since the sound
of a gun, fired and hitting the ground
at her side. She hadn't seen him, the small
boy watching from behind as she said good-
bye to the hurt. But she saw him now,
standing in the snow holding a flower
in one hand, saying that he understood.
He knelt beside her name telling her how
much the tears stung, wishing he was with her.

Night Pond

- for my father, on his birthday

hymns echo themselves softly
rippling cloudy waters clear
as the pebble slowly wanders down
to find a place on the floor of the pond

lily pads and melodies sound from above
singing their praises of comfort
as the notes of yesterday become the song
of today, planted firmly in the sand

twilight, and water warms,
the green of night flourishes with crickets
and stars shine their hymns against the sky
in a strength which glistens clarity

❧

Ellie, Sleeping

I watched you sleep tonight
and saw your legs growing strong,
the rolls of skin smooth and fair,
tearing holes in the knees of your jeans
as you wobble without the training wheels
and look back for me

to hold on to small fists
bundled close, one finger taken captive
by a heavy sigh, sheltered and quieting

I watched you sleep tonight
and saw your arms growing strong
ready to cartwheel across the yard
with the other girls on the block
as you wobble and fall the first time over
and smile up at me

lying there, small,
with wonder in your eyes and the fine
beginnings of hair showing on your head

Black-Tar Nights

Shadows show themselves often
by the street light in the cul-de-sac
they're the June bugs of our
black-tar nights, running to hide
from the ghost in the graveyard

All the kids come out for black-tar nights,
all but Suzie McKenzie--she's
usually grounded, listening from her window
for the ghost to come out and
the screaming of the June bugs

Black-tar nights don't start before nine,
even later if it's not black enough
and then the shadows move through the night
whispering to hide, as the counting echoes to fifty
and the ghost is loose

Mama Said Love Sometimes Hurts

Billy taught me how to dance,
the music swung us round and round
on the sawdust floor and with every turn
we took, every week, I
hung on tight.

We practiced a dip in a corner of
the White Elephant Saloon.
He said, *Let yourself fall--*
all the way back. I'll catch you.
So I did

but he didn't. And we
both fell on the floor laughing,
Billy rubbed my head, asking
if it hurt. He was sorry.
I was all right.

That was ten weeks ago. It was
Billy's birthday and around his waist
he proudly wore the
Montana Silversmith I gave him. I haven't
gone dancing since.

Mama called yesterday. Usual
conversation, work, weather,
everything is fine.
And she told me a joke
that was

very funny, and the laughter
rose from the pit of my stomach

until it would barely stop. She said
it's been a long time since she's heard
me laugh like that.

2

Ms. Hendrickson's Pucks

Ms. Hendrickson taught second grade.
Her husband was an Islander,
many important goals he made
with pucks he'd bring back home to her.

Ms. Hendrickson used all her pucks
to decorate our classroom board--
she said it would bring extra luck
for Mr. Hendrickson to score.

She also had a hockey stick
hanging from the ceiling.
When we played our evil tricks
she'd laugh and threaten to swing.

Someone Took the Angels

- a tribute to the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing, April 1995

He was about two years old
Blood dripping down
The side of his face, motionless limbs
Held in the arms of the firefighter
Seen on the television
In all our homes;
Our safe place, where children
Practice multiplication tables,
And parents tip-toe through the night
In a visit from the tooth-fairy.
Backyard baseball is played
Between father and son, as the dog watches
To chase an uncaught ball
Losing the sun, the chill of goose-bumps
Covers their arms and legs for
Evening bath water to wash warm.

Layers of life fell to the ground
When someone took the angels.
The grandfather and a social security check
Stretched a few extra dollars
For shiny coins to rattle in his pocket
When the grandchildren arrived,
A teenage girl and a locked bathroom door
Being banged on that very morning
By her brother and his hairbrush,
The elementary school teacher from
Last night's Open House
Who had each child's project on display
Beaming alongside the mothers and fathers,
And parents, with their practiced strength,
Built by years of their own, given
Every day, to the growth of others.

Senseless,
It struck us numb
With news bulletins and special reports,
Rescue crews and death-counts,

As days turned to weeks and moments to silence
Hands linked together
To keep a crumbling community
From crumbling further,
To dig through the needlessness
Caused by so few, to so many
Families, as we turned to our own
Who carry us through life
This life, our safe place.

❧

Wednesdays

'Wednesday is Sundae at Carvel'
the sign read when we drove past.
Every time.
Never 'Friday is Sundae' or Thursday
just Wednesday
and we all knew when it was
two-for-the-price-of-one,
the day made of rainbow sprinkles
and maraschino cherries.

*Dad won't say no to you,
you're the youngest, I heard
at the same time every week.
Every time.
Never the eldest or the middle
just the youngest:
we all knew it was my sibling duty.*

Lost in the melody beneath his fingers,
I crawled up onto the bench
and sat on his lap
my nervous heart beating with
each note played. Timed perfectly,
I cupped my hand over his ear,

*Daddy, it's Wednesday...
can we go to Carvel?
His reply was whispered in return,
Now go tell your sisters and
I'll be up in a minute.*

A mad scuffle, small bodies shouting
and pushing for the handle of the car door,

I get the front seat!
every Wednesday when we left.
Every time.

2

II

Lights of the Carousel

2

Don't Lie Down in the Chopper

Morphine took him back to Vietnam
Don't lie down in the chopper, flying
Through his head, he knew the enemy
Shot from below; the hospital careflight technicians
Had needles and a drip going through his
Veins, strong enough to kill, numb enough
To wash away the edges.
Don't lie down in the chopper, remember
The enemy and get rid of the ventilator,
He wanted to scream, stand,
As he fought all that was being done,
Pulling at the IV, slowly leaving
Consciousness, all that he knew behind;
All but the pain, imprisonment and
Torture of needles, prodding,
Fighting injury as they used restraints
Stilling him into a captive blur
Back in Vietnam.

Arrus BT

Words sound better if they look
Better on the page, 11 points make it my
First choice for everything I put my fingers on,
Research papers nicely wrapped, so
Pretty they couldn't say anything
Valuable; letters to old friends, words of humor;
Memos sent by a vice president concerned with appearances
Of what he hasn't gotten around to doing--everything,
Flyers, hung with the same hands that
Decorate the alphabet with Arrus BT.

2

Visiting Rock-Bottom

Visiting rock-bottom, cocaine
days and bed-time booze, where
friends have gone, hitch-hiking
to their next fix, selling
furniture for money so they can stay.

I was somewhere else then
and did not watch the walls melt, under
the black-light, did not hear
the music blurring into the sounds
of bone and tissue grinding in the ears
as pupils and shoulders swayed together.

I won't visit
and climb the walls of the dark hole, deep
in the ground, eating the dirt of the earth
on the way back out, the way up
pulling myself, my limbs with all my energy
just to stand.

Hiding Star

Tonight,
On the front step, away
From the chill inside
A star hung in the humidity
Bright as some, brighter than
Others, blending

In a quick moment, a flash
One frame
From a life's roll of film,
As the star fell, curving
Upward, swinging downward
Into an arc of darkness
Behind the trees

❧

Lights of the Carousel

Lights of the carousel sing their way
Through the window, horses jumping and dancing
To cotton-candy laughter
And ferris wheel blues.
Hundreds of voices bake into
Distant funnel cakes, wafting
Powdered sugar around the block,
Freed, with one red balloon.

❧

On Reading Emily

Such short lines and O! how much they see!
Late, of Darkened rhyme I first did wonder
About mourning, then one so quiet--was she?--
Dashing--scattered--titles of J. Numbers,

The strength of One who writes so forcefully!

Then Buttercups--her Whim for Bloom--I read
And Daisies, too--although they did not grow
In Amherst--a quiet little homestead
With an Emily it didn't even know!

❧

**One Look In My Mother's Eyes, And
There I Stand Twenty-Five Years From Now**

- for my mother

Filing out of the familiar church pew I haven't ever sat on
Before today, but from the same oak,

I'm approached by people who know me, whom
I haven't met until this moment,

And they see that she can complete my sentences.
For others, too, through the years, one glance

Has told that my visit is not far
From the warmth of the womb.

In my house a picture of myself hangs on the wall
And though friends haven't met her, they know who she is.

In a glance, to some it's the hair, the mouth;
But I know her eyes, my eyes, which guide me

Through her house, where she stands in the
Kitchen, canning, with a nearby print of my grandmother

Hanging by the hutch, for my mother to look to her
Eyes, and see herself, knowing it's not the hair or mouth.

I know my own daughter though I have not conceived
Her; she will have my mother's eyes, mine,

Her own, and they will guide her
So that she may find her place

In a pew, and with one glance, she will see
That it, too, is from the same oak.

Q

Think Spots

Bumpy spots, a rock
At a lake, wet spots, bathtub
Filled with bubbles,
Flat spots, slate near a wooded
Waterfall, white spots, snow-
Capped peaks, green-hill
Spots, valleys beneath,
Dark spots, 9pm
City subways, loud spots,
Road trips and radios,

Think spots



Four Davids

On the edge of chaos
 Or thereabouts
 With in-baskets and out-baskets and
 Through the passing of
 Hiring
 And firing
 Or thereabouts
 I knew four Davids.

Hill read a page of
Finnegan's Wake--
 The wine at lunch helped;
 Hill #2 was one of few--
 A Lone Star with
 Yankee humor;
 Hooper wore the fire marshal hat
 While ears around the office burned;
 And Ross, I shook hands with once.

Over the cubicles and
 Politics, among other names
 The three o'clock meeting
 Or thereabouts
 With a new receptionist there came
 Stares at the intercom and
 The page:

"David, you have a call on line two. David, line two."

A Kiss at Flathead Lake

You held me in your arms
warm, in the wake of wilderness,
wanting to be touched. *Sometimes,*
we just want to be touched,
clinging to the infant
who clings to us, feeding,
as we are brought in close, for a while,
standing on a wooden bridge, hugged
by weeds and daisies
just steps from each other, separated
by separate lives. *Sometimes,*
we just need to be held, my fingers
wandering curls so smooth, you said
girls have kept them in lockets.



Forgiveness

I'd cleaned my room, awaiting you
Gone for a gift, something Bambi
I'd hoped. But it was boys' spaceships
On the sleeping bag you bought. Then
Ten, ungrateful, uninterested;
Now, I wear a deeply set scar.

No longer married, money tight
And the electric bill unpaid.
I did not understand the warmth
In your gesture, the arms that held
Me at night when it was too cold,
Rocking me to sleep with your voice.

❧

The Poetry-Maker

Sitting at a red light near Shoney's
I glance at a man standing below,
Reaching to a sign much higher than he,
His pencil a long narrow pole.
He places a letter to begin making his words,
An ambulance rushes
Life--crisis through intersection--passing
Others who are busily headed toward
Something.
A moment, and he reaches high
Carefully placing a second letter
Before he leans back to the concrete
With his pencil, to chase,
Then selectively add to the sign a third.

Knowing the man's word before it
Came to be,
I pass through, driving myself
Toward the life-pursuit
Of a poet to be able to confine on the page
The blood of Christ flowing,
Spirituality and naked humility, a dove
Fanning each of its feathers whiter than the last,
Soaring up from the ground
By the name of soul.

At the reading, a flicker of light
And the words the poet had made
The language becoming his hands, later signing
One page, "To a fellow maker"
Before I arrived back at the intersection.
The man was no longer there, his pencil gone.
He had made his words, the letters neatly arranged

And under the dinner special for the evening
He had placed a value on the sign
High above
To be read from a place on the ground.

❧

III

The Feeling Burns

2

And to My Children I Will Teach

Fish may be red and cats wear hats
As Seuss has said, pictures and words
Speak what most are afraid to say.

Color a house inside the lines
If your teacher tells you you should
But if it doesn't look the way you want it to, go beyond the lines

let your hand plant a daisy
in the foreground, walk it through the blades of grass
you bring to the page.

You may stumble
on a moss-ridden log or an unexposed rock,
their colors needing to be deepened.

Color them deeper.



Of Many Miles

dust layer upon salt layer, over
hub with
days after weeks of
the miles passed; the frame
jolted and the
plastic bumped through
the months of road winding
smaller and
shorter
in
rear

view. through the haze of suds, I
thought brown, no
grey, grey is what I
know; emerging plastic and
metal from within, squeegeed
back to
recognition

Our Time

We spent Sunday under the covers
The rain fell down on the morning
Warm, in each other's arms, discovering
Each other's past and creating hopes,
And the big floral comforter on the bed
Moved with us into the living room
For an afternoon movie, rented
The night before, but not watched then;
The credits rolled, the sun downed
And I went to draw a bath;

You wandered back upstairs
To find me soaking, the steam
Curling the light wisps at my temples,
As you pushed them from my eyes, washed
My leg, curled under
Leaving just enough room for yours

Teaching me words in
German that I didn't know, but that seemed
Somehow familiar,
You laughed with me, as I mispronounced one
Sending toothpaste speckles onto the bathroom mirror
And you stood behind me
At the sink, the curves of your upper arms
Dry, still warm from the water

That night we lay in bed
Your hand at my navel, tracing circles
Under the petals of the flowers, delicate
As we talked, and you told me about
A kind of love which lasted five and a half years
But could not last any longer

And I could almost hear the longing
In your thoughts
Before you spoke them

You Can't Go to the Bathroom in New Jersey

Heading for Long Island, low-beams hanging in the fog
You rarely see it coming

Across the state line into Jersey
With only one more to cross, somewhere in the middle

Coffee settles in your cup and in your bladder, weakened
By milk and a stretch of I-80

You should remember the ranch-style houses, winding
With the two-laner all the way to the next town

The darkness, traveling 20 mph slower than it should

But the clock and pulse of your bladder
Are louder than thinking; with no warning

You see lights and exit the interstate,
Only to find that there is no re-entrance.

You Say, I Say

DAY 1...Don't want a girlfriend, you say? *Yes, I'm free,
Seven o'clock, dinner and a movie sound fine.*

DAY 2...Dancing, you say? *Why, I'd love to go dancing.
Wonderful, pick me up at eight.*

Heading for the table, another good song, *let's keep dancing.*
Sit this one out, but don't mind if I ask someone else, you say?

I wouldn't, but someone asks me. *Sure, I'll dance, stranger,*
Then up on your feet you stand: sorry, this dance is mine, you say,

And around and around we go.

DAY 3...Come over to watch TV, you ask? *Yes,
I'll pick up popcorn on the way. A quiet evening, good company.*

Going out of town? Busy tomorrow night, packing?
Of course, I understand.

DAY 4...Phone rings, like to help pack? Want to spend
Time together before you leave, you say. *I'd like that, too.*

TWO DAYS LATER...Phone rings and it's you, connected
To me, from far away. You call again, again, again, every two days.

Don't want a girlfriend, you said?

The Feeling Burns

it burns in a woman
told by a man she's not strong enough
to run the obstacle course
the feeling burns
through the cold winter sun
circles around the skier's eyes
and it burns
hungry in the hours of research
that earned a B+
the feeling burns
tender in the virgin
as she loses her virginity
and it burns at the feet
of young boys playing barefoot on sun-soft tar
awaiting a homerun in kickball
something burns
swollen in the belly of a mother
as she bends
and is kicked from within

it burns deep
as forty aspirin pave a trail
and make their way to the stomach pump
and the feeling burns
to open the letter
and they'll keep your resume on file
it burns inside the child
who waits for divorced parents
to reunite
after five years
and it burns in the sixty years
that can't lift what they could
at thirty

the feeling burns in the grandmother
who recites her grandchildren's names
testing years
and the Alzheimer's

2

May Dawning

i.

Your heart stopped today. At one o'clock
the sandwich you'd eaten sat in your chest
like a fist, balled tight.

Your wife, my mother, our registered nurse,
ran you out the door and drove you across the state line
within eleven minutes. All I heard was a shout of
stay by the phone. So I left our guests by the phone

and walked down Main Street
looking for a Mother's Day gift.
Searching three stores in twenty minutes,
gritting my teeth against acceptance
of what had just happened, I had to
find it. I arrived home
with the largest, brightest potted begonia
that I had seen. My arm ached from carrying it,
the pot hanging, heavy,
offsetting the the weight inside of me, the weight
inside of you.

ii.

A heavyset nurse was pounding
on your chest to bring you back, all of us
unaware until you were in a helicopter
on your way to the third hospital. Tonight,
I awoke with marks from carpet on my face,
my mother standing over me in the living room, whispering
to someone I just met at lunch.

It was a heart attack, I heard, then
told myself that plenty of people survive heart attacks.
Plenty of people. Plenty of people. I etched it
into the soft walls of my brain.

Within twenty-four hours all four
bedrooms in the house were full and all four chambers
of your heart were damaged.

iii.

We took turns driving
to the hospital, two and a half hours each way,
each morning, each evening. We took turns in ICU,
holding your hand, talking and reassuring each other that
you could hear. On the third day I heard, in the waiting room,
less than thirty percent survival
for an attack this size, and one minute later,
someone was touching my arms, gripped
around my knees, and I was
on the bathroom floor.

That day, your sister, with whom
you hadn't spoken in twenty years, called
to say she loved you. And my sister,
who once told me she did not believe in God,
walked right up, holding our hands
at the dinner table, and spoke to Him for all of us.

iv.

I can't remember the day you became a father
to me. My minister, my friend, and you

married my mother: I remember that day,
and I remember the days you graciously
stood in for my father
when he couldn't, and I stood in
for your daughter, when she wouldn't,
but for days now, I've been searching my mind
for the date you and I became who we are.

*Was it when you taught me to drive, laughing patiently
with each grinding of the gears? Or after all the miles
we'd traveled together, graduation,
and you offered to give up your seat
because there weren't enough?*
I saw the dampness in your eyes that day.

v.

On the fourth night, Eve,
your nurse, prayed. And as I turned the dial
a caller on the radio said, *our minister has had a heart attack
and has not regained consciousness.* My thoughts

were back in high school, when
you and Mom held hands
at my basketball games, and I was still young enough
to think that people didn't hold hands
past the age of twenty. Holding yours
for all these years has let her know
that you don't want a ventilator to do your living
for you.

vi.

And then I heard your laugh. The next morning
as I walked around the corner in ICU, I heard the laugh
that has echoed over shelves of books
when we've gone shopping. You were sharing stories
with the technicians who stood beside your bed,
and right then
I stood in your doorway crying.

❧

Dream Snap

The crumpling of paper, fluttering
Of eyelids, grow louder as they move
Closer to the side of the bed, warm and safe.
Closer. Louder. Bigger. Nearer. SNAP!
Stillness races through the brain, swallowing
Deafens in the ears, sleep is the pretense
As I wish you out of my room. Quiet
Takes over, beside the bed,
My eyes are jammed shut and my head
Counts...forty-nine, forty-eight,
Forty-seven, no bat to hit with, thirty-three,
Thirty-two, can I scream loud enough?
Maybe the neighbor will hear...twenty-one,
Twenty, nineteen, can't make it all the way
Down, get out, get out, I scream in my head,
And shoot to my feet like a madwoman, standing
Alone in an empty moonlit room.



Honeysuckle

Vine of honeysuckle, untwisted,
Not tangled into the fence

With years and roots of strength; let me love you
Through winter, while too much snow

Is falling; sit with me, under an umbrella
Of harvest colors, while it rains

More harvest colors; garnish my mornings
With your scent. Early, I watched you sleep,

Your limbs resting gently, un-
Moving, I wanted to hold you; instead, I held

The silence lying in the grass beside you; wisps
Of air, petals of laughter, peal

With each year, nectar sweeter than before.
I remember your eyes, crying

Heavy tears of honey, you and I nearer,
Days of an earlier season.

Now, not frightened,
As I once was by gentleness,

I watch, winter into spring, for you growing;
Waiting, I listen for the thaw,

Listen to what the ground beneath me
Tells me, noticing you there, curled

Like a child in a blanket. Then
Summer, not needing warmth, you stand

Taller each day, running
Barefoot through the weeds;

Sitting, sun at my back, once a week
I lean in and talk with you,

Smell the sweetness on your delicate
Collar, without getting too close.

❧

a woman of many boots

neatly lined along the baseboards of the closet
like young ducks lined, waiting to find their feet

black, brown, blue and red, with pointed toes and round,
they've danced across saw-dust floors, hiked

Glacier National Park and climbed Leesburg Falls,
they've squeaked their way down

high school halls to locker #749, marched
themselves into the boss's office

rain, slush, snow, shine, for most occasions
to keep my feet warm, little ducks will form a line

❧

Bylines

Down the hall, around the corner
Sits a man, name and full title
Appearing on last week's story
Of words he, himself, did not write.

When asked, a nod of interest,
And his assistant knows he needs
Briefing, before taking a stance.
She pulls the appropriate file.

At home he eats dinner, she plans
Meeting agendas with take-out,
Next-day conference calls and notes,
Their recognition, the small nod.

Saturdays he golfs and logs miles
Toward a pilot's license, she drives
To the office and finds roses
On her desk, signed *from you-know-who*.

A Letter From My Childhood

I used to watch as a child, as she painted
A pretty red gloss over her toenails,
Waiting for the tuna casserole to
Finish cooking, made for me,
Her own girls hated it; we knew she
Had baked it with bread crumbs on top.
Her tall and thin features were
Always put together, head to toe,
When she swam, as she read, calm

Through the screaming of children who
Chased children through the living
Room, fielding phone calls, complaints *Those kids*
Have been picking my flowers again!
As we hid flip-flops in the sewer
To float them out to bay, and raced
Sleeping bags down the staircase, sliding
The banister, walking
Our muddy shoes right over her white carpet
In the "good room."

It didn't much matter whose mom
Grounded whom, the same time,
Same strain,
Propping open the front door for a
Running start to hurdle the shrubs,
One end clipped shorter by outstretched legs.

And the moving began, the community
Became less recognizable
Hellos passed with the months,
Letters with the years, and the dropping of a line

Which caught her eye: *Tell your mom hello*
And then her response, because I didn't know,
I just didn't know
How much had passed with the years.

❧

Vita

Deanna Efird was born in Bethesda, Maryland on December 11, 1969. She attended Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School in Oyster Bay (Long Island), New York, and she later attended James W. Parker Middle School and General McLane High School, both located in Edinboro, Pennsylvania. She graduated from General McLane High School in May 1988. The following September she entered Westminster College, in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, and in May 1992 received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations. In January 1995 she began her graduate work at Austin Peay State University, and in May 1996 she received a Master of Arts degree in English.