# Listening

Category: Poems
written by Elizabeth Szewczyk | February 27, 2009

**Elizabeth Szewczyk**

I couldn’t erase their words,
catch the breath atoms, stuff
them between lips,
couldn’t raise survival rates,
lottery odds dependent on cells suctioned
at the precise moment.

Your chest thumping, frantic,
valves siphoning warmth, drawing
cold through vessels, to your feet
crisping leaves beneath us while
you spoke her life.

Replaying slowly, baby girl, toothless
smile, creative toddler scissoring
Barbie hair (and styling hers to match).
Then, like a runner, sprinting
to that day the tumor revealed
itself, unveiled her future and yours.

You visioned her mane, now extinct,
loose, straight, gracing the crook
of her back, gracing the oval of her
face, strands like gold
embroidery framing emerald eyes.

We’d be mother-friends,
shooting Prom pictures,
scarlet satin shushing past her hips,
his fingers yanking the collar of his tux.
They’d glisten, her upswept hair
perfumed hibiscus.

**About the poet:**

Elizabeth Szewczyk’s poems have appeared in *Westward Quarterly*, *Crazylit*, *Chanterelle’s Notebook*, *Shapes* and*Freshwater*, which she co-edits. She is also the author of the memoir *My Bags Were Always Packed: A Mother’s Journey Through Her Son’s Cancer Treatment and Remission* (Infinity Publishing, 2006) describing her son’s successful treatment for non-Hodgkins lymphoma. She teaches English at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, Connecticut and lives with her husband Tom and their dogs Marcus and Sophie.

**About the poem:**

“This poem was inspired by a friendship that occurred while my fourteen-year-old son Daniel was receiving chemotherapy. I became good friends with another mother whose fifteen-year-old daughter was also being treated for cancer at the same hospital. I wrote the poem when it became evident that this young girl would soon pass away.”

**Poetry editors:**

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