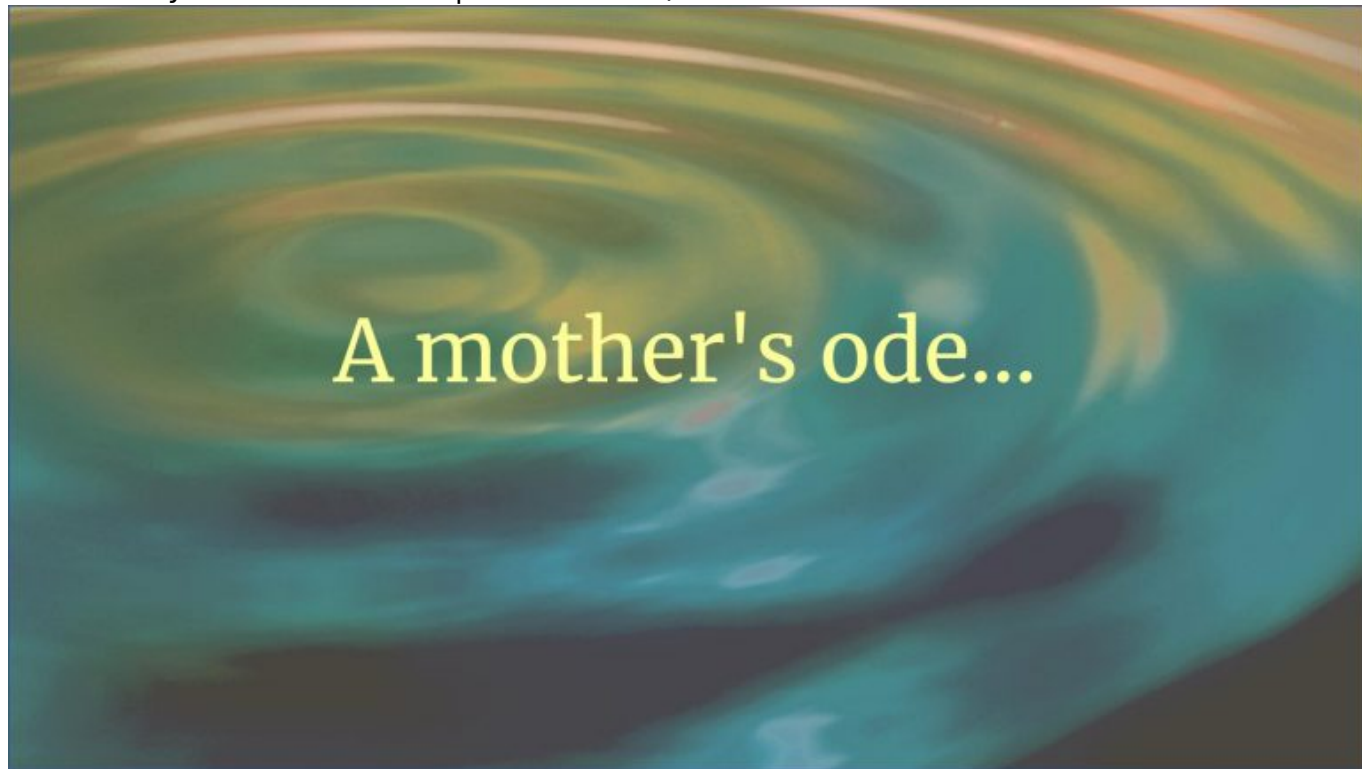


# Learning to Live 8.5 Hours From My Autistic Daughter

Category: Poems

written by Marianne Peel | October 18, 2019



The last time we talked  
she said she wanted  
every bone in her body  
to break.

And so I picture her on a ledge  
flirting with the idea of flying,  
knowing she admires the flitting of butterflies  
from one pollen hive to another  
I watch her wings  
open and close open and close  
like they are breathing  
like her wings are lungs

rhythmically pushing and tugging  
at the October air.  
When she jumps off that ledge  
she is one with the autumn air  
careening on currents,  
her wings a blur of color  
until she gently lands  
on my shoulder  
all bones intact  
as she nuzzles my ear  
humming that Lithuanian melody

I used to sing to her as an infant,  
the one she recited in flawless Lithuanian  
when she was twelve years old.  
Years of sign language,  
with me miming utterances  
my fingers dancing words, whole sentences,  
imploring her to speak  
to say my name  
to speak "mama"  
but all she said for three years  
was "minna minna minna."  
Which meant nothing.  
Which meant everything.  
I hold her in my hands,  
bone connected to bone,  
this fragile flesh of my flesh.  
This daughter who speaks  
in the language of butterflies.