

# The Ancients Had It Right

Category: Poems

written by Stanley H. Schuman | December 31, 2010

## **Stanley H. Schuman**

In Aramaic scripture\*, and Aboriginal Dreamtime.  
How else could animal life begin  
Except by Divine Breath, oxygen-enriched?  
How ingenious! Only two atoms: O<sub>2</sub>,  
Ideal for hemoglobin, mitochondria,  
Neurotransmitters, ideal for fight or flight, for vocalizing,  
For clever humans to shape tools, split atoms,  
Compose opera, sow seeds, harvest grain.

Consider my distress, in my just-opened pediatric office.  
Stumped by Angela, a three-year-old  
So panicked by my white coat, no way to examine her.

Screaming, clutching Mother, she knew and I knew  
This wasn't university-hospital, with back-up nurses.  
Instead, it was one-on-one,  
Advantage Angela.

Desperate, I felt for a stray balloon in my  
Pants pocket (from my own child's birthday).  
Putting it to my lips, I strained to inflate the stubborn thing.  
Instantly, Angela's tear-reddened eyes opened wide.  
The more I flushed and puffed, clown-like,  
The more she giggled, finally bursting into laughter,  
Sans fear, forgetting pain.  
My breath, a yellow balloon, a child's laughter...  
Three gifts from the gods!

\*Douglas-Klotz, N.: *Prayers of the Cosmos*, 1990 Harper, San Francisco, CA.

## **About the poem:**

"This poem captures two memories for me: my anxious first day in solo pediatric practice in suburban St. Louis, 1954, and my enchantment with the Aborigines' faith in the awesome power of nature in a person's waking and dreaming."

## **About the poet:**

Stan Schuman began as a pediatrician before turning to epidemiology. He is now professor emeritus in the family medicine department at Medical University of South Carolina. He helped to pioneer agromedicine—environmental medicine as applied to toxic exposures in farming-related fields. His several books include [\*Rainbows in Washtubs: Diagnostic Mysteries in Agromedicine\*](#) (Haworth Medical Press, 2006). "Writing poems has given me a

welcome break from left-brain epidemiologic investigation and allowed me to engage in relaxed, right-brain play with colors and emotions....After fifty years spent between the University of Michigan and MUSC, I find the peace of a campus town and family (my wife of fifty-eight years, eight children and eighteen grandchildren) conducive to poems, in my head and on paper.”

**Poetry editors:**

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro