

The Disabled Boat

Category: Poems

written by Steve Gunther-Murphy | May 14, 2010

Steve Gunther-Murphy

Drifting on the sea of disease
in a cardboard boat,

never knowing when the slash
of a spinal eel
will lunge from its coral-bone cave
and cut through
the threads
of a once dancing ankle
or the push of a thigh
singing race or run.

Waiting without wanting—
as the slap of a wave
against the paper-thin stern
then bow
brings on the storm
that pummels every movement
until you slip into a coma of the wind;

your sails ripped from the mainstay
and the tar between the rails
yelling like the death of a two-year-old child.

You wake weeks
later
and notice
that your keel is gone;

your body shakes like a rock cod against
the pith of the boat's floor
with the hook deep in your gill;
making you talk in slow motion
and without air.

Who wants to live this life
of a shadow fish,
pulled from the depths of who you were
and gutted of simple motions
or the ability to sing glee from your gullet?

This is not the space I am.

This is not the blue snap of yesterday
that burst forth from my mother's womb

like an iris
on an island of moss rock.

About the poet:

Steve Gunther-Murphy works in IT Healthcare at Kaiser Permanente in Oakland, California. He's been writing poetry since the seventh grade, has had works published in a variety of magazines and poetry journals and has given poetry readings in Hawaii, Colorado and California. "The muse tends to find me at all hours of the day and night and in all locations, so I have carried a poetry journal with me for over thirty years. I'm married, with two daughters. One is in her second year of veterinary school at UC Davis; the other works for a Boston healthcare nonprofit. My wife is a marriage and family therapist. Among the four of us, we engage some part of the earth's, animals' and human beings' health, inside and out."

About the poem:

"Some time ago, an unusual heart virus forced me to stop my regular activities—biking, hiking, surfing, gardening and even basic housekeeping—for more than a year. All I could do besides my day-to-day work was to rest, eat and sleep. I fell into a dark well. While I was there, this poem rose to the surface. And when I came back, I realized that I wanted to dedicate the poem to two friends. One is Teresa Harris, a former athletic star who was disabled in her prime by debilitating arthritis and fibromyalgia and who inspires me by nonetheless letting the sunlight deep in her heart shine through her life. The other friend is Ellen Case, an avid and energetic bike rider who was struck by multiple sclerosis and yet still manages to grow garden flowers inside and outside and to keep going."

Poetry editors:

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro