

Tom the Liver-Transplant Surgeon

Category: Poems

written by Clyde Partin | September 9, 2016

Clyde Partin

The atypical place he wore his beeper
Warranted him a cameo appearance
In an essay I once wrote on pagers
However,
On this spring morning,
He was impeding my progress
As he sauntered across the intersection
In intimate communion with his cell phone
While I waited patiently to turn right
Taking my son to school
At five minutes to seven
I doubt he got to eat breakfast
With his kids.

A transplant surgeon
Humbly ambling a half-mile to work
Exudes an abiding endearance
I knew where he lived
No sleek sexy sports car needed
The intersection in question
A divide between his bucolic neighborhood
And the frenzied pace of an academic medical center
He was just minutes away from dipping his hands
Deep into the abdominal abyss
Of human existence.

I did not begrudge his encumbering presence
Extending time I spent with my son
Besides,
I hear writing poetry is hard on the liver
Who knows when I might need a new one.

About the poet:

“Having forsaken baseball as a career due to an abysmal lack of talent, I attended Emory University, near my hometown of Decatur, Georgia, for college, medical school and residency. After six years in the US Air Force as a general internist and flight surgeon, I returned in 1992 to join the faculty of Emory University School of Medicine, where I continue to work and teach in the department of medicine. A unique diagnostic clinic dedicated to patients with undiagnosed or hard-to-diagnose illness has been under my directorship since 2013. While in medical school, I came under the spell of John Stone, Emory’s poet-cardiologist. In 1982-83, willing members of our class met

several times a month with him in what was one of the earliest medicine-and-literature classes in the country. With the help of a colleague with a PhD in literature, Sally Wolff-King, the course was resurrected in 2014 and enjoys a burgeoning popularity among our medical students. I live near Emory University with my wife, Kim DeGrove. One son is in graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the younger son plans to attend medical school in the near future.”

About the poem:

“My poetry frequently has, as its crucible, the mundane events and situations of daily living, which suddenly and unpredictably sparkle with poetic opportunity. Such was the case here. By the time I dropped my son at school and made my way to the clinic, I realized that a poem was gestating. I admit that I am still humbled and awed by the incredible work my surgical colleagues do and concluded long ago that, while I might have some cleverness with the written word, I would never be a clever surgeon. Lastly, the poem [Marginalia](#) by Billy Collins has always been an inspirational favorite of mine, demonstrating that some of the most inauspicious flecks of human existence are worthy of a poem.”

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer