

Top of the Hill

Category: Poems

written by Erika D. Walker | June 22, 2018

Erika Walker ~

"It's as if you're at the top of a hill,"
the doctor said. My father listened
from his hospital bed, a plastic tube

fed him breath he could no longer take
for himself. "Each time you get sick,"
the doctor said, "you roll a little farther

down the hill." His young face shone
above his white coat. I remember rolling
down green hills when I was young,

playing in the park where my father
had played as a child. I laughed, loved
the bump and thrill, the sweet smell

of summer grass. I raced my brother
to the top so we could fall again.
"We can catch you," the doctor said

and looked away. "But we can never
get you back to the top of the hill."
I see my father roll now, gather speed,

the ties of his hospital gown flail
like small hands. The doctor and I
reach to catch him, grass stains

the doctor's coat, my fingernails fill
with mud. My father closed his eyes.
If he remembered hills, he did not say.

About the poet:

Erika Walker lives in Denver. Her writing has appeared in *American Baby Magazine* and in numerous business publications. She coauthored [Denver Mountain Parks: 100 Years of the Magnificent Dream](#), which won the 2014 Colorado Book Award (history category), and her essay "[Farewell to the Boy Wizard](#)" ran in *Literary Mama* in 2016. She recently completed a memoir, *Loyalty Was a Kind of Love*, about the loss of her father.

About the poem:

"My elderly father had emphysema and congestive heart failure, but was living independently until pneumonia sent him to the hospital, then to rehab and

eventually to assisted living, where he passed away eighteen months later. During his decline and death, writing helped me stay grounded and present. We were running out of time, and I wanted to fully experience and remember all the moments we had left. This poem portrays the conversation with the doctor in which I finally understood that my father was dying—something very hard for me to face.”

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer