

POETRY | FALL 2014

Pre-Elegy for John

By Meghan Adler

Is there anything good about Parkinson's?

I asked my stepfather John as we swam in the pool,
water buoying his rigid arms and legs.

Eldapril makes me remember my dreams –
sales calls and shooting the bull with his dead
best friends. He spoke clearly then, the language
of chemical engineers: *turbine, butadiene, styrene.*

Fours years later in the kitchen, my stepfather
won't swim anymore. We sit at the table
and I pour hot water into his teacup. I want
to keep him talking. His ancestors were mule-skinners
who sat on buckboards, driving supply wagons
in the French and Indian War. Pennsylvania Dutch.
Where the people are known for their red barns and fat women.

John's time is regulated by 25 pills per day in blue pillboxes
and still he goes on, from cane to walker to stretch class.
He once showed me how to skull our Catalina 30'
back to shore. *I was born near a lake so water is part*
of my history. Patient, he pushed the tiller back and forth
to create movement without wind. How did he survive
his first wife and oldest daughter dying in one year?

It's a new day, so keep the smile that you have.

I drop new peppermint leaves into his empty cup.
He can still stir. Still slips anyone who comes to visit
a twenty for gas. My stepfather cried when the men
first walked on the moon and when he found his neighbor
Mrs. Weill dead in their shared basement. *She killed herself*
by breathing in gas. I dreamt about that for a while.

Says I'd have liked his favorite car, the 1965 hard-top
red Corvette convertible. I imagine his steady hands
at the wheel, light blue smoke rising from the tail pipe.

John once drove his daughters to see the Beatles
at the Pittsburgh Airport. Left work early and figured out
the route where the limo would be taking the Fab Four
to the center of town. Rode alongside and let
his girls hang out the window. Everyone was screaming
and Ringo gave my stepfather the finger.

I don't care if he's a Republican anymore.
For twenty years, he's padded his way in the early
morning to microwave eggs and green peppers
and broken clumps of sharp cheddar for my mother.
He's never forgotten to reheat her day-old coffee.
Before his afternoon nap, you ask him to say
something else about water. *A gallon is 7.5 pounds
and 0.833 cubic feet. But maybe I have that backwards.*
You tell him you think he's got it right.

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