

## Writing Elegies Like Robert Hass

By Jenny Qi

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Last night I heard Bob Hass read an elegy for his younger brother, and I chuckled when he said his brother had the impulse control of a ferret. And I thought of all the elegies I've written for my young mother, who ate only what she liked and scratched bug bites until they bled, and I thought Gee, I wish I could write an elegy to induce chuckling. What I meant was I wish I could remember her and chuckle.

It took me six months to talk about her, to admit she was dead. It took another four to say "dead." It took another five months and thirteen days and twenty-some-odd elegies to write how she'd scoffed—if *she* had raised that sissy friend of mine, he would've grown a spine.

I keep trying to write an elegy for my mother that remembers her like I do, or rather like I want to, how she could be so petulant and stubborn, so greedy for living, so hasty with love. I want to remember the quarters she kept for homeless men in the car she drove too fast, the oranges she pushed at my friends. I want to remember how she sniffled through movies and how pleased she was when I did too.

Instead, I always think of the Friday in February when I found her face down on the floor because I'd left the room for five minutes to cry in the bathroom and wash my face and the side rail collapsed and the doctor looked at me like I'd pushed her.

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Jenny Qi is getting her PhD in Biomedical Science at UC San Francisco. Her essays and poems have been published in various journals, including *The Atlantic*, *Huffington Post*, and *Off the Coast*. She is finishing her first chapbook. Read more about Qi at [www.jqiwriter.com](http://www.jqiwriter.com).

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