



LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

A catch in the throat of Allah. 2010

Shoemaker, Lynn

Madison, Wisconsin: Parallel Press, 2010

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/YVHJFHXOVYA7B8T>

Copyright 2010 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. All rights reserved.

For information on re-use see:

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Copyright>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

A Catch in the Throat of Allah



Poetry by Lynn Shoemaker

A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

A P A R A L L E L P R E S S C H A P B O O K

A Catch in the Throat of Allah

Poetry by
Lynn Shoemaker



PARALLEL PRESS 2010

Parallel Press
University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries
728 State Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
parallelpress.library.wisc.edu

Copyright © 2010 by the Board of Regents of
the University of Wisconsin System

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-934795-14-9

“The Mercy Singers” was first published as “Mission to Afghanistan: Four Forgiveness Moments” in the *Beloit Poetry Journal* and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

I would like to thank Cecilia Vicuña who nudged me onto the “it’s-OK-to-write-about-9/11” path. I’m also grateful to Robert Hedin who made helpful suggestions about a larger manuscript that contains these poems. And of course, gratefulness as always to my daughter, who is my most faithful reader.

my thanks to those who are leading a way through

Contents

Dust Cloud	9
Atta Sends a Tape from Paradise	10
My 9/11 Back Tattoo/Last Word to My Daughter	11
Tree Stump Koan #2	12
What I Find	13
Grief Families #1	14
Burmashave	15
Scorpion's Tail	16
Trophy Picture Diptych	17
Mother in Black	19
Ceremony	20
The Mercy Singers	20
<i>Meredith</i>	20
<i>Gideon</i>	21
<i>Jim Jim</i>	22
<i>Towana Jo</i>	24

Dust Cloud

And now the dust comes over us, whitish, not so fine as sleep, not so coarse as terror. It sticks like a muttering, a moan. Meddler. Scar picker. Step by stairway, it works into the floor cracks, street cracks, what we've never been able to mend. Will the mercy rain ever return? Exilic, we're walking, then rushing away from ourselves. Our feet glyph shapes we've never known before. Sometimes, we think we're breathing time, not air. Can we quit, stop, uptown, downtown, ever? Perhaps our lungs will tell us, the grit of the dead inside deliver up its pain. Will our stumbling, ghosted, ghosted, make the new names possible, visible? Our feet are praying for us, quick breathless prayers, begging a way through the burning and the burned.

Atta Sends a Tape from Paradise

Each word is an infant to itself. It's morning. We lift them into the sun. This is how we say the first line. This is how we try to chant the whole prayer. I admit that at first we wanted to kill you. You and you and you. What is your word for it? *Payback*. Saladin's payback, one wing of vengeance, one of terror, dive from the sky full gallop. What an unholy mess! Infidel, infidel to our own kneeling. For months, we walked your streets, arguing, imitating your cars and trucks. Corner to bank to doorstep, always we would lose. Finally, we sank back into our prayer mats, relearned the Prophet's, blessed be his name, first motion. Slanting into ourselves, helical, not forgiveness, but a giving in. All this before that blue September sun reached out for us, and we for our targets. In Arabic, the word for *friend* is *sadiq*. Sadiq, listen. It's better to be the dust. You can't enter Paradise, boots on, tower tall, standing in a humvee turret. We enter the merciful, the compassionate, the Divine Desert on our knees.

Bending forward and down
we kiss what we would
become, infant low,
lullabye lonely, a catch
in the throat of Allah.

Inshallah.

My 9/11 Back Tattoo/Last Word to My Daughter

Everything is emptiness.

Everything is compassion

—Thomas Merton

This is how I hope it will be. When you first turn my body, may your fingers be drawn to the sunshine shape, cast at the bottom of my spine. May their nerve tips recognize the plaza where you danced at only 19, both legs alive with the heat of those two tallest of buildings. May you run both hands up my devil's backbone, judging the heft of each structure, one on either side. I want your hands to blaze with the star-spangled explosion on the left and freeze 9:02 still with that darkening smudge sign on the right. Smoke. All the names escaping upward. You think you've found a prayer. It disappears at the base of my neck, without a promise of paradise or penal colony. Test it, Erica, dare this absence to test you. Only then can your trembling find the last word of those who jumped. Sky sound then ground, how it empties itself out, how its own trembling will touch you back, beyond any reckoning, within the skin, the smoke curling into the flames.

Tree Stump Koan #2

A few days before the World Trade Center attack, my sister died. To tell the truth, she committed suicide. She had a gift with words. Even words like “tree stump” and “razor wire” were a joy to her. One minute she was writing, yes, always by hand, pages and pages of words. The next minute, she tied a purple and orange noose-scarf around her neck. Her husband and I found other scarves like that when we searched the house, grays and yellow-greens, pinks and browns, colors that didn’t fit into any rainbow. She liked little knick-knacks, strange miniature beasts and small wire trees. She collected postcards of forest huts from all over the world. She told me once when we were young that she had names for all these figurines and forests, but she had to keep them secret. She didn’t leave a note, not a single curl mark on paper. The neighbors say they didn’t hear a sound, no flute, no punk, which were her favorites. So you see her husband and I, we didn’t feel anything on September 11th. It was like my sister had decided to become God’s asteroid, wipe out our forest feelings. The crater hole seems beyond all size, bottomless. September 11th just falls right into it. What I want to know is how she could do it so instantly, secretly, to snuff out her own life like a suicide bomber right in the face of God.

What I Find

“Whatever it was that was there is gone.” That’s what my friend Aisa says. I don’t want to believe she’s right. We crowd in close on all four sides, stare down into the pit. Sheer planes, almost plumb, a few workers, stragglers, dead quiet dozer parked off to one side. It’s a construction site waiting to awaken. Thousands of square feet, a profitable vacancy. If some martyr threw in a bomb, nothing would happen. Aisa and I cross the street behind us, edge up to the doodad tables. T-shirts, NYPD baseball caps, stacks of them, photos of a tranquil moon tranquilizing two monster hulks, small globes of glitter dust trick-sprinkling down, blessing the heads and shoulders of world trade forever. I start to fuss and fume. Aisa rests her hand on my shoulder. “Look, they’re only trying to feed their families.” We cross another street, follow the fence around St. Paul’s. It’s festooned with sacred junk, the stuff of our lives, trophies, anything that says, “We’re still here, nothing has changed, go round up the usual suspects.” Christ posters, a lei of origamic wings, the official casualty flag with its 2792 star names printed up softly in rows, folded victory case banners from this high school or other, one firefighter’s helmet, two white bed sheets to sign, magic markers, six, too many colors available. Nobody died. Let’s party. Let’s have a parade. Which normal flutter should we march behind? Where is my piece of the pain, my close and personal revelation? After searching for over two hours, here is what I find. The shut down Fulton Street subway entrance, its cans and sacks, stinking of piss. The churchyard iron fence, each arm of unknowable shape, black, cold, and spiked. And the unkept, unseen graveyard behind it. “Aisa, let’s bow our heads to this dirt clod. Here before, during, and after the towers. The only honest voice in town.”

Grief Families #1

I'm putting in my time, staring my way through this photo exhibit: Missing at the WTC. Wall families. Constellations of wallet pictures blown up. I'm up to 167, and nothing has happened. They're supposed to be death pictures. Every one of them is missing and presumed dead in the ashes. But here's one smiling at a party. And here's another, arms around two of her friends, cuddling the edge of a dance floor. I'm a little numb, a little choked up. But I'm not getting past the good-morning-America surface. I feel walled in, unused, like that stack of Kleenex over there. The guy I look like a little is the cheerful one with a beard. A few strands of our faces are the same. His poster says he liked rivers. I heard a story once about a Vietnamese man, a boat person. He was in a therapy group in Boston. For months he didn't say a word. Then in the middle of one session, he just dropped all his clothes. His body was covered with cut scars. He said, "Welcome to my country." Maybe these photographs are like unexploded ordnance. You know, the half-buried mines and bomblets. One day I'll be teaching my English class. One of the bomblets will work its way to the surface. There will be an explosion. I'll say, "Welcome to our country."

Burmashave

*Mercy is more like a snake
than anything else.*

My friend has a pet snake. It's not very big, say about the size of his son's left arm. It's not very scary either. Somehow it forgot to grow scales. My friend's son says its skin is soft as "mama's breast," smooth as "baby's cheeks." Their pet is part of the family. It likes the family room best, the warmth of the carpet, the darkness laid down by the coffee table with its fernlike fan of *National Geographic*. In the daytime, it hides under the davenport, that crack between the two worlds, its favorite spot. At night, it sometimes curls up and down the great dragon lamp, coil to coil, belly to belly. A few times it gives into temptation, time travels the window sill, pot after pot, ending with the African violets. My friend claims it's a Burmese python. The family has named it Burmashave. Burmashave is a lot like mercy. Everyone wants to hold her, cuddle her, Burmashave the Merciful, the shy one, even to mother her. The trick is to get her to slither up your left leg and spine. The trick is to get her to loll and laze around your bare neck, her head almost purring just above your face. Feel it? Burmashave. Mercy. Her tongue, more ancient than the earth, bless bless our first born breath.

Scorpion's Tail

*Inspired by a writing workshop
conducted by Cecilia Vicuña*

I don't know where she's from exactly. Chile, I guess. Maybe she's Mapuche Indian, I don't know. She left Chile just before Pinochet tried to turn the presidential palace into a hole in the ground. And she couldn't go back as long as the General was standing there amongst so much smoke, cutting people down and off. True to her name, she gathers remnants, strands, filaments from our eyes, air. Together, together, but where are the knots? She ties in something heavy, something old, and sets our breath swinging, as if we could all keep time to the earth. She expects us to wave loop, dance lines through our own sad bodies, spin from our bellies, spider out whole poems for her to take back, web over the 9/11 pit, back to lower Manhattan where she lives. And we want to do that. Smoke and smolder, we want to give every poem back to Spider Woman. Like a gaggle of four-year-olds, we're hooked to some Andean ridge rope. I don't know who is pulling and tugging at us, what ocean is out there. Who can tell where such thread by thread stumbling will lead? But Cecilia is up ahead. She will not cut short a single breath. "Child, child, child," she says, "if you hang on tight, stay real close, we still have a scorpion's chance."

Trophy Picture Diptych

1

I want to be like Spiderman, shooting snakes out of all ten fingers, loony looping from crime time to eternity. He doesn't have to kill any enemies, just goo them up. When he gets super-bored with the whole project, he just strips off his orange Spiderman outfit, tosses it into the garbage can, like an old rotten tomato. Then he hightails it back to Thought Woman, alias Hot Spider Mama, and waits for the beginning of everything to dreamweb the inside, inside. S-s-s-plut!!! "Gotcha, Dr. Octopus, gotcha."

2

Back from the desert a month now.
Got my trophy pictures inside.
Neck deep in the Big Muddy.
Saw an accident yesterday.
Some teenager bang-crashed his dad's
pickup off the Wilson Creek Bridge
into the Chattahoochee.
Four wheels spinning fake dreams,
one body pinned under.
Didn't stop to pull him out.

Mother in Black

Sometimes I make a mewling sound. I pitch it high, higher than a building could ever be. That morning, for a few moments, my skin became a blackness. Then the ambulance. Then the doctor's thin pale lips. Then the patches of *was* stolen from my back and thigh. Then the home happy promises, father and son, father and son. They whitened me. Not one person spoke to my skin. Nobody, a darkened language. Not until this picture. *Al Jazeera*. A mother sitting beside her son in a Baghdad hospital ward. She is dressed in black. She has just given up on sobbing. Touch him. Hold herself. Again. Again. *Yes, mother, our scars tell us which way to go*. I don't know what sound the two buildings made as the cracks spread floor to floor. And I don't care. I don't care about light wounds, light wings, or flying around in light. I care only about my baby. *Yes, mother, no baby talk*. *Now we will speak in burnt black tongues*.

Ceremony

We face toward the inside of the field, then sprinkle the lost lives behind us. There will be no washing of hands. We have agreed to this. We will not dab or smudge our foreheads. We will not press our lips, however moist or dry, to the ground. One by one, we kneel, settle to the earth as she did. “Zarmeena, mother of stones, sister and sister of dust, wrap your wise burqa around us. Pale with blue mercy it is.” The guards rush towards us from the other side of the field. Together they raise their rifles. They are too late. The dust blows away our flesh. They are too late. No faces. No faces left to shoot.

The Mercy Singers

Meredith

We bump shoulders, tease each other about always ending up in the same place, the same Union Square, farmer's market, squeezing the muskmelons together. Irises, gladiolas, gladden every step that surrounds them. Knishes, we smell and re-smell the knishes. But we always buy the darkest loaf of Bavarian rye our fumble-bumble hands can find. My husband leads me through the weekly vigil, the many shadows of Father George and his revolutionary horse. It's peace in Colombia this week. Colombian music, a savvy guitar, a Colombiano singing, dancing white wings into every tree and walkway. As usual, we finish our morning at Amy's, reading the *Times*, a cappuccino, peeking at each other's faces like we were only seventeen.

Holy shit!

The plane flew right into....

Holy goddamn shit!

I had to come to this place, dustland, shadows, airplane whine bouncing off the mountains. A woman in black, Meena, leads me and the others into her home. Her son is beside her, unable to speak, drooling sometimes, clutching at her shoulder, her hair. I'm shy. But I manage to mumble that my husband called on his cell phone. Said he was on the 53rd floor. Said he was going back up. Meena says that her husband was in the courtyard. Just outside the back door. No time to go anywhere. Oh, if we could just mother each other into the ground. Meena looks up, offers a cup of tea. Our hands do not meet. But the cup feels warm. Suddenly I realize that I want to lie down beside her, face to face, the drooler, the mercy song between us. In half an hour, the jeep will drive up. I'll pause at the doorway. Then leave.

Gideon

Aggies, cat's eyes, puries, steelies—not a chance. Only a rock, a plain old ordinary piece of gravel, would calm my daughter's heebie-jeebies. A white landscaping pebble from under a neighbor's shrubs, a stray gutter stone, a rock crushed a hundred times by a garbage truck out in the alley, they're scattered all over her room. I've seen her search, poke the beach sand for an hour and a half, not for a miracle shell, but just for some common hardness to hold in her fist at night. Once her mom brought home a piece of coral, lucked into it in some white elephant second-hand store, rose-tinted fans, dorsals and pectals, tendrils reaching toward all seven oceans at once. She placed it on our daughter's dresser, right in front of the mirror. Disappear, disappear, disappear. We never saw it again. Like our daughter willed her mirror to suck it up. I'm a musician, a folk singer. I love the oldies, Bob and Joanie, Cash, Leadbelly, all the 60's stuff. One time on a singing trip out west, a folk singer friend of mine gave me this geode, nodules and spikes, weird shades of purple, orange, brown, some pepper spots of crimson. I thought I could hear every song I ever loved swirling out of that inside world. When I offered it to my daughter, she actually winced back. Sitting on the side of her bed, she said, "Take it away, Dad. It's creepy."

Holy shit!

Flew right into, bit....

Goddamn holy shit.

A mountain is just a rock acting big. My daughter would like that. Rock and drought country. A land of mountains, bombs, and bullets. I don't know why I came on this trip. I'm no good with weepy women or kids that can't talk. So I sit out front, keeping this Mad Max mud house company. We're both just a couple of crate-sitters. I pick up my guitar, the cheap one I take on the I don't know where I'm going journeys. Sure, I'll play "Barbara Allen." Why not? Sure, I'll sing "Down by the Ohio." Why not? People start gathering around, strangers, not many men. Sure, I'll twang out a little "Tambourine Man," maybe throw in some "Route 66" or "Ring of Fire." Why not, why not? Nobody can understand a word I'm

singing, but they start moving to the music. Oh, oh, Mr. T. Trickster is creeping up on me. I sneak in two verses of “Be Bop a Lula.” One twelve-year-old starts to laugh, arches back and waggles his hips. I laugh back. Why not? I step over and hang my guitar around his neck. Then I try to say in Dari that I’ll take his picture. That’s when it happens. I see my daughter’s face in his. She’s calling me from inside the airplane. She’s saying that four men have taken over the flight, changed its direction. The men around her are whispering about doing something, taking some kind of action. She says she’s scared. She’s got her Walkman, but she’s really scared. I should have told her not to hang up. Don’t hang up. I’ll sing you something. “I am a rock. I am an island.” Sure, why not? “It’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall.”

Jim Jim

So what? She does her thing, and I do mine. I don’t care if her office has a door with five names on it or if she works in a gold-plated, terror-proof tower. I walk. I wander. I work the streets. Neon blink signs. Quick, blink back, blink back. Lookee here, two palsy-walsy pyramids, red apples and gold. I’d like to grab one of those right now. Designer jeans at \$150 a pop. I’ll mark this store down in my book. People think I’m crazy. But I take my banged-to-hell trumpet, station myself right in the middle of the street. I blare and blow until all the people get across. Cars honk at me, and I trumpet back. They honk louder, and I blare back louder. Until I got all the people smiling, laughing at that seething red Lexus, that stalled-out Infiniti just one year old. I’m blowing the terror right off these streets. Mom keeps hollering that I don’t take care of myself, don’t eat right. Once a month I give in, clean myself up. We meet in the lobby, take the express elevator up to the 78th, transfer to another express all the way to her favorite Windows on the World Restaurant. They always put us near the back, crimson tablecloths and real silver, but not before I steal a look out the window. Street people, we’re just specks down there, dust specks and blurs. We don’t even get on the screen. Mom always pays. And it’s nothing to her. But \$10.95 for a hamburger? That’s when I begin to lose it. I

ask her, “Who are these people waiting on us? Who works behind those swinging doors?” We always end up arguing. And I head for those long subway tunnels where I can play my horn, and “Cry Me a River” or “My Funny Valentine” bounces off the walls just right. Once I blurted out, “Not long ago, I watched this wino tramp, this dust speck, die. He had collapsed on a park bench, and he tried to get up. Raised his head a little. Then his breath just stuttered out of him. There was a small crowd. We all pulled back. We wanted to run. We should have been on our knees, giving thanks for him giving his breath back to the air, back to us.”

Holy shit!

God Almighty, they flew right into the center of . . .

Holy holy shit.

I had a hell of a time convincing the group to let me come on this delegation. They would look at my horn, my clothes, and shake their heads. Over and over, I kept saying, “Look, homeless to homeless, orphan to orphan. Don’t you get it? The streets, that’s the beginning of everything.” Finally, they did get it. They let me come. Even paid for most of my way. Even let me bring my trumpet. On the way in from the airport, this battered-up pickup, I keep looking for my people, the ones with no houses. Around every crossroad, they’re there. Around the markets too, scrounging the thrown-away garbage. Mothers, the smallest kids, circling a red crescent doorway, a goldy-glow mosque. When the others go visiting their families, I head for the streets. Blow some. Stop. Blow again. Soon a gang of kids has me surrounded. They take hold of me, lead me out to this tank, some Soviet relic, T-something or other, hasn’t budged in years. It looks huge, like a big iron building. We start climbing all over it, me blaring my trumpet, exorcising all the soldier breaths. I even get to climb inside. But I don’t find anything down there, no bones or bone dust, if that’s what you’re thinking. All the while I’m in there, I’m thinking about my mom. How the office wood must have gone up in flames, smoke thick, so damn thick. I bet she jumped. I bet she grabbed her purse and took the sky elevator down. When I shimmy my way out of the tank, it’s getting dark. Most of

the kids have taken off. Only a couple three left. I motion for them to come closer. Yeah, let's crawl under the tank. Lie down with the seeds and die. In the morning, we'll all wake up and whisper our mothers' names.

Towana Jo

I kept telling Jackson to move on over to my place. No use moping around his place. Alberta passed on 5 years ago now. That apartment's just getting grungier and grumpier. I got plenty of room, a spare bedroom just for him. Plenty of light. Subway station right around the corner. So he could catch the express down to work in that monster building of his. But no, he'd complain, complain like the world's ending tomorrow, but he wouldn't budge an inch. I remember when he did budge and mighty fast too. We grew up on a farm, sitting almost astraddle the Georgia-Alabama border, near one of those fancy white towns with a Greek name. There was a river nearby, and daddy had him a few acres of good dark bottomland. How he managed to get that land I'll never know. Yeah, we was growing cotton, though daddy would always stamp his foot and swear he wished he could grow corn. We had a mule, kind of a wild thing. And Jackson, he must have been about 12 at the time, sure was interested in that mule, eyeing it, shaking his head, pacing and muttering to himself. One day daddy just up and grabbed Jackson and set him down on top of Joansie. That's what we called her, Joansie. Well, Joansie began to huff and snort worse than a locomotive under a full head of steam. Jackson's eyes got bigger and bigger. Wasn't no more than a half-dozen snorts later that Jackson slid-fell right off that critter. Took off for the fence, crawled under, got shit all over himself. Been hiding behind that fence ever since. I saw the whole episode, yeah, the whole catastrophe, and I started forming me up a plan. Started gathering up some of daddy's best hay, hay from the bottomland, mixed it in with sweet grass. Every day I'd feed a little of it to Joansie. Got so she would follow me around almost, drooling for her hay. One day, I stationed myself over near Jackson's hiding fence. And when Joansie came over for hay and sweet grass, I climbed that fence and plopped right down on her

back. For a second, Joansie was one confused mule. Just when her ornery streak was about to take over, I reached down and gave her a handful of hay. From that day on, I could ride that mule anytime, anyplace, just so long as Joansie got her sweet grass reward. Ever since then I carried this bottomland knowledge with me. During the Klan times, all that burning and lynching, during the sit-ins, during all those singing and march times. Don't have to hide behind no barnyard fences. And when I moved up north, got a job teaching in the city, I wasn't about to hide even for a second. The moon is not a furling Klan robe, not any boss man's sweaty white shirt either. Sure I taught some from the books. But mostly I taught freedom. I remember one time Elaine Brown was in town. She's that Panther lady. We were talking right at this very table, not about guns, but about knowing what you're doing. I had two daughters right here in the room with us, so they could hear, learn. None of this shoot-up-the-courtroom wildness. Good river and bottomland sense.

Holy shit!

They flew dead aim into the center of . . .

Holy goddamn shit.

I didn't ask to go on this mission. They came to me, muttering and moaning that they needed an older person going to meet the old. They needed a person of color because the people they were going to connect with had sun and darkness in their skin. I'd heard this white muleshit before. Besides I had more than enough grief of my own. Yeah, a whole bucketful, a whole baleful of sorrow. These white radical types, they were messing with my grief. I was about to kick them out the door when they said something I'd never heard a white individual say before. They said, "Tell us about it. Tell us your sorrow story. We'll listen." So I did. I told them how Jackson spent twenty-five years in the man's army. Over there killing in Vietnam. Still didn't learn his lesson, stays way beyond what he needs for his pension. How when he finally gets out, he and Alberta come north to this city. But the damn fool idiot gets a job in those two monster towers. Where's the bottom grass near all that marble, super-glass? He switches from one tower to the other until they make him a

supervisor or something. Claims he's got a little office up there on the 78th floor. Hell, I knew what he was. He was a janitor. Still hiding after all those years. Goes to work every day, even though he's got some kind of dizziness, some kind of syndrome. Rides the subway down to Fulton. If he'd been over here like he should have been, keeping the family together, I would have kept him home that day. Damn him to Hell anyway, he was probably holding a broom when it hit. The plane, the flames, must have crashed right through where he'd swept. I don't even have a speck of Jackson's dust to sing over, to lower into the ground. Well, by the time I was through telling my story, I knew I was going to go. We're all here now, the four of us. Jim-Jim, he took off down the street. Said that's where the homeless were. Gideon, he's out front plunkin' his guitar. Meredith's right at the center of this burnt-out house, sipping tea with a burnt-out mother. But I'm over here in the corner, sitting on this bench with Old Grandma in Black. We don't have each other's language, but we get plenty said anyway. A sorrow look, click-clicks of the tongue, a touch of hands. Just being here. I know this family's story. A wedding party, friends and relatives from miles around, just like daddy gave me. Men got all joy-fevered up, started shooting their rifles in the air. Next thing they knew, they heard jets. They didn't hear the rockets until they hit. Nineteen dead, including the father and the daughter bride. Grandma in Black motions over to another one of the daughters. Looks about 12 or 13. I've never seen grief piled up so high in any child's eyes before. It's like her skin is so heavy it wants nothing to do with her bones. "Laida," I hear the name "Laida" a couple of times. Grandma has her sit between us. Not long before we start to sway a little. Grandma and I, we sway and hum, touching this girl on the knees, on the shoulders, on both sides of her face. We're touching, stroking her hair. The both of us, one on each side, we're blessing life back into this girl. Laida does not smile. She utters no sound except the in out shush of her lungs. But some glint comes back to her eyes. Her flesh makes a truce with her bones. Our group is supposed to leave for another town tonight. But I think I'll stay here. The bride's funeral is tomorrow. Her father's too. I begin to smell the grass, the river coming through this door. Tomorrow I'm gonna throw a handful of dirt down on top of the bodies. I'm gonna sing me a song for Jackson.



Lynn Shoemaker grew up in a small South Dakota town and moved to Wisconsin after spending time as a student, an activist, and a journeyman teacher. He is retired from the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, where he was a professor in the Department of Languages and Literatures. He has been writing and publishing poetry for nearly half of a century. Shoemaker has also been working in the peace movement for almost as long as he has been writing. In 2005 he joined a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation that worked for a short time in Iraq. His last published book of poetry is called *Hands* (Lynx House Press, 1982). He recently became a proud grandfather to grandson Gabe.

PARALLEL PRESS POETS

Marilyn Annucci • F.J. Bergmann • Lisa Marie Brodsky
Harriet Brown • Charles Cantrell • Robin Chapman • Jan Chronister
Cathryn Cofell • Temple Cone • Francine Conley • James Crews
Paul Dickey • CX Dillhunt • Heather Dubrow • Gwen Ebert
Barbara Edelman • Susan Elbe • Karl Elder • R. Virgil Ellis
Jean Feraca • Jim Ferris • Doug Flaherty • Allison Funk • Max Garland
Ted Genoways • John Graber • Barbara L. Greenberg
Richard Hedderman • Rick Hilles • Karla Huston • Catherine Jagoe
Diane Kerr • John Lehman • Carl Lindner • Sharon F. McDermott
Mary Mercier • Corey Mesler • Stephen Murabito • John D. Niles
Elizabeth Oness • Roger Pfingston • John Pidgeon • Andrea Potos
Eve Robillard • James Silas Rogers • Michael Salcman • Kay Sanders
Carmine Sarracino • Lynn Shoemaker • Shoshauna Shy • Austin Smith
Thomas R. Smith • Judith Sornberger • Judith Strasser • Heather Swan
Marilyn L. Taylor • Don Thompson • Alison Townsend • Dennis Trudell
Tisha Turk • Ron Wallace • Timothy Walsh • Matt Welter • Jacqueline West
Katharine Whitcomb • J.D. Whitney • Mason Williams



Parallel Press
University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries

parallelpress.library.wisc.edu
ISBN 978-1-934795-14-9