

First off, I would like to offer praise to Elizabeth Knies for her distinguished service, most notably the Surprised by Joy project—her work with Seacoast Hospice and her visits, accompanied by a select group of performers, to numerous nearby retirement communities where they demonstrated poetry’s ability to not only restore and raise spirits but to bring about much-needed joy. And furthermore, congratulate my fellow nominees, whose talents and contributions to our community are also being celebrated. In addition, I want to recognize my friend Walter Butt’s well deserved appointment to New Hampshire Poet Laureate, together with thanking him for his guidance and knowledge, his example as a poet and person.

I also need to acknowledge the Portsmouth Poet Laureate Program and the City of Portsmouth for their invaluable work and commitment. My fellow poets. Especially previous Laureates who’ve put foot after foot to the path, with conscience and flow, that I will now follow. Jim Rioux, who I’ve copped more from than there’s time to come clean tonight. The City Hall Poets past and present for not only the extra ears/eyes but something part heart and part stomach. Our performance group, Carteret Voltaire. And Andy Woolf, who I’d just begun to collaborate. As well as my teachers. All my friends and family. In particular, my parents, who put me up for so long and are still putting up with me. And Anne.

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These three poets walk into a bar. The bartender says to the first poet, “What can I get you?” And they say, “I sure could use a little irony,” pointing to the very top of their glass. The bartender then asks the second poet, “What’s the good word?” and they answer, “Better get me an analogy. Or whatever you got that’s close.” When the third poet is asked what they would like they gesture over to a booth where there’s a monkey pounding away on a typewriter and they say, “Let me have whatever the little guy’s having.”

It’s a good trick if you can pull it off. As a poet you can’t be just game. You must also nip some gumption. Toss back some brass. “You must go on your nerve,” as Frank O’Hara half-in-jest requests from us. And you must be willing to take risks. Kiss-off a few relics. But enlist them as well. Remind yourself what really holds reign on those book shelves of yours. And always do the body’s bidding as much as the brain.

As a poet you hoist and raise up the mundane. Presto-ing the plain-spoken and preposterous—nickels and pickled eggs, pyres made out of matches and napkins, this phoenix to be snuffed out with a shot of whatever's cheapest, and palming it all into keepsakes, minor-miracles. Or, something so lucid, so clued-in, it's criminal.

But you can never do it alone. It calls for accomplices. Ones who are willing to be at-a-loss or bewildered. Even outwitted, taken-in. "At last between two persons," there's O'Hara again, "instead of two pages." Without which the poem is a singular task. A past-act or worse, something passed-off, this transaction. And so it is here. In those gaps. That poetry matters again. Not only now. But just... then.

I'll end with a poem that had its start on Star Island--about as far as one can get from a watering hole, and it's dedicated to Mimi White who helped nudge it into the light.

### **This Doesn't Leave Here**

Though I confess I've grasped  
little of the sun and its input—  
the island's endless stare and the lull  
between the lace and singed sill--  
one could've guessed by the gull's risen bill  
and the last of the lilies holding still for us  
that nothing leaves here in focus, singled out.  
For most is lost to us, even doubt  
and one can only assume that the moth's wing  
is silt to the touch, that the plum is past-sweet  
and does well just to gasp and then take  
from the moment only that which is light-incensed, heat.  
And though having noticed the sea and having  
said glass I cannot help but worship my part in it  
how is it I can't wait to lower myself  
towards the grass and its whispering—  
all the world's intimacies chafed into gossip?