

## **Paper Boats (2021)**

It's drawn from memory  
this lake of violets  
near the broken branches  
last winter's storm took down.  
The rest of the yard fades  
to twigs and leaves and bare background.  
Shape the lines, work in the breathing blue,  
look up again to see if you  
remember what you saw  
before you looked down to draw.

Or compose some different lines  
across a different page.  
Stare again before you look down  
to write the words, cross out, rephrase.

It's against the grain  
this drawing from memory,  
this launching of paper boats  
on the fading blue  
of what we see  
hoping just the same  
to hold onto what we saw,  
or what we thought we knew,  
before we wrote or drew.

## From Writing Your Memoirs (2021—in progress)

### 1. Knickerbocker Village

Oak leaves and acorns,  
an early dusting of autumn  
this morning on the unfazed concrete patio.  
The late summer sunshine  
honeying everything somehow  
takes me back to the hot pavements  
of Knickerbocker Village  
and your childhood haunts,  
your friends the children of immigrants  
in those polyglot precincts of the depression.

I see you traipsing behind some saint's procession  
wafted in the distraction of pageantry  
laughing with your friends  
then sneaking into the cool of the vestibule  
carefree as a bird, a sparrow in a fountain.  
You dip your hands and splash  
the holy water in the stone font  
then back outside down the steps  
to wander up the crowded block.

Your mother didn't disapprove  
though once she spilled the beans  
and told your friends no Shirley lived here,  
no Shirley, just plain Geraldine.  
But when the neighborhood grandmothers  
urged you *mangia, Shirluza, mangia*  
or called to Shirluza playing in the street  
you believed in Shirley Temple just the same.

## 2. The Rheingold Girl

There you are the Rheingold Girl  
staring down the camera, an offhand wave,  
at the wheel of a convertible sedan,  
Brooklyn, circa nineteen forty-five.  
“Finest,” says the sign, white letters on black  
in the plate glass window of a background shop.  
We knew that picture growing up,  
*that was you*, among other thoughts,  
but the allusion to the Rheingold ads was lost.  
We didn’t know you’d turned a side street  
into a Hollywood backlot  
and staged a makeshift glamour shot.

Sixty-odd years on it got another look,  
the profile of your Facebook page,  
and amazed your friends no end.  
I couldn't tell if it was mirth or pride  
as you watched their reactions,  
that same wry smile looking out  
from two sets of eyes.

### 3. Singing School

Well, you were the diva's daughter--  
not the tabloid kind  
but one who'd sung  
between the wars  
in Paris and Milan  
before you came along.

Was it hard at times to live up to that?  
Just the two of you when Father died,  
mostly wiped out by the Depression,  
always somehow getting by,  
Mother giving singing lessons  
and working as a WPA artist at times,  
though she spared no expense  
and sent you on the *Isle de France*  
for a post-war version of the grand tour.

The high-ceilinged apartment  
almost always full,  
those voices, stories, arguments  
of who knew whom or who said what,  
another night, another scene--  
that was what you knew  
at times it seemed all you'd ever known.  
It wasn't till later, far from home,  
You heard the phrase "has-beens."

#### 4. Grace Girls Camp

Late night and the enthusiasm  
of young girls crowded round a campfire,  
roasted marshmallows, stories, songs,  
by day, instinctive negotiations  
and budding friendships  
with other children also far from home,  
a breathing lake, the beckoning woods,  
you took to it before too long.  
In your letters home you're dutiful,  
thanking mother for the packages  
announcing you had learned to swim  
and that you weren't afraid.  
You said the beds were comfortable  
but that there were no pillows,  
the cabin nice, the food was good,  
all in neatly scratched pencil,  
closing with a commonplace couplet  
you'd picked up somewhere  
and signed your loving daughter.

Did it come back to you those summer nights  
of haze, a rising moon, and fireflies  
when you sat on a lawn chair in the yard?  
You had little interest in the woods  
where we would disappear for hours on end  
and even less when Dad overflowed the car  
with groceries, tents, and mattresses,  
frying pans and a rusty machete  
then had us boys cram in  
for a week of camping in some state park.  
Dismissing it with been there done that,  
you might have liked it anyway,  
though maybe you saw in staying back  
a chance, once more, for a brief getaway.