

September 10 – 16th 2014

Journey toward my Grandfather

for Bob Miller (b. October 12, 1921 – d. September 4, 2014)

into the rolling hills of Ireland
I roamed
looking for the green secret of existence –
with your second generation legs
I began up a slate brown peak
while they were putting your body
into the cold cold cold
(and sometimes hot) funereal condominium
and did you know that
the mountains here
look like big, large, pebbles?
the kind that you could skip across the bay, that I see
out of the window...
It's a quaint bed and breakfast
with ceilings slightly too low
they amplify the big bony structure
you gave to me
and this view is something like
the view you might have had in Nantucket
when you journeyed with your love
toward the honeyed moon...
and probably like the coast in the Carolinas,
but not like the beach in Stone Harbor,
but maybe the midshipmen rocks of the Golden Gate?
but I'm on a different journey,
not celebrating marriage,
but celebrating you.

and every time the breeze
blows across my face
I let out a deep, refreshed sigh,
the same sigh and wince you let out
upon the first sip of a freshly cracked
can of cold Miller Lite
and did you like Miller
because it shared your namesake?
or just for the fresh, watered-down taste?

and the seagulls are hovering
and soaring and gliding
looking for scraps of food by the tide,

have they not eaten
since they attempted stealing your breakfast
so many years ago at the shore?
after they found their way
perched quietly under a canopy
– on the Queen Mary –
being left for dead
on the Irish Shores...
morsels of your bread still in their stomachs...
you hated those damn buggers

when your soul and body
were still swimming together
in the oceans of life
– metallic oils on a canvas –
you grabbed my hand
and with warm breath
inspired the Great and Never Ending
story of your life
and days before your 21st Century departure
it was all you could do
to keep your energy contained
at wishing me the best of Irish Smiles
and maybe I'm counting
those smiles with food
and keeping score
in a new game
that finds it's way
from table to table
with tears of joy
mixing
with butter and salt

mussels on a brick sidewalk
coated in cream and butter and garlic
and fresh brown bread to sop it up
the sun glaring off of the pastel buildings
and a grilled cheese with tomato sandwich
and how much you loved tomatoes
always a surprise that you never tried
to forcibly feed them to me
as I was leaving your home, and did you know
that I knew
that things would be different
when I tied up your bushes of tomatoes
the last time I

saw you?
and I dipped it in ketchup
and not mayo
and it was with the fervency of youth
that your ninety-two year old bones
rattled within to declare that
nothing would stop you now
from that Great Tomato Sandwich
on white bread
with cold mayo; lots of it.
and a coat of salt
to make the reds turn pink

and after they put you
in that cool dark condo
they were driving East
toward Ireland, to celebrate you.
and I was driving
on the wrong side of the road
West again, and a big old ocean
in between, toward you, toward them
and the man asked me
what I'd be havin' for dinner
and again I mustered
counting smiles with food:
fried shrimp
a fresh beer
crab cakes with tartar
and a plate of French fries

and had you not already experienced
that earthly death
you'd've died and gone to heaven
and won the new game
and maybe Ireland is heaven after all
where they serve your favorite meal
every night
and wish you "good evening Mr. Miller"
and "good day Mr. Miller"
and "how was the food Mr. Miller?"
and "enjoying the view, Mr. Miller?"

how many times did you eat
this greasy shrimp
and think of a view just like this?
and a sailor's delight in the sky

so pink, so soft
and the Sailor's Bar
nestled neatly in the sailor's wharf
and were you sure not to spill
any hot oil on those sailor's bell bottoms?
with their so white pleats
that Sinatra wished he could've worn
as well as you when he sang,
New York, New York, it's a hell of a town...
and all you ever sang
was the richer song,
the song of Life
and living
and shrimp...

these hills
have seen every passing century
and you saw tow
which is more than most,
and maybe the two you saw,
for us at least,
were the most important...
more than these pebbled hills saw
that's for sure:
the purple heather
catching up the creamed wool
spray painted red with vulgarity
and a few droppings
of thousands of sheep
and a few cows
and some horses
thrown in for fun
- but were the centuries you saw
really fun at all?

the end of a Great Depression
(one that Ireland still feels)
and a roaring era
with tinges of slavery and jazz
but mostly movin' on up
and getting' on out
out of Frackville
with its one church
and seven families
but I know I exaggerate
and the world thought it was cooperating properly

and then came Hitler and the Fascists
and you did like every good boy
and signed up promptly
to fight the good fight
and did you dream
the American Dream?
the night after Nagasaki
with a flourishing system of security
and pensions
and retirements
and new babies
and dogs
and corporate ladders
ready for climbing
and is that when you had my Mom?
the prospect of the '50's
America's Decade
the boom culture
with television
and microwaves
and still climbing that corporate ladder
Yippee!!!
What fun you must have had
in the driver's seat
at the climax of mankind's longest race...
was the finish line late
or soon?!
after Nancy, of before Bobby?
and then the place slowly wizened up
and they started thinking their dirty past
grimy enough for change –

Martin Luther King
and sit-ins
and Rosa Parks
and hoses blasting humans
and the end of segregation
and the beginning of permanent racism
and then came along
the icons of Jazz
and the icons of Pop
and boy did the boys down at NBC and CBS and Time and the rest devise that master
plan of hero-worship well!!!
and what was *free love*
to a man like you?
when a baby-maker

was a baby-maker
was a baby-maker
and never a portal to the soul
or a vagina
or a pussy
or something to be played with
and given drugs
and celebrated,
liberated
as the giver of life

and then they shot Martin Luther
and they shot the Irish Catholic Johnny
and then they shot his Bobby
which your Ruthie wept over with her Bobby
running around the town
and Vietnam roared on
and your son
wasn't like you when you were young
and there was no prompt sign up
and no good fight
only bad draft
and bad fight
and senselessly blood-drenched fields

but I'm listing all the things
you already know –
running away from the fact
that you're gone.
and running away from the fact
that those times are gone too –
records, history...
second-hand underwear
with its first owner bleached out
beyond oblivion

and did any of this occur to you
when you walked your dog,
and had all the babies
including the youthful surprise
that baby girl,
when you had already begun aging?
and as the pensions and retirements
spilled forth into your accounts
for so many wonderful years
did you ever sense

that you were the last
in the line of lucky men?

maybe we're the last
of the lucky men,
the ones who you left
to bumble about
in the tumultuousness
of a life-riddled planet,
lucky to know you
lucky to have your eyes
lucky to have no hair
lucky to have broad tense shoulders
lucky lucky lucky to enjoy a bourbon
and lucky to know your name
and know your children
and know your grandchildren
and luckier yet to see
that in your great-grandchildren
you might span
to a third and greater century...

but mostly lucky to be
walking among these hills
and eating tomato sandwiches
and whistling favorite tunes
and frying my chest
like an egg in the sun
the same sun you used to love
and the same sun you used
to get warm
and cheer up
and bring the hummingbirds in spring

and mostly lucky
to know that you had your ninety-two years
and you had your fried shrimp
and you had your children
and you had your bourbon
and you played golf
and drank beer
and woke up early to see the sun rise and light up the world
and luckier yet
that I still have mine ahead
thanks to you, for after all,
what is life if not lived?

what'll ya say,
Dear One?

September 16th 2014
Kenmare, Ireland