

Poetry by Robert H. Deluty

Perfectionist

Anxious when working,
Guilty if shirking.
Fearing heightened expectations
When work is commendable,
Dreading disapproving gazes
For efforts lamentable.
And should perfection be achieved,
Comfort is painfully brief,
For a fall from grace is awaited,
Stifling hope of lasting relief.

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I remember his left arm.
Leather-tough, lightly freckled,
Thick as a fireplace log.
Culminating in short, dense fingers
With near-perfectly round nails.
Most memorable, though, was the forearm,
Damaged by five blue numbers:
His concentration camp tattoo.
A daily/nightly reminder of
Evil and martyrdom,
Faith and resilience.

Name Calling

Recent birth announcements
Evoke a frightening epiphany:
In 60 years, most grandmas
Will be named Ashley and Tiffany.

Senryu

goes to the market
just to hear another voice --
paper or plastic

centenarian,
3-month-old great-granddaughter
exchange toothless smiles

side-by-side, carpoled
eighth-grade boys, ninth-grade women
sit miles, years apart

at a wishing well
pondering the downside
of eternal life

three Polish Jews
walking through Arlington,
offering thanks

Sunday School . . .
a nine year-old demanding
hard evidence

her brother-in-law
regarding multiple drinks
as group therapy

a friendless thief
wishing he could teach his dog
to hold a gun

asking the artist
to tattoo a thin blue line
through her ex's name

jewelry box . . .
beside the pearl necklace,
lanyards her son made

over breakfast
the astrophysicist reads
his horoscope

albino peacock
showing off its plumage . . .
a strutting snowflake

warning their children
that fidgeting in church
makes Jesus sad

a multi-pierced teen
challenging her professor
to define “normal”

high school senior
seeking a high-paying job
with loud music

Lessons

He loved to tell the story of how,
On his first day of Yeshiva
In Poland’s Jewish Ghetto,
Mothers brought honey cakes,
Shaped like the letters of the
Hebrew alphabet,
So that their children
Would come to associate
Learning with sweetness.

A brilliant man, deprived by war
Of even a high school education,
He set foot on a college campus
More than fifty years later to attend
His first son’s Ph.D. conferral.
When introduced to the faculty,
With utmost respect and pleasure,
He bowed.

His second son, now a professor,
Remembers these stories
As he teaches his daughter
Her ABCs.