

the Poetry Photography ISSUE

When Chris asked if I would be interested in being a guest editor for OITM's First Annual Poetry and Photography issue, I really had no idea what to expect. Ever an optimist, I thought it sounded like it might be great. We jotted down a brief call for submissions, wondering if the deadline would bring us a mad scramble for enough poetry to fill a couple of pages.

What a delightful surprise it was to get so many poems. And such wonderful poems too. It was truly difficult to choose which to include here. My criteria? I looked for those that would, separately and together, speak to some vital part of the experience of being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, in this place and in this time. The poems here reflect a range of ages and backgrounds and stages of life; they demonstrate a mindful engagement in the dialogue of what it means to be who we are. (I include one of my own here, because Chris tells me that it's only fair to exhibit my own work to show what my bias might be.)

Please come to the August 10 reading to experience the poems live and in person. Many warm thanks to all who submitted poetry. You are all wonderful! And an equal number of thanks to all who are reading these poems. Enjoy.

Cheryl Carmi
July 1998

Postcards My Brother Used to Send

I found the poetry and postcards
my brother sent me,
buried in a shoebox beneath the calm,
yellow chill of antiquity.

The skyscrapers and boardwalks
he called home rise to view
in my palm – torn and wrinkled
panoramic sights of city streets:

photo by Scot Applegate



Castro, Christopher, Bleecker, Duval—
"Full," he wrote, "yet so empty."
I shuffle his happiness
in my hands: still-lives

of his errant ways scattered before me.
I see him smile in each.
He never called home.
They adored him in neondrenched cities

Where, I know, men dance on pillars
in pink light, tight underwear,
laserbeams growing
into their chests and torsos.

His poetry confused me: childhood,
masturbation, men together in bed.
Now his life is a blur on my carpet:
"Sis, you must come to New Orleans—

You'd love the French Quarter!" I live
an ordinary life here in Iowa
and my children will grow up
never knowing their lost uncle, going

slowly as I scrub the drawers of my hutch:
a complete resurrection and burial at once
for the boy whose peregrinations
became his family. The last postcard

from Boston, barely legible, inscribed:
"It was the only life I had."—melodramatic,
a quote from a poem. The wake is tomorrow,
someplace Northeast, his remains blown

on winter snow, freezing until spring
where he'll grow into daffodils and azaleas,
second life, true beauty, reaching toward
the sun in daylight and the moon, safe moon.

– Jeff Walt

Until My Breath

The staid grass stretches
To the stars, wavers
Like the shadow of water.
The sea's thousand probing tongues
Inch up sand.
A grisly coven of trees
Wave their frightening arms
At the moon.

The land is severed
Where a poem might end
Had it the body of a continent.
Standing along the swollen shore
My ankles are consumed
By the steady throb of tides.
I pull words out of my head
To make room for truth.

Soon, dawn will leak
Out a trap door
Behind those mountains
And slide easily
Off my skin.
My breath will again
Become something I can believe.

Because night, too, is made of blood
Even the sky must die
Piece by piece.
Tonight, in lung-still air
Behind the shadow pines
A million far-away suns
Burn the blackest part of the sky.

– August Bleed



I Dreamt of Your Visit

through all of this
grey morning
i turned over your picture
from thought to rain
and deeper
in
your wide hips
and angry cigarettes
carving circles in
a place i don't know

and at last back
again cold and
empty handed
—all the ways
you reach me still
what lies
between us
is time

i tasted
a fresh grief
of losing you
on
parted dry lips

– Cheryl Carmi

(haiku)

Natural Progression

He said "I love you,"
and stole from me five summers.
So, I found a she.

– Kerry Slora