

Bill Stifler

The Year After My Father Dies

The year after my father dies,
I see him watching me
from his bedroom window.
I look up, and he stares through
me, so that I turn, but nothing
I can see explains his fixed
gaze, some distance only
he can contemplate while I stand
my ground, sweating in the heat
of this summer day.

Other days, he sits
at the head of the kitchen table;
coffee cup in hand, he stares
out the window as we
go about our daily business--
oblivious to our cares--
the pain of his absent gaze.
His mind is elsewhere
His cigarettes burn to ashes
that the wind finally scatters.

My mother and sister ignore
his moody silences.
The dead should not be named.
I wear his name like an epitaph.

Days pass. At odd moments,
I sense him. A glimpse of his face
reflected in the glass of a passing
car. The faint acrid odor of smoke
in an empty room. A whiff of after
shave in a public restroom.

I know the moment is coming
when I will see him facing away,
while I will reach out hoping
one last time before I let him go.

Bill Stifler teaches at Chattanooga State Community College and is a graduate of the writing program at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. Originally from southeastern Pennsylvania, Stifler has lived in the Chattanooga area since 1972. His

work has been published in *Science News*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Switched-On Gutenberg*, *Fractured Voice* and elsewhere.