

## **Bruce Morton – Three Poems**

### **Cleaning Erasers**

“So was it when my life began; So is it now I am a man; So be it when I grow old, Or let me die! The Child is father of the Man;” (William Wordsworth)

Yes, I considered it  
To be an honor to be  
Asked, or was it told,  
To gather up the erasers.  
Folded felt, white from a day's  
Use, the blackboard gray  
From the arc of their rub.  
There were six of them,  
Stacked three to a hand  
To be carried down  
To the boiler room  
Where Mr. Kelly was,  
Custodian of the netherworld  
Where hum and heat were made,  
Hung heavy on mops drying,  
A stink of solvents that lingered.  
There on the wall at the base  
Of the stairs it was; its toggle  
Switch flipped to turn on  
Its shrill electric whine  
To inhale chalk dust,  
Sucking what was in the felt,  
Particles of arithmetic, spelling,  
Words and musical notes  
Absorbed into a vacuum, then  
Carried upstairs, back, back  
To the classroom to be placed  
At the base of a clean slate.  
I now breathe the dust  
Of reminiscence and try  
To remember what was erased.

## Forgetting Mother

Dust bunnies burrowed  
In the dark corners of the closet  
Propagating like there would be  
No tomorrow. There would not be.

Would not be because she forgot  
Herself and then everything else.  
Memory went, spirit seeped;  
Flesh peeled pound at a time.

A hard way to go, not to know  
The feeding tube could not feed  
Or whose was the hand that held  
Hers until the final letting go.

Now it was about the discarding.  
Her clothes hung on hangers, worn  
Thin with the wearing, dated, or not  
Worn at all, polyester double-knits.

They would all to go to Goodwill.  
Each piece would be folded, then  
Commented upon. What was there  
To say? Something must be said.

It was there we found her, at rest  
In the dark, dusty closeted corner,  
The size of a cigar box, but plastic.  
Ashes to ashes and all that—dust.

This was what she had become,  
A box of memories composed,  
For the rain to soak or to blow  
Away over dry and windy fields.

But here's the thing. In saying our  
Goodbyes, in packing our keepsakes,  
In mapping our journey, we did not  
Remember her until halfway home . . .

## Vintage

On the backroads I pass  
The past even though there  
Is no passing lane.

I've gone by lots of old stuff;  
Call it by-gones, supposed  
To be seen and past.

There is the abandoned,  
There is the dilapidated,  
Then there is the patched.

Some may see it as junk,  
Others antiques. But there  
Is no denying true vintage.

To be truly vintage it must  
Have a story, tell a story.  
It must have history.

It must have bullet holes,  
That misplaced punctuation,  
Second-amendment syntax.

Dry-docked fleets of vintage  
Vehicles pocked by caliber,  
Rust in yard and and field.

There are signs everywhere,  
Vintage speed limit signs that  
Aimed to slow vintage traffic.

What passes for scenery is  
Becoming tomorrow's yesterday—  
Maybe gone, maybe not.

**Bruce Morton** splits his time between Montana and Arizona. His poems have recently appeared in *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Ibbetson Street* and *San Pedro River Review*. He was formerly Dean of Libraries at Montana State University.