

## David P. Miller– Five Poems



### Feature Poet

### I Cannot Tell a Lie

*for Jane*

For your birthday, I schemed to give you  
the ocean. No, not *I'll give yuh the moon,*  
*baby* or *Our love is vast as the briny deep*  
in case anyone's cliché-dar is twitching.  
The genuine ocean for you, lifetime  
wave-delighter and Pisces to boot.  
February 22, your birthday with George W.,  
Dad of our country and his little hatchet,  
cherry-chopper with a come-lately conscience.  
Georgia, your well-forgotten first name,  
an impulse of maternal heat and patriotism.  
Name that doesn't name you though alliterates  
cozily with "Jane," second name, the one I married.  
I'm never tempted to make like Ray Charles  
though you are indeed *on my mind*.

Now given that the Pacific *per se*  
was a bit much all at once, you unwrapped  
the Gulf of Chiriqui and a bay tongued into  
Isla Boca Brava's Panamanian shore.  
Howler monkey families fanfared the dawn,  
serenading with choral groans  
like gale wind forced through a stone cave.  
Our thatch-roofed veranda's porch  
rose over the beach, where sand crabs  
scraped their petal drawings  
till the tide erased them. We drank  
directly from coconuts, greeted the gecko  
motionless on our bedroom ceiling,  
posing like a postcard.



My father's age was the same as mine  
when we put our parents receding  
in the east. At twenty-one  
this is what the child does, I thought,  
straight-arrowed at a Master's degree  
that collapsed into a dishwashing job's  
stupefied mind.

And now I shock myself,  
remembering two vehicles caravanned to Pittsburgh.  
One of our fathers hauled a trailer.  
But whose father was he? Oblivious  
over time, I don't remember.

That means I don't remember  
which parents embraced each other  
as their oldest child signaled goodbye,  
and which mother wiped salt water  
from her face, on her own.

## **Accident and Attachment**

### *Blunders*

He pioneered west in a staunch black Ford  
to Pittsburgh, City of Bridges. Dwelt in classrooms  
of the Cathedral of Learning, a tower so named  
without a blush. He abandoned the I-me-mine  
he carried there, and doubled back East.

But imagine a parallel biography  
in which, with amassed credentials,  
he now expounds acting at a fantasized  
Midwestern college. Remains in a dogged  
but halting first wedlock. Almost remembers  
how he got there. See the professor crossing the quad  
between classes in winter, dropping his papers.  
Fade to fog and corn stubble.

### *Devotions*

The self that returned, now writing this for you,  
returned without the degree, shed a mutually  
blundered marriage. In tangible time,  
at a September's end, he stood on flagstones

in a western Massachusetts orchard, read poems  
to apple pie eaters at picnic tables. Listened  
three hours in the rising night and thickening dew  
to poet voices, a symphonic bass guitar.  
Scanned for the Milky Way among constellations  
city light doesn't allow.

He'll report this to his wife  
tomorrow. Their two voices will ruffle the air  
over the kitchen table, four parents in photographs  
on the wall above their overlapped hands.

## Summer Jobs

Present on a roofed breakfast deck.  
Grassy view sloped to the town highway,  
traffic's permanent sigh and hiss  
angled up through apple trees.  
Three Berkshire ranges in blue-gray  
the more heightened away from green  
the further back they fall. Two other  
inn-stayers stir early now with me.  
Tanglewood nuzzles in woods downhill;  
music the nectar that drew us to this  
Appletree Inn. Pushing red spheres  
cluster my eyesight among writhed wood  
and leaf cloudbursts.

Two young women foreshadow breakfast  
placing salt and pepper, sugar troughs.  
Return to place tented cloth napkins. Return  
again with silverware and menus.  
Hummingbird scrapes sugar water from flowers,  
feeding its unspeakably desperate heartbeat  
outside the porch rail. Before my eyes, summer jobs.

Twenty-one, I floundered into a summer job.  
For two weeks college students breached  
a naval base mess hall. Every ten minutes  
we surveilled kitchen workers. Checked locations  
and what the hell we guessed they did,  
including imagined rest room respites.  
Tabulated gruntwork data against people  
hung on minimum wage lifelines. They should have  
hated us punk snoops. Now I am almost  
in the way of unruffled women setting breakfast

at an uphill tourist house stuffed with retirees.  
A bee stretched no longer than a finger joint crease  
researches the lavender petunias  
at my table. Also, an apple just now fell,  
as ever not far from the tree.

## Each Year's Odometer

1.  
When my family was young,  
mechanical odometers rolled their numbers  
as interlocked barrels. Hardy veteran autos  
pushed the count toward nothing  
but nines. Kids strained from back seats,  
watching the sedate rotation to a row of zeroes.  
Imagine those irresistible nulls.  
A child's charm for starting over.

2.  
Each year's odometer rolls back to one  
from three hundred sixty-five or -six.  
Aerial cameras swoop across swarmed Seoul,  
mobbed Melbourne, overrun Times Square.  
People kiss, scream, wave *Hi Mom* hands  
for international television.

Fatalities on wheels strip the sashed New Year's baby  
of grownups he will never know to miss.  
The codger with his scythe gathers them and vanishes.

3.  
Buttered saxophones, "Auld Lang Syne"  
via Guy Lombardo, swelled across  
a disappeared black and white TV screen  
when 11:59:59 fell into 00:00:01 like water in water.  
My teenage earworm, loyal from then till now.

4.  
Twelve/thirty-one flips to one/one  
like a vintage departure board.  
The calendar count then fattens day by day,  
pratfalls again this final midnight  
as the great electric ball strikes the platform

or a wrangled champagne cork sails across the room.  
We free-fall back to one/one, yell away  
the tired year. Celebrate like all's forgiven.

5.

Imagine zero minutes, zero seconds.  
The immediately gone instant  
between New Year's Eve and Day.  
Like 00000 turning 00001  
before anyone notices. Anything might happen  
because nothing has happened yet.  
I want that moment. I've never grasped it.

With first shout, first embrace, caress  
of champagne glasses, we're already headfirst  
into a yearlong crawl toward the next  
balloon set to burst at eleven-fifty-nine-fifty-nine,  
that last instant of three-hundred sixty-five  
(or, every four *auld acquaintance* rounds,  
sixty-six).

**David P. Miller's** collection, *Bend in the Stair*, will be published by Lily Poetry Review Books in 2021. *Sprawled Asleep* was published by Nixes Mate Books in 2019. His chapbook, *The Afterimages*, was published by Červená Barva Press in 2014. His poems have recently appeared in *Meat for Tea*, *The Poetry Porch*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Constellations*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Nixes Mate Review*, and *The Telephone Project*. He is a member of the Jamaica Pond Poets. With a background in experimental theater before turning to poetry, David was a member of the multidisciplinary Mobius Artists Group of Boston for 25 years.