

## John Tustin – Two Poems

### Schultz

When I was a kid my family had a dog –  
A dachshund named Schultz.  
He was the most good-natured pet  
Any family could ask.  
He would rarely bark, he wouldn't get angry  
And I cannot remember a time he ever bit anyone.  
He seemed too jovial and sweet for such behavior.

We happened at some point to have a rat in our basement –  
A single rat almost as big as Schultz  
Who sneaked in through an uncapped pipe.  
When one day our cat came shooting out of the basement  
As if his tail were on fire  
Schultz figured out something was down there  
And he knew it was an undesirable.

It was then that millenniums of instinct  
And centuries of breeding came at last  
To his snarl and his nose  
And his sturdy little legs.  
His face furrowed. His paws steadied into taciturn statues  
Of single-minded concentration  
As he attempted to lunge all at once.

My father held Schultz back with one hand  
And closed the basement door with the other  
As the fevered doggo snapped and cried to be let free  
So he could eviscerate the vermin invader  
Who deigned to exist in the same space as he –  
Whose ancestors had savaged badgers from the burrows  
Of Prussia and banks of The Rhine.

Suddenly our dopey and harmless pet  
Was a cunning and one-minded missile  
Of ferocious and efficient destruction.  
He was at once Schultz and also not-Schultz.  
It was instinct kicking in.  
Instinct and centuries of breeding.

The boy couldn't help it.

So when you ask me  
(More likely sooner than later)  
With your slack-jawed incredulity  
Why I did whatever new thing  
I am supposed to have done  
To anger and disappoint you  
I shall respond:  
Instinct and centuries of breeding.

This boy can't help it, either.

### **Stray Cart**

I was in the parking lot,  
Walking from my car to the store –  
A length of perhaps 300 feet.  
I noticed a stray cart loose and solitary,  
About to bump a car  
In a frenzy of sudden wind  
But I was too far from the action  
To stop it

And it was then that I realized  
That I hadn't forgotten you  
After all.  
No, you were there  
In my pocket or maybe  
Walking a pace or two behind me.  
I realized you are still here  
Even though I don't think about you  
All the hours of my day anymore,  
Haven't seen you in years or spoken to you  
In quite a while.

It was in the parking lot  
During my steps between  
My car and the store  
In a strong gust of wind  
That I knew I hadn't forgotten you  
And now I see you're beside me  
While I type out these words,  
Banging them  
Like the soldier's hammer  
Into Christ's hanging nails.  
I'll lie in bed and you'll be in the same bed,  
Never in reach but there.

Immobile I am  
And you come crashing into me  
Like an errant shopping cart  
In the incautiousness of the wind  
Again, again and again.

**John Tustin**'s poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2009.  
[fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry) contains links to his published poetry online.