

Joseph Kleponis – Two Poems

Daily Games

In the summer before the summer
of jobs, cars, and girlfriends,
there was baseball –
every morning,
every afternoon,
and stretching into twilight.

Hot, sweaty, covered in infield's dust,
we played game after game,
in heat and in humidity,
even when Edgar's simple cousin knew
"It's too hot to play baseball"
we played and played some more.

In centerfield, Ace would drift,
backward or forward,
whatever was needed
to make an effortless catch.
Frenchie pounded fastball after fastball
until he learned a curve
that took us half a day to solve.

Richie, Dave, Ratso, Petey,
Johnny, Eddie, Steve-o and me,
along with others who floated in and out
hung out at the varsity diamond,
even though none of us would ever have
the talent the talented possessed.

We played on, oblivious of the obvious:
that games at some time have to end
called short by obligation or other interests.

We argued rules,
compared strategies,
and shared what passed for secrets.

Who knows what we learned,
if anything, on those summer days?

Baseball as a metaphor is a conceit
for poets, playwrights, and storytellers
spinning tales that cast
hitters as legendary strongmen,
pitchers as slayers of hubris and muscles,
coaches as wily judges of men and motivation.

We were just playing a game
in long days of heat –
learning the angles –
judging distances –
calculating when to take a chance –
trying our hardest not to be gamed
by the game within the game
that, for a summer, was daily life.

Our Bubba

He had a name
his parents gave him
when he was born,
and it was surely recorded
in city ledgers and church books, too,
when he was christened,
but we didn't know his name,
or if we did, we forgot it.

The teachers may have called him by his name,
but we didn't listen,
or it didn't register with us
like so much the teachers said.

Maybe his mother, grandmother,
or the lady next-door
called him by his name,
but we didn't hear it.

We called him Bubba
because his little sister
called him Bubba
because she couldn't say brother
and never said his name.

We wanted him on our side
in baseball, basketball, or football
because he was big, strong, agile –
he helped us learn the games;
he watched over us;
he was, after all, our Bubba.

After high school, he joined the military,
where he surely had a name,
and they did not call him Private Bubba.
But we really do not know.
We heard he was stationed in Hawaii,
and we imagined Bubba surfing.
More recently it was reported he had retired
to Alabama, perhaps,
with a wife, and three kids:
Billy, Sue, and Ray.

The years have passed
and all of our hang-outs –
Louie's, the A&W, the Rialto –
are either gone or changed,
but their names remain
embedded in our memories,
cementing their identity,
like the name Bubba,
the name of our brother,
whose name we never knew.

Joseph Kleponis has taught English and American Literature in schools north of Boston. His poetry has been published in numerous journals including, *The Aurorean*, *Eucalypt*, *First Literary Review -East*, *Leaflet: the Journal of the New England Teachers of English*, and *Penmen Review of Southern New Hampshire University*, *Methuen Life* as well as *Muddy River Poetry Review*.