

Marge Piercy – Five Poems

Respect

I live within a mile of the sea
but haven't entered it since
a white shark ripped apart
a young surfer. I stand above

on the edge of the dune
but even when I see a fin
way out, I back away as if
the great white could fly.

The sea belongs to its own.
We're always trespassers,
visitors who leave mounds
of trash to pollute its waters.

The ocean owes us nothing.
It knows it will outlast us

I can't accept the loss

No one I've been close to
is replaceable. Missing slices
suddenly through an ordinary
day like a swung machete.

What we did together, our
talks, our excursions, raunchy
jokes, all items packed away
in a museum basement

to gather dust. We identified
your body in the hospital
morgue and then even that
shell was gone to ashes.

A good friend weaves into
my life and once that cloth
is torn, what remains of love
is just a hole all through me.

What we carry

Mother birds sing while brooding
eggs in the nest. The embryos
growing inside the shells hear
and remember the songs.

I remember my grandfather
murdered a few years before
I was born. Tales from Mother,
Grandmother gave him flesh.

We all carry memories we never
witnessed. We interpret our
lives, history from stories sunk
deep into our childhood bones.

Sing, mother bird, even though
predators may hear you. Pass
on what you know, songs that
celebrate exactly who you are.

How long can connections endure?

In my childhood, I was solitary
often except for my cats and my
watchful ever demanding mother.

From high school on, I cultivated
friends as if they were African
violets fragile but pretty enough.

In my anti-war and movement days
I lived in groups. Had to steal
time to write, even to think.

But now alone with like everyone else
who values their own and other lives
I miss my friends, want their faces

in the room, their laughter and tales
even their troubles. I touch partner
and cats but no one else. I wonder

if when Covid finally goes down some
mousehole, if I'll remember how to chat
or like a hermit, I'll huddle in silence.

How long can affections retain heat
and light when stored in the unvisited
dank basement of our lives?

The necessary return

When the time comes,
I want to give my body
back to the earth, no
chemicals added, no

cement tomb, just me
going back to where
we all came from,
dirt to dirt. Minerals

I ate and drank all
my years, just lent.
Time to return them.
time to give final

thanks. I ate meat,
fish, shellfish, all
the bounty of veggies
and fruit. Now let

whatever will, eat me.
That's only fair. What's
left should grow into
that oak by my grave.

Marge Piercy has published 20 poetry collections, most recently, *On The Way Out, Turn Off The Light* [Knopf, September 30, 2020]; 17 novels including *Sex Wars*. PM Press reissued *Vida, Dance The Eagle To Sleep*; they brought out short stories *The Cost of Lunch, Etc* and *My Body, My Life* [essays, poems]. She has read at over 500 venues here and abroad.