

## Mike L. Nichols – Two Poems

### Would It Be Okay

I get that we are tough,  
that we'll get through this  
because, I watched you  
gripping the telephone  
pressing your forehead against  
her nightingale patterned wallpaper  
and smiling those exact words  
after announcing her passing  
to the voice on the other side  
but

would it be okay if  
for right now I just  
didn't get through this, if  
I didn't even try to? And instead, stood  
gaping for an hour or for a year,  
tumbling down the rabbit hole in Slow-Mo  
snatching after her fluttering  
hospital gown, falling  
through memories: her teaching me  
to iron my own shirts, to vacuum, to overlap  
each pass, keeping the carpet lines straight.  
These little necessities I see, but  
I'm still struggling  
to get the meaning  
in the nightingales' wobbling song  
and

would it be okay if  
these uninvited guests got up  
from her matched floral print  
couch and loveseat,  
her cushioned piano bench,  
her lattice backed chair set with  
tear shaped trickles of lacquer  
hardened on each leg,  
and wordlessly walked out,  
taking their false sympathy and forced cheer,  
bouncing and straining behind them  
like white and blue helium balloons,  
leaving us, unaccompanied, with her absence  
and

would it be okay if  
I just gave way, collapsed to my knees  
on the ceramic tile in front of the  
crumb strewn kitchen counter  
breaking  
into one hundred-thousand  
boy shaped pieces  
and  
would it be okay if  
in imitation of the indent  
left behind by her withered body  
in the rented hospital bed  
I arranged myself  
splayed out, starfish style  
to sink, to drift, to drown  
in the unfathomable  
sorrow?  
because

I know  
we are tough  
and

I promise to be tough,  
later.

## **Numbers Game - 1984**

Teen drug rehab begins with ten  
days PJed detox on a locked wing.  
Stare through the steel Safe-T screen  
at the playground swings across the street.

Stand in line with the other jonesing *patients*  
for your cigarette ration. In group sessions  
say nothing unless pressed.

On Family Day circle up  
in the one-on-one room.  
Talk about the damage  
you've done. Then,  
Mom is saying

The cancer came back.

Like a relative you never liked, knocking  
while opening the door calling,  
Hello? Hello?  
And it's spread like,  
like cancer. Everywhere.  
Maybe three more months.  
Definitely not a year.  
Dead mom walking.

In group you can talk about  
fourteen-year-old girls selling  
sex for a quarter gram,  
or drug deals gone bad with  
keg-boots to the back of heads,  
teeth congealing in gutter red,  
but you cannot picture her  
faded husk filling a casket.

On Family Day you sat side by side  
holding hands and cried.  
See her tendons laced with  
bulbous blue-green veins.  
A connection, for a moment  
greater than the unknown  
sum of her remaining days.

**Mike L. Nichols** is a graduate of Idaho State University and a recipient of the Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize. He lives and writes in Eastern Idaho. Look for his poetry in *Rogue Agent*, *Tattoo Highway*, *Ink&Nebula*, *Plainsongs Magazine*, and elsewhere. Find more at [mikenicholsauthor.com](http://mikenicholsauthor.com)