

Robin Stratton – Five Poems



Feature Poet

Ashes

Fires rage
wind blows
smoke fills air
we might have to
evacuate.

I have to figure out
what to pack
what is most
important.

But when I stand
and look at my stuff
it all seems
important:

photo albums
lap top
knick-knacks
favorite mug
great grandmother's vase
ceramic rooster
five hundred books.

At the same time
in the very same
moment
it all seems
not important.

So what I grab is
a candy bar
and my brother's ashes

Gifts

I was in my 45th year when my dad said
did you ever notice that you always explain your gifts
and that's when I realized —
I had a habit of telling the recipient
why I gave them the gift or
where it should go or
how it should be used

So as I handed him his gift he said
try to just give it to me without explaining
and I said okay
but I knew that sooner or later
I would tell him
that his new dog planter would be perfect
on the second to bottom step
on the left side of his front porch.

Sorry

Sorry for not taking your call
Sorry for not adopting a blind elderly dog who needs a good home
Sorry for using those free address labels without making a donation
Sorry for not always rinsing my recyclables thoroughly
Sorry for taking too long to conduct my transaction at the ATM
Sorry for being in your way in the cereal aisle at the supermarket
Sorry for faking those orgasms
Sorry if this poem sounds some other poem you read a long time ago
Sorry I couldn't stop the cancer from spreading
Sorry I was able to smile at your funeral
Sorry I don't believe you've gone to heaven
Sorry I don't believe in God anymore

What It's Like to Live with a Birder

You go out for a
walk in the woods
the sun is bright
the breeze is warm

trees are starting to bloom and
you go home and tell him
you saw a murder and
he is jealous and asks
did you get a picture?

I Am Driving

down the coast of the Pacific Ocean
with a world-famous scientist
I have been in love with
for 25 years

the radio is playing songs from the 70s
and suddenly I am 15 again
insecure with thick glasses
I love the music of
Chicago, Styx, Kansas, Foreigner
the summer before I graduate I hear
the Boston album everywhere

Billy Joel's "Only the Good Die Young"
blasts from someone's boombox while
I play tennis with my friends
and dream of having a boyfriend

I intend to be the youngest recipient
of a Pulitzer for my novel
and have my own TV show
featuring poor struggling writers
who didn't hit the big time
like I did

Years go by
I have put seven dearly-loved
dogs to sleep
my niece and nephews grew up
and had kids of their own
I've lost both parents
and a brother

The one constant: my writing
I do not win a Pulitzer
I give up thinking I will
it used to hurt to say it
but as the years go by
it seems less important

I have completed my 60th year of life
six decades on this earth
I am not the same person
who heard these songs 45 years ago
but I still love these songs and

I am driving
down the coast of the Pacific Ocean
with a world-famous scientist
I fell in love with
25 years ago

Robin Stratton is the author of four novels, including one which was a National Indie Excellence Book Award finalist (*On Air*, Mustang Press, 2011), two collections of poetry and short fiction, and a writing guide. A four-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she's been published in *Word Riot*, *63 Channels*, *Antithesis Common*, *Poor Richard's Almanac(k)*, *Blink-Ink*, *Pig in a Poke*, *Chick Flicks*, *Up the Staircase*, *Shoots and Vines*, and many others. Since 2004 she's been Acquisitions Editor for Big Table Publishing Company, Senior Editor of *Boston Literary Magazine* since 2009, and she was Director of the Newton Writing and Publishing Center until she moved from Boston to San Francisco in 2018. Now she leads the popular "Six Feet of Poetry" and "Fiction by the Foot" series. Her latest book is *Some Have Gone and Some Remain: Autobiographical poems and essays*. She'd love to have you visit her at www.robinstratton.com