

Shelly Blankman – Two Poems

Smiling Eyes

On the diamond he was hailed as a hero,
off the diamond condemned for his color.
His day in the sun shadowed by a white,
his reputation ravaged by racism.

Hank Aaron, *Hammerin' Hank* —
now hammered by a history of hate
still painfully present. And I was about
to meet him for lunch. I was forewarned

this one-time super slugger bore new
labels now: Angry, aloof, bitter. But angry,
aloof, bitter men don't have eyes that smile.
He talked little about baseball, more about

family, less about legacy and more about
traveling, massaging his strong calloused hands
as he spoke. *Arthritis from all those years of
playin' ball!!* His laughter, laced with sadness.

A nation still remembers *Hammerin' Hank*. Hero. Victim.
I'll always remember his smiling eyes.

Theodore

Whatever happened to Theodore? Just 10 years old, plucked
from his home because his parents were deaf, deposited
at a children's hospital as if he had nowhere else to be.
That was the law back then. An unstable home meant rats,
mold, asbestos, abuse, drugs – or deaf parents of a hearing child.

The hospital became Theodore's home; the ward, his bedroom.
Doctors, nurses, aides, and volunteers like me were his family
now. The other children wore their scars of neglect. Their cries
and combats over toys and games echoed everywhere.

Theodore was quieter, calmer. He usually could be found seated
cross legged in a corner of the playroom, his lithe frame against
the wall, hunched over a book, coloring, or reading.
The system had failed him. He was taken from a home of love
to live in a hospital. He was there when I started as a volunteer and
three years later when I left. Thirty-five years later, I still wonder.

Shelly Blankman lives in Columbia, Maryland, where she and her husband have filled their empty nest with three rescue cats and a foster dog. Their sons, Richard and Joshua, flew the coop some years ago — Richard to New York and Joshua to Texas. Following careers in journalism, public relations, and copy editing, she now spends time writing poetry, scrapbooking, and making cards. Her poetry has appeared in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Poetry Super Highway*, *Praxis Magazine* and *Halfway Down the Stairs*, among other publications. Several years ago, Richard and Joshua surprised her by publishing her first book of poetry, *Pumpkinhead*.