

## Susan Vespoli – Two Poems

### I'm the Screamer in the Munch Painting

Turns out I have a temper.  
Yes, it's a shock to me, too.  
Look at my OMG facial expression,  
mouth in the *Oh!* position. Palms  
to my cheeks in the *My-God*,  
I thought I was perfect. Oh, sure,  
I'm a fan of colorful language,  
a freak for the F word,  
(Don't ask me to give up the F word.)  
But, imperfect?

Can I forgive me?  
Even heaven throws tantrums.  
Watch her lob flame spears of blood  
and orange. And the ocean? How she  
froths while throttling the pier. So, yes.  
I'm a screamer when angry,  
and though I don't have devil horns  
or a pitchfork, I've learned my wings  
are just scapula. And, a halo? Never  
had one, just this human dome of flesh  
over skull that flashes with furious light.

### On the Day You Were Born

I woke at 2:00 a.m. with my first contraction and thought, *this can't be it.*  
*It hurts too much.* On the day you were born, my older sister was still up,  
her hair wrapped around an orange juice can clipped to the top of her head.

On the day you were born, the whole house rattled awake. My parents,  
your father, who was sleeping in the basement, caravanned us  
to Andrew's Air Force Base Hospital. On the day you were born, I was 17,

had long sheets of brown hair, and no idea about pretty much anything.  
On the day you were born, I was led to a bed in the maternity ward,  
a long row of us faced the same wall, partitioned by curtains for privacy.

Next to each bed, a chair, where each of my three took a turn sitting,  
while the others hung out in the hall. My mother, a hot ball of nerves,  
a tornado of knitting needles and pastel yarn, sat mum,

hadn't spoken to me much in nine months, except *pass the salt*  
and *we'd wanted more for you*. Your father, an 18-year-old dude I'd marry  
a week later, because that was what one did in 1973. It didn't last.

My dad, the calmest companion, Zen military officer in a chair.  
On the day you were born, the woman on the left of my curtain cried  
until she was gurneyed to the delivery room. The woman on my right

whimpered like a puppy and someone a few beds down screamed.  
Nurses measured progress with fingers, slipped theirs into me, sighed, *still*  
*at three centimeters*, left, returned, *still at three centimeters*, pointed to the wall

graph of circles that opened to the coveted ten. One nurse gave me a crash  
course in Lamaze breathing and maybe that helped, because by 10 p.m.  
I was rolled into a room where a doctor I didn't know stood between my legs

with a scalpel saying the word *episiotomy*. On the day you were born, my belly  
writhed and squeezed until presto, you were held in the air like a small plane,  
your eyes asking, *where am I?* Your mouth a ruby cheerio ready to wail,

and as the doctor threaded his needle, you were whisked through metal doors  
not to be seen again till morning when, into a room of new mommies on beds,  
me one of them, you were rolled in a Dr. Seuss-style 12-baby-slot stroller full  
of tightly wrapped burritos with squished faces and I immediately recognized yours.

**Susan Vespoli** writes poems and essays from Phoenix, Arizona. When she's not writing,  
she's walking her dogs, riding her bike, or leading virtual writing circles on Zoom. Her  
work has been published in *Rattle*, *Nasty Women Poets Anthology*, *Mom Egg Review* and  
others. For more, check out her website at [susanvespoli](http://susanvespoli.com)