

## Cake Mistake

Peggy made a huge mistake  
when she baked a  
grocery store celebration cake.  
She put a *D*  
where a *T* should be  
in the middle of the  
word *CONGRATULATIONS*.

The customer was pissed.  
But Peggy kept silent  
as the irate woman left the store  
without paying for her order.

Peggy's manager docked her pay,  
and yelled at her for making  
such a stupid mistake,  
to which Peggy replied:

"Look, I never went to college  
and there's no spell-check when baking a cake.  
And I'm sorry I screwed up, but I think that *D*  
will taste just as sweet as a *T*,  
so I'll take that cake home for my kids to eat."

Aplomb

When I was a kid,  
my mother's execution of  
the silent treatment  
erected a scaffolding of shame.

But her rejection in my youth  
produced equanimity in adulthood.

And so I thank her for the mettle  
her emotional abuse constructed.

## Craniopharyngioma (Youthful Diary Entry)

Craniopharyngioma gave me  
an excuse for being unattractive.  
I had a problem inside my head.  
It wasn't my fault  
I stood four foot eight inches tall  
and looked like I was  
twelve years old instead of eighteen—  
and then nineteen  
instead of twenty-four.  
I couldn't be blamed for  
my sans-testosterone body  
straddling the line  
between male and female.

The brain tumor  
spurred questions  
about my appearance,  
aroused ridicule,  
and provoked sympathy.  
I heard voices whispering:  
“Guess how old that guy is?”  
And, “Is that a dude or a chick?”

And while I waited for my  
body to mature, to fall in line,  
and to achieve normal progression,  
I remember wishing the surgeons  
had left the scalpel  
inside my skull  
before they closed me up,  
knitting the stitches  
from ear to ear.

I prayed the scalpel  
would twist and twirl  
while I slept at night—  
carving my brain  
like a jack-o'-lantern—  
splitting the left and right  
hemispheres,  
and effacing the memory  
of my existence.

## Somebody

Every person is worthy of love.  
When you look up  
and see somebody on the street,  
just think—  
someone out there  
cares if that somebody  
comes home tonight.

## Crying at Bedtime

Nothing prepares a parent  
for the tantrums of an autistic child.  
There's no well of patience to draw from.  
You adapt. You divert. You distract.  
You do whatever it takes to calm the child down—  
until you earn that blessed moment of peace,  
when his eyelids drop and he drifts off to sleep,  
his small body folded in the cradle of your arms.

## Fingers in Hair

I run my fingers through  
my son's tangled mop of brown hair  
as he lies next to me in bed.  
It's 4:30 a.m. and we can't fall asleep.

He waves his hands in front of his eyes,  
making stimming motions,  
and I imagine his head slamming  
against the windshield,  
a spiderweb crack forming  
in the sheet of glass and  
blood pouring from  
an opening in his skull.

I press my hand to his head  
to try to stop the bleeding,  
but the crimson liquid  
slips through my fingers  
and stains the carpet  
and fabric seat covers.

I am reminded of a  
Gospel passage (Luke 12:7 NIV):  
“Indeed, the very hairs  
of your head are all numbered.”

I hold some of my son's hairs  
in my hand and realize  
I cannot prevent a  
car accident, fall, gunshot wound,  
or disease from killing my son.  
I can't prolong or preserve his life.  
I can only love him while he still lives.

His hands whip in front of his face,  
and he prattles phrases  
only he understands.  
I bury my fingers deeper  
into the mound of his hair and whisper,  
“Come on now, sleepy time, Colin.”