

SOS: Sand Turtles Stranded at Doe Lake

By Kirsten Elmer

Somewhere,
In the middle of nowhere,
There's this tiny lake that's
Overpopulated with sunfish.
"The Family Lake," Dad calls it,
When all it really is
Is slimy water which thick furred dogs
Splash around in and lap up with drooling mouths
While children reeking of too much sunscreen
Stuff sand into their bathing suits on the beach.

There was the year that I was six
And my siblings and I
Made sand turtles on the shore.
Later that night I sat on the dock
Waiting for my turtle to go home,
But it got too dark and Mom called me inside,
Saying, "Don't worry, he'll make it."
But I know my turtle never found the sea.

There was the year my mom dropped
Her thick gold rimmed glasses
Into the lake because my dad
Waved a sunfish in her face and laughed.
And then there was the year my dog dropped
His whole tiny legged body
Into the lake and got stuck under the boat
And my dad had to jump in to save him.

Every year of my life,
Of my brother's, of my sister's lives,
Of my mother's married life,
Has been dropped into that lake.
My father has spent these years splashing around;
My mother, sun bathing on a raft;
My siblings, wading in shallow clear water;
While I swallow thick gulps of water as
Seaweed coils around my ankles
And my aunts and uncles dissect me with their words—

"So are you eating tonight?"

"Do you *eat* meat?"

"Do you run marathons,

Like your father,
Like your sister,
Your brother?"

There was the year I told my dad
That I didn't want to go back,
And he told me the story about how
He used to eat peanut butter down on the docks
Of his grandparents' cottage on that same lake.
The story I've heard a thousand times before.
And he reminds me of the time
I won the fishing derby when I was seven,
And he pushes me to miss all that.

So I drop another year into that lake
With all the washed away turtles
Who never found the sea.