

Carl Leggo

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## Swallow Light

In September trapped sun, for the first time,  
Carrie and I sat on her back porch, and talked  
about growing old and holding fast to life.

My mother said, *Learn to be happy.*  
I almost asked,  
What is the curriculum of joy?,  
but I didn't want to sound like Mr. Rogers.

Recalling childhood is like swallows  
flying light in a blackberry bramble.

For our mother's birthday, my brother and I once bought  
a beer mug from Woolworth's, a wild woman's image,  
wide grin, flared nostrils, like the monstrous other that scares  
Abbott and Costello in *Africa Screams*, and my brother and I  
carried our amazing find to Carrie who aped our glow, even  
though we then knew she'd never win an Oscar.  
She still has the mug.

*Remember Maxine Porter?*  
*In middle age, she said, I have wasted much of my life.*  
*I don't want to waste any more. I hope I have the heart for life.*

She told me about Canada Day, how she went  
to Margaret Bowater Park and amidst the crowds

celebrating, saw noone she knew.  
*One time, I knew everybody in Corner Brook.*

She knows the peril of a long healthy life,  
the memory seared in longing.

*Carrie said, Stuart Stuckless joined the circus, hurt his back,  
got a settlement, everything taken into account, he did well.*

On Wednesdays when Carrie baked bread she wore  
faded blue mauve pink panties on her head to prevent  
stray hairs falling into the dough, and the kitchen window  
always steamed up, the world condensed, hidden.

*You can never have enough life  
to do all the things you want to do.*

Carrie told me stories about other mothers  
like she was seeking the ingredients for a stone soup  
we might enjoy together in late lean winter days.

*When Daisy Parsons got Alzheimer's,  
her sons Fred and Ted cared for her  
like two nurses on Dr. Kildare.  
They couldn't put her in a home  
because they needed her old age pension.*

Memory is a winter window, stained frost, light etched lines.

*Every Sunday Francis Dove's mother went to church.  
Francis parked his car at the bottom of Lynch's Lane,  
and slid his mother down the hill on a piece of linoleum,  
and the neighbours always said, Like a saint, nothing stops her.*

I grew up on winter weekends eating moose meat stewed  
long and tender, and my mother's homemade bread  
spread with Good Luck margarine and Demerara molasses,  
mouthfuls of sticky soft sweet steam.

*Did you know if you eat a lot of beets you will pee red  
and scare yourself half to death with fears of death?*

Like the pond skater knows shadows, fissures, vibrations,  
the resonant text read hypertextually, poised between

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sun and night, I no longer know the way back, but  
Carrie's wisdom like fridge magnets might guide me still:

*always remember to forget  
what you don't know won't hurt you  
always remember somebody nice  
kindness somehow stays with you  
be open to new ideas  
we're getting older like everybody else  
be nice to want nothing  
everything is good*

As a boy Carrie always bought me McGregor Happy Foot socks.  
The other day I bought a pair. I might even take up dancing.



*Carl Leggo and his mother, Kerry Leggo, summer 2007.  
Photo: Lana Verge.*