

## A Selection of Poems from *Voices* 2006

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# ETTIE TAICHMAN

## *THE CONSTRUCTION WORKER*

Just yesterday he was huddled on the arm  
of a high rise crane, a tiny morsel  
about to be swallowed by flames  
raging below.

Then a dramatic rescue  
as he, suspended at the end of a rope,  
flailed wildly in the empty air.

But today, he's sitting solidly on a couch,  
easy morning life on the early show.

The host, genial, leans toward him  
asks how it felt.

He leans back to reflect,  
temples throbbing,  
face shiny with sweat,  
lips poised to speak,  
as though a mouthful of words inside.

But this man can't say a thing.  
Nothing. Just the rhythm of his breath  
here, now, alive.

The host bends closer,  
a vacuum cleaner,  
intent on sucking  
a simple answer from this man.

But the man needs to be still  
for he's just seen the endpoint  
and anyone can tell  
he needs to keep it  
inside himself  
a while longer.

# CARMEN H. MASON

## *IF*

If, when little Rumi's sleeping  
and baby Tess is lying still with  
pudgy arms out to the world  
and the Scarlet Tanager is  
flashing crimson against the blatant sky  
if I walk out onto the porch and sway  
my arms wrapped round myself  
as once a lover did  
and cry

oh world, I will  
not see them through to where  
they're going, so small, so full  
of here and now, so tender new

If I feel my aching knees  
and weakening arms as I  
hug myself, my mouth now dry  
my hair no longer braided  
thick and roping down my back  
the porch now darkening  
all about me  
who shall not say, seeing me sway  
and cry  
the scarlet bird gone into night  
who shall not say I was greeting  
the night as a lover might  
rather than saying goodbye  
goodbye?

# JUDITH PINES FRIED

## *ONCE I MOVED TO APTOS*

The Aptos house was new —  
unlived in before.  
All the other places  
had pasts of their own  
to which were added  
the varied tunes of my tenures.

Wilshire Boulevard hummed  
down the block for twenty-five years.  
In Dallas the flightpath shifted with the winds.  
West 83rd Street roared of Broadway.  
West End Avenue had car alarms.  
Waco was so long ago  
I only remember the sound  
of chickens in the yard  
and my grandfather's laughter  
when my big brother  
lost at dominoes  
and kicked under the table.

In Aptos I had five acres:  
redwood, eucalyptus, pine, and oak —  
viewed from every window  
in terrible silence.

I did not live there long.

# ALMA GUINNESS

## *THE WORKING WORLD*

The working world, said Eliza Pouch,  
Is fine for me, for I'm no slouch.  
I know the rules; there are rules without number.  
I've no bad habits to mar or encumber.  
I get there early; I stay there late.  
I'm perfectly charming to people I hate.  
I pay close attention to bills and invoices.  
I gather up facts for my boss to make choices.  
The coffee I drink I drink at my desk.  
In clothing I favor the non-picturesque.  
But you mustn't suppose that I'm terribly plain,  
That I look like I've stood for a week in the rain.  
My eyes are light green, my hair is spun gold.  
I'm round in all the right places, I'm told.  
How come all this toil? Well, it's this way, honey,  
For over a year I've been stealing their money.

# JOHN CAPPELLETTI

## *KRAPP*

This Beckett character pronounces “spool”  
over and over on a darkened stage.  
You’d think him just a senile, muddling fool  
but not some tragic figure in his rage

like Lear perhaps or ancient Oedipus  
on learning that his mother was his bride.  
But this old man on stage has much to teach us  
in this poetic story stripped to the bone

if we but listen to the poet’s song.  
The sound of words has superceded meaning.  
In melody there is no right or wrong.  
What this rapt gent is hearing must be pleasing

or why would he repeat himself like this?  
“Spool. Spool,” he says, savoring each sip of sound  
like a glass of absinthe or a young girl’s kiss,  
while he beams like a little lad who’s found

ten pence cleansed on a rainy Dublin street.  
The years of his life sit in boxes on a shelf:  
tape-recorded journals easy to repeat  
played on his birthday to celebrate himself.

He listens as his voice of younger years

relates the annual summaries of his life.  
He doesn’t like the pompous self he hears  
unless that voice is speaking of his wife

or lover. Otherwise, he is as bored  
as bananas, or impatient with himself.  
A whiskey then is quickly, neatly poured  
and Krapp is gleeful as an Irish elf.

“Spool.” The sound rolls over his tongue like hills.  
The valleys lie in this year’s birthday tape.  
There’s nothing to report this year but ills  
and the sad regret old age cannot escape.

It’s bloodless winter here in this gray place  
where Krapp’s old shuffling shoes scrape on the  
stage  
and silence shouts the absence of an embrace.  
The stories stored on tape or on the page

are texts for nothing, endgames played by fools.  
But sound, the musical shape of words, gives  
pleasure  
and warms Krapp’s sorry heart with soothing  
“spools.”  
This landscape’s bleak but not devoid of treasure.

A suckling’s sound can still cheer this old boy  
and tickle a timeworn tongue with newborn joy.