

**Jim Ciletti** □

*Pikes Peak Poet Laureate 2010-2012*

## **SELECTED POEMS**



### **Chopping Firewood**

I love splitting wood on winter days when  
air holds my face with cold hands  
my mouth breathes out white sky  
warm sunlight soothes my bruised bones.

I love splitting wood on winter days  
when I roll these barreled stumps  
to a certain distance before me,  
separate my feet, and dig in my heels.

Eyeing the center ring  
I raise this ax above my head,  
brace it as all the ropes and  
wires in my arms and back  
wind and coil to strike down  
this ax  
again and again and again  
like a fan blade wild in sunlight  
until the pine crackles open  
and smells clean enough to bite.

With a hand on each half  
I open the log and  
feel the pine  
fly up into my face in flames.

-- James Ciletti

## **A Junkyard Must Be Heaven**

*For Jimmy, my buddy on trips to the recycling yard*

A junkyard must be heaven  
When you're five and a half  
In your father's big red truck,  
Squidging your face against the window,  
Bulging your eyes to watch the big crane  
Lift whole car bodies into the blue sky.  
And the noise of it all makes you say,  
"It scares my ears, but it's fun."

The joy of it all  
When you're five and a half  
And can hold tight to your father  
As he lifts you to touch the yellow crane  
And your tongue tastes the happy air.

The glory of it all  
In the scale room, where father  
Takes his junking money and buys  
A cola of your own, and his friends ask,  
"Who's your big helper today?"  
And the pride of it all as father  
Pays a quarter to you as well.

Yes, a junkyard must be heaven  
When you're five and a half  
Going on forever,  
With a quarter and a cola,  
Falling asleep against your father,  
Dreaming, of returning again and again  
To the heaven of the junkyard.

– James Ciletti

## **Wooden Fence Post**

Tree rings circle the cut face  
of this fence post. The rings  
SWIRL in a pattern like the  
WHORL of my fingerprint.

Tiny frost crystals dot the  
CIRCLES with icy stars.

Is this why tree branches  
REACH for the heavens?

I look again at the  
COSMIC  
tree ring  
SWIRL;  
again the  
WHORL  
of my fingerprint.

I too reach for the heavens

## Mr. Fee's Doctoral Thesis

I was over at Mr. Fee's today when  
he was working on that Ford again. Shoulda seen `im.  
You know, he took out the whole steering column,  
pulled out the ignition wiring and deft as a surgeon  
spliced, fixed and replaced it all.

Shoulda seen `im, old Mr. Fee  
sitting in that big white Ford truck,  
his grey hair, his back straight, mind ticking,  
and ready to turn the key for the first time  
and that engine RRRRRRRR-ed and cranked right up  
and he hit the gas pedal and blew out the puffy blue smoke  
until the exhaust was clear. Now he's just sitting there,  
looking out over the steering wheel, glazed eyed,  
and you can see his inner ear listening to  
the engine with each push of the gas pedal,  
his inner ear an invisible stethoscope, picking out  
each tick-beat of the V-8 engine piston strokes,  
looking straight ahead through infinite caculations,  
sounding out for a miss, a valve tick, a testing push on the gas,  
a hard rev of the engine, a few more revs REVS,  
he tilts his head, listens one last time,  
face bearded with grease, he looks out at me  
shuts off the engine and says,  
"I think we got `er now." Shoulda seen him,  
his smile as wide as a chrome bumper.

-- James Ciletti

## Three Haiku

By James Ciletti

Robins in the tree  
reflecting in the fountain,  
black cat lunges. Splash!

I touch yellow and  
red tulips then blow kisses  
to the rising sun.

The sun we circle  
shines from the moon I see  
on the frozen pond.

## Word Magic

If this poem were pottery  
it would hold new wine,  
or if a dancer's legs  
these words would jump and jive.

If this poem were a stream  
you could stick your hand  
into this page and pull up  
sparkling fresh water to your lips.

If this poem were my father  
it would walk bowlegged  
and praise itself for saving  
five cents on day-old bread.

If this poem were the night sky  
you'd feel the stars  
sink their teeth into  
the back of your head.

But since this poem doesn't hold new wine,  
doesn't jump and jive,  
and you can't get fresh water here,  
nor see my bowlegged father,  
I guess the best thing to do  
is to reach into the back of your head  
and put the stars back into the sky.

--James Ciletti



## Italian Omelets

Scramble the eggs in this green bowl  
into the whirlpool, clattering fork.  
Ah! The aroma of sweet peppers, frying  
as they did in my grandfather's kitchen  
on a green and wooded hillside  
in Faeto, near Foggia, Italy.

Turn up the stove heat until  
the peppers sizzle,  
fork one out, daub it on a towel.  
Your mouth waters.  
Taste the Italian sun!

Now the eggs, whipped,  
tip the bowl over the skillet  
watch the yellow waterfall  
crackling into the hot oil sounding  
of the ocean in a shell near  
the beach along the Adriatic where  
my great-great-grandmothers crossed  
over from Albania. I hear our voices  
in the eggs in their bellies.

Oh, I love to stir the scrambled eggs into the  
sweet red and green fried peppers. Watch  
them bubble and cook into a fluffy cloud.  
"To America," Grandfather Oreste said.  
"Me too," said Grandmother Bruno.  
"A fritatta," my father, Leonard, said.  
"Me too," I say.  
"Mangiamo! Let's eat!"

-- James Ciletti