

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