

Back Home

We were in the middle
of moving her family from house to duplex,
we were in the middle
of the basement under the lowest beam
foraging through storage boxes for throwaways
to re-use the boxes for keepers,
when phone upstairs chirped like irritated bird.
We let it squawk in its tree,
remaining in dim world of outgrown toys
and the home-woven blanket
a spider had died in.

We were in the middle
of a break downing lemonades and wiping sweat
from our foreheads,
we were in the middle
of her couch watching the tail end of a movie
we'd seen a dozen times while playing dominoes
from opposite ends of that couch
when phone in next room warbled.

"Where have you been?
Regina's been calling you!"

It was her daughter, from job
where she logs more hours than at home.

We were in the middle
of protesting the obvious,
we were in the middle of common sense interruptus
when woodpecker whacked limb from tree past its prime:

"Regina says they took Gramma to the hospital."

This is in Spartanburg, South Carolina,
the "back home" referred to,
not this house, not the complex apartment
rented before it,
the "back home" where the family re-collects
every June
down the hill from the liquor house
and around the bend from the cemetery where
they'd first tipped beer bottles to the moon
the "back home" where birds at night chirp like
telephones and
now
like a bad chalkboard erase job
one sentence stands unfinished:

"I'd fly back home right now if ..."

We were in the middle
of a warm room turned eerily cold and silent,
in a house of short-term memories
collapsing like cards
into a confusing math problem on the coffee table,
this house
is as meaningful as a three of spades
to the sparrow Tweetie-Birding several feet from the
front porch.

We were in the middle
of a Twilight Zone episode
and Rod Serling was nowhere to be found.

Mark States

Mark States is a well-respected poet in the Bay Area scene. Performance poet, host of Poetry Express in Berkeley, facilitator of the Public Speaking for Poets workshops, he uses humor, parody and characters to reflect the angst and insecurities of everyday life. He has featured throughout California at such venues as Da Poetry Lounge (Los Angeles), The Ugly Mugg (Orange), The Starry Plough (Berkeley Slam), Oakland Literature Expo, and Café International (San Francisco). He was ranked at Berkeley Slam in 2001 and 2002 and finalist at Oakland Slam in 2004. Mark was open mike emcee for the Berkeley Poetry Festival (1998-2002) and coordinator in 2004. Mark has written three poetry collections (Reinvention from Mother's Hen in 1995, Grip of the Past from CC Marimbo Communications in 2000, and Tongue Control, The Laguna Poets Series #215 from The Inevitable Press in 2001). He has appeared in such publications as Oracle, Poetalk, The Plastic Tower, and online in Poetrymagazine.com and Muse Apprentice Guild, and on television in Poetry2001 and Touch of a Poet. The performance poetry video "Oakland Crazy" came out in April 2004.

