
POETRY | SPRING 2017

Bathing My Mother

By John C. Mannone

To the tub filled with baby warm
water, I guide her disrobed frailness
from walker to bath chair, she lifts

her arm from my shoulder to wall's
handrail—shiny in the half-light. I wash
her face that's sometimes wrinkled

with confusion, sometimes pocked
with laughter. But only compassion
flows through the washcloth, finger tips.

My hands cleanse her in secret
places, the unclean places, our eyes
touching each other's tears. I rinse

water, as if baptism, a rebirth pouring
in thin sheets down her back, each vertebra
a rosary bead I stop to pray on

for just a moment, while lifting her
soft-silvered hair stranded with beauty
of age, and a sorrow of not remembering.

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In the shower, my husband and I, touch  
each other's face, our lips softened  
in the same jazzy steam; we caress

our hurt away, thankful that we stand  
together, our hands on the other's back  
rubbing each bead of bone

in silence.

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**John C. Mannone** has work in *Blue Fifth Review*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Peacock Journal*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Baltimore Review*, *Pedestal*, *Pirene's Fountain* and others. He's the recipient of the 2017 Jean Ritchie Fellowship in Appalachian literature and two Weymouth writing residencies. He has three poetry collections: *Apocalypse* (Alban Lake Publishing) won 3<sup>rd</sup> place for the 2017 Elgin Book Award; *Disabled Monsters* (The Linnet's Wings Press) featured at the 2016 Southern Festival of Books; *Flux Lines* (Celtic Cat Publishing). He's been awarded the 2017 HWA Scholarship, two Joy Margrave Awards for Nonfiction, and nominated for Pushcart, Rhysling, and Best of the Net awards. He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex*, *Silver Blade*, and *Liquid Imagination*. He's a professor of physics near Knoxville, TN. <http://jcmannone.wordpress.com>

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