

The Good Thing About Almost Dying

By Steven Lewis

For my pal Jeremiah Horrigan, who knows better than I

Bob Marley isn't my name. I don't even know my name yet

—Bob Marley

Alone on the small weathered back deck I just
repainted, gray planks, white rails, glass of red wine
on the black wrought iron table, I'm looking around

through the afternoon slant of sunlight and shadow
at the footprints we've left inside this tree line: swings
gardens, sheds, playhouse, picnic tables, campfires,

flowerbeds, small pond, the treehouse I can't see around
the bend, recalling the daze of a virus that drove me
to the brink of a dark bottomless lagoon, opening my eyes

to early spring in Port Royal, SC, skinnier, grayer, weaker,
shorter of breath, but the same me, no one else in the bed,
Spanish moss waving languidly outside my window, not

the bare branches of maples and aspens back home.
I did not wake up a new man, reborn or reimagined,
no one other than who I am, the same me returning

to the mountain months later, same husband, father, brother
to the wood turtle I saw this morning, likely headed to a nearby
shale pond, stalled on the road, the two of us with packs on

our backs, ones we've carried around all our lives, mine making
me lean forward, watching my footsteps on the chip and oil
country lane, thumping reminders of my weight on this earth,

my shadow up ahead, echoes of memories left behind, a day
older than yesterday, a day closer to the edge of the pond
as I would have been, virus or no virus, and like the turtle,

I am in no rush to get there, pack sliding off my back as I sit on an ice age boulder to rest, to consider and reconsider the house, gardens, sheds, swings, treehouse, the timpani of crickets and birds

that will someday follow the turtle slipping soundlessly into the dark water, swimming down to the warm mucky bottom where we are, each of us, nameless, eternally ourselves.

Steven Lewis is a former Mentor at SUNY-Empire State College, longtime member of the Sarah Lawrence College Writing Institute faculty, and longtime freelancer. His work has been published widely, from the notable to the beyond obscure, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *LA Times*, *Ploughshares*, *Narratively*, *Spirituality & Health*, *Road Apple Review*, *The Rosicrucian Digest*, and a biblically long list of parenting publications (7 kids, 16 grandkids). He is a Contributing Writer at *Talking Writing* magazine and Senior Editor/Literary Ombudsman for the spoken word venue *Read650*. His book list includes *Zen and the Art of Fatherhood*, *Fear and Loathing of Boca Raton*, *If I Die Before You Wake* (poems), three recent novels, *Take This*, a generational sequel, *Loving Violet*, and *A Hard Rain*, all from Codhill Press. A new novel, *The Lights Around the Shore*, will be published in 2021 by Moonshine Cove.

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