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WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Who could resist paul-small-p, frankly, he relaxes me. In 'Deconstructing XMAS' he succinctly expresses those galling feelings that creep in as you pack away the holiday folderol. "Santa is squashed between Joseph and Baby Jesus..." 'Kalimera' recommends the delights of a wandering mind in a morning-hour's daydreams by the sea "watching as relentless waves / patiently grind the rocks smooth." 'The Early Birds' and 'Life Lessons' are each as comically written "I understand there are misguided creatures / that see merit in the early morning hours," 'Empire of the Sun' rounds out the*

selection. "November has been giving me a cold shoulder for weeks now, / about to leave me for a winter affair." There is something embracing and sharing about Bluestein's work. I think he says it best, 'accessible poems about ordinary experiences made extraordinary'. Spacing is poet's own.

Five stars

Deconstructing XMAS

Dying trees are dragged to the curb, weeping tinsel
and trailing tangled strands of Christmas-light spaghetti,
the ornaments packed away in red and green plastic coffins.
Santa is squashed between Joseph and Baby Jesus
and the Wise Men are suffocating in plastic newspaper bags.
Wrapping paper, rolled and rubber-banded,
will sleep undisturbed on an attic shelf.
The ghosts of Christmas past.
But there is no need to mourn; they will be resurrected
when the stone of Thanksgiving is rolled away
and bells can be heard ringing
at every supermarket entrance and shopping mall.

Kalimera

Just as the eye of the sun is opening above the horizon,
I walk the deserted beach, watching as relentless waves
patiently grind the rocks smooth
and polish broken blue-green bottles into sea glass.
Who knows what might wash up on shore?
Maybe a bottle with a letter inside from a young woman
who I will travel to Greece to meet in a café by the water's edge.
Maybe a suitcase stuffed full with money,
thrown overboard at the approach of Coast Guard patrol boats,
then floating for days
to make landfall at the very spot where I am standing.
No one would know who found it; no one else is in sight.
I could open a Swiss account and, in time,
buy a whitewashed cottage on the island of Crete,
where the bottle-woman and I could live.
I would teach her English; she would teach me to cook
and we would walk on the beach, collecting shells and sea glass,
listening to the waves

and greeting the seagulls that gather on the sand.

The Early Birds

I was awakened at dawn,
not by my alarm clock, which I no longer set,
but by a gathering of dissonant, 6 AM birds.
Chirping sparrows, croaking grackles
and chattering starlings, committed, I suppose,
to getting an early start on the worm-hunt.
But what do these worm-eaters
do with the rest of their day? Flying here and there,
bringing twigs and string to the nest
soon gets tiresome and so does gossiping
about the snooty, overdressed cardinals.

I understand there are misguided creatures
that see merit in the early morning hours,
but I prefer to keep company with the 10 o'clock birds
that find a telephone wire from which they watch the world
and eventually, swoop down to snatch their breakfast.
After all, the 6 o'clock worms aren't going to travel far
in just four hours.

Life Lessons

There are many expensive ways
to learn life lessons.
Buying a white couch
is just one of them.

Empire of the Sun

November has been giving me a cold shoulder for weeks now,
about to leave me for a winter affair.
Abandoning me to the season of brown grass,
chapped hands and wintergreen pines.
The fingers of bare branches scratch against a blue sky,
a red cardinal stands sunlit against the snow.
I envy him his wings to fly.
But I'll wrap myself in my books and blankets
and wait for May to overthrow winter's regime

and restore the empire of the sun.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I am an obstetrician and blues guitar player who started writing poetry in college, but got sidetracked by medical school, songwriting and playing in a band. More than fifty years later, I returned to writing poetry after I joined a local poetry group. Having spent many years writing songs, I found there were things I wanted to say that stepped over the edge of two or three rhyming verses and a chorus. Nearly everything I write now is drawn from observations and experiences in my life. “Deconstructing XMAS” is a slightly sardonic account of our family’s post-Christmas season, “Life’s Lessons” was inspired by owning a black dog and reading Billy Collins’ book of “small” poems (Musical Tables) and “Early Birds” is a reflection of my irritation at being awakened every dawn by the inconsiderate birds that inhabit my backyard. I live near a beach where I often walk early in the morning (since I’m awake anyway). It is the place where I can let my mind off the leash to run free, So far, it has always returned, sometimes with an interesting idea in its jaws, which is how “Empire of the Sun” and “Kalimera” were born – the products of too little sleep and too much coffee.*

Throughout high school, I disliked poets and poetry, The hills of meter, form and unraveling the meaning of abstract metaphors were difficult to climb and most often didn't seem worth the effort. Nonetheless, I eventually found poets whose work I admired and wanted to emulate – Billy Collins, Ted Kooser and Langston Hughes, who wrote accessible poems about ordinary people and experiences made extraordinary through the power of words. The world is a remarkable place, but too often, we are blind to the things happening all around us. Everyday events become wallpaper – until someone holds them up and says “Look! This is worth noticing! Even if it's a small thing, it is important.” Poetry does that for us.

AUTHOR BIO: I am an obstetrician and blues guitar player who started writing poetry in college but got sidetracked by medical school, song writing and weekend gigs. Although in high school, the hills of meter, form and understanding the meaning of abstract metaphors were difficult to climb and often didn't seem worth the effort. I eventually found poets whose work I admired and wanted to emulate – accessible poems about ordinary experiences made extraordinary. Also there were things I wanted to say that wouldn't fit in two rhymed verses and a chorus. I returned to writing (and submitting) poetry in 2018 after I joined a local poetry group. Since then, in addition to poems and short stories that have appeared in a wide variety of online and print publications, I have had two award-winning full-length books of poetry published by Silver Bow Publishing - TIME PASSAGES in 2020 and FADE TO BLACK in 2021.