

10 (ten) Poems 10 (ten) Poems 10 (ten) Poems 10 (ten)
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By Josh Crummer

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Josh Crummer will write for food. He resides in the Tri-Cities. The position does not currently exist. Not since 1959...Time for another State Poet Laureate again, in Michigan...No idea if there is a stipend, but he should at least get traveling expenses grazing for leftovers. He sent ten poems in and I was determined to reject at least one...no such luck. Just take my word, Josh is good, Josh is great, He's worth the read. If his titles aren't enough to entice you—skip this gourmet dish and go do a load of laundry...To paraphrase Seinfeld (an old 90's show, about nothing that ran for 9 year—(just check-out Drew's tattoo ;)): 'He's real, and he's spectacular...'*
[Tip: the line had nothing to do with poetry.]—Crummer is busting-out all over...
(To maintain poet's spacing each poem is on its own page.)

Refusal to Acknowledge a Beauty Queen

Miss America. Little Miss Perfect.
Miss Pink Princess from a crystal
kingdom. No-nonsense drama queen.
Miss Primp and Pretty, Pert and Perky.
Pick that salad combo. Pick that pimple.
Peter Piper picked unwisely
pertaining your material demands.
Miss Double-D. Miss Dancing Queen..
Miss Match my brand-name clothes.
Miss knows her man. Miss knows
every man. Miss my meaning? Miss
no hoe but the hoe who wronged you
for stealing your style. Mysterious;
mystify my dreams. Misty the moment
I'm never near. Miss me with your nonsense.

Kangaroo Jack

Back then so much depended
on who dated who that week
so I asked Rebecca to a movie.

Another Attitude Era milestone –
water bottle vodka during math;
“Outside” by Staind on every radiowave;
midnight peeks at Kate Winslet
drawn like a French girl.

When Tony Hawk wasn’t cresting waves
of a pixelated vert ramp
and Goku wasn’t wasting
five episodes charging Spirit Bombs

the villain survived anyway,
us boys dreamt of girls in our grade
with the grace and restraint
of a Jerry Springer brawl.

Last fall we watched two planes
disappear into a building,
are we next the question
keeping us up at night

so it made sense to live the moment
which sometimes meant
flying like Icarus toward a heat
we felt, we had words for,

but couldn’t define aside
from locker room bravado –
At that age, everyone has a plan
until life hits them in the face.

Her Cheshire smile, it’s
fading from my memory now
but the whining locker hinges
between periods, still clear –

and she said yes.

So we saw *Kangaroo Jack*
which I can’t remember well
but I expected more talking animals.

I saw ships dotting the seats ahead
as our eyes drew sails of our own
over the cup holder
when suddenly her lips on mine

again and again
deep breath and again
enough strawberry lip gloss
to quit Pop-Tarts cold turkey
and again and again
and

Down at the Riverfront Park

Leather-skinned lesbians sit and stare
at a budget Ozzy Osbourne
teasing irradiated walleye
while a seagull pecks vainly
at pavilion pavement.

On the opposite shore,
a salty Great Lakes barge
sketches stone mountains into existence
with its craning pencil.
Bicycles hum their ratchet buzz

past rusting cars and pedestrians
as a little boy soars
from his mother's fraying patience
down the sidewalk
while crashing waves of car traffic

spill from the concrete skyway above.
This is where our elderly rest
once their race is done:
white lace curtains,
high-and-tight lawns

frozen as their masters watch
water meander from port
in a steady pickup truck,
American steel
wearing five o'clock shadow.

Don't fear the flags these fishermen fly –
as long as you're not a narc,
the DNR, or worse,
wunnadoze goddamn liberals,
no one will ever know you're here.

I Don't Use This Often

Currently my hair is blue
and serotonin level is low.
Not on here to see your little dicks
and listen to your big ego.
I may be a snack
but I'm no hot Cheeto;
I'm more like a Wheat Thin,
looking for an 11
who wants to kiss my forehead,
looking for a normie boyfriend,
for female partners,
for spontaneous sex and fun.

All bodies are good bodies –
tell me what song you look like.
I'm always wearing scrubs
but I ain't no scrub;
I'm a professional wedding date
daydreaming of cheesecake –
tell me something sweet to get me by.
Talk revolution to me. Smack me
with your best pick-up line. Open with
your deepest secret or your best joke,
but don't get attached.
Want to know more? Just ask.

Live, laugh, fuck. Stay up
all night with me so I know it's real.
Also a job, your own car and place
are key. For heaven's sake,
have all of your teeth.
If you like tacos, beer and coffee
we'll get along great.
Ideal date would be pizza
and crime podcasts.
But if my pup doesn't like you
I probably won't like you, either.
I'm not here to play games.

Bonus points if you can keep plants alive.

My Hometown the Fallout Level

“This place looks like a Fallout level. ...what? It does.” – an ex

Here, history is told, not shown;
no wrist-strapped Pip-Boys spoiling what was
underneath these knotted trees and clay.
The Johnsons spent wistful years wishing
Zilwaukee was what Saginaw became;
no three dollar bills from their fledgling bank
circulated; and Kawkawisou’s lands
shrank from treaty slice to nature preserve.
Yet beyond the rusted warehouse beneath
our bridge, our brick Consumers building,
windows punched as a time card, life reveals itself –
local-league baseball pennants sealed
in the corner bar ceiling; lifted trucks swarming
the party store, clutching twelve-pack pollen
like so many worker bees;
empty nesters in windbreakers jogging in tandem
along a paved footpath as aluminum boats
start their cross-country swim downriver.
If our annual beard competitions ceased,
the men of this town don’t seem to care.

Never in my years did a Mole Rat or Super Mutant
shamble rowdy from the corn rows.
If war doesn’t change, neither does peace;
though this land changes hands
from nature to native to white man
to nature, a peaceful life exists here.
A quaint, quiet life, yes, but it is good.

Under streetlamps and stars I walked alone,
listened to working men weave glory days
from memory, watched child-sized shadows climb
metal jungle gyms long uprooted from this earth.
How foolish I was to take you home,
to hear the privilege in your voice
tell my formative years to go fuck themselves.

Do All Your Poems Reference Video Games?

If by that you mean the virtual lands
children explore in parental absence,
the last frontier for NASA's unchosen
to penetrate heaven aboard a reckless white shuttle
then yes, they're in every poem I write,
the same way every poet name-drops
Auden, Knott or Lawrence in their collections;
lip service checkmarked like an Xbox Achievement.
You think they're haunting a library, a graveyard,
some dive bar in Manhattan? News flash, nerds:
They're sitting on my cat-scratched sectional,
flatscreen glow washing our eyes
when we should be sleeping,
joyously picking literary plots apart
in an RPG played again and again.

Introducing: The Chocolate Starfish

While our elders at Monday catechism
threw a Hail Mary at our waning attention
by presenting Creed's song "Higher"
as a Christian song,
a paunch pre-teen boy whispered dirty jokes
to anyone who'd listen,
collecting our giggles and gasps
like a used car salesman.

Four years of stitching
the Word of the Lord
onto the hairshirts woven
by our parents and theirs before
undone by a couple questions:
*You know they mean
by a chocolate starfish, right?
Ever heard of a blowjob?*

I don't remember his name
but his voice –
like he'd been smoking
in the boys' room since birth –
reverbs to this day.
Shaved head giving off
ex-con vibes in middle school –
It was impossible for us
not to follow his words
down the glory hole.

Maybe his parents tracked
the star of religious ed
to our little brick building
wishing he'd stop growing up so fast.
Maybe they dumped him here
while they drank some hot dog-
flavored water of their own
uninterrupted for a couple hours.

The giggle nuance between mischief
and innuendo is subtle
yet easy to distinguish,
and our elders knew they lost us for good.
We never saw paunch Marlboro boy again,
the rest of us carrying
the forbidden seeds he planted
and the next day,
at the lockers,
on the playground,
this strange fruit grew higher

to a place
where

COVID Body

Morning mirror hints a thinner waistline
as wall-shaking steps burst my bubble.
I pass through kitchen portals just fine
but the crawlspace gives me trouble.

I'm not a fat man; more like fluffy recluse
farming cellulite under lucky black sweats,
accruing mass, storing aches in my glutes,
empty pizza box a certain clue of regrets.

Carryout will be ready in 25 minutes –
fuck that noise. Deliver for an extra five.
Call girls charge dunno-what per visit
but Lincoln bribes drivers to see if I'm alive.

More to love. Cake for days. Dummy thicc.
Each new lover has a plan until I get naked.
Thrust a little high and try that peach-eating trick
so she won't spitefully ask *You gonna make it?*

Winter won't evict Autumn. Let's walk, me and I.
Capture colored leaves on my phone if all else fails.
Ten minutes in, two leggings pass my right side
in tandem, in orbit, invisible rails.

I'm not as complacent on this as one might think.
Sometimes, when there's positive influence afoot
I plan to run a mile as morning sky turns pink.
My heart races at the thought. I stay put.

Rubber Soul

at some point
a man must look
deep within himself
and ask
if he truly loved
The Beatles
as a teen,
G-rated jams
about octopi gardens
filling stadiums
with dollars and pounds
stopping traffic
below the rooftop

or was it
tacit acceptance
from parents
and peers,
mistaking tradition
for wisdom
playing *Yesterday*
on repeat
during that hairy,
awkward time
where any god
will do,

wearing habit
like a purity ring
as booty-
poppin' bass,
45 beats
per minute rocked
high school crushes
two-stepping slow
as penguins
in the dark

while his vines
dug deep in
cafeteria walls,
certain the rest
of the world
wasn't as mature

Séance

Once I found balance between scald and ice, my forehead hit the fiberglass,
reddened skin hidden from the reticence and loathing

roaming the world outside while, in thickest steam
and fastened eyes, I conjured paradise from other men's minds –

feather down fields, Tuscan hills, blacker half of the moon –
when from a thousand miles away you found me,

secret entrance pressing my thigh;
lips nesting our shoulders as doves waiting out rain,

fingers tracing our idle palms –
until my eyes open, or water runs cold, whichever comes first.

THE POET SPEAKS... *A fair amount of the poems published in here are influenced by a melting stew of early Tony Hoagland, Eminem, Charles Bukowski, Kim Addonizio and Japanese jazz fusion music. Even bigger influences were from poets that I didn't like – Emily Dickinson, Rupi Kaur, assorted Button Poetry slams on my Instagram feed and more. But you don't learn if you don't give all forms a chance, and this mix has led you to the collection you see here. Many of these poems, however, were born from the ashes of a sudden breakup last summer and written during the most isolating periods of COVID-19.*

The subject matter of my work here – observations on incels, first dates, hometown memories, swipe culture, rejecting Modernism in high academia, getting fat, music fads and sexy daydreams – is all mine. Or, I'd like to say that, but that's not entirely accurate. I feel the moments depicted in these poems are universal in the sense that we've all encountered these feels at one point or another and they're at the root of our experience as young people in the 21st century.

The only solution to preserving the experiences of a generation increasingly skeptical of social media and elder statesmen, yet still trying to capture mindfulness and compassion for their neighbors, is through poetry. I hope these poems resonate with you in some way and encourage you to record your lives through verse while we're all still capable.

AUTHOR BIO: Josh Crummer will write for food. He has survived COVID, a 500-year flood, several economic meltdowns and heartbreak in one year, and he will survive you. (Imagine that in the Merovingian's tone from The Matrix Reloaded).

Selected recent and semi-recent publication credits include:

- Sky Island Journal
- Moonstone Arts Center
- South 85 Journal
- Alien Buddha Press
- Vita Brevis Press
- SPECTRA Poets

- Still Life Literary Arts Journal
- Poets Choice
- Cardinal Sins