

Dust and Air

I.

Sitting in a church, in a pew
cramped next to my mom singing
the melody. My grandma
sang alto. I used to think
she just sang hymns out of tune.
Either way, she sure was sure
of herself. I wasn't sure.
I would sing the melody
listening to my mom. I
looked up into the golden
finish of the wood rafters.
It wasn't just dust and air
blowing all around up there.
This was God's house and He had
to visit sometimes.

II.

Sermons always have moral
lessons: right and wrong, black and
white. They told me exactly
what I should do. Except, they
never told me what I should
believe. My father's parents
know their Apostolic church
has been chosen to go to
heaven, and they know
that when my father left, his
mind must have been poisoned
by my Lutheran mother. Where
does that leave me? Singing and
listening. Black and white. Black
or white. Baptized and confirmed.
But what did I confirm?

III.

The grooves of my footprints in
the firm snow reminded me
of a toddler drawing a
sun: a circle with little
lines stemming from every side.
Because toddlers' circles have
sides. The sun bounced across the
wide Nature Center path, through
the empty space between the
branches where this browned, frail
bur oak leaf used to hang. But,
it wasn't just dust and air
blowing through here, everywhere.
Where did we worship before
churches were built?

IV.

I've always wondered about
the people in history
who claim to have contact with
a divinity. Whether
it is real, or could they be
hallucinating? Lying
or misinterpreting? My
experience (in the pew)
is of a presence around
my heart, connected with a
feeling and a memory;
in the Nature Center too.
The presence is a pressure
that makes me smile sadly.
Love and wishful thinking.

V.

In the moment when I can
see both horizons, the black
sky blurs with the black dirt, the
world feels like one big doll house
inside a snow globe, and the
stars are a clue, the only
inkling we get of what is
really out there. I feel small,
as if life was His dream. But
maybe we aren't small to Him.
Like a teddy bear is to
a toddler – half her size but
her whole world. It can't be just
air and dust. I was left

to pretend

to believe