

# With My Family On Memorial Day

for David

*Wes Hempel*

We sit next to the barbecue, already two grown men  
you with a family of your own  
and listen to Uncle Frank tell how shrapnel  
spread up the back of his legs  
He waves a spatula at the smoke and fills his glass  
as he talks, white foam spills over the sides  
In Dresden the bodies like coals

I think of the only death I ever saw  
We lived in a comfortable house then  
four rooms behind the railroad tracks  
a back porch, a walnut tree  
bodies of cars in the yard

First we caught the frog in a potato chip bag  
then dropped him into a pot of water  
We were boys and your friend Mike said  
if the temperature is raised slowly enough  
the frog doesn't even notice

When the afternoon is over, you carry Jenny  
on your shoulders to the car. Donna pushes  
Chris in the stroller. Everyone kisses me goodbye

This is not something we do often. Years creep  
in between the days we see each other

Driving home, I think of the voices we listen to  
the imperceptible progression  
how it starts in the garage with a broken Volkswagon  
Dad directing your hand on the wrench  
There will always be cars to repair  
So you follow him onto the floor of the shop  
bend over engines where years of oil  
slowly seep into the lines of your skin

At night you drive home to the same neighborhood  
where the row of walnut trees, your daughter  
in the driveway with a hose, your son lifting  
his face from the edge of a bra, and the white head  
climbing the sides of your glass  
have nothing to do with choices

It is the same life we knew  
with nothing but years between  
nothing but slowness and gradation

It is not a question of happiness  
or repair, the reassembly of a life

We have not returned with killings every night  
a child's face ripped from his head  
each time we close our eyes  
the smoking remains of a man on his knees

We are two boys who yell Jump to a boiling frog  
two men who do not know destruction  
only this slow comfort, and the summer  
gradually rising around us