

Stolen Breath

I was five
when air didn't fit in me right
when running took the last breath
back then

I could no longer take
the deepest breath
filled with the crisp grass
or dripping in spring's pollen
it was bearable though
I had the river's calm pace
the soft purr of the crickets
the cool shade of the willow trees

I was sixteen
when we got the first car
its engine puffed
shooting black waves of smoke
the family eagerly breathed in the fumes
it pleased a sense of sweet ambition
disguised as greed
My parents dug out the purple lilies

making room for the car

I was to stay away from the smoky beast

lest my lung get sucked up

Into a black abyss

My sweetheart kissed me that day

I couldn't breathe

his cigarette stained mouth

mingled with mine

I was twenty one

Working out of the local dairy market

already having given up foolish high school dreams

My breathing was rather controlled

except the coughing as couples went by

gray mist pouring out of their mouths

The country-side fields were

country diners

the willow trees cut down

to make room for the auto repair shop

to fix the thousands of cars in our small town

of only sixty people

I was thirty two

raising a child of three
who pulled painfully on my hair
and made me forget
her missing in action father
she could run a mile
maybe more
as I watched from our porch
covered in tall grass
and prancing grasshoppers
she was curious of the walking sticks
the ladybugs and the fireflies
we captured in glass jars

I was fifty two
sitting on my porch
as I watched the bulldozer
the crane
and the large trucks
plow into the forest
searching hungrily for its secrets
in an instant something new sat there
that took up the air
my air

I could barely hang onto
another breath taken
another cough given
The earth shook in agony
as its children were uprooted
chopped, shaped, pressed
into something unrecognizable
I woke up in the hospital bed
They said I couldn't breathe
as if it wasn't obvious

I was sixty three
still looking as if I was fifty
yet feeling I was ancient
like the Egyptian hieroglyphs
or the Greek letters
No longer could I play
with my grandson
or daughter
who moved away from me
to enjoy the new wonders of life
I was so stubbornly against
The creations humanity took away

my breath

and I slowly die

wondering if I'm just unlucky

Part of me is interested in the

exhilarating hum of the car

as it speeds down the highway

or the ring of the phone

connecting me to those far away

but I do not think I could enjoy

such creations

when me and the earth I was born out of

are dying