

**Poems**  
**by**  
**Tom Weis**

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The four poems by Tom Weis are about Relationship, Love, and Life. And making life better is the central enterprise of the Kansas City Kansas Community College.

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**NO PLACE FOR VISITORS**

Your 16 by 16 home  
with the comfortable loft  
was too small for me  
and my daughter

And though your hospitality  
was generous beyond reproach  
I could see it begin to tighten  
around your lips

73 acres is barely enough for two  
and we didn't fit  
with our decadent city ways  
our fear of outhouses  
and longing for hot water

My daughter's light-up tennis shoes  
an affront to the night  
my camera and Bermuda shorts  
screamed tourist

We bumped you both coming and going  
and took the good chair  
not knowing

But for one moment  
my eyes swelled from emotion,

joy maybe . . .

On the back porch  
listening to your man  
pluck the mandolin  
and sing in his  
booming bass pitched  
just right

And my girl with you  
cracking walnuts for the dinner  
that grew straight  
from your land

Was it the whiskey  
or the cool evening breeze  
as the sun set

Even the dog...

Even the dog knew  
but then again  
dogs always do  
Tom Weis 8/02 (rev. 8/07)

### **KING SNAKE**

It was just dark

The two oil lamps  
on the table  
the only light  
when William brought  
the king snake inside

Thick and black  
twining and coiling  
around William's sun burnt arms

It was William's land  
his cabin, his table and lamps  
and his snake

And the value of each  
in its utility

No more no less

The snake a killer of lemmings  
that raided the onions  
drying on the porch  
and so a friend to William  
and his woman  
who lived alone together  
at the end of a two track  
dirt road

Perfect except  
for a scar on its belly  
the king snake tasted  
the smells of William's cabin  
with its darting tongue

coiling and sliding  
through his arms,  
a slow dance  
a long caress

But this moment was  
for my six year old daughter

who sat at the table  
anxious about her hair  
thinking about being a cheerleader  
like her older sister  
and shuffling her feet  
when William in his overalls  
asked her if she wanted  
to hold the snake

And maybe it was  
the hypnotic writhing  
of the king snake

or maybe it was  
William's deep voice that  
asked her  
in such a soft way  
permitting refusal  
tasting the air

She raised her arms  
and he draped the moving coils  
over them

She looked up  
smiling.  
Tom Weis 8/02 (rev. 8/07)

#### **MAIMING SMALL ANIMALS WITH THE LAWNMOWER: A BRIEF HISTORY**

I

When I brought the baby rabbit, not weaned,  
two others dead  
victims of friendly fire  
from the lawnmower wars,  
it fit easily in the palm of my hand  
or the shoe box  
on the passenger seat.

I drove to Karl Hemingway's house  
the famous wildlife photographer  
and big game hunter  
whose sons were halfbacks and handsome.

He told me I could either feed it with a bottle  
for four to six weeks and hope it would live

Or feed it to the barred owl  
he had tethered to a perch in the basement  
"He'll only eat fresh"

Like the wild foxes Karl had in a pen in the back  
a twelve foot cage  
with a tree limb for climbing  
the two musky foxes  
ran in tandem faster than squirrels

and like the barred owl  
not exactly pets . . .  
models really

The barred owl sat big eyed, stoic,  
two half domed silver lights  
illuminating him in sharp detail  
his image to grace the cover  
of National Wildlife or Ranger Rick

This had been Karl's line

Upstairs were the mounted heads from Africa  
hoofed creatures with impressive horns

Karl took a drag on his pipe waiting for my answer  
which, either way, would be wrong.

II

Garter snakes and hop toads  
more than five

III

And today  
pushing the lawnmower  
in that reverie that comes  
from doing something simple,  
surrounded by the engine's drone

With too much momentum to stop,  
I ran the lawnmower over a tiny toad  
big as your thumbnail, no bigger  
and pushed on  
over the top and beyond  
and stopped

And looked down

and the toad  
was whole, untouched  
though the grass was cut  
Tom Weis 7/02 (rev. 8/07)

### **PERSONAL ATTACKS**

I will speak of personal attacks  
in a Seussian way

for betrayal deceitful  
too painful to say

once spoke, so said  
worms its way  
through your head

rehearsing, retorting  
ripping and snorting

the sycophant rants  
and the pachyderm pants

a swelling of tension  
too tense to mention

metaphorical blood drips down  
ear's soft dimensions  
red and bright

Was it worth it?  
Were you right?

Mute to wander  
cinderblock halls

a chance encounter  
as chance befalls

you want to say:  
"you've lost the way"

but you don't  
your tongue glued  
to your throat

now all that remains  
of personal attacks

a chance encounter,  
a re-retreat  
and time

to redefine

the files of memory  
you can't delete.  
Tom Weis 8/07