

“Nostos [Homecoming]”*

**Collection of poems being published in the anthology “Still Coming Home,” (University of Colorado, 2018).*

By Michael McAndrew MA ‘07

Prick

A needle prick in the arm

Junk up the nose

It shouldn’t have been like this

She thinks back to how good she looked

In the uniform

Looking in the mirror

Even if her hair was in that stupid bun

What looks the best was how she saw herself

These fucking Whole Foods cupcakes

She knew she was gaining weight but didn’t care

The junk made her crave cold sugar

She may as well pick up, try to score

It’s not like she could drink after the DUI’s

Intoxalock doesn’t test for heroin

Maybe getting kicked out wasn’t the worst thing

At least she didn’t have anyone

Telling her what to do

Her boss

Her boss

Her boss

It didn't matter

The NJP had been quick

Nothing happened to him, but the whole command knew

The women under him

Push it away, pick up, go home, shoot up

She had a dog and some disability fun bucks

Seems strange to be disabled from something

That never happened

Don't say it, keep quiet

The dog gave her cold wet kisses

Her nose ran too

She held him close and breathed in

Dave

Never ask Dave about how his wife is doing
He probably got divorced again
In just makes things in the smoke pit awkward

Never drink and drive
You'll absolutely make it past the cops
The gate guards on base are another story

Never date someone in your shop
Things will go really well for awhile
Until you fuck it up like you did with the last one

Never get married for BAH
It's a lot of extra money
For the divorce lawyer you'll have to pay for later

Never go on deployment
Eventually you'll have to come back
That divorce won't pay for itself

Never buy a brand new Mustang
18% APR is a really good deal though
The dealer even gave you "military financing"

Never get that moto tattoo

Is that an Eagle Globe and Anchor?

You're a cook in the Air Force for chrissakes

Never cheat on your wife (again)

Especially not with Dave's wife

See, this is the kind of shit that makes it awkward in the smoke pit

Midrats, or, fourth meal

Hot biscuits and gravy

More or less snot on bread

Bacon

With the texture & consistency

Of an old scab smothered in ketchup

The eggs have the faint aroma

Of degreaser and disinfectant

A chicken patty

I get 2 from the guy

I cranked in the chiefs mess with him before he got kicked out

Luke warm already, 1 bun only

Skip the cheese, been sitting out

Cold seasoned fries

“What’s the seasoning?”

Guy holds up plastic container marked “seasoning.”

Fuck it

Don’t press my luck with dinner

The lines too long anyway

Smoke a Newport

Chug coffee, Black

Cram a kit kat in mouth, swallow some of the wrapper (just some)

A cheap buzz as I head up on deck

For the last watch of the night

Later on, I trade some pre-workout

NEW! LEMON LIME “FLAVOR”

To a CS2, “We good.”

For a shrimp po boy from the ward room

Might actually be fresh(?) shrimp(??)

The roll is soft, not even close to stale

This is the best meal all day

I think

As I wipe the horseradish away

From the corner of my mouth

I smile

Skip mid rats

Untitled

Moon

Coin on a dead eye

Only other light

The soft glow of the HUD

Hornet lazily drifts

Under lunar token

“On the ball”

Right between crosshairs

“Is he gonna catch?”

Fuck

Another pass

Wire gets skipped

Pilots lean back against the windscreen with me

Droning on

They could have made it, easy, one pass, easy

“On the ball”

Take two

Hits the deck hard

Caught it

Green shirts retract it

He begins to taxi

“Hey thanks a lot man!”

“You too sir, you too...”

They all shake my hand, head down

Break down HUD

Time for a last cigarette

Then hit my rack

As I do

I glance over

And wonder

Where did those bombs go today?

Not my problem

I spit into the ocean

I Still Do

I watched a man

Drop his wedding ring

Into the ocean

On the eve of my first deployment

“You dropped it in the drink”

He said it was an accident

But

He divorced that year

That’s not the reason I don’t wear mine

I got married between deployments

And had a hard time believing

Anyone was waiting for me

Untitled 2 *(also being published in the Blue Nib and Peach Velvet this summer)*

The inside of my mouth

Already tastes

Like beer vodka cigarettes vomit

Very calmly

I add the umami

Of a shotgun barrel to my palate

In this moment

I feel so Zen

Tears dry stomach quieted

My blood

Is going crazy

Staccato pounding in my ears

I'm outside on my porch

My wife sleeps inside

I don't want to make a mess

This is just a dry run

I didn't put the shells in yet

Not very brave, I guess

I put the gun away

Make a mental note

To try harder next week

Motherish

It occurs to me
Not for the first time
I climb into my coffin rack
More like the womb
Than the tomb
Strange kind of mother
Named after a dead president
One of a kind one of a dozen
A kind mother kind of mother
1092 feet long bound back to the Persian Gulf
The cradle of civilization
Her children fly from her
Full of fury
Just as quickly return
Slamming into her
With a frequency
That can only be described
As a repetitious toddler
Playing hide and seek
Ships are always women
Not always to suggest
A lover
The place a young man can call home
Bound tight in her steel embrace

Smoke, and Time, to be published in Peach Velvet, Summer of 2018

Smoke

You can see the ocean

Still, in the twilight

Behind a rope

As if waiting patiently for a movie

Everyone has their heads bent low

As if in prayer, or profanity

Little coals lighting tired eyes

The exhaled smoke hangs in the air like a fog

Like a mu'adhin's call to prayer

Start-ups begin

Last flight ops

For the night

Newport's Red's Basic's

Tossed into empty ammo cans

The after chow respite finished

It's time to go to work

Time

Time doesn't count

It happens all at once

In grains of sand

Or even drops of water

An ocean wave

Or volcanic eruption

On watch staring at the sea

Wanting to go smoke and forget

A different watch, staring into darkness

Waiting to see if any of the kids on the unit wake up with a bad dream

Sitting at a bar in Malaysia

Talking about nothing in particular

It's snowing and the kids need to go to school

I'm arguing with an 11 year old about why she can't wear flip flops today

I'm stamping my new rank

On a green flight deck jersey

I'm labeling the kids clothes when I get into work

I don't want them to argue about what belong to who in the morning

Whole milk in plastic tumblers with cartoon characters

Whole Red Bull's from Thailand, uncarbonated and warm

Tiger Beer mixed with Irish Car Bombs

Mixing Miralax into orange juice

Men and women who can't speak about what they know

Kids who haven't mastered how not to

"I heard you were in the army, is that true?"

I was in the navy

"My grandpa was in the navy, that's how he got all his teeth knocked out."

Yeah, that can happen

"Is it true you have to make your bed all the time in the navy?"

Just every morning

"That's all the time."

Uh-huh

"What war were you in?"

This one

"There's a war going on now?"

Yep

“Will you eat breakfast at the table next to me?”

Yes

“Is the breakfast in the navy good?”

Not really. Well, the biscuits and gravy were good

“We have that here.”

I know. It's better here

So, those are just some pieces I've submitted and had published recently; many of them are in various stages of submission at other journals. Enclosed is a "sneak preview" of my newest work, submitted last week to the Michigan Quarterly Review's Spring 2019 issue; on the theme of Iran. I hope you enjoy.

The ocean held the city in which I lived, high atop a tower of glass and steel

The city floated upon the waves, a little part of America-where it shouldn't be

Tentacles of empire; phallically extended, obscenely into Neptunian kingdoms

Aircraft carriers are (un)usually safe from consequence

Bombs and missiles are its only export

Our captain said we're doing our nation's business: "putting warheads on foreheads."

Many Americans go the whole war without seeing the face of their enemy

This changed when my ship entered the straits of Hormuz

We were told of a threat to close the straits (their straits)

I'm still not sure why that was a threat or even our business

Chemical attacks mines torpedos anti ship missiles suicide boats

This was all promised if the tentacle transgressed

Periplus, the Ancient Mariner, knew the straits but didn't name them

The Kings of Ormuzd we're wealthy beyond measure

It was they who named the straits the Hur-Mogh, or date-palm

Ormuzd was destroyed by a western power over a religious misunderstanding standing

The Westerners thought the Ormuzd were something they were not

I didn't yet understand, ensconced in the glass and steel

How vulnerable I was

I could not did not understand why we were there

At the time, I didn't understanding anything about Iran

My total knowledge came from propaganda and American 80s movies

In the navy, one of my jobs was to look through cameras and make sure what was happening was the thing that was expected to happen

Every day I put on my uniform and ascended the tower of glass and steel

I looked out past a tensely pauses flight deck, into the straits

Little boats all around the ship, bravely keeping up with a nuclear powered wake

I could dimly see people on the little boats, just a few

Helicopters patrolled the carrier airspace, like King Kong was on the tower

I stood transfixed by a monitor in the tower

A feed was playing on it, and

I could see the face of my enemy

He looked like me

The uniform skin a slightly different shade

Mid 20s dark hair eyes not smiling, neither was I

Looked like rather be studying at university

Maybe there was a woman waiting at home

Not so different after all

He couldn't look at me, I had the advantage

Not fair not just notted together by fate or luck

Almost seven years passed us by

I still think of the man who was my enemy

