

Elegy Sequence for Charles Coe

The eight poems that follow form a sequence of elegies written for and in memory of Charles Coe, a friend, poet, teacher, chef, and former NEPC board member. Some of these poems are haibun (a hybrid form that combines text, title, and haiku), and the final poem, “Pulmonary Embolism” is an experimental nonce form in which the starting letter(s) of each line (sometimes a single letter, sometimes more than one letter) form the title of the poem when read down the poem from the left-hand side, either phonetically or as is.

Our Collective Grief

For Charles Coe

The problem with being friend to all,
is when you die, when we learn
through the off-hand insta-scroll,
of your being gone (such an oxymoron),
of your *isn'tness* over and over,
as you were so much more
than just friend to one,
we can't grieve
alone.

Climb from the wreckage, you urged
in one poem about grief.

Oh Charles, there is no wreckage of you,
only a wreckage of us, a landscape
we must learn to stagger up from
and move through, a landscape
from which your humor, your wisdom,
the warm soup of you
was swallowed in an instant
as if by a sinkhole.

What *can* we do with our tears,
but sing, cry out, then one day find,
as you would have, the perfect punch line
to a joke about how much we miss you.

reading your poems our breath on the window

Food Storage: In Among the Glass

For Charles Coe

I should have jettisoned it
long ago, plastic,
with plasticizers,
not what I want
in my food,
but I keep running out
of the glass ones,
and there it is,
round body, round lid,
clear bottom, pink top
reminding me of the soup
it came home with,
a soup cooked
thick with squash,
with broth,
with more than a tinge
of black pepper,
of flavor cooked in
deeper than a well,
and all the other soups you've made
for me, for friends,
and then, for your own healing,
you'd told me,
until death cut short
your daily walk
to the freezer.

I want to pour water
into that container,
place it in my own freezer
until hard, hard enough
to smash into shards

my grief.

Snow's Answer

For Charles Coe

From the kitchen table, a spoonful of soup
cooling in my breath, out the window,
the mountain of sand, dredged up
from last spring's basement dig-out,
a great potential, but not-yet-realized spread
to regrade the yard, now a white mountain,
a ski slope, a sledding hill, looming large
in its silence, still waiting for more
snow,
and I wonder what is a god that stings me
through my leg every uneven step I take,
what god would steal my friend's very breath,
and yet at once reveal to the world such beauty—
the lace-draped pines, the untouched white,
except for footprints leading to the door?

The Imperfection of Loss

For Charles Coe

The vole scurries across the pavers
then underground. The last soup, chicken,
pumpkin, stalactites dripping with umami,
invited seconds. She can still smell it.
Every time she reaches for a container—
the round vessel, the round top,
plastic, still in the drawer, she knows
she should discard, but can't—
that was *his* soup, *his* umami.
Listening to music on his bluetooth,
she can't not think of his Rube-Goldberg setup—
YouTube, remote, search by voice—all in service
of some joy, a band he wanted to share with her,
a band diving into the cold, a band that sang
to the clouds, where he couldn't have known he'd soon go.

Now You're Gone I Bake
For Charles Coe

cooking with my dead pouring my heart in

Thanksgiving and I need to make room
in the freezer. Out come the peaches
from my trees last summer. After the thawing,
nectar. Sweet to spoon into mouth. And rhubarb
I cut from somewhere. And strawberries, frozen
so long, still packed in ice hours later. All these
I mix with cinnamon, lemon powder, and cornstarch,
spoon them into the crust, already baked hot.

stopping for pie on the way to the bardo

I hadn't Mentioned the Blood

For Charles Coe

I might not have called had he not made the announcement on social media—his announcement about the cancer, had I not been on Facebook that week, had I not read his post, but I *do* read it, and with my call, he brings me into the presence of his life. He brings me in to the soups he had stored in his freezer—several of them, so that, in his convalescence, he can rotate a different one each day, and I imagine soups on rotation like a line dance or a circle dance, a conveyor of soups for the purveyor of soups, and, during the call, I remember his soups, how good they are, and how soup can mean everything, or be a sampling of most things with flavor steeped in like a deep friendship, and I feel the joy in the soup of our conversation—friends, parties, books, music. What we look forward to, and how we are feeling. Then my promise to call again, except, with my own healing, the days slip. And in those few days, I learn of his passing. So confusing, so soon after our conversation.

painting the picture
unused *my* brush
with cancer

All the Ways I Wonder How You Might Have Gone
For Charles Coe

were you standing
were you trying to stand
were you headed to the kitchen
to the phone on the counter
was it ringing, bring-bringing
were you splayed on the couch
were you hungry
were you going
for one of those wonderful soups
you told me were in your freezer
were you off to get a pen
did you have a wonderful
idea a wonderful thought
you needed to get down
how hard did you try
before you fell
did you feel a pinch
a sharp
did you roll
did your eyes bulge
did you feel alone
were you lonely
were you alone
were you all alone
did you think about the word *did*
one letter away from die?

Pulmonary Embolism
For Charles Coe

Pull me to you
my friend, you.
Oh, how could you be

nabbed from me. Now
airy as the sparrow
embellishing the

old maple tree.
Is that enough,
my gone one? It must be.