

## At the Ohio Writers' Conference

Conrel told the story of Cleveland,  
Growing up there sixty years ago:  
How his Mom would take him downtown shopping  
And his Dad to the Auditorium  
To hear Charlie Parker and Dizzy play.  
Ida recalled the home remedies  
Her grandmother conjured and nursed her with  
Seventy-odd years ago in the cold  
Country of the Upper Peninsula.

We were lifted out of the ballroom  
Into the muggy summer streets along  
Lake Erie where we walked with  
The wide-eyed boy eating an ice cream,  
His mother holding his other hand,  
Wiping her brow with a lilac-scented  
Handkerchief and wishing for a cool rain.  
We faintly heard from across the decades  
Bird and Diz bopping "Koko" with fury;  
Their music living still in the story.

We felt an old lady's callused hands  
On our chests and backs as she slowly rubbed  
The stinking soothing salve she concocted  
Atop her wood-burning cook stove –  
"You silly goose, don't hold your nose like that!  
You gotta breathe Granny's medicine too  
If you want it to get inside you  
And work with this here rubbing I'm doing.  
God, you're a puny little thing aren't you?"

We traveled north and then back again  
To the banquet hall in Dublin, Ohio  
Where we cheered the nattily-dressed man  
And the woman with vinegar in her laugh.

The country of stories is a vast one.  
Sometimes we are lucky enough to find  
Companions who can show us the way.

*A poem by Francis E. Kazemek  
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