

At the Ohio Writers' Conference

Francis E. Kazemek

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.