

## Edwin M. Zimmerman

(1924-2012)

Ed Zimmerman was a man as protean in his professional life as in his devotion to family, and friends, and to the arts, especially music, textiles, and poetry. His poems appeared in a full-length collection, *A Piercing Happiness* (2011) and a chapbook, *At Truro* (2012). He died October 6, 2012, at his home.



Ed was born June 11, 1924 and grew up in the Bronx, the youngest of three children of immigrant parents. His father, Benjamin, came to the U.S. as a 12 year-old with a sewing machine hanging from his neck and made a living as a tailor in New York's Garment District. He never learned to read or write English, but he and his wife Toby made education a top priority for Ed and his siblings, insisting "a B+ isn't good enough for a Zimmerman."

Ed graduated from DeWitt Clinton High at age 16 and attended Columbia College on a New York State Regents scholarship, while working part-time as a movie house usher at the rate of 33 and 1/3 cents an hour. While at Columbia, he began writing short fiction and poetry. He also embarked on a self-guided education in classical music, traversing all of Beethoven's string quartets until he found his favorites, the final ones, which he felt "broke all the rules" and which, at age 19, he chose for his funeral.

Ed graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1944 then joined the Signal Corps-6th Army. He was in training when the U.S. dropped the atom bomb and on leave in Los Angeles with a buddy a few days later when Japan surrendered. He wrote, "The celebration lasted through the night. We, being in uniform, were repeatedly hugged and kissed by women of every age. We cooperated." Serving in occupied Japan, Ed monitored the VHF radio transmission stations in the hills of Kobe and worked in Yokohama as editor-in-chief of an Army newspaper.

Lt. Zimmerman came home in 1946 and enrolled at Columbia Law School on the GI Bill. After graduation in 1949, he headed off to Oxford to study literature for the summer then settled down to the serious business of law, first serving as a law clerk to U.S. District Judge Simon H. Rifkind then to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stanley Reed. He went into private practice at Sullivan and Cromwell in New York in 1951. That same year, on a boat to England for vacation, his name was the last on the ship's manifest; the first was Caroline Abbot. They married in 1956.

Stanford University Law School came calling in 1959. Ed loved teaching at Stanford—and taking writing workshops with Ken Kesey and Larry McMurtry—but he was equally proud of his work recruiting the best and the brightest to the Law School faculty. In 1965, he took a sabbatical to work in the U.S. Justice Department, where he served as Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust in 1968 and argued before the Supreme Court in *U.S. vs. Container Corp.*, a leading case on the antitrust implications of information exchanges. In 1969, Ed accepted a partnership offer from Covington & Burling and practiced antitrust law there until his death. Ed was also a Founding Trustee of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

In 1975, Ed began collecting Oriental carpets, buying pieces that "spoke" to him. His interest in celebrating the beauty and craftsmanship of handmade rugs drew him to Washington, D.C.'s Textile Museum and eventually to its management. He was President of the Board of Trustees from 1986 to 1996, helping lead a period of enormous growth and stability for the museum. The museum bestowed its Award of Distinction upon him in 2008 in gratitude.

Ed's deep knowledge of and passion for the arts—from classical music to textiles, opera and ballet—found its deepest expression in his love of words. There were summer workshops on the Cape with poets Alan Dugan and Stanley Kunitz, afternoons composing verse at his beloved country house, Goose Woods, and weekly meetings for nearly 30 years with the Capitol Hill Poetry Group, some of Washington, D.C.'s finest poets. Ed's poetry has been published in *The Partisan Review*, *The Other Side of the Hill II*, *Hungry as We Are*, *Ten Years-Castle Hill*, and *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*. He was also a featured poet at the Library of Congress Poetry-at-Noon Series in 2009.

Ed is survived by his wife and muse of 56 years, Cassie; his daughter, Sarah, an architect; his son, Lyle, a biologist; his daughter Miriam and son-in-law, Steve York, documentary filmmakers; and his granddaughter, Rebecca York, an artist and musician.

Ed's poems previously appeared in *Innisfree 9* and *Innisfree 14*. In this issue, we present a selection of poems from his books as well as a few left on his desk at the time of his death. At the request of the family, Ed's poems are preceded and succeeded by two poems from two of his friends and colleagues in the Capitol Hill Poetry Group, Jean Nordhaus and the Editor.

*I. A poem by Jean Nordhaus*

**The Natural Sonneteer**

*for my friend, Ed Zimmerman*

Whatever he has to say, he writes it down  
in supple, figured lines. He never counts.  
Yet there are fourteen exactly, every time.  
A miracle of sorts, like fish and loaves.

Always there is enough. And not too much.  
Ancestral music shuddering from the brain  
as if that measure, patterned in the genes  
were foreordained, a law of nature  
ravishing the pulse, a Roman justice  
closeted in chambers of the beating heart.  
He wears a coat and tie, a four-in-hand,  
and walks with grave decorum through this life,  
iambic, antic, musing as he goes  
on love, fine tapestries, and heroes' grief.

[first appeared in *Poetry* (1994)]

## *II. Poems by Ed Zimmerman*

### **Blue Sea in Every Window**

After too many decades away we return  
to the small house on the dune, to the white  
bare room with blue sea in every window.  
Time has mangled people and mangled places—  
there are gaps where close friends used to be,  
frames of new houses despoil hills  
and swales that flowed like bayberry velvet,  
the beautiful girl we knew has become a wizened  
bird of a woman. We walk the road going  
to the house where our small children once played  
but now see only brambles, the rose-trellis ruined,  
and cannot find a pathway in. But the sea  
is constant and its rote soothes us in our sleep,  
the morning light continues to startle, the sun  
is red at night as it sinks into the bay. And you  
defy the years and again become  
the girl I knew from the tiny sea-side town  
who is learned about yawls, ketches and skiffs,  
jibs and foresails, about the patterns of the tides  
and the winds, about who is truly skilled in sailing  
and who is not. I stand grateful and amazed  
that you trusted your life to a landlubber,  
unskilled, awkward, always surprised by the weather.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

## **After Pruning**

The apple trees stand butchered but alive—  
they will bloom again despite this savagery.  
Their severed limbs lie tangled in the pasture  
piled for rotting with yellowed garden waste,  
but my avaricious eye cannot ignore  
the wealth that lurks within the snarl, and so  
I pry out branches wide as arms, limbs  
thick as calves but heavier, and one stout  
segment in the shape of two thighs and a crotch.  
I am dazzled by this abundance,  
by this promise, despite mayhem, of more fruit  
from living trees and this gift of dense firewood.  
They make me grow reckless and almost wish  
for winter and its fires so that I can feed  
the wood-stove apple limbs and crotches  
even though I know it is unwise  
to rush the seasons.

[from *At Truro*]

## **The Limits of Poetry**

Poetry is not an instrument fit  
To convey the anguish a father feels  
For a daughter, most at peace with animals,  
Who is guilt-ridden at having had  
To will the death of an old sick cat  
That, perhaps, had not been as loved  
As retrospect requires, that now  
Is entombed in the garden's earth, honored  
With a pretty bush, and recollected  
In the quieter house as a purring machine,  
A small outboard motor,  
A motor-mouth of love.

## **Printer's Error**

The new club member directory arrived  
and I am dismayed to find my name not listed—  
not even an empty line to mark  
where, during decades of belonging, it had resided.  
My better sense instructs me not to see  
an eerie portent in this printer's error,

but the damage has been done and I grow jealous  
of those yet in the array of published names—  
figures on the shore as I am carried farther out—  
and jealous of all whose names are not etched  
in disappearing ink, such as the young,  
descending the escalator, en route to work,  
bodies glowing, hearts beating in rhythm,  
unremarkable, but belonging to every club.

### **The Cinematographer**

I do not know the plot as yet but know  
this night is fit for a dramatic exit.  
The streets are empty, the buildings ruined by fog,  
spires appear and disappear, and down  
in the harbor baffled ships bleat and complain.  
I do not know the plot as yet but know  
the camera should film me from behind as I  
stride into the mists and disappear,  
making my farewell to music of a viola  
that blends with groping horns, all falling  
silent in half a minute, leaving in the viewer's  
sight only bare pavement, leaving  
in the viewer's ear an echo of a Mahler song.  
I do not know the plot as yet but know  
the lens should scan the gloomy skies, and search  
from empty gray horizon to gray horizon.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Lovely A.**

I am authorized to tell you  
that we cannot live forever,  
that our cells will not forget to die.  
I am, like you, disconsolate.  
I had intended a permanent existence  
with time to relish every crystal truth  
the computer, retrieving and retrieving,  
ever sang, with time for every delta  
on the coastline of Brazil, with time  
at Svalbard where the ice is blue  
and indolent seals flop unconcerned  
until they push off, lazy, to the Pole.  
But now I know that lovely A.

who once presided in a black silk sheath  
lies disarranged—a loose necklace  
of bone in the earth in Queens.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Easy Women**

*(From the N.Y. Times obituary of Clyde Tombaugh, the astronomer who located Pluto, whose father had admonished him: "Clyde, make yourself useful and beware of easy women.")*

He left Kansas for the night skies of Flagstaff  
and began to interrogate ten million dots,  
sifting them over and over and over again  
until he caught a twitching residue of light—  
the missing planet, once X, now Pluto—  
making himself useful. As for easy women  
surely there must have been one or two  
gentle, dazzled, longing souls for whom  
the young sky-searcher was a prince of star-light,  
at least one who, had she been at his side  
while he looked and looked and looked,  
might have edged close to ward off the chill  
of the night's vast loneliness and who  
in a flush of urgency might have been easy,  
though he, no doubt, would have stayed useful,  
leaving her, who cared not a whit  
which smudge harbored Pluto, to confront alone  
the terrible enormity of the desert sky.

[from *At Truro*]

### **Googling Lionel**

Something the other day reminded me  
of Lionel, my brilliant boyhood friend,  
whose mind was agile, whose temper gentle,  
who at an early age liked to wander  
through mazes of mathematics and did so  
surely, as though on well-lit highways.  
It has been more than half a century since we spoke  
but his image remains clear in my mind  
and I think of him time and again—  
cheerful, quick, unassuming, finding

humor in the awful—and since I often wondered  
what he had made of his life and whether  
he knew what I had made of mine,  
I thought it time to reconnect, compare  
the totals, reminisce. So I went to the great  
vat of facts, typed his name, discovered  
to no surprise that my friend had flowered,  
taught admiring students at warp-speed,  
published more than a hundred papers on topics  
such as the asymptotic properties  
of order statistics, and displayed kindness,  
charm, grace, common sense, and wit.  
What I hadn't bargained for, what numbed,  
was the shock of finding that these affirmations of my friend  
were in a stale obituary, a decade old,  
that I had been harboring a ghost,  
that I was lonelier than I had realized.

### **Connoisseurship**

We are dropping like leaves from a November tree  
And I have become a connoisseur of funerals.

Some were scripted by the guest of honor who  
Cast the speakers and the ushers, selected the music,  
The location, the presider, so that the ceremony  
Was, in effect, a last work, subject  
Of course to a few conventions—the invocation  
Of some Deity or other, the preacher's assurance  
That the deceased was never happier, was being borne  
On the eagle's wing, had a Very Important Personage  
As a personal guide to the next strata of life.

Some arrangements were left entirely to survivors  
Because the deceased had not anticipated  
The event, or was too ill, or did not care.  
Usually then the adult children are in charge.  
They can be tall, impressive, in prime of life,  
Fierce in their adulation, in their insistence  
That the ceremony fit, but when the hooded  
Casket is wheeled from the altar, down the aisle  
They follow, crying like five-year olds.

## Family Day at the Ballet

The lobby thrums with the scurryings of the very young.  
Dressed for holiday they buzz in tilting circles  
around and under their keepers. A taut voice  
warns: "Sarah, you are starting to get lost."  
Then all file in for Columbine and Harlequin,  
for black-suited dancers with tricorner hats  
mirrored by small dancers with tricorner hats.  
And a golden line of dancing fat men  
confronts itself in miniature—wave after wave  
of replication as two generations  
glissade across the ballet stage.  
The viewers are in titters and the mothers proud,  
but I, impelled by something half like justice,  
want another tier to the array—old ones  
who celebrate, who move as best they can,  
shuffling, galumphing in slow arthritic circles  
but dancing in black suits or gold, wearing  
the indicated hats, starting to get lost.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

## Father's Day

In the dream I had displayed  
a singular defect of character—  
I had neglected to bury my father  
and the two black-suited men  
glared at me as they deposited  
their linen-covered burden at my feet.

I protested that all had been seen to  
years before—rites, eulogies,  
interment—but they would not listen  
and turned their faces away leaving  
in my direction only outstretched arms,  
fingers pointing at the bundle below me.

I awoke, suddenly aware it was the anniversary  
of my father's death, a date half forgotten  
but noted by some secret timekeeper,  
who struck chimes with the dream,  
reminding me of unfinished business,  
leaving me to grope for what it was.



[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Decoration Day, 1938**

*(March 15, 2011. The last doughboy is buried.)*

*Q. What was the weather like?*

It was end-of-school weather,  
short-sleeved-shirt weather,  
first-sunburn weather,  
line-the-boulevard weather,  
as we waited for the parade.

*Q. Were there bands and marchers?*

There were high school bands,  
American Legion and National Guard bands,  
bands with snarling silver trumpets  
and thumping drums. There were  
marchers from ROTCs, the Army Reserves,  
the Boy Scouts, and the Camp-Fire Girls  
wearing their beautiful new breasts.

*Q. Was your world a happy place?*

Adolph Hitler was in the daily papers,  
Mussolini in the rotogravure,  
Coughlin on the radio and in the neighborhood,  
the Brown Shirts of Kuhn in Yorkville  
and the Silver Shirts of Pelley  
in middle America, all gushing hatred.  
But we were young and played stick-ball,  
punch-ball, roller-skate hockey,  
basketball, and football on a rocky lot.  
Our parents were frantic, but we were happy.

*Q. What do you most clearly remember seeing?*

One open car with three frail  
figures waving feebly—  
drummer boys from the Civil War  
who had long outlived  
their great commanders  
who had been transformed into avenues—  
Burnside, Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan.

A clump of elderly men  
with boy-scout hats and khaki shirts  
marching with banners that pleaded  
"Remember the Maine."  
But most of all a mass  
of merry, youngish veterans  
who rode on floats of cardboard boxcars  
marked *quarante hommes et huit chevaux*—  
hero doughboys, confident victors  
of the Great War to End All Wars.  
They shouted lewdness at spectator girls.

*Q. How did the parade end?*

I can't recall. It must have petered out—  
they must have run out of wars.

*Q. What made you wish to write this poem?*

I did not want those trusting doughboys  
buoyant enders of all wars  
to perceive others assemble on dim streets.  
I did not want those innocents to disappear  
from memory without at least a footprint,  
at least a chord that echoes for a minute  
before the great silence.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Homage to a Minor Deity**

Fiona Ridgeross wore a crimson birthmark  
The size of a luncheon plate across her face  
But we, 15-year old boys  
In her high school English class, otherwise  
Intensely interested in feminine beauty or even  
The sexual attractiveness of tables and chairs,  
Did not notice the splotch. She had revealed  
The way a clump of words can resonate,  
Rise and fall like ocean waves, hint  
At scraps of haunting song, and what we desired  
Most of all was for her to write in the margin  
Of a page of our work, "How nice."

## **Anna Sergeyevna**

(Turgenev, Fathers and Sons, Ch.25)

After they left, Anna Sergeyevna  
Fell into the pit of depression  
Though Heaven knows why.  
She could not read, she could not sew,  
Could not take pleasure in the shapes of things,  
And could not play her proper parts.  
She was haunted by a heavy sadness  
As stars are hounded by dying specks  
Of terrible density that warp orbits  
And limn the diminution of our Sun.  
What brought her back only Heaven knows—  
A sunny day, a visitor perhaps,  
A false anticipation of a love,  
Some ordinary thing that made the stars less bleak.  
Something healed or seemed to heal  
And she resumed her proper daytime roles  
Although at night she locked the blinds  
Against the stars' implacable light.

## **Sleeping Quarters**

During the Great Depression  
I shared a bedroom with two cats  
and a snoring great-grandmother.  
The cats stretched themselves  
out beside me like young horses,  
their bodies rattling all night.  
The east window framed  
a grape arbor, alive  
with dawn's chiming birds.

In third grade I would go to sleep  
every day at arithmetic period  
and had to go to the back  
with the dumbbells.  
After I got used to the snoring,  
the dawn bird chorus,  
the rattling cats, I moved  
up front with the scholars.

Sixth grade, we went back  
to our big house, leaving the cottage

where I'd had to share a room;  
I got back my old nest  
overlooking oak trees.  
But I had to lock my arms tight  
to my chest every night  
so my wrists would not fall  
below the bed springs  
and be slashed by the mad man.  
Silent as death he was—  
let me sleep all night. Still,  
there he was, under my bed,  
razor ready.

### **Aunt Sally Got the Blues**

After they left and the laughter died  
she became lost in a dark corridor  
that seemed endless. She did not know why.  
Because they left? It was unlikely.  
But she could not read or sew or cook  
or play her customary role of being wise  
or take pleasure in the shapes of things.  
She was haunted by a massive invisible sadness  
as stars are hounded by specks of terrible density  
that warp their orbits. What brought her back  
only heaven knows—a sunny day,  
a visitor perhaps, a crossword puzzle  
that almost solved itself, some ordinary thing  
that made the skies less bleak. Something healed  
or seemed to heal and she embraced her proper  
daytime life, although at night, she locked  
the blinds against the stars' unloving light.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **The Family V**

Mr. Viridian, vendor of rugs,  
who used to sit on a throne-like chair,  
commanding his minions to unroll  
Cleopatras from Tabriz, Heriz,  
and Samarkand, was kind to me  
and helped me savor crimson lac,  
cobalt blue and aubergine.  
But he grew too old to tend his store,

and they stashed him into a colorless room  
where he would not breathe and did not keep.

Madam Viridian, who once was lithe  
and used her breasts as scimitars  
cutting to anguish each yearning wretch,  
grew too wide for a full embrace,  
grew too sere for a spurt of lust,  
yet waddled serenely in the night  
aflame with ardor, like a girl,  
all cochineal and madder red,  
and was kind to me, disclosing how  
there is beauty in a love of love.

Uncle Viridian, poet and fraud,  
who used to rock his porcelain words,  
purporting to seek epiphanies  
but only hunting the little space,  
the consolation of warm thighs,  
was nightly harassed by chilling dreams  
of former loves forever young  
who mocked how his passion had wilted away,  
yet was kind to me, warning me  
from aniline dyes and clinking rhymes.

ViVi Viridian, daughter of grace,  
was kind to me when I was young,  
and taught me how to nurse a drink,  
taught me how to nurse a love,  
taught me no and taught me yes.  
She vanished with swift elegance  
before she slowed or swelled or grayed  
yet inhabits every color I perceive,  
magenta, gold, or indigo,  
and coaxes me in my half-light  
to praise the family Viridian.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Sixteen Cunningham Dancers**

They assume stances Fokine never dreamt of  
even in nightmares, and move to control the chaos  
in which they spin They fall lightly like November leaves,  
lie on their backs, arms held up, hands cocked —  
(a field of flowers broken by sleet). Before he died

Merce Cunningham decreed that his hand-picked troupe of dancers would tour the world for two years and then disband forever. But they are defiant as they end their dance and sharply slap sixteen pair of hands against sixteen pair of thighs, and look as though they will dance forever.

[from *At Truro*]

### **A Young Woman Writes from London**

Life in general is not bad—London bustles and hones my imagination. But in November it is also raw and dark and I live in a cramped room. When tired I feel as though I am floating in a gray sea, quite lost, belonging to no one and to no place, with only tiers of fog on the horizon. I long for a clean, airy house, bright with sunlight, with high ceilings, banks of flowers, pictures coloring the wall, decent furniture, and a fine piano. And although none of the males around are suitable for the purpose, I feel in the mood for a violent love affair.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Kamila Stosslova**

Fame came late for Janacek and later still, at sixty-three, passion. Implausible, obdurate, futile it fixed upon a bewildered young woman, dark-eyed and less than half his age. For the eleven years left of his life he wrote love letters, sometimes three a day, that flustered her. Sometimes out of kindness she replied and tried to infuse sanity as when she warned that were he to know her he would soon be bored. But it did not matter and he grew more passionate as he aged

transforming her into a melody  
for the first violin in his second  
string quartet, lodging her dark eyes  
onto the gypsy girl of a song-cycle,  
setting echoes of her in roles of four operas,  
the Sinfonietta, the Glagolitic Mass,  
and more in the great starburst of fecundity  
of his final decade. And near the very end  
of his life, after a chaste visit, with her son in attendance,  
he wrote: "*And you are sitting beside me  
and I am happy and at peace.  
In such a way do the days pass for the angels.*"

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Five Pacific Bucks**

In the woods behind our country house  
five young male deer saunter into view,  
too old to be fawns, too young  
to carry multi-tiered racks of antlers.  
Each, though, has a sprout of horns,  
some more scant than others, like the first  
tentative moustaches of high school juniors.  
They are at peace with one another, travel  
as a herd, graze for a bit and then move on,  
vanishing together as suddenly as they appeared.  
I had not expected the sight of five  
pacific bucks and almost regret the fact  
that soon those antlers will blossom into  
elaborate candelabra, that these deer will struggle  
with each other for the ownership of does,  
and that like school alumni returning for reunions,  
each will paw the ground and shake his massive  
rack, showing why he is more important.

[first appeared in *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **Their Plenitude**

I'm glad my father isn't alone tonight  
searching empty rooms, my mother gone;  
he isn't well equipped for solo grief.  
I'm thankful the others are with him in the house—

the aunts and uncles, the first and second cousins—  
voices, cards, the smell of cake and coffee.

I never gave much thought to family ties.  
A boy is not apt to be amazed  
by eight bustling sets of aunts and uncles,  
or by "The Girls," my mother's maiden cousins  
who in summer houses fluffed my pillows,  
saw me into bed, closed the door.

Of course by now they're dead, all of them,  
the aunts, the uncles, my father decades ago,  
but the gratitude that surges through the dream  
is vivid, and whether I loved each in their time  
I cherish all now—their plenitude  
drifts down like rain upon my old-bone sleep.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **For Stanley**

Italian! Italian! he sang out scornfully  
to the opening of Mendelsohn's Fourth Symphony  
whose brocades of sound he found too flashy.  
And for Beethoven's Fifth he sang  
Dih, dih, dih, daah, and asked  
"So what?" and he repeated  
dih, dih, dih, daah, so what?  
My boyhood friend Stanley was a severe  
interlocutor of the music we listened to  
on clunky records that scratched and hissed.  
He was severe as only the young can be  
when confronting the idols of their elders.  
I was too uncertain and unknowing  
to inject iconoclasm of my own,  
but learned, almost a lifetime ago,  
that music is a conversation.  
Sometimes a composer is dull as mud,  
his music routine and vacuous  
as extended discussion of the weather.  
Sometimes the music has a little wit or flavor  
but ends up like a one-joke movie.  
And every now and then, perhaps  
in the middle of the night when four hours  
of sleep has fooled the mind into wakefulness,  
one encounters, in the dark, music



with something to say, poignant or astringent,  
new in style or old, but fresh. And like  
conversing with a brilliant partner time  
goes quickly, one feels brilliant,  
one wants the conversation never to end.

### **Farrell Declines to Sleep with Balanchine**

(After lines by Louise Bogan)

Good night, good night, there is so much to love,  
from the skitter of half-steps to the arced jeté,  
I could not love it all, I could not love it enough.

You sing by movement, in tones full or slant,  
new configurations that never pall.  
Good night, good night. There is so much to love

in every motion that you spin me to,  
how could I risk those lucent angularities?  
I could not. Love it all? I could not love it enough

and know the night's fierce murmurings  
are less enduring than your supple tutelage.  
Good night, good night, there is so much! To love

you as I do I must be purely motion,  
in the stance and orbit you devise, else  
I could not love it all. I could not love it. Enough

passion can be squandered in ordinary ways—  
I'd dance in bed as any woman would.  
Good night. Good night. There is so much to love  
I could not love it all. I could not love it enough.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

### **On the Death of Merce Cunningham**

A master of movement, Merce Cunningham decreed  
that on this death his small, hand-picked troupe  
would circle the earth in a final tour and then disband,  
even though they still danced the way he taught them to—  
taking turns skipping over one another,  
forming perfect circles from broken rings,

floating to earth lightly like November leaves,  
effortlessly rising up as though buoyed by water.  
And yet he commanded the death of his own creation—  
surely a kind of post-mortem suicide—  
perhaps out of fear they would soon be corrupted,  
perhaps out of jealousy of those who survived,  
perhaps as a witty unexpected motion  
that makes the commonplace startling and memorable.

### **A Piercing Happiness**

On a soft September afternoon  
in the garden of the museum  
seven middle-aged docents,  
transform themselves by wearing  
resplendent silk ikat robes  
contrived a century and a half ago  
in Tashkent, Bukhara or Samarkand.  
The cloth glitters with each movement  
and flaunts flowers never seen  
in the light of day, alien fruits,  
five-fingered figures that could  
be hands without palms or combs,  
all splattered with clouds of color unlike  
those of any sunrise or sunset that we know.  
The shapes are strange but the colors pure—  
shining golds, clear greens, deep blues,  
swirling reds and darkest aubergines.  
The coats were portable wealth to early owners  
and to me, fortuitous bystander to this parade,  
an unexpected source of piercing happiness.

[from *A Piercing Happiness*]

*III. A poem by Greg McBride*

### **Diminished**

*I stride into the mists and disappear.*  
—Edwin M. Zimmerman (1924-2012)

It was a good thing  
to tell his story  
with our stories,

each of us  
one thin strand of who  
and what he was,  
and he for me  
a keeper of the best  
of who I am.  
But keepers depart,  
one by one,  
a piece of me  
tucked under an arm.  
His story, my story,  
that intersection  
now closed. Remembering  
him, remembering me,  
I drive away  
under skeletal trees,  
turn onto  
Woodside Parkway,  
take the detour,  
and hope that when  
I get home, someone  
will know who I am.