

1985

## Great;Grandfather

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# Great-Grandfather

When you died, you left memories for me.  
I find them in this lakewater,  
In the shifting mud,  
The images too faint on my canvas.

I do not see the clear blue eyes  
That saw turn of century, two Wars, and Depression,  
The eyes whose center my elders eagerly sought,  
The eyes closed in the coffin.

The painting is of your hands in prayer, reaching for the sea —

Wrinkled hands with brown spots  
And crevices carved by weeding flowers  
You showed me but never picked,

Hands holding mine on the way to Lion's Park  
Where we stood at the edge of the cliff,  
And saw Sandusky Bay fight the rocks,

Hands shaky as willow boughs  
Pointing out nests in the cottonwood trees  
To unfold the story of the water cranes,

Hands teaching me how to skip stones across ripples,  
Scraping gypsum against limestone to spell my name,  
Hands washed in water and formed of clay like sediments.

But I grew out of the water, away from your hands  
As I grew out of white anklets and patent leather flats  
And went out to play with my cousins.  
My father and uncles conversed with you —  
Too soon content, confined to your green recliner,  
Your hands resting on the plastic arms.

Now I clasp your hands again  
As the water wrinkles my fingertips.

*Debra Benko*