

Three Poems by Lynn M. Hansen

Thirty-five Women and One Empty Chair

*After the photo by Sydney Ember, New York Magazine
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Secrets, like dark shadows,
follow him,
beg to be heard.
Fed by an ego
that mocks honesty,
drugged by his own power
his sleight of hand
produces
broken trust,
sexual harassment,
serial seduction,
rape.

No matter the drama,
mounting consequences
shed from him like snake skin
until his verbal comb-overs
ceased to camouflage.

“America’s father figure”
stands naked, his secrets
stripped from him by a tidal current
of revelation. Damaged lives
litter his shoreline,
tangled within a wrack line of lies –
sulphurous and vile–
baring faces he thought
would remain hidden
forever.

Climbing the Dawn Wall of El Capitan, Yosemite, CA

Thirty-two pitches, nineteen days
three thousand feet, two men free climb
a coarse grained granite monolith–
the Dawn Wall–
thought impossible by many.
Crevices in vertical rock challenge
finger tips. Rough and bandaged,
bare hands cling with resolve,
sticky soled shoes dance up
sheer stone face, spiderlike
belayed by web
of rigged ropes
spun out.

One climber, missing a finger, grasps
hand hold after hand hold,
puzzles a route
rehearses moves
memorizes sequence
manages muscle fatigue,
twists, stretches, lunges,
swings, dangles. Another climber falls,
hangs, falls, hangs, falls, hangs – ten times –
core strength and balance push
past the worst pitches
onto number sixteen,
considered a stroll.

At the summit, champagne sprays
celebration –their dream realized
their bar for possible
recalibrated.

Flashback

Hot August at Sierra Conservation Camp
where inmates sweat their time,
jammed into an exercise yard, wait
for the petite woman from Friends Outside,
the one who wears two different colored shoes,
listens to their concerns,
carries messages to family.

To visit with prisoners, the woman
is approved by the warden, searched
and accompanied by a guard who uses
a specific choreography to walk her past
the mass of men, guides her
through an inmate cluster to the small
portable building— her office.

Redheaded and fair skinned,
she wears an Asian conical hat, shade
from brilliant foothill sun,
and stops abruptly
when the guard turns and stands frozen
before her—a flashback of Vietnam.
With steeled jaws and bullet eyes
he says, “I want you to take off
that goddamned hat!” – a resurgence
of hatred for *Victor Charlie* (Viet Cong).

Startled, yet composed she replies,
“Sir, I am sorry this hat offends you,
it was my father’s fishing hat. I wear it
in honor of him.” With that the officer’s jaw
relaxes, eyes soften,
he resumes his duty,
disarmed.

Lynn M. Hansen is retired professor of biological sciences who volunteers teaching science to students in the local elementary schools. She is a member of the Ina Coolbrith Circle, Orinda, CA, a founding board member of the MoSt Poetry Center, Modesto , CA and is currently President of the Modesto Branch of the National League of American Pen Women. Her poetry has appeared in *Quercus Review*, *hardpan*, *Song of the San Joaquin* and *The Gathering 12: Ina Coolbrith Circle Poetry Anthology 2014-15*. She has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and authored her first collection of poetry, *Flicker, Poems by Lynn M. Hansen* published in 2013 by Quercus Review Press.