



**POLAROID POEMS**

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A SOULSPEAK E-BOOK

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*In this electronic version, I have edited some of the poems and also changed the order of a few.*

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P.O. Box 5932  
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Author: Justin Spring  
Phone: (941) 306-1119  
E-Mail: [soulspeakspring@gmail.com](mailto:soulspeakspring@gmail.com)  
WEB Page: <http://justin-soulspeak.blogspot.mx/>

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**JUDGES COMMENTS****POLAROID POEMS**

*Winner of the Spring 1995 White Eagle Coffee Store Press Poetry Chapbook Contest*

**Polaroid Poems** is a worthy collection. Spring is hard after meaning, and thankfully he isn't so bound up in self or the conventions of 'gratitude' that he can't detect the looking. His needs are too pressing for that: as real as the spliced narrative he finds himself in, as real as the goodness of that mystery, as real as the corresponding gaps in our attempts to understand ourselves. He wants to be loved, sure, but he insists on living as well. There's courage in that integrity. I enjoyed the ride.

**David Craig**

Contest Judge

## **AUTHOR'S FOREWORD**

These poems are an, attempt at a poetry somewhat equivalent to a *Polaroid* snapshot. In this sense, the poems have some of the qualities of Pop art in its breezy incorporation of many of the visual and verbal idioms of our popular culture. Indeed, how could it do otherwise, given the medium? But the poems also have some of the more endearing qualities of *Polaroids*: they are records of specific moments that are quick, highly visual, and taken from odd angles.

I might add, and this may be unnecessary given all that I have just said, that they also have many of the qualities of everyday speech, something I am obsessed with and which I hope adds to their "of the moment" quality.

Needless to say, they are also relatively informal in structure except for one trick shot and a handful of formal portraits that seem to be an unavoidable component of any album.

**THE UNFINISHED SUSPENSION BRIDGE***Tampa Bay, Morning Fog*

The bay is so white. Peaceable.  
 Everything is lost in light. Even  
 the normally boisterous steel-workers  
 are perched on cables,  
 walkways, hoops,

like angels,  
 gazing at the flowering light, thinking  
 what they'll tell their wives, later,  
 over beers. When the juke-box slows:  
 Eternity. I saw it. Really.

Even  
 the homosexual construction boss  
 far below them on the caisson dock  
 is lost in thought. Occasionally, out of habit,  
 or maybe the hell of it, he'll look up  
 at the hazy bridge as though  
 he could see, it. He knows the boys  
 are goofing off. He doesn't care.  
 He loves the fog, the way the light,  
 disguises things:

He's five or six,  
 standing in a neighbor's yard:  
 Yellow boots, yellow coat  
 He loves it here: no school, no rules.  
 The morning's so soft and white  
 he can barely see the house he left.  
 For the first time in his life  
 He is happy.

He smiles,  
 seeing himself again: A yellow finch.  
 Strutting about. Aglow inside.

**BAND GIRL, FORT LAUDERDALE**

I'm being ignored again. This time  
it's the young, blonde in the tight white jeans  
sitting next to the big plain girl  
who keeps leaning over, talking to her.  
But the blonde doesn't seem  
to care about anything, as if  
she'd made a mistake, thought  
the band was going to be  
Rock, but it's not,  
it's one of those young,  
progressive groups, and they're good,  
especially the singer, the way he keeps  
reaching down, giving me the shivers,  
and then I see her looking up at him  
like a small, wild garden,  
and I realize what it is. She's his girl.  
And the girl next to her is her best friend,  
her protector, the one who keeps telling her  
she has to be crazy, that all he cares about  
is himself, and his music, and getting high,  
that living with him will kill her.

But the blonde  
stopped listening to her months ago.  
How can she explain to Rita  
she can't stop, that she loves Billy,  
loves his music, that every time  
she hears him sing she feels him  
walking through her body  
like he owns it.



**COLLEGE VISIT**

Two lights, a K-mart, dog-leg-left  
and there you are: a tour of sorts  
with friends of yours, a joint that's smoked  
with several more, and later on, when I look up,  
uncomfortable at being high  
in front of someone else's sons,  
a soft, concerned attentiveness  
you try to hide as you direct me  
to my bed, a pumped-up quilt  
of reds and blacks, a Mondrian,  
hand-sewn, you say, by Roz,  
your friend.

    The room,  
of course, is your room: the  
iridescent gun-blue skis, the too-few  
books, the dark, cascading window ferns,  
the cat that bounds up on my chest,  
with four soft paws and falls asleep,  
not caring that I'm someone new  
who'd wandered in, who meant  
no harm, who'd dream all night  
of wandering through another's house,  
then get up early, say good-bye, and drive out  
past the dog-leg-left and empty mall  
as though he had another life.

**PANAMANIAN NIECES**

My Panamanian nieces are in the bathroom again,  
inventing themselves. I'm off to the side,  
in the bedroom, resting, trying not to think about  
the bullets of lipstick, the mascara, the gel,  
the furious styling .

A door opens.

It's *Stasia*. She doesn't see me,  
she is still lost in the mirror behind her.  
Someone is still calling to her, longing  
for her, *Anastasia!* She is unfolding  
slowly, petal by petal, *Anastasia!*

She sees me.

For a moment, we are both trapped in the mirror.  
She wants to die. I look up at the ceiling,  
like a man hoping for rain.

She begins

to laugh, softly, almost  
playfully, as if to tell me  
sometimes she gets swept away,  
just standing there, practicing .

She's looking, though at something else,  
something in my eyes before. How  
quick, how sharp they were.

**STOLEN POEMS**

*For Dixon Toro, who stole my very old maroon Chevrolet in NYC. It was recovered and Dixon arrested, 6 days later in the Pelham Gardens Motel at 2 in the morning.*

Two years on Rikers,  
that's heavy time Dixon.  
You're going to get it  
too. Glucksman says so,  
he showed me your record.  
Like a bill of lading,  
he said.

Crack probably,  
that's what Glucksman thinks.  
I remember listening to him  
in the Criminal Court Building  
nodding, Yes, Crack. But it  
wasn't crack Dixon,  
it was something else,  
the way I'd babied it,  
that's what I think,  
the way it gleamed beneath  
the vapor lights. That  
deep maroon .

You should've  
kept walking Dixon,  
punched a Porsche instead,  
got high for a week, bought earrings  
for Lydia, *plantanos*  
for her kids.

It must  
have been the envelope.  
The way it lay there.  
on the seat, crisp, like money.  
Dixon, listen, I know  
you read my manuscript,  
my twenty poems. I found  
them on the back seat floor.  
With the cans and wrappers.

And then, Consuela. Ah yes,  
Consuela. Who lived downstairs.  
Who went to Hunter. Who did  
the books at Hector's bar.  
Who smoldered. Who was unfuckable.  
Who was always reading,  
who couldn't take her eyes  
off you, who liked your friend's  
poems, who didn't know  
you were thinking of leaving,  
of writing poetry, that  
the crack was killing you,  
that Justin was sleeping one  
off, that you had his car,  
that Lydia was not your wife,  
that her kids were driving  
you crazy, that you had always  
wanted her; and Yes,  
Consuela, that he would slide  
down your belly, his tongue  
like a swollen animal,  
the motel door open  
and the traffic streaming by  
like rifle fracers and you  
moaning, No, Dixon,  
*Dios, favor ...*

Listen, Dixon, it wasn't  
the poems. That they weren't  
yours, that you used them  
on Consuela. I've done that,  
maybe worse. Everyone has.  
It's what you' didn't do.  
You should have called, sent me,  
a postcard, put a Personal  
in the Voice, told me some  
were shit, some made you shiver,  
that Consuela had unfolded  
like a wet flower,  
that she tasted like smoke,  
like a forest. You  
should have told me how  
it felt Dixon, lying  
there, pressing her  
nipples, when it all  
came down.

Somebody,  
you should have told somebody,  
Dixon, anybody: the guy  
across the cell from you,  
the one the jailer just  
brought in, the bookish one  
with all those poems. Look  
at him. He's on to you,  
and not amused. He can't  
believe you've got the nerve  
to hit him up for cigarettes  
then flop down on his bunk  
like that, your arms outstretched,  
and tell him that you're doing  
time, You swear to God, Your  
mother's grave, for something  
that you didn't do .

**HUX IS GETTING MARRIED**

Here it is, Santa Monica, I told you.  
Hux's place is just down there,  
past that hill. It's like a  
stack of boxes, full of surprises.  
Some movie actor lives downstairs.  
His girlfriend too. I saw them  
lifting weights one night.

Lea?

Lea's thoughtful, soft.  
It's going to be a good marriage,  
Hux's third I think. He must be close  
to sixty now. These late marriages:  
the wedding nights must be so odd.

Desire?

Of course desire, it's always there.  
But something else, a kind of awe:  
all those years of slowly dying  
in singles bars,  
and here you are,  
starting out your life again  
with someone that you barely know.

**A PORTRAIT OF LITTLE JS  
IN A PROSPECT OF COINS**

It has to be my stubborn side  
keeps me on my knees like this,  
flipping nickels up an down,  
hoping that you'll smile,  
or frown.

But listen,  
things change, Jonathan.  
You may be surprised one day  
to find you like the edge of things:  
the dog-faced boy, the half-man girl,  
instead of all those flat tableaus  
the world keeps hoisting up for you.

*HEADS OR TAILS?*

the barker cries,  
and holds the nickel high, mid-air.  
You edge up slowly, look around.  
He knows you're trying to guess the scam.  
You double-clutch: a voice inside you  
hisses: Heads. You see the rest  
as in a film:

the sly, attentive barker's eyes,  
the nickel tumbling, you below,  
the Indian's Augustan nose,  
the rush of hooves. The Buffalo.

**THE POET TAKES ON THE HEAVY THINKERS  
WITH BOTH FISTS**

Consider the wife in Oliver Sacks  
who saw life in snapshots, with gaps  
in between. Who always felt giddy  
when Harry came home. *Like a  
cinema housewife*, she'd say to herself,  
seeing him first at the foot of the walk,  
then in a close up, murmuring, *Alice*,  
before he flicked by to flop  
on the couch and click  
through the channels.

This,

she reported, was something she lived with.  
But then there were times the snaps  
were quite different: she'd see Harry first  
at the foot of the walk, then in a close up,  
murmuring *Alice*, then in the next shot,  
back on the walk, still rushing towards her,  
lips pursed to kiss her as though he had not.



**SARASOTA FASHION REPORT**

Fashions change daily now. We like it that way.  
They are printed nightly, like newspapers.  
It's not unusual to see the dead  
unfashionably dressed, unable  
to get to the mall, embarrassing  
the family.

Every once in a while,  
a hollow ball of light explodes  
over Alachua or Clearwater.  
Those who have been there  
say people are just standing around,  
looking vaguely annoyed,  
like loan officers.

The chameleons  
have begun climbing the walls  
by the hundreds. They love the pink sky,  
have adjusted to it, matching its color.  
From a distance, they look like fingers,  
or tubers, twitching, pushing  
their way upward.

A soft, isotopic rain  
has begun falling over the next county.  
There are low buildings there, like barracks,  
or cloisters, where writings are kept.  
Sometimes you'll see us there, down on  
all fours, humming and swaying,  
blurting out phrases.

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