

Shine

by Arlene Tribbia

When I was nine, my mother told me: you can't fix the world or other people, don't even try, so focus on the things that shine and don't ever smoke or make excuses for yourself, you'll be happier, which is the best way to be.

When I was ten, I wouldn't take off my cowboy boots as I skipped through dreamy days wondering how the birds outside my bedroom window stepped from tulip to unbent tulip while I tripped and hopped up the stairs to my room.

When I was eleven, the world felt slippery with ancient qualities and yet new and gadgety and it wasn't hard for me to lie to my mother or the boy who sat behind me at school once I learned how to measure and watch people face to face when what they said wasn't true.

When I was twelve, I was afraid of needles and ponds of water and I was transfixed by both, which, depending on the circumstance, was a kind of fire escape for my mind as I learned about fear and forgot about what my mother had told me.

When I was thirteen, I held hands with the coolest, cutest boy in our school and a crowd of voices inside my head cheered and I felt a cascade of needles whistle through my chest making my heart into a small airy pillow.

When I was fourteen, my mother died and I felt a moral obligation to say yes to the ice and snow of my father's moods and also to the closed doors, hard walls and ceilings of him and to the two boys who dropped into my life to give me beer and cigarettes.

When I was fifteen, I put my heart in a drawer and longed to sleep until noon, hitchhike across India and break all the rules, but this meant money, mantras and saying goodbye, so I moved every

fantasy of mine a continent away and attached it to the tip of a memory I still had of my mother's soft voice.

When I was sixteen, I got a job and met a boy who listened to Johnny Cash CDs and believed the pigeons in the park could explain the physics of why and how and he had a smoky, sultry tongue, a hookah and he told me one day I would see his face not in any mirrors, but on national television.

When I was seventeen, I visited the Statue of Liberty alone and had a hot dog with ketchup for lunch and decided from that day on, I would try to find the shine in a person's heart even if the future people I would meet lied or had small backbones and twice as many doors in their house as mine.

When I was eighteen, I spent nights studying days on the calendar, chain smoking and mentally sending out entries for boys to love me as I watched the refracted shadows from car headlights make silhouettes on the ceiling and walls of my dorm room and my hand-built life ricocheted and bounced around me.

When I was nineteen, I decided to quit smoking and say yes to my life anyway, like my mother would have wanted and once I made these resolutions and was about to close my eyes to dream, I saw her sitting in the shadows smiling, sewing stars on a cape of clouds with a needle and thread made of light.

When I was twenty, I fell in love again and wondered if he was true and if my mother was nothing more than a delicate phiff of air by now or if her transparent heart could easily be blown away by a gentle wind, a breath or a sneeze and then I knew it didn't really matter because she had fixed the world on one lovely setting for me: shine.

