

My Old Man, Across a Hotel Pool in the Bahamas

by Con Chapman

It took my dad eight years to pay off the note he signed
to buy the little store, grandiosely sub-titled
“Mid-Missouri’s Finest Specialty Shop.”
To celebrate, he took the family on a real vacation,
to the Bahamas; white beaches, conch shells,
calypso music and all that, three guys playing
“Cocoanut water, rum and gin” on steel drums,
guitar and trap set outside on the deck by the pool.

Up in my room, I had to memorize 200 lines of poetry,
punishment for some mortal offense imposed
on my junior English class, by the time we got back.
I can't remember what we did or didn't do, and
whether I was as guilty as the rest, but I wanted to be
out in the sun, on the beach. I wanted to see a
barracuda, a manta ray, all the creatures of the deep
I'd read about back when I wanted to be a Navy frogman.

Instead I lay on my bed and read about the rude bridge that arched the flood, and ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do or die. It's a wonder I can stand to read a poem these days, much less write one. I came down for a break one day and saw him, sitting in a lounge chair across the pool, staring off into the middle distance, as if saying to himself, "So this is what it comes down to, my only son, sitting sullen, alone in his room, reading poetry?"

