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FOUR POEMS BY SUZANNE NIELSEN

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Translocation

Geese were about yesterday for within two miles
I'd counted 17, a group of 8 flying in an almost uniformed V
a group of five flying in a row, four more following behind
at different speeds. One in the road flattened
with its wing perched up toward the sky.

Later that evening I am standing in line outside
a theatre thinking about smoking when a student I'd
had in a writing class approaches me. I hadn't seen her
in many years. Names don't always come to me, but if I think back
to what someone has written I can usually recall the name,
such was the case.

I asked if she was still writing.

I told her she looked happy.

She told me two weeks earlier she'd had surgery.

Her partner needed a kidney and hers matched perfectly.

Two weeks ago? I said. And look at you, who would know.

Our eyes locked, and for a brief moment I saw in the reflection of her
eyeglasses my new haircut, in the shape of a kidney.

You saved your partner's life, I said, drifting back to the street
back into the evening chill and the hum of the traffic.

Oh, no, she said. He saved mine when he encouraged me to write.

Off she walked, but as I watched I saw her wings spread and take flight.

Timing is Everything

My husband wants a manual wind wristwatch.

This is something I have an opinion about.

He's still never gotten over Reagan being elected.

Time stopped then, and America has steadily digressed, except for that brief
resurrection during the Clinton years.

I have Aunt Lil's wind up Wittnauer, given to her by the St. Paul Police Department
in honor of her husband's 29 years of service.

Can't read the dial, he said. I need an extra large, chubby wrists.

Aunt Lil kept that watch in the built in buffet, top center drawer, lined in its satin box
like the coffin she was buried in a decade ago. I remember her opening that drawer, retrieving that
red box and winding the Wittnauer. She'd watch the second hand go around the dial for a complete

circle, close the box back up and tuck it safely in the drawer.

Click click click she'd go, off to the kitchen to brew egg coffee.

Tonight I went on EBay and spent three hours bidding on a wind up watch.
Before retiring I won the auction.

A 1960's Helbros Invincible Manual Wind Watch, just in time for Easter.

This morning I took the Wittnauer out of storage, in a drawer covered with vintage half-slips and camisoles. I set the time for Daylight's Saving, wound the watch, watched the dial go around once, and then slipped it on my wrist. I smiled thinking how timing is everything and how automatic it is to form an opinion.

Saturday on Snelling

A neon green flyer arrived in the mail today.
Your diploma is ready to pick up, it read.
It was a Saturday, offices at the university
are open until noon, it was 11:00 so Honey and
I got in the Saturn and went back down Snelling Avenue, where
I'd just come from picking my son up at the airport earlier this morning.

A picture ID required, and can you come back Monday
waited for us behind the counter in records. Here's the card, the diploma must
be here, I said. I prefer Saturday to Monday.
Always one more hoop.

I left Honey in charge while I went the bathroom. When I came back
the diploma, the size of a Chagall, was conservatively waiting for my reach.

The next morning Honey handed me a copy of the letter he'd sent to the university
dated April 16, 1996. He also handed me a copy of the letter he'd sent to me informing me that he
was delighted to hear I was going further with my studies.

"You've got talent, and I think the drive, to do very well in graduate school...it can be incredibly
stimulating, but it can also, at times, put a strain on your B.S. Meter."

Eleven years later, now married almost 10 years to Honey, the only B.S. have been the constant
hoops. Where will a person ever find a frame the size of this diploma?

Sensing the Environment

Study the painting

If you see ego interfering with art
mentors have taught to mimic

If you hear answers more than questions
you might question an absence of liberal arts

If you taste a bitter residue among colleagues
suggest a new diet

If you touch a sensitive nerve in doing so
retreat to your painting

If you feel as though you've painted that canvas in dirty mimic
you must move on

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Suzanne Nielsen, a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, teaches writing at Metropolitan State University. Her poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in literary journals nationally and internationally; some of these include *The Comstock Review*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Foliate Oak*, *Identity Theory*, *The Pedestal*, *Pindelyboz*, *Rosebud*, *Rumble*, *Thunder Sandwich*, *Word Riot* and *580 Split*. Nielsen was recognized by storySouth's Million Writers Award in 2005 for her notable story, "Fists for Hands." So'ham Books released her collection of poetry titled *East of the River* in December 2005. So'ham will publish her collection of short fiction in May of 2007, titled *The Moon Behind the 8-Ball & Other Stories*. Nielsen earned a BA in Writing from Metropolitan State University, an MA degree, with an emphasis in fiction writing, from Hamline University, and an EdD through Hamline University.