
Cultural Daily

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Richard Jones: "Salt" & "Lost"

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Richard Jones is the director of the Creative Writing Program at DePaul University, as well as the author of five books of poetry. The most recent is *The Blessing*, published by [Copper Canyon Press](#).

Cultural Weekly is proud to premier these poems by Richard Jones.

SALT

I unbolt the lock
to my father's workshop,
the small, gray, wooden shed
at the cottage by the ocean,
and go inside with an empty box,
hoping to find something I can take home,
something I can use,
though everything is rusted—
the hammers, saws, pliers, screwdrivers,
even the locks and toolboxes.
The dim, flickering fluorescent
lamp over his workbench
illuminates all:
the curved metal blades of a boat propeller
aged from salt air
to an elegant green patina,
a wooden oar smooth and silvered with age,
a blue and white General Electric
clock radio (corroded),
a fisherman's anchor, piled chain,
and hanging overhead,
out of place in the workshop,
a crystal teardrop chandelier
that once brightened
my father's cozy parlor,
the prisms and beads all lost,
the gilded arms and columns

wrapped in dust and cobwebs.
 And waiting still in ordered ranks
 on makeshift shelves of rough boards,
 a dozen dusty glass jars
 my father always said were
 worth their weight in gold.
 I heft in my hand a jar heavy
 with screws, washers, nuts, and bolts.
 I wipe the jar on my sleeve
 and it shines. For a moment
 in my father's old shed
 with its cache of rusted tools,
 I stand and listen to the ocean's roar;
 I taste the salt in the ocean air.
 Which says more about a man's life—
 the shining jar or the all-pervading rust?
 When I was just a boy,
 my father taught me those heavy jars
 have the right thing for the job,
 if I'd take the time to look.
 As for the rust,
 "All things shine and rust,"
 he'd say,
 standing in the shed,
 putting well-oiled tools back in their place
 and wiping his hands with a rag,
 "that's the way it is."
 Then closing the doors he'd look at his son—
 my young face must have seemed uncomprehending—
 and bolting the lock he'd add,
 "In that, too, you must find happiness."

LOST

When I couldn't find the way,
 I thought of Blackdog,
 the blackest dog I'd ever seen,
 so black that on a dark night
 I couldn't see her
 though I knew she was beside me.
 That night,
 I didn't know where I was,
 and stood on the corner, lost,
 remembering her brown eyes,
 the muscular tail waving,
 the joy that made her butt wiggle,
 and the way she taught me
 living is all about love,

and more—that one must
live fully in the moment,
like a dog, by instinct,
following one’s nose,
pitiful, tenderhearted, humble.
Then I closed my eyes,
wanting the tug of the leash
in my hand, the pull, knowing
she was the clever one,
always deciding
where we should go,
days when we ventured forth
to walk in woods
or stroll through our small town.
Even in the battered blue car
when together we traveled everywhere,
I would turn
to her sitting beside me,
black dog looking straight ahead
and trusting the road,
staring through the windshield
as if only she really knew
where it was we were going,
as if even then she knew I was lost
but would help me find the way.

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