

Beneath the Surface

On the surface,
I am a responsible teacher
willing to take on one more project
that no one else will
to help out
to give kids something good.
Willing to put in extra hours,
get emotionally involved
and dream with them,
for them sometimes.
Happy to have the best job
in the world.
But, beneath the surface
I want to pack up my pooches
in my red pick up truck
and run away
with just enough in a backpack
and no more,
leave behind my obligations
no matter how noble
and spend hours
thinking
reading,
playing my guitar and singing
Find myself a place to camp
near a natural hot spring,

sleep in my tiny tent
cozy and warm
drinking percolator coffee
fresh off my two burner, Coleman
propane stove
take afternoon naps
and make a production
out of making a sandwich
or some pasta, if it's dinnertime.

On the surface,
I am the boss of many,
giving orders
and
making sure
work gets done
But inside
I want to put a microphone
in my hand
stand
on the stage
and read
this
to you.

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By Mike Drescher

On the outside it's difficult to place me;
I've been mistaken for so many things:
White, Latino, Italian, Arabian, Native American:
Various labels applied and misapplied,
Imposed by strangers who can't see
The real me -- my true identity.

On the surface, I'm a red herring,
An ethnic blank slate,
Donning different disguises for every occasion,
Like a spy from Mission Impossible,
Camouflaged by my ambiguous appearance.

But on the inside, I'm Japanese-American.
The ashes of my memory drift like smoke
Across the Pacific, to Nagasaki,
Where I see my great-great grandfather
Boarding a ship bound for a new world
On the other side of the ocean.

The ashes swirl in tiny eddies of air,
Floating along a dock in Vancouver
Where my ancestor jumps ship,
And sets off to build a new life for himself,
The first of his kind in that unfamiliar land.
The ashes follow him through the years,
Sliding past the family grocery store,
His imported wife, and the mountain
That will eventually bear his name.

The smoke from these ashes continue to glide into the past
Settling briefly on a page from my grandfather's photo album,
Of him and his brothers, Japanese-looking children
With names like Jack and Paul,
Kneeling beneath an orange tree,
Joining tanned arms in the Southern California sun.

With a sudden frightened leap,
The cloud of ash is carried back across the Pacific,
Following my grandfather off to war,
To an island in the Philippines where he storms a beach,
Plowing through neck-high water
Towards an enemy who looks just like him.

Suddenly, the smoke shifts, billowing back to California,
Where the rest of my grandfather's family is
Herded into the stables at Santa Anita racetrack
Before being deposited in Manzanar,
Where four years of dust forces its way
Into their nostrils, eyes, and mouths,
Whipped in from the desert,
Through the barbed-wire fences,
Past the guard towers with their
Spotlights and machine guns.

On the surface, none of this shows.
No scar lingers.
But underneath, understand that I was born from parents
Who defied their parents and the risk
Of producing yellow-spotted babies
To have me.

Understand that the smoke from these ashes
Follows me as well,
That it is my inheritance,
Tracing my footsteps through my life,
Mingling with those of my ancestors.