

Nicole Street

Happy Birthday Dear Kidney

His kidney arrived at LAX.
I imagine it on ice motionless
in a tin box, painted white with a red cross.
What makes someone give an organ?
Murray's been off dialysis for one year today.
We sang in celebration of the kidney,
and Murray's health.
I wish the donor could have heard us.

Before her gift, Murray was like the cupcake
balanced precariously, moving toward the abyss.
I watched as it, and its candle with the small flame
flowed toward him and
determined to hang on as the wick stood upright,
advancing as blood through the body, to be filtered
and it all must be processed
in my mind.
I wonder, could I have given him mine?

My grandfather unknowingly donated an organ
before it was popular.
He had only one kidney when he died,
the other shriveled
from the radium in his pocket
he carried home to show his children
when he still believed them, that it was safe.
The steel mill in Fort Wayne ignored
the deaths of the men who lifted the rods.
My grandfather demanded
that the company protect his men,
before more died.
His bosses reminded him of the war effort.
They issued each a pair of cotton gloves.

I feel the back of my sides
recalling the space to crouch down in
during an earthquake, the triangle of life,
planning to purchase iodine pills.
If radium spills, our kidneys won't do us any good,
nor those who need them when we no longer do.
Happy birthday. No kidney, just a card.

