

I Am Not a Writer

Posted on February 24, 2022 by Bob Rossi

Bob Rossi's poem "Deincarnation" was published in December 2021's *Labor: Studies in Working Class History*. He's graced us with another.

I Am Not A Writer

Bob Rossi

Late one night, wearied by the misfortunes
And follies of men, I put aside my work
And wondered at continuing.
It has been a century, longer, since those I knew
And loved took breath and tools and bread
And tears and the virtues of
Their hands and hopes to work.
I promised them that I would tell
Something of their lives. In coal-dusted patches,
On prairies, in kitchens warmed by sun and polenta
And wine, in taverns, on telephones to those

With only days or weeks to live, in scrawled letters,
In silences I made these promises. But my hands and wits
Are not so steady as their sewing, the hammers in their hands,
Their prayers once were.

I took a breath and wondered at continuing on, ready
To surrender this effort, ready to consign what I
Have ill attempted. It is beyond me. It throttles
My brain and heart. I am not a writer.

And then I felt at my side a gentle presence, a hand
Brushed my shoulder. A soft voice whispered, telling me
To go on, to look once more. I argued: I am not a writer.
Go on, she said, you promised. In life I lost three babies
And a husband before I was twenty-three. And there were
Others who also have much to ask of the living. Too quiet then,
And then stilled by death, now they petition for a kind word
From the living. I answered: I am not a writer.

There were Mike and Pauline in our house, just kids with babies
Of their own. Nineteen years old, and she couldn't read or write,

And in a foreign land, with a husband in the mines. There was Joseph,
Who left no trace, disappeared one day Into the dust as our men
Too often did. And there were my boys, and Senta and Ernest,
And Milka, who led the strike seven years later. My parents, and
Another sister. Seventeen of us under one roof. Should this
Not be told? I answered: Please, I am not a writer.

I remarried. Jack had a pool room, went to work in the mines
For us, risked his life for us. The winds blew us this way and that,
Some left behind, some married off, and then on to California
In the 1930s. My sister married Rudy Giecek, the union man. She
Laughed: you didn't know that, did you? There is something else,
Indeed. Our prayers became yours, our vowels and consonants
We gave to you. We wanted you to learn addition, not subtraction.
You have our union card in your pocket. And you complain to me?

Mary (Sablich) Lordanich, twenty-three years old in 1920, visits me,
Reminds me that I have within me what will kill me. Hurry, she says,
There may not be much time. Write! Yes, there are those who will greet
you,
Be angry with you on the other side. Those who you have hurt are there.

Some will forgive, some won't. Those you loved, and those who loved you,

Also wait. But don't eat yesterday's bread and think that you will be satiated.

Instead, bake a loaf and leave it for tomorrow.

Someone will be hungry and will need it.

Author



Bob Rossi