



COMMUNITY

In loving memory of
Herb Ware, for Georgie and their girls

When the copter from Eastern Maine Medical
circled the Ladies Aid Field
to take Herb off the island,
Lorraine had just gotten off the radio to them,
It doesn't look good. 10/4.
Red-faced and sweating, she labored,
gentle-voiced inside the ambulance
to make him comfortable.
Georgie was in there holding his hand,
whispering that it was all right to go
that Nancy Jean, their daughter, years gone now,
was coming to take him across.
Barbara Ann, another daughter, red-eyed
and teary, rubbed his temples.
Don climbed in, ducking, six foot plus,
to offer a prayer, Gracious God . . .
Norman stood at the rear door, stocky, stalwart.

I was headed over to their place on foot,
a casserole in my boat bag
when I met the ambulance coming toward me.
Lynn and Emmy, following behind,
motioned for me to jump in their truck.
Just this morning he'd been alert and jovial,
but the cancer had spread too far,
the pain was too sharp and he was gasping.

Gaile, a visor haloing her bushy gray curls,
stood by with the aid of her ski pole cane.
Junior Bracy in a fluorescent red vest
motioned the copter down. A small crowd
of witnesses, murmuring and hugging each other
surrounded Herb in respectfully spaced rings:
folks he'd given ride after ride to in his boat
or truck, folks whose houses he'd replumbed,
whose sheds, ramshackle from rot, he'd built back,
a grateful smile, for him, payment enough—
even some he'd shouted off his turf
if they were noisemakers or litterbugs.

Herb could be tight-lipped and gruff,
more inclined to show how he felt
by unchugging your rusty water heater,
by tinkering your dead engine back to purring
than with words, and, though happiest,
probably, when taking his one-engine Cessna
farther Down East up over this rugged coast
still unspoiled, almost, long-fingered and
trying to keep hold of the sea, he was damned
if, after barging back in his vehicle
from the hospital, he'd spend his last moments
alone in that contraption. So, just as
the copter touched down—one puff, one puff . . .
Children inching forward to ask what was wrong,
shrank back when told we thought Mr. Ware
had just passed on. Kelly tore off to get Dr. Liebow,
but there was no need to confirm it.
We all knew. Herb had died as he wanted to,
out on the island among us
and the love here, the love.

Susan Deborah King