

Elizabeth Romero

Finding Truth in the Details

BY CATHERINE GAINNEY

Like any good poet, Elizabeth Romero gets her kicks wrestling words. "Poetry is a way of explaining the world to myself," she said in a recent interview. "Even if I don't know the answer, I feel better because I framed the question in words."

Romero says her inspiration is born of introspection and collecting her thoughts on paper. "It comes from inside ... if it has something to say, then it comes out. It's pure emotion that the poet tailors to the art form. No light stuff, no ambiguous emotions. The questions that are within me are the ways that culture meets my needs. There is a drive within me to understand what is going on — I see so many broken people."

Born in 1945 in Chelsea, MA, Romero was influenced at an early age by the works of Dickenson, Shelley and Keats. *The Little Treasury of Modern Verse* was her favorite book as a child.

Even then she says that she wrote compulsively, keeping journals and writing poetry.

Romero feels a special kinship with women who are on the streets. Conducting poetry workshops and helping others give voice to their experience is a dream she has long nurtured.

"If you can write your experience down, you can distance yourself from it so it doesn't hurt. I especially want to reach young girls because they are at such a pivotal time in their lives. Writing helped me catch hold of myself. If I had not found an outlet I would not be here today. It is a way of connecting myself to the world, of grounding myself."

While Romero is not working at her day job at the Columbian Lutheran Center, a facility for senior citizens, she is busy volunteering at *Real Change*. This local artist is a witness to life's reality. And in its starkness she finds its meaning.

"The best way to the truth," she says, "is in the tiniest details."

When Mothers Are Mentioned

I think of you of course
though I knew you so little.

I think of the time I knocked you down.
You were drunk and I was angry.
It wasn't hard, you went sprawling
and looked up at me with wine-wet eyes.
I looked at you and the rag rug,
the scarred bureau, the radiator
the coffee table and the cat.
I said I'd better get out of here
before I kill you.

And I ran out the door, down the stairs
and into the street.
Having nowhere to go
I came back and sat on the stairs
in the hall. I could hear
you on the phone
talking to the police, I have this daughter
you said and paused
and said again I have this daughter—

I could just start walking
come to a country store
say I will sweep for a meal.
I could live on my fat:
the butter I spread too thick,
the eggs I ate too many of,
the meat that was not mine to take.

Blue Willow

Cooking was something I
learned to do well—this was
a chicken roasted golden
perfect—I was carving the leg
and thigh huddled like a plump
comma—the fork slipped—
the chicken fell on the oak
floor while he held
a plate—he liked things
to go smoothly—frightened
I picked it up—I'll take
that one I said and hurried
to carve some more—No
you won't he said—I don't
mind I said—I never
knew the answer to these things
whether my obvious fear
infuriated him or something
else—suddenly he slammed
the whole plate of food
down on the floor—chicken
rice peas—bits of plate
everywhere—I don't remember
the sound—how about this
he said—the dishes
were Blue Willow—a gift
from my aunt—I loved
them—now there is one less
I thought—I don't remember
what happened then—not
the children's eyes nor
the frozen silence of dinner—
only that bits of plate kept
appearing in the sweeping
in the dusting—bits
of plate for weeks afterwards

I Shall Die

I shall die with a beer in one hand
and fading photographs in the other.
I shall die with the memory of someone's eyes.
Was there ever such a person?
I shall die screaming and snarling
like an old alley cat.
Mean, ugly
and disrespectful
to the last
so help me God.

Queen of Nothing

I am
the queen of nothing
I read silences
I read between the lines
I live in spaces
that have been overlooked, cracks
not yet filled in.
Nothing must be done
even though it is not encouraged.
It is good to be
the queen of nothing.