The Engine of Christmas

a man
a God
and a birthday . . .

the engine of Christmas slops
into cold soft cardboard.
with it,
fast hungry reindeer
plumped paint
hohohoing
pissing their vapors of truth:
love usable toward the toy.

black frozen streets
sad seasonal
suicides
panhandling bells, desire
into dust—a slow crucifixion of
self: the creative condition
insisting we be friends
when really nothing more
than strangers

the engine of Christmas
bounds
the distance of my
poem—
the freak neatness of
freedom inclined
toward a valium
a fishhook
a hole in the ice:
the box growing greater
each passing moon.

the engine of Christmas
swings
into our being true
to a center at the edge
of silence and in rush
impassioned and in fury
about our bones and blood
like the easy sway of children.

—Michael Smith

Celilo

Roaring waters whisper in the morning distance.
Dark-skinned men on wooden platforms fish
dipping long poles and bone-colored nets
streaking the white water:

A man dressed in black hollers at me
across the vacant lot;
I ignore him and continue to explore
the deserted post office.

My grandparents pass in horse and buggy,
I watch them from behind a mound
with weeds growing scattered in the sand
that reminds me of the preacher's balding head.

I eat some dried salmon remembering words
from an old song and begin to sing it.
Hymns from the church and seagull's laugh
disruptingly mingle with the morning mist.

—Earle Thompson

My Turn

It is sad and tough being poor,
you do not have enough money to buy
what you want/need at the store.
what is depressing is when it comes
to meals you often wish you could
have even more.

When you live in poverty when the
holidays arrive they're not fun they
are a chore.

Being on the streets you must
strive to stay alive.

When you come from a broken
home and run away that
is a memory that does stay.

You must trust in god yourself
strength and instincts to
get you through each
day.

—John Arnold