

At the Nursing Home with Dad

In Memoriam: Ricardo Y. Navarro
January 15, 1916 – December 31, 2001

I was visiting alone. Eighth floor, in his room
overlooking the valley. On the bulletin board
a note: RYN/Speech Therapy. Daddy,

Daddy, I said, you had speech therapy
today, what did you do? They did all
the talking, he stuttered. They did

all the talking, he giggled, and kept mumbling
this line of mantra that seemed to echo
in the distant autumn hills of Rockland

while my mind raced back to my first year
in high school, 13 years old, and even now
I can still taste the slice of raw ginger

he told me to suck on while he and I
are at the grandstand and he is teaching me
public speaking, he is telling me

to raise my voice, but not to shout, to keep it
deep and low, to let it come from the belly,
as I recited a passage from Clarence

Darrow's speech defending a union
leader, my father saying louder,
louder, I can't hear you, I can't hear you

in the half-dark from 30 feet below.

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Longhushan Idyll

Doing Ancestor Lu Dongbin's Tai Ji Quan
sword dance outside
in mid-Autumn: a deer is watching me
from the edge of the woods
as it sniffs the wind
descending from the west.
A full moon above the pines
but it is playing hide
and seek behind the clouds
and trees. In the valley,
smoke is rising from a thatched hut.
I have been following my routine
of daily meditation since 11 last night.
It is just 3 in the morning now
and there is no sound
of human presence here
on Dragon Ridge. The Breatharian
Hermit Xuan Kong
in the Immortal's Cave
on the Eastern slope
has not shown up for days.
I listen for his footfalls but
there is only the rustling
of the wind in the pine trees
and bamboo leaves swirling around me.
Jiang shifu told me
to sit and meditate and go
into the void. No, shifu, now is not
the time to block everything
from my eyes and ears
and float
in emptiness.
There is so much to feast on
with the senses. Why
go inward now when the earth
is so rich with its colors,
scents, tastes and sounds?
Li Bai, Su Dong Po, Tao Qian,
Du Fu, my mentors and brothers,
let us get together again.
Send for the best turtle soup,
deer tendon casserole,
West Lake carp, Shanghai
crab and chrysanthemum

flowers.
Let us get drunk
on the best Lanling wine
and ride the dragon chariot
on the Milky Way.

By Rene J. Navarro
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Walking in the Woods

Autumn Equinox. It is going to be hot
today I know from the fog that has stalked
the landscape behind the house
as if a blanket has mantled the earth.
Walking in the woods I step on the leaves
and the acorns and I relish the sound
of a nut cracking. I see the rock by the side
of the trail: I have lighted an incense there
to honor the spirit of the forest
and seek its blessings and grace for us.
I smell the faint scent of a skunk:
it must have been here before me
or perhaps it is just foraging
deep among the trees. At the end of the trail
there is a sign: Dismount your bike
and walk across the street Safety First.
I idle at the bridge and watch the river.
Upstream there is white water as it hits boulders
and fallen tree trunks; downstream
it is calm like a mountain lake.
The hares that I have observed before
are out sniffing and nibbling at the grass.
They always come in pairs
like swans and cranes. I sit on a log and remember
the times in Hangzhou, the leaves
refusing to turn in late October two years ago,
as we danced through the movements
of the Sword Immortal
and soaked in the warm light
of an Autumn sun.

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