

poems from What I Learned *by* Guy Ewing

From you
I learned the power
of the listening mind.

Surrounded by
empty sheets of paper,

you listened

until one day

you spoke a poem,
"out of nowhere,"
we said,

out of
what your listening
made.

More than anything,
you said,
you wanted to be able to
read the paper
on the subway
on your way to work.

"Just the normal,"
you said.

From you
I learned that
a mother's love
shines brighter
when there is less to give,

small pieces of cake
divided equally.

Learning fractions
so you could use the
measuring tape at work,

slowly, slowly,
your hands moving
along the measuring tape,

your eyes,
careful.

You would watch me,
waiting for me
to show you what to learn
next.

I feel you watching me
now, as I write,

as if waiting
for me to speak,

as if wondering
whether I can still imagine
what comes next.

One night,
you told me about work,

a friend's hand
cut off
when the cutting machine
lost its shield.

Not like the night
you played your drum for us,
your hands dancing
across the skin.

You said
you would study,
learn,
study,
learn.

You said
you would
get a
job
a job
a job.

From me,
you learned
to type,
read multiply.

From you,
I learned to draw birds
flying out of the page.

Guy Ewing has worked in the literacy field for twenty years, mostly as a front-line literacy worker. He is currently facilitator/researcher in a project funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, "Identifying Inclusive Models of Lifelong Learning in Canada."