

Dianne Stepp

photo by Barbara Michelman

UP CANYON FROM MAUPIN



Up Canyon from Maupin

We mill like strangers
by the river
where the turbulence
spends itself in shallow licks.

The air is oily with juniper
and sage, the skeletal
rattle of weeds
winter's only hint.

You carry the box of your dad's
ashes to a table under a willow,
your sister, the album.

Across the river a train
tears past. A breeze
catches your sister's hair,
twists a strand
to a button on your shirt.

This is Virgil who loved fishing best.

*Here he stands grinning
with his rod at his favorite hole,
hitching his waders.*

*Here are the scooped tail fins,
gash of gills laid in a row.*

*And here he holds to the camera
a hand-tied bucktail caddis fly.*

You read a poem about time
caught and locked in stone.
Your daughters look away,
perhaps embarrassed,
perhaps thinking of themselves

years hence, or thinking of the stars,
how they will hang
in dazzling clusters, how the moon
will alter the landscape to silver.

Someone finds a rock ledge
where the river plunges and bucks.
It takes the ashes slowly,
a milky swirl, a tail of white.



Dianne Stepp lives with her husband in Portland, Oregon. Her poems have appeared in a variety of literary journals and anthologies. Her chapbook, "Half-Moon of Clay," was published by Finishing Line Press.