

The Lesson

Bruce Roseland

My parents each voted for
a different political party,
joking that when they voted,
their votes cancelled each other out.
When I was six, my father took me along
on election day,
to the one room school house
where the local ballots were cast.
I was given a sample ballot to fill out
in order to keep me amused
while my father voted.
Behind the curtain, I marked my Xs
by names that looked nice.
Down the ballot I went, putting my mark
right and left, having nary a clue
who any of these names were.
Soon as I stepped out of the booth,
my great uncle, a crusty old tobacco chewing
curmudgeon on my father's side,
grabbed my sheet and upon seeing
I had spilt my Xs right and left,
let out a roar, saying he's been
a straight party man for all his days,
since the first time he could vote.
Said he could just as well have shot
some of those SOBs, as elect them.
BUT NO!
The straight ticket, his ticket,
was the only way.
Enraged, he stomped out of the one-room school,
leaving the election clerks, my father and me,
in stunned silence.
Later my father explained to me

that upon seeing my split sample ballot,
my great uncle assumed my father had left the fold.
My dad was merely amused.
That day, I learned
what a dyed-in-the-wool iconoclast is,
and the value of a secret vote.

Judge/Judge Not

Bruce Roseland

Judge

Late fall, beautiful day.
At the drive-up window
of a liquor store,
an electric wheelchair is parked.
The patron chats a while
with an older female clerk,
then wheels off to the nearby street,
a plastic shopping bag tucked at his feet.
A fringe of white hair rings
his baseball cap.
An American flag flutters above on a stick.
Two oxygen canisters
are strapped on the chair's back frame.
Obviously, he has problems.

Judge not

Late fall, beautiful day.
Less than 10 minutes later,
walking out of a grocery store,
fig newtons in hand,
I spy the same guy,
now in the Food Mart,
cruising in front of checkouts,
looking at faces.
The same bag is at his feet,
the one I thought full of liquor,
can now be seen full of groceries.
Either of two stories
I could have believed,
depending on when

I had walked by.
Was he a guy on his last legs, end times,
seeking oblivion?
Or a guy making rounds, chatting up
the neighborhood,
making connections?

Turning a Page

Bruce Roseland

2022 – a year of widespread drought
across Western and Northern plains.
Folks in towns complain their lawns
turn brown under relentless, rainless,
heat of spring, turning to summer,
turning to fall.

In the countryside cattle ate last year's
browned grass and then the grass roots.
Early fall sales of calves resulted
and then, paring down of herds.
Economics is everything,
when it takes so many cows
to keep a family on the land.
Cows cannot eat hope.
Semis full of high-priced hay bales
travel from the East,
going someplace to a rancher
trying to buy a little time,
trying to take a few more mother cows
to what we all need:
deep snows of winter,
wetness of a rainy spring.
Holding on with pure grit,
we all wake up,
look out a morning window,
waiting for the weather to change.