

Ode to My Mother: Lee Banuk (#15)

By Ron Banuk
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Born a Catholic / under the crucifix,
I was the first / in a family of six.
I earned my keep / before the others,
Patching the pants / of my younger brothers.

From my first / Communion dress
To my proud / Confirmation address,
I remained / tata's girl,
And always was / matka's pearl.

I learned to swim / the Australian crawl.
Could do a Mazurka / in a dance hall.
I raced with Olympic / roller skates
Played tennis / and round ball first-rate.

I dated a man / from South Boston.
Walter Novak / my godfather's son.
He could ice skate / and dance like the devil,
But was way too short / for my level.

I married well / a football star—
A Navy man / before the war.
In a Polish church / Joe married Lodja.
A war was on!
I went to Stoughton, / Joe went to Georgia.

Two boys, two girls, / then a son I raised.
My man caught fish / and I had them braised.
He changed his trade / from coppersmith
At Quincy yard / to draftsman forthwith.

Early in life / I lost two brothers;
Next my father, / then my mother.
My man died early / in seventy nine;
Travel then became / my new lifeline.

My children married / and showed their fertility,
As grandma aged / with respectability.
I visited here / and traveled there;
And made many friends / as a good card player.

Then one-day / sickness laid me low,
Emaciated with / a tumor below.
Death was then / diagnosed to come;
Surprisingly recovery / was the outcome.

Some say it was / a miss-diagnosis,
A faulty doctor's / poor prognosis;
But when I led / Julia to believe,
It became apparent why / I was given reprieve.

Down I went / another time;
Broke my hip / at 89.
Again they said / recovery would be rare.
I soon was up / and dancing with the mayor.

All my other / worldly connections,
So much tinsel / upon final inspection.
Like a first-prize / roller skating victory
And a Canasta win—/ such vainglory.

My youth then vanished / with all its glory,
Mirth and laughter / now a forgotten story.
My friends faded away / as did my memory.
An old-age home / became my Purgatory.

Oh what then / is the mystery
That life holds / for a few to see?
All our deeds / have the sound of tin,
If the Holy Spirit / dwells not within.

As this thought / began to take shape,
I made my way / to the Fireman's Escape.
Breaking with tradition, / I looked to the shore,

The land of the Savior, / the one Mediator.

No longer would the worry / of having done enough
Stir fear of Hell / and the Lord's rebuff.
With no more debt, / I am forgiven
Soon to be / with God in Heaven.

So now I say / from God's eternal rest:
His angels insist / I make one last request.
To rely on your works, / to do you best,
Will leave you surely / of salvation divest.

But to rely on Him / as sole procurator,
No priest or sacrament / as Mediator,
Will give you assurance / of life hereafter
God's grace and mercies / forever thereafter.