

## KADDISH

*For Robert Krenitski, 1956-2007*

### I

Pensively glancing back at you in my mind, brown hair and eyes given up to the eternal skies,  
while I walk down the frozen sidewalks of 21<sup>st</sup> avenue.

music city, obscure winter moonlight, and I've been up for two days, talking to myself, talking  
to the walls, reading the Kaddish aloud, listening to Sufjan Stevens americana  
whispering through the creaking speakers in the corner

the strings resounding and bugles blowing – and recapturing you in my mind three years after -  
And read the words of the psalmist aloud – confused, burdened about my  
image of the divine and the discomfort in my skin – shaking nervously towards  
the infinite

And how It never resolves unless the songs repeat again, making sense of time and  
remembrance of grace

Thinking of what is to come, Your life – and if I follow the plan you had for me  
your dying thoughts – the final moments as that car came tumbling down 287 accelerating  
towards the ancient obsolete beauty and wonder of Haifa beaches and arches  
overlooking soldiers fighting to bring the Apocalypse

And how it all starts turning away, the dreams of grandchildren reunions, freedom with lover and  
children safe from fear-

the great American cities burning ashes behind – black President changing minds but not enough  
to make the pain disappear from bloated stomachs on Harlem's streets

Difficult to discern what to weep for anymore, what minor place to reach for or whether to let  
it disappear into the distance and uncertainty of the next decision – step – breath

You traveled to the Orient in your mind and through my screams in India, lifting the bloodied  
man wet with piss

What is there left to say when the affirmation is gone and the stability of my mind to write words  
on the page without constantly erasing – having it all start over again

And start over it does – constant regeneration that never produces the same effect  
flashes come now and again in sighs, and your worship of God  
eyes flowing with tears as your voice is raised towards the Most High

Will it ever last for more than these deceptive hints that your life is still here? Can it become  
more than a dream I wake up disappointed to find reality?

I keep walking – turn on to Murphy Road, passing the shattered windows of southern tenement  
houses – antebellum mansions of a world you never knew, the sky refusing to  
change its disposition

But now back towards the Clifton streets you walked 40 years ago, shooting hoops to escape the  
trap of your home and bipolar mother screaming for you to stay inside

Kept walking to Paterson buying treats for your sister making your stern father proud faith  
wavering in fear of the afterlife

Beef brisket on the table and four-minute prayers for holy digestion and healing – Europe was  
out of reach – only Passaic County within grasp and modest expectations of  
happiness

You lay your head on the pillow thinking of athletic scholarships and ways to hold on to the love  
of your life – competing with the world for her ambitions of global travel -  
competing with the adornments of your local church – guilt ridden confessions  
when your intentions were always pure  
you knew, and I know the sorrow of your sister husband dying hair falling bit by bit and scared  
for your kids – supposed danger of supposed crystal meth infested Pennsylvania  
woods  
Giving money to any plea of your family to leave no room for regrets – midnight phone calls and  
obituary preparations for others until it was time for your own  
- where can I find what is left of you?-  
Still trying to understand how you cared so much and struggled without us knowing  
sacrificing sacrificing sacrificing hearing your cries at 3am  
Lying on my floor till I fell asleep between pacing and counting stairs  
you waited patiently each night – radio on Rutgers basketball trying to console  
me to just fall asleep and let eternity wait until tomorrow  
No more of your mother, - she gone before you – but your visits kept her alive for years  
dedication of week to week when your sibling wanted her to die for her  
sins of neglect  
Yelling at you for your goodness while I played the piano nearby drowning out the confusion  
No more of your father, - gone away through a heart attack – you sat in your driveway until  
the pain went away – but it never did  
Clifton was too rough for you – the doctor your nickname for covering up the marijuana smells  
of your basketball teammates  
But you never partook, not judging but fearing the disappointment of your parents – their  
unsure commitment to your future  
The 70's never engulfed you because your burgeoning love for future mother filled the time of  
would be protests  
Munich was foreign and Vietnam escaped your luck of birth draw timing mother post-partum  
depression  
Mr. October Jackson hitting balls out of the park while the TV set shook and beer drank  
in first years of college – pulling back mothers hair as she threw up  
flushed down the toilet as you loved her and put her to bed  
She now throws up from wine trying to forget the pain of loneliness without you  
you both made it together for so long until the hideous heart let you down valves  
disconnected with no warning  
What did you feel? Your last thoughts? Mother's face bloodied while you died – you died trying  
to wipe the blood off her face unable with the seatbelt obstruction  
heart stopped with a look of horror trying to save her life's love obsession  
Those last moments are still difficult for you to recapture – even in heaven you are lonely  
for your wife to join – looking on her suffering with relative time seconds  
are supposed to go by fast in the afterlife but always goes too slow when you look  
down  
What is the radiance like? Is your smile the same standing next to Peter, Abraham, and Moses?  
Do you ask questions? – are they answered? Do you ever wish to come back  
down, can your contentment satisfy the longing for your family?  
Is it a triumph or confusion of figuring out your new surroundings? No changes in weather there

or icicles hanging down – or satisfaction of pleasure with your eternal lover  
Mother grieves alive with your memory pressed to the front of her mind – glasses of wine can't  
change feelings – sometimes would be easier if there was hostility but none to  
find

Unknown blessedness I pour out to Thee – thy will – thy death will of confinement, no  
way for the wanderer to seek it all without consequences – no more last chances here – only  
God's darkness and choice of spot for light – Death, an apparition, an illusion, shadow yourself  
no more!

## II

Images of the hospital have not left your mind – like the reappearing chorus of  
Cannonball Adderly shouting for Mercy – Mercy – Mercy

Nervous ticks waking up in the morning – shaking tears work again no more  
steady hands of the woodsmen coming home with flowers in his hand

You went with him that night – dating again like it was in the beginning, the  
cosmos coming together and finally being found

The Doctor came in bringing you the news you already knew, ripping you from  
the arms of the corpse in the bed three floors below – it's OK he's just going to rest for a while  
she screamed as you wept uncontrollably sorrow beyond curses merely reckless utterances

locked yourself away until you had to tell your family through sister-in-law's  
naïve kindness

daughter covered her own face with pillows until the tears dripped through the  
other side of the soft rectangular temporary comfort

Something happened to mother something happened in those weeks that I only  
witnessed in spurts

'I'm your mother, come home now Scott where I can see you' but it never was  
soon enough

Spends her nights watching more television envisioning global travel adventures  
without responsibility of mind thought memory

After coming home I took the next bus to New York – not knowing what to do or  
say but seeking escape, depressed head tilted back on the dark green couch of Dan's West  
Village apartment

Room spinning round loud beats party punctures got home late that night woke up  
to the sound of my own screaming

Hour train to face NEW HOME NEW with limited testosterone left in the place  
and too much room for menopausal angst without check

Exhaustion wears emotions thin and mom is still hiding in her chair upstairs  
wondering why these things all seem inevitable sometimes

Left on the next flight for Nashville – envisioned past movies with similar returns  
– wondering what was next to come – finances working out upper middle class lifestyle lost and  
mother fading away – I was only 18.

Thoughts of body lowered into the ground on a weather perfect for that day –  
damp grass and water christening the new tombstone

Pastor repeating lines from impersonal texts – patiently waiting in line shaking germs passed along perpetuating life’s cycles and chance catastrophe

Stay! Here! In the moment! Forget not my teachings and admiration for what you have done - do not linger on the instability of your mind and the remnants of fearful sermons – ten-foot pews

Crying three times in five days emasculating emotions figuring out when the tear ducts will stop and when I can finally wake up in the morning with energy and repassion for life

Abraham, Moses, speak up and remind that we must keep singing to God each day Blessed be his name

He wrote – ‘don’t rush through life, and keep things balanced – in perspective – remember others and your mother – the key is in what is above – love – it will always shine through

Love,

Your father’

which is Robert

### HYMMNN

Blessed be his name in the mental wilderness of the aftermath – may His name be Praised

Magnify Laud Honor Exaltation in the Holy Blessed will of His Zeal  
In the house of Morristown Blessed is He! In the after school shouting and adolescent after school care admonishing Blessed is He!

Blessed be He in sorrow! Blessed by He in Victory and Death! Blessed be He!  
Blessed be He in the smoke from my mouth! Outpourings of love in community! Blessed be He!

Blessed be Robert in Death! Blessed be the car of memories! The music of the driveway conversations!

Blessed are those who Mourn! Blessed are the uncomforted! The street children and smack addicts running loose!

Blest be your depression! Blest be your fading mind! Blest be your sagging face and weary eyes!

Blessed is He who trusts in the midst of the Darkness! Who serves in the midst of uncertainty!

Blessed Blessed be the Lord of the Most High! Blessed be His name!

### III

Only to have not lost that night on the back porch in late July, with the water cooler leaking and dad’s surprise

only to have seen him pacing in the hallway about who to give the surplus to making sure  
everyone would be OK  
only to have the idea of an insane man through his mind for a few years and wipe them away  
with such grace and love  
only to have seen his first college year – the learning process he went through  
only to have asked more questions – and known there was not more time  
‘The key is in balance – sustain the love you have been given – increase in my love’  
- just one last glimpse, seeing him wave out the car on my flight to Nashville  
What if I knew?  
Is there anything left behind to recapture? Any remnants I can gather?

#### IV

O father  
what is lost from my mind  
O father  
where can I find our conversations  
O father  
long drives in the car  
goodbye  
with your smile to genuine for authentic pictures  
goodbye  
compassionate conservatism with pure intentions  
goodbye  
receding hairline  
goodbye  
white lines  
with your increasing waist  
with your fear of Hell  
with your mouth of encouragement  
with your fingers of tenderness  
with your controlled anger and meekness  
with your voice singing loudly and off-key  
with your ruddy complexion  
with your naïve optimism  
with your Vietnam timing  
with your Fernando Ortega tears  
with your hopes for your children  
with your eyes of mother  
with your eyes of giving  
with your eyes staring at the wall while you sit on the toilet  
with your eyes out in the distance in your own world  
with your eyes of Czechoslovakia from generations past  
with your saggy white underwear checking locks at night  
with your eyes  
with your eyes of marriage

with your eyes  
with your eyes  
with your Death of abundance

V

All all all all all all all goes over the shadows into the steps of the back porch  
God God God Robert you have saved in his entire life and your servant always calls  
all all my stomach falls again each time I recall that car  
God God it moves too quickly and the ground shakes when we look at it  
all all hear my cry when I forget your name and the power of your voice  
God God of the most high change our Time to make more sense in humanity's eyes  
All all goes back to dust returns to You the most high  
God God God all all all God God God all all all God

*Nashville, February 2010*