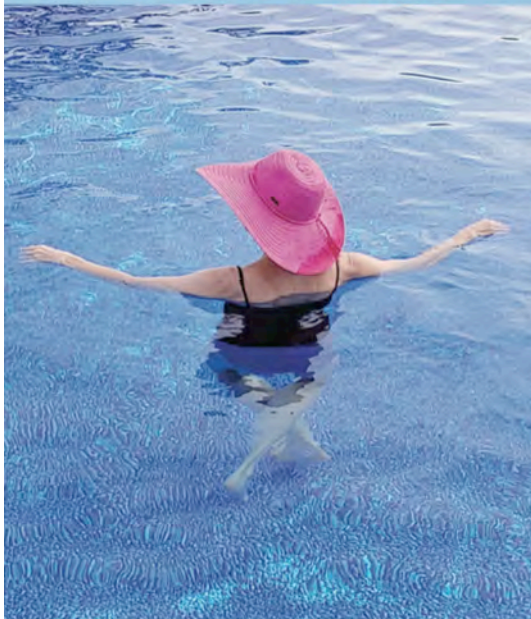


Two Cats Watching
and Lester's Widow



New and Selected Poems by Mary Lee Gowland

Poems from the 1980s to the present chronicling Mary Lee's life, loves, and losses from the beach in Santa Monica, to the Sierra Nevada foothills, and the Texas Hill Country.

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Also by Mary Lee

Tender Bough

Hand in Hand

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Surprise Yourself! Fun Writing Exercises for Today's Kids

Posing for My Father, a memoir

Introduction

When Covid-19 came along I needed to stay busy, so I put myself to work cleaning out my office. I found chapbooks and manuscripts I'd put together over the years and realized now is the time to put something together. Why else had I dragged all this stuff with me every time I moved? I compiled two books - poems about my own life, and poems about people I'd read about, or met, or imagined. But then I decided to put them together in one volume. I hope they give you pleasure. Even the sad ones.

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Part I

**March 1979
October 20, 1987**



**Pacific Coast Highway
Santa Monica, California**

Ovulation

I dream of kissing younger men
and people who keep rabbits in the bedroom
as a sign of gentleness

Being bit by a great big rabbit
can kill the part of childhood
that believes cuddling and warmth
are what make people grow

This is what also comes
from too many years sleeping alone
one becomes almost Japanese
in the need
for hard surfaces

On this hot afternoon
the sand molds to my body
it's not a man
but it sure feels good

Lipstick

Max Factor hasn't changed the scent of his lipsticks in thirty years. They're just as I remember as a child, my mother's coral lips, white, white teeth, wide beige belt, her slender ankles accentuated by Spring-o-later heels: 1957, the year my father bought a turquoise Oldsmobile so we could tow our trailer to Yosemite and the Grand Canyon where my turtles dug, thinking they were at the beach.

My mother didn't like the fact my father had mistresses, one night-stands, illicit affairs.

But he was so handsome, and tall, his eyes were bright his thick hair wavy, he was the epitome of health and beauty and so were we his wife and daughters.

Look at the proof sheets.
I'm the only one scowling, I'd rather be hiding up in the poison oak.

My sister was gregarious. She had loads of friends. She always had a gang to hang around with. She removed herself early on. Even at eleven she had her own room off the patio so maybe she didn't hear Mother crying, didn't know father didn't come home some nights.

But she had to have known. Her bedroom was right off the garage. While my glass bedroom

opened into the night which intruded
on a five-year old girl, like a gardener in overalls
not to be trusted.

It turns out no one is to be trusted.

Which is why I live alone and wear
Max Factor lipstick - for the creaminess I enjoy
when I smear my lips together
in a gesture similar
to kissing.

What I Have

I have wrinkles around my eyes
and wrinkles around my knees.
I have stubs and receipts and twelve-year-old sheets
that I bought when I was married to Roger.
I have no chipped dishes, and no chipped teeth,
but lots of tea and packages of noodles from Japan.
I have thoughts that march around my brain like
a high school drill team in short white boots.
I have admiration for women stronger than I am
and have pity for people who are weak.
I have friends who belong to someone.
I have breasts that remind me how much
I want to belong to a man who will hold them.
I have gratitude and worry and hunger and lust.
I have a fear of never having children, and
a kind of shameless rush at the thought of
never having children, of falling in love,
and traveling to far away cities
where the views are glorious at night.

Dream of the Big Cats

Darryl Ruocco has huge, gigantic hands
with neat little square tips for playing volleyball
and five Great Danes who romp and play.

I'm weighted down by the big black dog.
I love it but am also worried about unintentional injury.
And, will it protect me from the tigers?

The tiger-lions are escaping.
We all run into a house where Shelly Wissot
pours melted brown sugar over sesame buns
which are impossible to chew.

A barge passes. I have no shirt on.
Benjie says I have the legs of a dancer.

Now that all the lions have been released,
students scream and try to slam the doors.

I carry the baby lion in my arms.
He's huge, wonderful, warm, cuddly,
eyes closed, but has the sharpest teeth.

All the mother lions follow me,
even the anemic one.

And this becomes an anti-hunting film
with horrible real footage of deer being shot,
how they jump and fall.

We are against the killing.
We are against the hunting of animals.
We only want peace with the beasts
pure and simple animal love.

In Rachael's Room

I once tried to help Rachael clean up her room.
There was so much stuff I didn't know where to begin.
She had saved everything she had ever found
or won at carnivals – broken crayons, pop-beads,
half-colored drawings, stuffed animals, shoes and shirts
and skirts and socks and books with their covers torn.

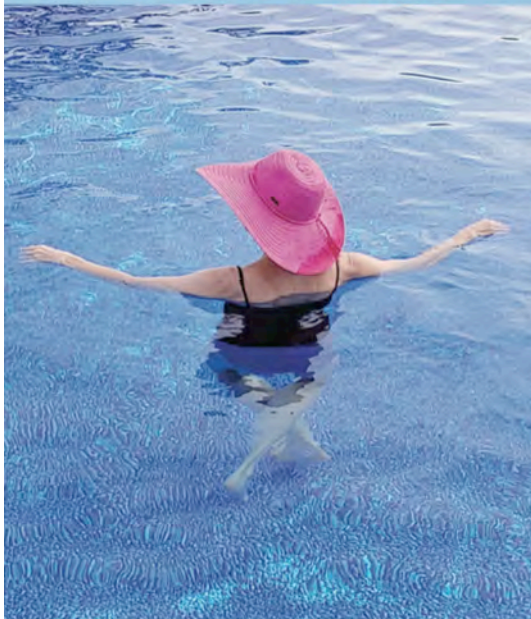
Her dad came in and dumped a big cardboard box
in the middle of the room. Then went to work.

By the end of the day the box had become
a house for the cat who batted at us
through doors and windows we had cut away.

I wore a tiara and Rachel wore angel wings.
We didn't run out of things to do all day.

When her father returned
he glared down at us smiling on the floor
and didn't say a word.

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