

POETRY

Carol Took the Call

Henry L. Miles

Al had tethered me to the class of '53,
webbed me to classmates before the web,
invited me back every ten years.

Last summer, at our fiftieth reunion,
Al devoted a wall to our twenty-nine eternal absentees.
Reading the wall, we empathized

with organ recitals of our surgeries and such,
decided to gather next in five,
not ten years.

Chukar calls and darting lizards distract me from Al
as I hike Slate Canyon. In a grove of scrub oak,
I meet two oncoming hikers. One says, *Are we glad
to see you.* They were lost too.

Blackfoot High School 1953: it was 12:58.
I was walking up stairsteps to class,
saw smoke upping behind a cardboard notice on the wall,

saw Brent, Tom, Ray, Orlan, and Al, lurking.
Al whispered, *It has a 20-inch fuse.*
We ran to class; the bell rang; in minutes, a blast echoed.

Fireball (Mr. Ferrin) saw ripped cardboard on the floor,
a burn mark on the wall, no one in the hall, and
discovered no one out of class. Next morning

he saw thirteen surprised faces.
Fireball said, *I don't know how*
but I know you guys did it. I want it stopped.

My friendship with Al was constantly tense:
our parents wanted us alcohol and tobacco free,
Fireball wanted us in school,

the police wanted quiet cars,
bouncers demanded our ID.
It was as if the guardian gods of Blackfoot

unleashed all their bonding forces on us.
Acting surprised, we survived.
Two years after my diplomaless graduation,

I got religion, missionaried, and married.
Thirteen years after his diplomaless graduation,
Al met Joyce, got religion, married her and became a Mormon bishop.

My neighbor asked why I was going to Idaho.
To attend the funeral of an old drinking buddy.
He said, *You drank?*

I hike through Bear Flats, pass a rotting wall—a lean-to of pine logs,
enter the mountain's shadow,
the dusk of tall trees, an eerie space of solitude.

I kneel and feel for the freshness of a boot print,
choose a dim path up a draw of pines and aspens,
sit on a large flat rock,

pull a page of poetry from my shirt pocket.
In primal silence, I say, *Al, I feel you're here,*
and I read him Yehuda Amichai's "Near the Wall of a House."

...

*And he who was lost like a dog
will be found like a human being
and brought back home again.*

...

One wintered leaf rustles in a scrub oak tree,
one fork withered and one fork barked.
A pair of crows sports over, caws echo back.

White threads of flora rising up out of mud
at the edge of melting snow,
surprise me.

HENRY MILES was an economic development officer in the Foreign Service, mainly in South America, before retiring into an M.A. program in creative writing at George Mason University, which he completed at Brigham Young University, where Darrell Spencer was his thesis advisor. He has published in *The Wasatch Review International*, *Touchstones*, *Irreantum*, *Inscape*, and *Dialogue*. He and his wife, Carol, have five children and twenty grandchildren.