

"Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

The Pleasure of Parenting By Carlos Martinez

It's the same routine every night: first the children
don't want to clean their rooms, then they don't want
to eat whatever's been cooked for them, then the issue
is baths, they don't want to take them, then the pajamas
don't quite fit and the books they want to read aren't the books
they want to read and then when the lights are out,
they don't want to fall asleep even if you lie down with them
and spend an hour or more of the dwindling night
cooing and singing, making comforting parenting noises.
What they do is toss and turn, kick and lash out until
someone somewhere in a darkened bedroom becomes
very loud, the walls hum with anger, the floorboards
rise up as if an earthquake happened, the cats jump from
the end of the bed and scatter, fur sticking straight up,
and the light bulbs shatter. Then the children are offended.
They cross their arms and swivel on their hips
away from you, facing the wall as if it's about to open up
and let them in someplace better, where frazzled parents
don't exist, they can have dessert any hour of the day
or night and school and homework were never invented.
So the night drags on and you remember when all it took
was a stern look, a frown, or in desperate situations
a swat on the bottom and then you fell asleep quietly.
Now the children threaten to sue if you touch them, promise
to tell the authorities you are being brutal, their word,
and you know that the heaven's will part and the gods
will strike you down because the gods, after all, have a sense of humor
and nothing you can say or do will drain your children of
their exuberance, the lives they'll lose soon enough, anyway.

This page was last updated: January 8, 2000