

Seattle City Council

Culture, Civil Rights, Health, and Personnel Committee Meeting

Wednesday, 2:00 PM, April 30th, 2008

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **John Burgess**

Today's poet is **Michael Schein**

Michael Schein of Ballard is a poet and novelist whose work appears in many journals, including *Slow Trains*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Ledge*, *Pontoon*, *Elysian Fields*, *RockSaltPlum*, *Runes*, *Lilies & Cannonballs*, and *Drash*. Michael's work has received honors, including most recently Finalist at the 2007 San Francisco Writers Conference and a 2008 Pushcart nomination. Michael is on the Board of the Washington Poets Association, Director of the LitFuse poetry workshop, Executive Director of Tieton Arts & Humanities, and a volunteer member of the ACLU-Washington speakers' bureau.

In the Checkout Line

by Michael Schein

It is Tuesday, a little before six o'clock,
and the checkout lines are backed up
so far that carts block the aisles.
The shoppers are tired, they've worked all day,
and now their domestic chores resume:
wheeling the cart, squeezing the legumes,
selecting between brands of tuna.
Before them lies more traffic,
the mewling cat or spouse,
bruised fruit, dinner to cook,
sullen teenagers who balk
when asked to help
with the dishes, yet
miraculously, they are not grouchy:
a faded woman in a bright scarf
pushing a cart laden enough
to feed an Ethiopian village

steps aside for a hunched man
clutching one pound of ground chuck;
the checker, who will be on her feet 'til ten,
jokes with a man whose toddler
romps like an untethered goose
through fields of Snickers and Baby Ruths,
while a young couple goofs on headlines
from the Weekly World & Enquirer,
Tofu is Plot by Aliens,
Hillary Spanks Monica.
The shoppers, bovine
in their gentle herding and shifting,
breathe the florescent air
with the patience of beasts
who know they will be milked
and fed and bedded down;
they mean well, take turns,
use dividers, choose
between paper and plastic,
don't abuse the express lane.

When the bomb detonates
I decide not to permit it
to knock a single can off the soup display;
this is my poem, these are good people,
so just for today the jagged fragments
will slip through the spaces between sighs,
bounce off the atmosphere like
tiny meteorites of forgiveness
on a cloudy night, unseen, harmless,
allowing these weary folks to be home
in time for dinner.

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