

The second place poem in this age group, "Learning Masculinity," is also a tribute poem; this time the speaker's father is the worthy topic. Its narrative covers the father's impact on the speaker from birth to learning to drive at sixteen. In this candid and heartfelt poem, the father's actions are metaphors for the love between father and daughter and the truth of real masculinity, which is different from what the reader assumes.

While the poem's opening is a bit raw, the poem's celebration of how the father (who delivered the speaker) loves and respects her makes the opening palatable. The bold type in the opening and closing emphasizes the information: "**I did not drown. . . / in the toilet. . . / I was born on.** / Let's start there" The opening also alerts the reader to the emergency of her birth. The speaker's drroll tone is evident: "with dad debating whether to get the camera first or call 911" and that her mom "tells this story at every birthday party I wish I didn't invite my friends to, / and I like to secretly think it's for my dad."

This new definition of masculinity continues and the father's love and wise advice for his daughter are evident. When the speaker was seven, she was embarrassed to dance with her father at school father/daughter dances, even though her father "never learned how to be embarrassed" and was "patient through each one." In teaching her how to drive, they "inhale together and don't stop until my hands relax on the steering / wheel." His protectiveness is apparent: they listen to the Bruno Mars' song "Grenade" about unrequited love, and her father tells her that the "song only counts / if you're talking about your brothers." He also believes that she shouldn't "jump in front of a train for anyone" unless he has "seen every side of [her]," Her father makes her "give those weird one arm sideways hugs to boys because they have cooties."

The father also shows his venerability. He's "never been afraid to cry in front of me" [the speaker] and "says concrete can bend if you hug it tight enough." He also "serenades me to sleep" even though he's "only kind of good at singing." Unlike other fathers, this one congratulates his daughter "on getting [her] first period / and kisses the awkward out of my forehead before I can say 'gross.' "

The ending of the poem is especially moving, and repeats the bold type of the opening:

My dad delivered me on a toilet and didn't faint at the smell, or the stench,
He smiled at the water slide of newborn skin and said, 'Baby girl, welcome
home.'

My dad works all day and still cooks dinner.
Makes me a cup of tea when I'm up past 10:30 and says

this is masculinity.

watch it coil through my fingers.

It was meant to be tender, don't let any man tell you different.

It is this "tender" brand of masculinity that this poem pays tribute to; it has worked well for the speaker and her father.

This poem takes the reader by surprise, first by the frank opening, next in describing the father's unique masculinity. Tender, emotional, and protective, this masculinity is nothing to scoff at, but something to celebrate.

Thank you for the pleasure of reading your work!

Marie Kane, Final Judge
Sarah Mook Poetry Contest, 2018