

Walt Curtis

Strawberries

I swoon at the flavor
of first fruit—fresh strawberries.
They're from the earth. Oh my God!—
there's nothing like the taste
of Oregon berries picked in the patch.
Sweeter than candy, sort of like fine
wine, but not spoiled by alcohol.
Crimson jewels from the rainy wet
dirt. My heart beats faster—
recalling sore knees, bent back,
muddy blue jeans—berry splotches
dotting my once-white t-shirt—
the sport of strawberry-picking
as a teenager near Oregon City.
We kids hated it, complained
about getting up at 5 a.m.
to board a retired school bus.
Arriving at some farmer's field
way out in Clackamas County.
The dew-wet, cold raspy rows
of ground leaves waiting
to be fondled, caressed, combed
by nimble fingers for elusive
fruit jewels. Always June was damp,
misty; gray clouds rained down
mildewing and rotting the berries
unless the sun would come out to play.
Then sunburned face and neck that day.
At lunch maybe a peanut butter and

jelly sandwich, can of pop—eyeing
the girls and avoiding going back
to work in the miserable muddy fields.
Still I would kneel on the ground,
bend my back to pay homage to that time—
to taste again startled sugar,
nectar of the gods. Simply
twiddle off the green stem, and
plop ripe berry ecstatically
in my teenage mouth. What pleasure!
The exquisite form of strawberry—
I dare not delineate it!—
is heart-shaped, pitted,
arrowhead of silken fruit.
Every variety has a different
texture and fragrance: Marshall,
Shuksan, Brandywine, Hood,
Crescent, Michael's Early, Gandy,
Climax, Lovett, Aroma. I savor
the names of strawberries
as they roll from off my tongue.