

Michael McDowell

Restoration

Woods Memorial Natural Area, Portland

On a July afternoon so hot the rhododendron leaves curl
and our tomato plants and dahlias droop,
I take the puppy over the hill to walk cool, shaded trails
along ravines of firs and cedars, maples and alders.

The dirt path is a cord pulling the dog forward.
Nessie sniffs right and left, stops
to interrogate a clump of sword fern,
chew a branch of Nootka rose, snuffle a carpet of buttercups.

We can hear I-5 over a ridge exhaling its continual sigh.
In the heat-of-the-day hush, a single bird calls, then quiets.
Beneath the green canopy, behind a wall of salmonberry,
Woods Creek quietly gurgles over its rocks.

Long ago I brought my children here
when a slimy creek slid around old tires
and bumped against chunks of concrete and crumbled bank
which clogged its raw orange-clay throat.

We dodged clawing arms of blackberry,
climbed over roots of upended trees,
skirted seeps and sodden trail and leaped the creek.
English ivy smothered trees and slopes.

After twenty years of activism, grants, and volunteers,
thimbleberry, Oregon grape, and foamflower now
cloak the slopes. Salmonberry and Indian plum
hold the stream's banks and cool its riffing waters.

The puppy pauses on a crib wall high above the creek,
then bounds along a boardwalk, peers through cedar fence rails.
We stop on each footbridge for the damp air of creek bottom
to wash over us, welcome as an ocean breeze.

