

Michael McDowell

## Beach Bonfire

After sunset we walked north,  
My children pushing bicycles through dry sand,  
Till we came to driftwood logs and built a fire.

Families flying kites in the twilight packed and left,  
The clouds flew off northwest to southwest,  
And darkness settled around the flames whipping in the wind.

Because we sang the right songs for this northern beach,  
Songs my mother's mother taught her,  
And told the old stories with our toasted marshmallows,

Hundreds of stars came out, the surf crashed louder,  
And the lighthouse on North Head three miles away  
Winked especially for us.

When the bonfire turned to coals,  
our water bottles of ocean water with fierce hiss and steam  
plunged us into darkness.

My daughter said, "Look, the waves are glowing!"  
In the booming black night, every cresting wave's white foam  
Glowed phosphorescent as a Halloween glowstick.

"It's millions of tiny sea creatures," I said, "each giving off light."  
We walked south along the night beach,  
Patterns of light glowing, shifting, crashing.

On the deserted road home  
My children bicycled in front and I followed  
With my headlight on their backs:

They glowed in the darkness,  
Small creatures turning and shifting  
And, for a moment, filled with song and stories in the darkness.

