

BRAD ORSBURN

Dr. Black Cat's Buffalo Rain Dance, 1980
offset lithograph and screen print, 22 x 30 in



courtesy the artist

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Sam

My father, working all hours
downtown at the radio station,
dressed like the president
of an English Bank—Harris Tweed,
knit tie, shirts starched with staves
and cufflinks. He must have been
closing in on 50, no life insurance,
investments, no savings or IRAs—
every last red cent (as he used to say)
spent on clothes, watches, sports cars.
He believed he was going to live forever—
no reason to think of anyone
left behind.

If he gave a thought
to anything else on earth, it was Sam,
his 20-lb. black & white bruiser of a tom,
who came in as my father returned
from work, jumping onto the counter,
rubbing against the coffee pot and
sugar bowl until he was served
his can of Friskies or 9Lives. Then,
dish licked clean, he'd paw-by-paw
sidle past the fruit basket and
toaster and leap on top of the fridge
to a cast-iron skillet—too big and heavy
to ever use—where he'd curl up

purring as my father spoke to him
and scratched behind his ears
as he went to sleep, despite dishes clanging
and my stepbrothers blaring
reruns of *Gilligan's Island*.

22 or -3,

I was teaching tennis, working a night shift
for \$2.50 an hour at Hi-Time Liquor,
reading Yeats behind the register
when it was slow. I had a VW van,
monthly payments, I was going nowhere
but drinking after work with pals—
mai tais, Singapore slings, Three Dagger Rum,
imagining what might be left
of the exotic world after Vietnam,
should I ever put together the wherewithal
to find my way out of town,
burning blindly through the youth
I had left.

I was doing nothing,
really—moonraking, plenty of time to kill—
yet, when he rubbed up against my leg,
I made little effort to give him the attention
his sweet disposition deserved,
to offer anything more than a casual
scratch. Now, waking in the middle
of the night, just short of 65,
far too late in the day
to recoup the smallest loss,
I think about that old boy
and realize how much I miss him.

Christopher Buckley's twentieth book of poetry, *Back Room at the Philosophers' Club*, is due in spring 2014 from Stephen F. Austin State University Press. With Gary Young, he edited *Bear Flag Republic: Prose Poems and Poetics from California*, 2008, and *One for the Money: The Sentence as a Poetic Form*, from Lynx House Press, 2012. He was the 2013 winner of the Campbell Corner Poetry Contest. He has received a Guggenheim, a Fulbright, and two NEA fellowships, as well as four Pushcart Prizes.