

JAMES HARMS

Every Night

In his eighties my father moved nearby
And watched me love my children
In ways small and smaller, mostly
In how we embraced at every
Parting, said I love you in front
Of strangers, kissed as if the act
Of placing lips to cheek or lips
Was a way of sealing the envelope
Of time, a letter we laid at the feet
Of hours, our hours together,
Which we honored daily with one
Brief embrace after another, affection
So normal to us and ordinary it
Seemed strange to have my father
Remark upon it again and again
With admiration, a sort of awe.
And so he began, too, in the last years
Of his life to say as a sort of psalm
I love you whenever any of us
Left the room. As if each doorway
Was an air lock into another atmosphere
Of familial devotion.

Every night

I kneel beside my young son's bed
Not to pray with him or to his sleeping
Self, but to feel his small chest rise
Beneath my hand, which measures
His breath the way my father now
Measures his days: with chances
To say, I love you. I love you,
I whisper to my sleeping son,
Who snores softly, and rolls over.

James Harms is the author of nine books of poetry including the forthcoming *Rowing with Wings* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2017). Originally from Altadena, California, he now teaches in the MFA Program at West Virginia University.

PETER HARRIS

Santa Cruz, CA:

House with Mailbox, 2002

Digital pigment print on polyester substrate, 6 x 8 in



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