

# Poetry Porch: Poetry

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## Elegy Sketched in an Estuary Cove

By Richard Dey

Christopher R. Gillespie (1942–2015)

Last night, a cold January night  
on the coast, a friend who loved nothing better  
than a sail on a summer day, died in bed.  
As well as anyone, he understood  
the estuary tide and eddies, knew  
the channel curves and rocks, the salt marsh creeks,  
the sound and pull of cord grass grazing the hull,  
and where in mud to find the choicest quahogs.  
He won his share of races, and lost them too.  
Summer nights, in the moonlight, he'd anchor out  
for a picnic alone with his wife (the no-see-ums  
notwithstanding), other nights with their kids and friends.  
It was the west branch of the river he knew best.  
He'd sketch it time and again, in different media,  
knowing, though, he'd never catch all its moods,  
how he knew them, their pulse his own.

This morning the river is frozen over in  
its upper reaches, ragged with ice floes at  
the harbor mouth where waves, white-maned, break.  
You wouldn't think in a time like this a man  
like him would have his boat in the water,  
out in the cove, that he'd row out to her,  
raise the sail, and let go the mooring.  
But it's not what you think about—cancer.  
Surely in his mind, in his dream of life,  
the boat heeled and hummed as she surged ahead  
on the boisterous sou'west wind, a bone in her teeth,  
eliciting his balance, his windward sense.