

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Klieglight Kliegl

By Helen Heineman

In Memory of Joseph Kliegl

My father invented lights for a living,
Illuminating the Met's orchestra pit,
The Roxy Theatre and the Rockettes,
Even the Long Island estate
Where the Scott Fitzgeralds drank and danced
On a summer's evening.

Over fifty when I was born,
Already the father of three,
In my early years, he took me on spring walks
To Cunningham Park, burned piles of leaves
In fall with me in our Queens backyard.
In winter when the tennis courts were flooded
And frozen over, he skated with me,
And I wore my velvet hat and muff.

Later, he found me a difficult daughter
Who wanted things,
A college education, not a job as secretary,
Though even Dickens learned shorthand
To make his start in life.

He never doted on me, or held me on his lap.
Angry when I spent too much on clothes, he disliked
My TV preferences for the roller derby and Milton Berle,
And demanded A's in everything.

I delivered, though, "After all," he said,
"It was only what I expected."

When I earned my Ph.D.,
He sent a hundred dollars with a note,
Written in a faltering hand:
"I'm proud of you. Love Daddy."
I spent the money on the complete novels
Of Dickens and Trollope's Manor House series,
Bound in red leather.

He's long gone now, buried in New York,
In a district stuffed with cemeteries
On both sides of the road,
In a graveyard so overcrowded
It took me hours to find his marker.

But his brief last message,
Signed as if delivered to my childhood self,
Still streams from those books,
Like those wonderful lights
That gave off brightness without heat,
Sending our family name into the dictionary.
The memory still lights up the room for me.