

Our Generation

Carl Dennis

Whatever they'll say about our delinquencies,
They'll have to agree we managed to bridge the gap
Between those who arrived before us
And those who followed. We learned enough
At the schools available to fill the entry-level positions
At the extant sawmills our elders managed,
At banks, drug stores, freight yards, and hospitals,
Then worked our way up to positions of trust.
There we were, down on the shop floor
Or up in the manager's office, or outside the office
On scaffolds, washing the windows.
Did we work with joy? With no less joy
Than people felt in the generations before us.
And on weekends and weekday evenings
We did our best to pursue the happiness
Our founders encouraged us to pursue,
And with equal gusto. Whatever they say about us
They can't deny that we filled the concert halls,
Movie houses, malls, and late-night restaurants.
We took our bows on stage or waited on tables
Or manned the refreshment booths to earn a little extra
For the things we wanted, the very things
Pursued by the generations before us
And likely to be pursued by generations to come:
Children and lawns and cars and beach towels.
And now and then we stood back to admire
The colorful spectacle, the endless variety,
As others before us admired it, and then returned
To fill our picnic baskets, drive to the park,
And use the baseball diamonds just as their contrivers
Intended they should be used. And if we too
Crowded into the squares to cheer the officials
Who proclaimed our country as fine in fact
As it is in theory, as faithful a friend to the planet
As any country we cared to name,
A few of us confined to a side street,
Carried signs declaring a truth less fanciful.
A few unheeded, to be sure, but no more unheeded
Than a similar few in generations before us
Who hoped that the truth in generations to come,
Though just as homely, would find more followers.