

Cold War Bunker

Laura Sweeney

When we returned to Bible School Thursday morning
we thought we were going to make lanyards.
But instead, our teachers announced a field trip, explained
that our town was located a few hours from Omaha's
Strategic Command Base. In a nuclear attack we
were in range of the hit list. We all grimaced
as they loaded us onto a bus said *We think you'll like this*
without telling us where we were going – a gravel lot
at the intersection of Hwy 17 & R 38. Underneath
we filed into a doomsday shelter, like the boys and girls
I'd seen in a movie marching into a cavern to be devoured
by body snatching beasts. I whispered *Jesus*
as I'd been taught to ward off danger. They escorted us
into a radio room where I imagined a DJ spinning
atomic jingles or signaling us through the rotary phone
or the antennas towering above to take shelter.
The shelves were stocked with mystery meat, canned
cheese, and biscuits. They gave us each a lemon drop.
As we walked through the dorm of cots I wondered

what trinkets I would bring to fill the drawer underneath.
Maybe the cross my father carved for me in the basement
where once my family huddled praying the tornado
that funneled through central Iowa would pass over us.
Some of us linked arms but I didn't feel safe. Besides
in case of annihilation, wasn't our god big enough
to rescue me and my classmates? The early Christians escaped
into caves. But I wanted to escape into the white church
with the red steeple high on the hill across the highway.

Laura Sweeney facilitates Writers for Life in Iowa and Illinois. She represented the Iowa Arts Council at the First International Teaching Artist's Conference in Oslo, Norway. Her poems and prose appear in seventy plus journals and twenty-four anthologies in the States, Canada, Britain, Indonesia, and China. Her recent awards include a scholarship to the Sewanee Writer's Conference. She is a PhD candidate, English Studies/Creative Writing, at Illinois State University.