

MARILYN JOHNSTON

Final Flight

—an elegy to Robert, one of the WWII Flying Tigers

It was fall and the birch leaves
barely turned by the time
he left, in the season he
always looked forward to—
with its slight chill in the air
and the crunch of dried leaves
as we followed the narrow
Willamette River path;
the call of the heron as it
unfolded its great wings
over the slough.

And I remember how
he'd race ahead of me,
and for a moment
was that tiger again,
in his P-40 over China,
as it pitched,
yawed and rolled—

and now, his missing left leg,
a metal prosthetic,
leaping out
of a frayed cuff;
and his missing right hand,
hook high overhead—
as if he could
outrun time,
and I half-believed him.

MARILYN JOHNSTON is an Oregon writer and filmmaker. Her collection of poems, *Red Dust Rising*, about a family's healing from war, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is a writing facilitator in the Artist in the Schools program, primarily working with incarcerated youth.