

I Am a Jew

Michael Gurian

I am a Jew, 47 years old, of no special courage.
Every day I try to feel myself in the soil and the stem,
 in the light of ancient books and of new words;
I try to sense the fingertip of G-d in the fragrance
 of my children's newly washed hair.
Every day, I try to sing with a spirit both measured and ecstatic,
find places to worship where I can feel the warmth
 that first attracted me toward my birth.
Scorn the beasts that covet the blood on my door.
 I am a Jew.

Have you seen the Jews? When a train rumbles by,
we see ghostly faces in the boxcars. When hounds roam the kingdom,
we know those white teeth grin because the animals have already fed;
 I am a Jew already eaten. In seventh grade, in Laramie, Wyoming,
 three boys grasped my big Jewish nose with pliers—
“Does it stretch? Does it grow?”
 I still feel the flat file marks on my skin.

The Jews have forgiven the world, but do not know if the world has
forgiven them.

 This is a Jew.