Richard Blanco of Bethel read his poem “One Today” at the second inauguration of President Obama. Here, he explores the connections between his hands and the hands of his father.

My Father, My Hands

by Richard Blanco

My father gave me these hands, fingers inch-wide and muscular like his, the same folds of skin like squinted eyes looking back at me whenever I wash my hands in the kitchen sink and remember him washing garden dirt off his, or helping my mother dry the dishes every night.

These are his fingernails—square, flat—ten small mirrors I look into and see him signing my report card, or mixing batter for our pancakes on Sunday mornings. His same whorls of hair near my wrists, magnetic lines that pull me back to him tying my shoelaces, pointing at words as I learned to read, and years later: greasy hands teaching me to change the oil in my car, immaculate hands showing me how to tie my necktie.

These are his knuckles—rising, falling like hills between my veins—his veins, his pulse at my wrist under the watch he left for me ticking since his death, alive when I hold another man’s hand and remember mine around his thumb through the carnival at Tamiami Park, how he lifted me up on his shoulders, his hands wrapped around my ankles keeping me steady above the world, still.

Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry is produced in collaboration with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Poem copyright © 2012 Richard Blanco. Reprinted from Looking for The Gulf Motel, University of Pittsburg Press, 2012, by permission of Richard Blanco. Questions about submitting to Take Heart may be directed to Gibson Fay-LeBlanc, Special Consultant to the Maine Poet Laureate, at mainepoetlaureate@gmail.com or 207-228-8263. Take Heart: Poems from Maine, an anthology collecting the first two years of this column, is now available from Down East Books.