

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

According to Stu Kestenbaum of Deer Isle, this week's poem is about a special sort of laughter: "the snorting, uncontrollable, transcendent" kind "that visits us in childhood."

Laughter

by Stuart Kestenbaum

You know the kind of laughter
when you laugh so hard and unexpectedly
you can snort liquid right through
your nose, like the soda you were drinking.
That's what happened to me with a milkshake
when I was 11 years old and too worried
for my own good. My uncle and I were swapping
book jokes. "Have you read Tiger's Revenge
by Claude Balls?" he asks, which strikes me
as so funny that I begin to laugh
uncontrollably and milk is dripping from my nose
almost like I've thrown up, but instead
I feel incredibly light and happy.
That's the kind of laughter that even
if you have been crying and heard someone
else laughing, you would start to laugh.
It spreads like a wind passing
through leaves, it makes the bitter muscle
of the heart unclench itself. Imagine,
all this from only eight words from my uncle,
and one of those a preposition
with only two letters.

Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry is produced in collaboration with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Poem copyright © 2003 Stuart Kestenbaum. Reprinted from House of Thanksgiving, Deerbrook Editions, 2003, by permission of Stuart Kestenbaum. 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.*