“Found Voices” is a chapbook of ten fictional tales and dramatic monologues. One tale is a prose poem/microfiction; the other nine pieces are in verse. None of the material is autobiographical, although in one tale, the unidentified speaker is me (I’m recounting, pretty faithfully, a dream I had one night). My hope for most of these pieces was that they might work equally well on the page, as narrative poems, and on stage, as theatrical monologues. Since they’re mostly quite long, I’ll include only the closing poem here, but the table of contents should give you some idea of the collection’s range.

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In Memoriam Robert Jarrett Waldron

My father died this Tuesday… I’m sorry—I see

the words on the page, but not how to mean them…

My father, died, this Tuesday. You in this room

knew him, I suspect, better than I did—I suspect

knowing him less whole, you saw only the truer

part of him. Even before founding this reading

series, this "shared continent" of yours, he was a

poet "of confessions, of the small lyric tale

of who did what to whom, not meaning to, and how

it hurt." You may know those lines; what you may not know,

what he never wrote of, as far as I can tell,

was how he loved his children, my brother Grainge and me,

into a cessation of engagement; as adults,

we withdrew to our three corners of the ring,

rarely to risk the touch of gloves. Before June, I'd

seen the old man once in six years. But then he fell

ill, and sent for us, and I came… And so I can

stand here, and feel, well, some warmth of him in my arms.

Too slim a weight, perhaps—less than a son should feel?

Yes. But it is something. Tomorrow at his church,

as you know, is the official memorial.

This one's the rehearsal. I'm hoping that the grace

you've learned here to bestow on homilies like mine

will buoy me; because tomorrow will be harder;

perhaps, without your help, too hard. I have no church.

Nor, of course, was my father, not as most people

measure it, a man of faith. What he believed in,

he wrote, was "not belief but worship"; his faith was

"not faith but praise." He sang and prayed his heart out with

the Christians, while remaining, or so he claimed, a heathen.

I have my doubts. I suspect worship converted him.

He worshipped broadly. He kept a log for it, of what

to worship next. We two were there, quite often. Even

as kids, we'd know it was our turn: he'd hold us more,

do more with us, shift to study us as we spoke.

Usually, we'd be paired with some other item,

like swimming, cycling, something he hoped we'd come

to love together… I'll tell one story. For five weeks

we went caving. I did love it, in fact, and he

loved it, you know what the Bluffs are like—no one who

grows up in Barracks Gap can help knowing, at least

by reputation—the Bluffs caves are spectacular.

And then they're terrifying: always that fear you

might be lost. But I wasn't deterred—which he took

pains to praise. You know: "It's when it's hard to worship

that the worship starts." I was 16—of an age

to wince when somebody in my life went all pet

piety on me. But I did want to cave. I nodded with.

And in secret bought a guidebook, with wonderful

charts, which I studied till I had by heart. And trip

after trip, I grew easier with them—aware

that at any time he might declare the program

had moved on, that *this* trip was our last—so falling

harder, faster, as with a holiday romance.

And at first, both my passion and my flair, the work

he took for flair, delighted him. He let me lead;

and I went where in the caves I had read to go.

There's a poem from then, "The Bluffs"? He inscribed it

to me. It imagines being lost in the pitch dark,

and admits to the wish to *be* lost, and the itch

of dissatisfaction at *not* being…

And then,

of course, we did get lost. I took a wrong turn and

he followed. I took another, and I knew it

must be wrong. Which… Well, I *was* stubborn, and I was

stupid, but the point was, I was also quite young.

Why, I thought, can't he tell: take charge? Instead, there was

a tunnel it seemed we could maybe squeeze through and

I squeezed down it. And he followed. But it narrowed;

he got stuck… His arms were thrust out in front of him,

that was something; so after a while, a long while,

I had his sweatshirt tugged off, and he could squinch free.

But then we were in a cavern. Massive; featureless;

and who knew where. I was slumped with my back to

the wall, knees to my chest; I shook, and shook, the breath

wheezed out of me in bolts. "My kind of cathedral,"

was what my father said. A whisper, but it echoed.

He laid his hand on my shoulder; sat by me;

took out the thermos and the sandwiches. He was,

I could see but not accept, quite deeply happy.

We ate in silence. We sat. He reached for my flashlight—

his was off—and extinguished it. We sat there

in the absolute blackness, hearing each other breathe.

Till my panic dimmed to a kind of resignation,

and his rapture to something sane… Ha! My dad

the badass psalmodist. And his god-drunk epiphanies.

Forgive me. To be his son, without being a

child, I do find that tough… We got back as we'd come,

him leading now, but not much fuss. Well, I did turn

my ankle, and of course had to lean on him. That

was the end of the caving, and again he'd won.

My task now, if I have it right, is to praise him.

It should be easy. I loved my father, I looked

up to him, my mother died just as I turned ten

and he became our only parent, he raised us

with love and fervor, he was there. But it was dad

who taught me about praise, and what he taught was,

praise without challenge, without color, praise that isn't

hard is thin. Do I believe this, I try not to,

but in his case? Despite myself, I find it true.

He was spectacular; he was terrifying;

he was most comfortably himself measuring

himself against the dark, and the emptiness, to sing

into their resonance of scale; he loved to fail,

“to finger the bits of the broken song.” He was

delighted by what he couldn't find ways to like—

the wheeze of barrel organs, cell-phones, the smell of beer—

he laughed at what peeved him and he became endearing.

He loathed the hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful"—

in church warbling the Monty Python variant,

"All things dull and ugly, all creatures short and squat"—

not, he averred, to drown out the original,

only as ballast to it. He taught me to read;

he sang in the car; he smoked. (Rarely! I reacted

as though to *clouds* of smoke!) He overpowered me;

all my life I was so young and small. Nursing him

these last months began, perhaps, as a small revenge.

It became more tender; perhaps wholly tender.

Burying him now I am at a loss.