

On the Dayton Floodwall, May 28, 2010

by Robert K. Wallace

Tonight I wrote till the sun went down,
Dusk on the floodwall, no worry about the sun.

Lovely association with the past, three-decker steamboat,
Lights a-glitter, sailing down river.

After passing middle-aged white guy,
A bag and a bunch of clothes on his bench,
A stirring glimpse of the future:
A mother herding her daughters,
Aged five, four, three, and two,
Along the path, the fifth, new born,
In the stroller she was pushing,
Instructing each and all lovingly.

Short and dark-skinned, like her daughters,
She looked to me Hispanic, so I rolled
Out my Spanish from my time in Spain
Thirty-four years ago, grateful
That she answered, naming each daughter
And saying her own as Laura,
Reminding me of the Laura from Barcelona,
About her age, I met in Jerusalem
Late last June.

Walking farther than usual,
Enjoying a light breeze,
I passed Laura and her daughters
On the way back, stopping to chat,
Too, with the guy on the bench, he
Being an old running buddy of my friend Frank,
Who, this man does not yet know,
Can no longer live at home, having
Moved last week to an extended care facility.

As we spoke, Laura and her five
Passed us now in this direction,
Stragglers now in line,
Her staccato maternal patter as reassuring
As the fireworks that just came upriver
From the Reds' game, a new home run
Perhaps contributing to another home victory.

Heading off the floodwall to the city park,
And up to Schneider's Sweet Shop,

Now open to ten p.m. in the summer,
I saw a couple of SUV customers loading up
Before I ordered something myself,
Which, as I ate at a table, gave me
A good view of a heavy-set middle-aged man
And a heavy-set late teenish girl,
They joined, in making multiple orders,
By two tall, thin teeners in black baggy pants,
Low over gaudy sockless tennis shoes,
Black shirts equally long and baggy,
Their voices intentionally inarticulate or not,
All I could make out being from one,
“Lost 400 skateboarding today.”

As the four walked out the door,
It being closing time,
I was able to ask the teenage counter girls
What kind of guys were those,
What category you would put them in,
To which the youngest, the alert, perky one,
Catching my drift, said, “Gangster.
Not impressive. Not to me.”