

The Words

They can stitch up wounds
as easily as slit the skin—

words can chip away the bricks
that are built up in our heads.

Words are born by breathing in the air around us,
letting the present fill up our lungs,

they are the quivering voice box,
and the twitching tongue.

Listen: words travel from my mouth
into a hive of electronic circuitry,

where they are stored in a honeycomb of wiring,
and then, miracle of miracles,

this past recording of my voice—
what you hear now—

travels out from a loudspeaker,
and taps against the drum

of your inner ear.
The Morse code of my words

enters the empire of your skull
like a flaring electrical storm.

For a moment, the space between you
and I is overwritten, collapsed.

We are in unison, in spite of it all.

This is what the words can do:
when strung together in a sentence,

they become a warm jewel,
or a flinty arrowhead.

Words can wound us. Words can heal us.
They are a balm of illuminated kindness,

they can say *I love you, I miss you,*
and *Why did you abandon me?*

Best of all, words can pull us together,
and resurrect the dead.

When I think of those missing from my life,
when I see their faces in my daydreams,

I also hear their voices.
Listen now.

Can you hear the beloved dead,
of your own life, whispering to you?

It's okay, they say. I'm still with you, they say.
Think of me, and I am still alive in your head.

Words are what people remember of us—
words can travel beyond the grave,

words can offer healing to the future,
and they can bind the centuries together.

Beautiful words are inside you right now.
All you have to do is open your mouth,

and let them go.

Patrick Hicks

Augustana College, 2001 S Summit Avenue, Sioux Falls, SD, 57197