

Names Which Must Be Spoken

Names abounding rolled from my grandmother's tongue.

 Klimek, Voboril, Piskorski

She tolled their weddings and births, illnesses and deaths,

 Kruml, Kapustka, Turek

their foibles, infidelities, kind acts and cruel.

 Beran, Kusek, Papiernik

She traced family trees down to cousins far removed

 Welniak, Skolil, Benda

and mapped their names by topography.

 Cedar Valley Koellings, Lost Creek Nolls,

 Box Canyon Florians

My grandmother prayed with Goraks and Sudowskis,

worked altar society with Blahas and Bruhas,

danced the polka beside Miskos and Longs,

prizing each name like a mother her child's,

 Wozniak, Zabloudil, Furtak

until age stole her breath's naming grace.

She lies among Radils and Huffs, Cummins,

Carkoskis, Kovariks, Meeses, Krajniks, Petskas—

Such as these walked here to the sound of their names.

Names which must be spoken, time leaving so little else.

My grandmother named my first forty years.

We are never too late to speak them:

Wachtrle. Her name. Wachtrle. My breath.

Darrell Petaka retired after more than thirty years as an editor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Before university life, he worked as a psychiatric tech/caseworker and nursing home evaluator. His poetry has appeared in *Bolts of Silk*, *Red Fez*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Scissors & Speckle*, *LummoX*, *HEArt Online*, *Eunoia Review* and elsewhere.