

Gracie in My Heart

Well, Gracie,
you're in there.
You made it,

but-

but, I don't think
this is what you had in mind.
Sure, you were hand-picked
when you were a baby or a cub
or a piglet
or whatever newborn pigs are called.
And you were raised in special
sanitary surroundings
a "pure porcine environment," they called it.

So, now you are in my heart, Gracie,
or at least part of you is.
Your perfect aortic valve has replaced
my disfigured one,
and though you will not know any more
of your own life,
part of you has joined and is prolonging the life
of a poetic sort of creature,
a human creature.

I think, Gracie,
I want to think, Gracie,
that when you were whole
and had your own integrity as a creature
that you once or twice hesitated,
lingered,
to look a moment at a sunset,
or cocked your round head,
to listen to a bird call,
or heard and wondered about
the laughter of children,
the cries of newborn baby pigs younger than you.

So Gracie, here we are.
Inseparable for the rest of my life
and for the rest of the life of your
aortic heart valve.
We two, we are one.
It's not quite like the oneness of marriage.
You see, it wasn't a minister that knit us together.
It was a surgeon,
a surgeon of the heart,
a skilled compassionate heart surgeon,
a female like you,
and your name is Gracie, and hers is Nora,

Nora Burgess to tell the whole story.

I'm sure glad the three of us met.
Are you also glad, Gracie?
I hope I can do continuing honor
to that most precious part of yourself
that was given to me.

Know that yours
is a place of honor in my heart,

a place of gratitude

and honor. ❖



BOB RANDOLPH, a Kaiser Permanente member, is very active in the world of poetry. He has published 6 books of poetry, hosts two radio programs regularly, and is a guest on several others where he discusses and recites his poetry. He wrote *Gracie in my Heart* in August 1994, after having an operation to replace his aortic valve with a porcine valve—given to him by a pig he named "Gracie."