

His Back Pocket & Other Poems by Mick Cochrane

Mick Cochrane is a professor of English and a longtime teller of stories. His published works include novels, short stories, essays, and poetry. His work is compelling, candid, and cuts straight to the heart of what it means to be human, what it means to experience love, loss, limitation, and transcendence. What follows is a selection of three of his poems.
-- DailyGood Editors

My Mother's Wooden Spoon

I keep it in a clear tub, neatly labeled
"Childhood," my mother's wooden spoon, darkened
now with age, like a vintage baseball bat.
She spent her last months crippled by MS, ankles
grotesquely swollen, her heart and kidneys
failing, confined to an adjustable
medical chair provided by the county,
positioned in our shabby dining room.
I helped my sister do what needed to be done.
There was an oxygen machine, a catheter
bag, compression socks, bottles of pills.
That spoon was always in her hand.
She used it to work the controls on her chair,
or point at what she wanted brought to her.

When she needed us, she banged it on the arm
of the chair. I could hear it, even in my bedroom,
writing an essay, listening to music,
trying to forget who and where I was,
and I didn't always come right away.

When my sister tried to read to her
some lines from Khalil Gibran, parents
and children, archers and arrows, my mother
pointed that spoon like a weapon, silenced
what she didn't want to hear.

On the night before she died, her brother
sat at her side, flown in from Nashville
because he had a feeling. Charlie
leaned in to kiss her one last time and
she touched him on the shoulder with that spoon,
her hand a crippled claw now, something regal
about her, clutching her battered wooden scepter.
Someday my sons will have to take the lid off.
What's this? they'll wonder. Who saves a wooden
spoon? Keep or toss. They'll need to decide.

His Back Pocket

for Dr. Joseph Leach, Minnesota Oncology

Don't worry he always says I've got

something else in my back pocket

he's got clinical trials he's got

off-label he's got stuff from Sloan

Kettering he's got what Lance

Armstrong juiced his team with

he's got more milestones he
tells you he's got your twins;

graduations he's got some new
theories his back pocket has

back pockets who's your tailor

you ask and he just laughs he has

your next birthday he's got Gamma

Knife and gene therapy and some

cocktail the Mayo Brothers don't

know about yet he's such a modest

magician he's got your trip

to California he's got stories

about remission like you

wouldn't believe he's got something

for nausea and pain and numbness

and tingling in your extremities

but you both know there's always

a last thing even in the deepest

pocket "time is an ocean"

you know what he's got

to show you "but it ends at the shore"

not today but soon you can see its outlines

almost feel the weight of the last

thing he will produce from his back

pocket

In Zone Three

no one thanks us for our service

we have accumulated no

points no perks we have no

right to upgrade no hope

of extra leg space or complimentary
anything it doesn't matter what indignity

our poorly packed luggage suffers to make

it fit we are nobodies red-eyed

sleepless lumps of coffee fear

we wear cargo shorts and Crocs

we are the army of the un-

fashionable we are a-stylish we

take no selfies because

we don't want to know we are

flustered by TSA and pet

the wrong dogs we belong

on a bus but we are here please

forgive us our sorry state

our heartache is too sudden

so this one time we must

find a way to fly

For more inspiration, join a circle with Mick Cochrane this Saturday. For anyone with a story to tell, questions abound: What do I say? What form shall it take? Who is my audience? And once written, why and how to send it in to the world? Saturday's circle is an opportunity to hear Mick talk about his work and share insights about his writing process. You can RSVP for the circle [here](#).