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September 11, 2016

On CNN, the reporter interviews a priest
from Manhattan, asks him what long term effect
9/11 has had on us all. The priest says
*For fifteen years we've all been walking around
with a lump in our throats.*

I was an ocean away,
in Ireland, already afternoon,
in the stands of the Galway Races.
The boys we were meeting had just
heard the news on a taxi's radio.

Inside, people placing their bets
at each glass window. All the TV screens
that tracked the race flickered off
and the news came on, and we had
bought Guinnesses,

and we held them, half full, unaware
they were in our hands as the second plane hit –
or a replay of the second plane hitting,
again and again. I was in Ireland,
in the country four of my great grandparents,

Honora and John, Esther and Samuel,
had left for Ellis Island.
Ten days earlier, my parents
had driven me through New York City
to the Newark Airport.

From the backseat as we crossed
the George Washington Bridge,

the Towers. Ten days later,
Flight 93 would also take off from Newark.
This was the last place I would see

my father alive, who would die
in his sleep that November.
There he stood, bottom of the escalator,
in a light green polo shirt, khaki shorts,
boat shoes and white socks pulled

halfway up his shins, waving.
I no longer remember where he said he was
when the planes hit – perhaps in a van
delivering flowers, his new
retirement job. We will keep asking

each year *where were you?*
until no one was anywhere,
until a new world grows up,
pushes up beneath September.
My mother, up late one night

watching the news – Ground Zero,
family members still there, xeroxed copies
of the missing gripped in their hands.
My mother, falling asleep to this,
asked God if there's anything she can do

to relieve their suffering –
to let it be done.
The next morning she found my father,
cold, unmoving in the bed.
I flew home for his funeral,

leaving Ireland before the semester ended,
before a planned trip to Amsterdam,
my plane ticket exchanged for a flight
back to Newark. The embers
of the Towers still smoldering



though I didn't look out the window.
Several of my aunts and uncles, my sister
met me there. In a rented limo,
we rode back to our old white house
in Connecticut, rode through

a tangle of thru-ways, potholes,
we rode home through the flags.
In my memory they were everywhere –
draped from every possible bridge,
and homemade USA banners and posters,

some in tatters. I craned my neck,
the flags hung from the balconies
of the steep apartments.
Uncle John, sitting across from me,
noticed my noticing, lifted his hands,

palms open to the grey canyons, said
It's been incredible –
you've missed it all.