

## “MY FATHER’S RULER”

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### My Father’s Ruler

After he died, I came upon it in a box,  
the small grave of his few possessions:  
an eighteen-inch length of stainless steel thinner than a dime  
that helped this humble heir to Gutenberg  
compose for almost thirty years  
hand-set type for printing business forms.  
I never asked, and so I never knew  
the craft and cost of every mortal day.

When I pick up the ruler—cool, straight, strong, silent—  
I feel as if I’m touching his fingers,  
warm and long, agile and elegant as a pianist’s,  
made for the instrument he never played,  
though I did, my lessons paid for by his labor.

I use his ruler often now to measure  
lengths and widths and heights and depths  
but most of all to draw straight lines.  
But it does not tell me how  
to measure the distance between us now—  
longer than all rivers, wider than all seas,  
higher than all stars, deep as the griefs  
of all lost daughters, fourth-dimension runners,  
discomposed, looking for lost fathers,  
forever seeking a straight line to them  
in this bent and buckled, weak and weary,  
cold and clamorous world.

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\* Sr. LUCILLE C. THIBODEAU, p.m., Ph.D., is Writer-in-Residence at Rivier University. A Professor of English, Emerita, she was President of Rivier from 1997-2001. She earned her Ph.D. from Harvard University in Comparative Literature (British, French, and Medieval Latin literatures) and is a Fellow of the American Council on Education. Sister Lucille is also a member of the New Hampshire Wildlife Coalition and a board member of Voices of Wildlife in New Hampshire. Her current research interests include animal ethics and animal rights. Most recently, she has published an article on factory farming in the United States in *Ethical Vegetarianism and Veganism* (Routledge/Oxford, 2019). In spring 2020 she will teach a course to Rivier juniors entitled *Animals, Justice, and Responsibility*. Sr. Lucille has published several poems. She continues to work on a book-length manuscript of poems as well as on a memoir.