

Class Reunion Website

by Morgan Ray

A rose by your name
meant you were dead.
Scrolling the list of my classmates
I was shocked at how many,
not yet sixty, were gone.

It was cancer mostly,
turns out, we were all
downwinders, raised
in the desert basins
and valleys of Utah.

We went about the business
of being teenagers, unaware,
that some of our fates were sealed
at nearby test sites where they waited
for prevailing winds to carry

clouds of radiation,
down and away from California's
heavily populated cities.
I was twenty-five before I heard the term
downwinder.

Now, so many dead,
including my best friend Sue,
who married Willie-the-postman
in our senior year
and made it last.

I liked her so much that I agreed
to wear a frilly bridesmaid dress with
a hoop skirt and floppy brimmed hat;
a get-up straight out of
Gone with The Wind.

My mother loved that baby blue dress.
She made me let her take my picture,
standing by the swing in our backyard.
It broke her heart when I accidentally
burned a hole in it with a cigarette.

I was never sure
if it was the dress she mourned
or my smoking
or the belle she knew I'd never be
or that I was leaving home.

And now, I wonder if running away
from the trailing blue ribbons
on a floppy brimmed hat; fleeing
the Utah desert and all it represented
might just have saved my life.