

## Poems by Stanley Barkan

### MY WIFE SAYS

*after Hal Sirowitz*

#### I

Don't try to pass that car,  
my wife says.  
If you do, we'll get hit on my side,  
and I'll get killed,  
but you'll survive.  
Then you'll be all alone,  
and, after awhile, you'll be so lonely  
you won't want to live anymore.  
Then you'll call Dr. Kevorkian  
who'll help you to commit suicide  
and probably be put on trial  
because there's a law against it  
in New York. Then nobody else  
who needs to end his suffering  
will be able to do it, all because  
you didn't listen to me.

#### II

Don't do the Atkins diet,  
my wife says.  
All the meat you'll eat is full of fat,  
and you know you can't do without bread & pasta.  
What'll you do when we go to Sicily  
and they cook *pasta trapanese* for you?  
Are you going to refuse and insult them?  
What about all that garlic bread you love so much?  
And how are you going to refuse frijoles  
with the chili you taught me how to make?  
And how are you going to eat

chow mein and chop suey without fried rice?  
Your veins will just fill up with fat and cholesterol  
and you'll get a heart attack and die young.  
Then I'll inherit everything  
and eat pasta and chili and chow mein  
with garlic bread and filjoles and rice  
to my heart's content, and live to a ripe old age.

## PARADOX II

"Dashiell is  
a poet,  
an artist,  
a musician,  
and a good person  
—perfect for our family."

"Dashiell kissed me."

She is 6 going on 7,  
maybe on 27.

Her mother laughs,  
remembering when  
she was in the 7th grade  
and asked her mother:  
"When is it old enough  
to go out with boys?"

Her mother answered:  
"We'll worry about it  
when the time comes."

A day or two later,  
she announced:  
"Mommy, the time's come."

Oh, but when is it time?  
Isn't there time enough?

We rush headlong  
into adulthood,  
not even stopping  
to be a child,  
skipping rope,  
jumping right over  
to teen time,  
hurrying  
to become  
a grown up—  
all too soon.

Then we look back  
in wonder at  
what has passed,  
what we missed,  
yearning for another  
chance  
to be young again,  
a child once more,  
“innocent as strawberries.”