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Flint Hills National Grasslands, for Daniel

Denise Low

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Earth
Sandra Scott-Revelle

FLINT HILLS NATIONAL GRASSLANDS, FOR DANIEL

Our eyes travel into blue haze
forty miles, and I tell my son
about our several-great grandparents
who lived just west of this summit.
Their graves lie in a far distant fold,
a valley where their voices mix
into a blur of lost wind gusts
like those rushing into our ears.

I tell him about a photograph
of our Lenape grandfather —
his jet hair and deep black eyes
looking at us from a quiet face.
It must have been springtime
because of the flat dry bluestem
crushed around his wagon in ripples
half a lifetime before any marriage.

I tell my son about Grandmother,
mostly Irish and German,
and lots of questions about her past
but she was born in Kansas
and now lies in the quilt layers
of hills around us, next to him
and next to twin baby girls
and my own mother's ashes.

Under the stalled sun, afternoon
seems to hang unmoving forever —
the solar fire just past zenith,
the clouds heaped to the heavens
above flint-smooth edges of horizon.
Below, monarchs flicker a trail
as they migrate through the Hills
as far as any of us can see.

Denise Low, Kansas Poet Laureate 2007-2009, is a fifth-generation Kansan from Emporia, where she grew up with the Flint Hills on the western horizon. Low won a Red Mountain Press Award for "Shadow Light: Poems." Recent publications are "The Turtle's Beating Heart: One Family's Story of Lenape Survival" (University of Nebraska) and "Jigsaw Puzzling: Essays" (Meadowlark Books). Her doctorate is from the University of Kansas and her Master of Fine Arts from Wichita State. She was a professor at Haskell Indian Nations University and is a founding member of Indigenous Native Poets. Deniselow.net