



Al Ortolani

Distinguished Kansas Poet

- [E-mail](#)

Al Ortolani has been a teacher in secondary education in Kansas since 1974. He began his career in Baxter Springs, Kansas where he taught from 1974-79. He then moved back to his hometown of Pittsburg, Kansas where he taught from 1979 to 2006. Presently, he teaches for the Blue Valley School District in Overland Park, Kansas. For several years, he was a member of the adjunct faculty at Pittsburg State University, and at the moment, works with Blue Valley Advanced Placement students in the College Now program offered through Johnson County Community College. Ortolani is married to a teacher, Sherri Ortolani; they have four children, two who have entered the teaching field as well.

Ortolani's poetry has appeared in a number of journals around the country. Including: The Kansas Quarterly, The Midwest Quarterly, Kansas English, The English Journal, Wilderness, The Cottonwood Review, The Quarterly, Aethlon: A Journal of Sport's Literature, The New York Quarterly, The Redneck Review, Poetry Motel, The Sow's Ear Poetry Review, Modern Haiku, The Laurel Review, The Little Balkan's Review, Kansas Voices and others. He has one chapbook *Slow Stirring Spoon* which was published by High/Coo Press and a book of poems, *The Last Hippie of Camp 50* which was published by Woodley Press. His poems have been anthologized in *Wild Song: Poems of the Natural World*, edited by John Daniel and published by The University of Georgia Press.

The Oxbow

The old woman has oxbowed,
weathered
and turned back upon herself
like a slowly drying stream.
Today, she sits at a small table
in a large room, and listens to herself

tell secrets. Her most important visitors
are the departed
who return
upon mysterious invitation,
rising from the fathoms of her past

like catfish
in turbid pools, waiting
the autumn rains
that will again
connect them
to the river.

Previously published by The Midwest Quarterly

Coyotes

I was out trying a Volkswagen
for my daughter, when I see these two
coyotes dipping through the fence row
and tailing like two bullets of wind
across a green pasture.

I bounce behind the wheel
of this yellow bug, churning up the road's dust,
thinking thoughts of rust and end play
and new bred brakes, and I know
they never lift an eye

from my noise. Well, I'd honk
and throw a hearty wave
but the horn's dead, and the road
jogs way right
so I plow ahead. Hands at ten and two,

the sudden coyotes
two specks in a farmer's field
and already disappearing.

Previously self-published in broadside format.

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Finding the Edge

You put both hands over my eyes
and walked me, scuffing leaves
through the hardwoods,
until we emerged into a clearing
unspckled by cooling shade.

You clamped your fingers tighter
over my eye sockets, and we edged
toe to heel
up over the lens of caprock, limestone

scraping my soles. In the distance
a crow raked the silence, beating winds
filled my hair, and punched my jacket
with balloons of air.
More you said, a little, a little
and we inched, you nudging my foot
forward like a doorstep.

Then you said look and turned loose your hands.
I blinked,
wobbling on the cliff's edge, gasping at how
the tips of my sneakers extended over the sycamores
two hundred feet below.

I rocked, swaying forward with the reel of gravity,
and I felt the tug of your hand
bunched in the middle of my jacket,
pulling me back, gently
from the treetops, which deceptive in their
bright net of leaves
were rigidly individual, defined
as clearly as the single hawk
quivering in wind drafts.

1st Place Winner in Kansas Voices Poetry Contest, Winfield, Kansas

The Day Before Winter

Leaves scatter in tight winds
while the grackle sketches a bouncing line
across the picket fence
to a place on the lawn.

There is little movement,
even among the neighbors,
who may with long, November chins
dropped to their chests
wedge a foot into the back door
and with a tip of a broom

sweep yesterday down the steps.

Previously published in The Little Balkan's Review

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