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Life's A Beach

A Thesis Presented

by

Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing & Literature

Stony Brook University

August 2012

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2012

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
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Abstract of the Thesis

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I think the best abstract I could propose is the words by much finer poets than me. I have collected a few blurbs and think they express what this collection of poetry is all about.

Tammy's is an expression of homage to Frank O'Hara, Whitman, Ginsberg and other poets of the orgasmic line, but at the same time, we realize, Emily Dickinson would have walked to Long Island to embrace such a spiritual sister.

William Heyen

These are grown-up poems from a woman who knows that life is indeed "a beach" and yet time and again she makes the decision to spread her blanket on the sand and dive into the surf anyway.

Christine Gelineau

While most of us make lists to get organized, hers dismantle the world, then browse it. The effect is a bit like attending a yard sale in veiled Melancholy's sovereign shrine.

Julie Sheehan

These are poems to embrace and be embraced by. They're poems to be swept away by. They are poems to abandon yourself to and ride like a motorcycle into the bold American night.

George Wallace

Tammy helps us realize that our everyday, speaking vocabulary, our plain language, can exert extraordinary power—that is when put together by a skilled and sensitive poet.

Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr.

Tammy alternates between the provocative and the visceral. ... Hers are poems that resonate and reverberate and are to be savored with each reading.

Ed Stever

Life's a Beach comes right at you with a sense of yearning; an indescribable thirst longing to be quenched. ... [It] is everything rich and full; deserving fully of rapt attention.

Leonard Greco

Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan slits her poetic wrists and lets the blood flow onto each page. She tells it like it is, with no holds barred.

Peter V. Dugan

It is here, in these pages that we hear the voice of a hard-hitting heroine. A raw record, her words dig deep and flow into every crevasse, every pore.

Callie Jean Slusser

For my children, the best poems

I have ever seen.

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Preface

When she isn't totally immersed in senses, creating poems with a toughness that barely counterbalances their eroticism, Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan is equally, passionately anti-war, pro-soldier, anti-abuse and outraged at meanness. In all that, she is also able to apologize—specifically, and universally—for the opportunities we have all missed and for all the stones we are forced to swallow.

I'm not a biographical critic. I believe all we have and all we should need to appreciate a poem are the words on the page. Still, I feel compelled to tell you, knowing Tammy as I do, that these poems are genuine. There is no pretense, no literary "construct" here. Tammy has endured enough, survived enough to have earned her accolades.

It is a "biographical fallacy" to think that every-thing a poet writes is about the poet herself. But it is also true that Tammy is creating characters who are, themselves, completely credible and true.

The person who is "Swallowing Stones" is an "every-person." The stones are all we are force-fed, as often suffocating us, rendering us silent. Tammy's gift is to "expel" the stones, finding a voice for the long-suffering, even as she, herself, lost a son to a hit-and-run. She speaks for us all when she says:

For 40 years I have been
walking this road I
paved in stones, to you.

Her path is sometimes painful, but also so well-crafted that we feel compelled to read on to discover her truths.

Tammy's poems are every bit as sensual as *Fruits and Vegetables*—the highly acclaimed book by Erica Jong, who told me men kept hitting on her, which may have been compliment because she was that good a poet, or a threat because some men believed every word was true and thus an invite for their sexist advances.

Make no mistake, there is a street-wise, earthy, no-nonsense poetry working here. There is no shame in some just-plain-sexual poetry. The counterbalance to that sexuality, if a reader feels a need for balance, is the vast empathy shown for those who have suffered, those with post-traumatic stress, as in "How Do You Go On After?" which enters a soldier's mind.

We feel and believe the regret in "Maybe Some-day" and "My Apology." The speaker may, indeed, want to seduce the "Altar Boy," and be "damned to hell," but, in "For the Poets of the World," we understand Tammy's passion for her craft. It goes far beyond anything just sensational, beyond any singular emotion.

These poems, as expressed at the end of "For the Poets," are "bright blessings." Accept them as a gift and enjoy them all.

Dr. David B. Axelrod

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following publishers and presses and organizations who published and featured my work: The Southampton Review, Long Island Quarterly; MOBIUS; Performance Poets Literary Review; Cross-Cultural Communications, The 7th Quarry: Swansea Poetry Magazine; Xanadu; Toward Forgiveness: an Anthology of Poems; Karen Mannix Galleries; Newsday; The North Sea Poetry Scene Press; Best Poem; Reflections: 9/11/01; Asinine Poetry Journal; Poets for Peace, The Valentine Project; Perspective; Poets for Darfur; Long Island Domestic Violence Prevention Association; Haiku One Breaths; and Tattoosday: The Tattooed Poets Project.

POEM #6

I am not the Coca-Cola girl,
the Cheez-It tidbit waiting for you to taste,
the limo ride to the Yankee's game,
the Wrangler-Jeans chick baking in California sun,
and I never was or will be Sunday mornings in spring.

I am the time-ticking-away second hand,
the flat tire on the side of the road,
the too-high door jam,
the worn-out tooth brush,
the 59 cents in the ashtray,
the Lunch Poems dog-eared book,
and the one who never forgets to tell the truth.

MAYBE SOMEDAY I WILL GET IT RIGHT

I forgot to close the window near the book case and bring in the cat and roll up the windows in the faded green clunker I call my car in the oil-stained driveway, and get the flashlight new batteries just in case of another week-long blackout, and fill a few gallons of water and let out the dog before the rain comes down in sheets. I forgot to tell you I need you. I forgot to cut back the Montauk daises and cover the pool and store away the grill and pack away the lounge cushions, the ones with white and blue stripes, the ones you hate and the ones I love, and crank down the squeaky brown picnic table umbrella, the one the yellow jackets seem drawn to, and put Michael's school project Adirondack chair into the shed before the leaves are done falling and walking becomes a trick we both watch to see if the other can do it. I forgot to tell you I want you. I forgot to salt the drive and put the shovels near the front door, and get the winter clothes, including the scarves I crocheted with brown and orange yarn, and the sweatshirts—the ones we got from the Giants game in 1998—and the boots that I swear I am tossing out each spring before the blizzard hit our home like a tidal wave. I forgot tell you I love you. I forgot. I forgot. I forgot. I forgot to fill the bird feeder and plant the red tulip bulbs, and lime the lawn and put a fresh coat of paint on the mailbox and hose off the screens, leaning them against the wooden shingles of our single-story home, just as my mother had and her mother had before her, and put the house plants out for air before the robins arrive to pull worms up from their slumber. I forgot to tell you how I pray. I forgot to tell you I remember August 31st. I forgot to tell you I was wrong. I forgot to leave the porch light on, just in case you return.

MY APOLOGY

I am sorry for every word you did not hear
for staying instead of leaving for every second
of sadness I did not hold you through.

I am sorry for all memories I marred your mind
for fighting for your rights even when you didn't want it
for all the distance I drove away from you.

I am sorry for the magic I missed by sleeping alone
for not slow dancing with you when the music stopped
for every thought I had at the sink washing dishes.

I am sorry for leaving you alone as you thought I did
for not giving you the son you wanted
for being me and for not being her.

I am sorry for all the moans I did not cause
for not carrying more of you in my heart
for not being crushed by that fact.

I am sorry for writing poems instead of singing songs
for trying to be what you needed but could not be
for finally saying I am done with all that.

SPOONS

I remember when you spoon-fed me ice cream as we lay in bed on that rainy afternoon
and the way your fingers tasted and your neck had a hint of sweat and I closed my eyes
and you drove away the dark and I called your name in a low, soft moan.

I remember when you spooned sugar into your morning tea on that sunny Tuesday
and I watched you drink as if you were a foreign film I could not understand
and your smile told me my poetry made you hunger for more than a nine-to-five life.

I remember when you spooned dirt into the flower pot and filled it with mums for me
and I was peeking out the window seeing you bent down working away humming
and I decided then that I was not who I wanted to be without you in my days and nights.

And I remember how, after you left, I packed away all the silverware, including those
spoons and I gave the box to the Salvation Army, hoping for some salvation of my own
and I drove away from our town knowing I would never see another sunset like you.

THIS POEM HAS NO TITLE

However it holds her raven hair and his robin-egg eyes and misery's cousin and my left hand, your twisted smile and yesterday's dirty dishes and Wednesday's forgotten trash day, the yellow ten-speed's handlebars and two mosquito bites and a photo of me at nineteen.

This poem has no title, nevertheless it keeps the second hand clicking and the dryer turning and the TV blaring, the radio playing, my empty stomach churning and my drunken neighbor yelling, while the car is moving toward the impossible.

This poem has no title, still it surrounds us in Allen's voice and Whitman's beard, morning mist and white-tailed deer, three bay scallops and one dying star, my four cats and seven purple balloons, the last day of summer and my bruised wrist and their ending affair, pain's sister.

This poem has no title. Still, it corrals my thoughts and unleashes the wind and naps at 2 a.m. and is on the road with Kerouac, works out with Jack LaLanne and sings "Look What They've Done To My Song Ma" off key and plays spider solitaire when no one is watching.

HOW DO YOU GO ON AFTER?

your eye has put the enemy in your cross hairs
your finger has been on the trigger and squeezed
your nose has filled with the stench of burning bodies
your brain has switched to auto-pilot
your legs have twitched with the urge to charge
your lungs have filled with foreign sand
your belly has been purged at the sight of his insides
your arms have held him as life seeped away?

THE VILLAGE

I wish you could have known me back when we could have been together, living in the village in a four-story walkup, having gatherings of artists, poets, jazzmen. They would carry the scent of 12th Street on their jackets. I would lean in for a drag of your cigarette when we played five-card stud. The men and women would come and go speaking of Michelangelo. We would have been something. We would have sparkled. We would have shone like new dimes tossed in a fountain.

I wish you could have known me back in 1946, right after the war that took you away and brought you back. You would have been an artist, would have never grown tired of sketching me. When it was evening, I would sit out on the fire escape, naked to the moonlight, and you would have found all you were searching for.

Back then, I could have been her instead of me and you him. The world would have been smaller and we would have fit in a twin-sized bed. We wouldn't have worried about any more wars. We would know ourselves before anyone else and I would wear that summer dress you like and we would know why the stars were set in the heavens. I would have red hair and you would gather it up and brush it out as you told me the names of the towns, flowers, faces, clouds you wished upon while you were over there.

Then, we would turn in each night, turn in toward each other.

FOR THE POETS OF THE WORLD

This is for the women who write poetry in menstrual blood, the men who write it in the back-breaking work sweat, soldiers who write it in their battle-wound-free-flowing-in-the-sand, the short-order cooks who scrape the grease off their skin to scribe their lines and the prostitutes who use semen to write when they have a moment to rest.

This is for the masons who write their words in wet cement and then chisel them in dry concrete, the tattooed women and men baring their poetry on their arms, backs, and legs, and the ones that are doing the ink.

This is for the cattle slaughterers standing in blood all day, their wells deep enough to write verses for years to come. The cops writing tickets to make their quotas, turning their pads over to write the best lines ever written, and the criminal with the knife to the woman's throat, cutting his own instead then scrawls one last haiku.

This is for the firemen and women running in and out of flames who write their poems with soot and ash, for the dentist using pulled teeth and dental floss to create a mobile of words, and the teachers cutting out words from term papers to paste into place for the perfect sestina.

This is for the farmer who writes his poems in the dirt with his hoe, the fisherman who pulls the guts and skin from a catfish and sees the one true poem before him, and the beggar grubbing for your change, using McDonald's napkins to write the great American cantos. And this is for the lover using his skin as her page, the mathematician who writes poetry in binary code, and the midwife who delivers the child and before burying the placenta, writes on the floor boards of the newcomer's home, a two-word poem in brilliant, red letters, "Bright Blessing."

ALTAR BOY

I know all about your Catholic upbringing.
I was raised with fear of the fires of hell,
made to wear a veil, confess sins I did not
understand before I was allowed to take
the body of Christ into my mouth.

I know the Ten Commandments,
have been confirmed and yet, I
want your skin burned by my touch
and my tongue to cool your fever.
We'll travel the pilgrimage of senses.

You'll see your God as you moan,
shudder as I rise up off you to become
a being other than myself. I want you
to want, need, long as much as I do.
Listen for my voice that disturbs your dreams.

I want to take his cross, construct our bed,
splay you on it, dangle rosary beads
between your fingers, push and withdraw
with each "Our Father" and each
"Hail Mary" that passes from your lips.

I want to be damned to hell.

MY HEART IS A WEDDING CAKE

it stands here in white
and smiles wondering
if you know i would
rather be sailing with you
on any lake than be here
now with my apple-face
of happiness and the next
40 years of mr. he'll-do
because you did not tell
me how my lips burned
your skin when i whispered
my hello and pressed them
to your neck you did not
let me in you kept us
inches and a world
apart and so you smile
i smile as i cut into this
cake as if i were cutting
my desire out i will
wear pink tonight
and pretend lights
and eyes shut you will
find your way into
my arms we will be
in our pine forest
be the only dancers
able to hear the music

BUILDING THE BRIDGE

I know you have been searching
for the words, the sounds,
that bridge of conveyance
as you suffer in your silent cell,
rejoice at the birth of your child,
toil during your work-a-day,
mourn the death of your mother,
read your favorite poet's work,
yearn for your lover to return,
lie prostrate in front of your god,
awake from a dreadful dream,
watch your grandchild ride her
bicycle, rescue the trapped beetle
in the bookstore, march in
demonstration against an unjust
war, breathe in the sweetness of life.
I will be your voice. I will let you rest
in the cave of my mouth. I will
build your bridge to the world.

HAITI

(January 25, 2010)

I stare at the trees, close my eyes
see details in negative, the black
instantly white, the white stark
black. All fades to gray.

I open my eyes to see the sky,
watch clouds dance into view.
I wish on each, tell mother
earth to hear my prayer.

I watch the children running
in the park, see them smile as they
swing in time with the beating of
my heart. I think about you, there,

my Haitian sister, wondering where
you will sleep tonight, worrying
where you will find water, food
for little, empty bellies.

I wait for the news of your rescue.

THIS IS THE MOMENT WHEN

the sunburst in your
eye catches eternity
the curls of your hair
frame your face

the stubble on your chin
scrapes my face
the pulse in your neck
throbs rhythmically

and kisses liquefy me
into you you into me
this is the moment
when your scent lingers

in my nose the cup
of your hand enfolds
my breast my fingers
play down your back

as masculine mass
of leg wraps feminine
and the sureness of you
surrounds the sway of me

this is the moment when
the world melts away
we are all that remains
and the energy we made

TRAFFIC ON THE PARKWAY

“Why do you always rap your thumbs
on the steering wheel like that?”
she asks as she slides her right foot
out the open window sunning herself
on this lazy afternoon. “Like what?”
he asks as he watches her twirl
her long, brown hair.

This trip is pointless, she thinks,
as pointless as his speeches about
the outrageous cost of food
and beer and cigarettes, as pointless
as his insights.

“Like THIS!” She raps on the dash board
as if she were listening to Metallica,
as if she were thumping his forehead.
She chuckles at the thought. What
would he do? Hit her back, cry out,
stomp his foot for her to stop?

The two in the next lane are
somewhere else, somewhere far
from him/her, where happiness is
swallowed whole, where you glow
from it, where anything is possible,
where everything is new, where
tapping sounds aren’t even heard.

POEM # 1

(for all the soldiers)

If I could offer drops of faith
to fill your endless need

I would open all my salty rivers,
let them flow into your desert.

If I could wrap our eyes in
memories of peace

I would blind us both,
blessed to grope.

If I could morph these bloodied arms
into armored wings, I would carry us up,

allow us just a bit of space to breathe,
see more than the battlefield.

We would know more than the sound
of the firefight and the smell of hope incinerating.

ADDICT

Does the salt of my skin remind you of India
the glint of my eyes, the North Sea
the heat of my cave, the Mojave
the hmmm of my lips, a hint of the Atlantic
enticing you in?

Does the throb of my throat remind you of Ireland
the grip of my hands, the last day of school
the flat of my belly, the Sunday you wasted
the slope of my foot, the hill you rode down
teaching you the lesson for the last time?

Does the bend of my knee remind you of Italy
the edge of my ribs, the lure of lines on a mirror
the curve of my hips, the way we learn to read
the mount of my breast, the still-warm bread
baked in the afternoon sun?

A DAY TOO LATE

I watch the back of your head
as you walk away. I waited too long,

didn't say, didn't do what I knew
I should, I could, to hold you here.

Words burst the seams of my mind.
Desire stabs my ribs as I stand silent.

Would one syllable turn you around?
Would it be, "Wait, stop, please, don't?"

Dropping all defenses, I run for my life
after you.

YOUR GENERATION

Son, daughter this is
your Pearl Harbor,
your Vietnam.

What you see and hear
will be the tales you tell
generations to come.

Photos, songs, and poems
will be what is left
to help convey today.

What memories are now
seared into your souls
like evil brandings?

How I wish I could find
Linus's blanket to wrap you in,
and walk you back to Sesame Street.

SWALLING STONES

I have been swallowing
stones all my life.
I am an artist at it.

The first was on the day
I was born. The need to draw breath,
to cry out, was muffled.

Daily, I was spoon-fed stones.
How does one so small protest?
They thought my wails were cries for more.

As calendar pages turned
I grew and swallowed,
swallowed and grew.

No amount of swallowing
could accept all that was shoved in.
My belly near bursting, I learned to expel.

By double digits I found my voice
to testify to years of stones
doled out as if dessert.

With children of my own,
swallowing stones
came with different reasons.

When my oldest boy was cut down
I swallowed jagged glass. All those
stones and time helped smooth the edges.

For 49 years I have been
walking this road I
paved in stones, to you.

DURING

the high school football game
the trip to the mall
walking in the park
eating dinner
taking a shower
driving to work
making love
silly love spats
dreaming at night
mowing the lawn
getting mail
washing dishes
hanging laundry
telephone calls
watching evening's news
saying of prayers
writing poems
our soldiers keep dying

JESUS LIVES AND HE IS DOING A WORLD TOUR

Jesus lives and he's on a world tour.
He'll be in Stratton on the December 10th,
at the downtown mall. Tickets, only \$139.95!

Grab grandma, Aunty Patty
and sister Jo. Seats are going fast,
a one-time-in-your-town show.

No malady too tough for J.C., miracles
with a money-back guarantee. For those
too lame to be there, his miracles are on CD.

Tee-shirts are available in sizes 3X
to small with scriptures in fluorescent
colors and something to suit all.

He'll be leaving town soon. You're running
out of time. If you want to be saved,
operators are standing by.

Call our 800 number right away. The first
1000 callers get bumper-sticker blessings
and a glow-in-the-dark crucifix—both free!

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

(for Allen Planz)

Are you my mentor?

No, I'm your pimp.

The truth stripped down to words.

Are you my lover?

No, I'm your pusher.

The needle always finds its mark.

Are you my redeemer?

No, I'm your executioner.

I pray the ax is razor sharp.

ABRAHAM'S OFFERING

Like Abraham we offer up our young
laying them upon the altar of war—
our purest, our strongest, our best.

When first presented, placed in our arms,
examined, grasping their small hands,
we do think of sacrificial lambs.

But when our creations take up arms,
marched to battle by military bands,
I tell you this: If I had known

I gave life to nothing more than cannon fodder
I would have pinched his nose shut,
covered his mouth with my hand

until his sweet life ebbed away
instead of having my child brought home
swaddled in our country's flag,

resting in some metal cradle.

THE STORM

Wind brushes branches
against our pasta-poor home.
Rain beats upon half-
opened window, sprinkles
our just-loved faces.

Moonlight dances shadows
across our nesting room.
I glimpse a smile on
your well-kissed mouth.
In our garden there are

no snakes, no fruit,
no booming voices,
no condemnations,
no you, no me,
just us.

I take you into the belly of me.
I love me best—"me,"
which is only another
word for "you." And after,
as with all storms,

there is calm, sleep, and dreams.
Then, I wake to morning's light
and your Michelangelo finger that
draws me back to your side
to fill the chasm within your ribs.

I KNEW KISSING YOU WOULD HURT

I wipe drops of sweat off my stained lips.
I know this metallic taste, this bitter seasoning.

Tell me all the lies I need.
Tell me we are not momentary.

Once you held a poem in your throat.
Once I searched for blue beach glass.

I knew kissing you would hurt
but I didn't know it would last this long.

DANCING IN NORTH SEA

Golden fish eye gazes at
my apple-blank stare.
I fear I have lost the sun
while seeking the path.

October leaves turn
yellow, red, and brown
catch in the wind, land
in a blond girl's hair.

Stars slip out for a dance
with the moon tonight.
I sneak out to join. My
neighbor, walking his dog,

spots me in my gown.
My bare feet touch mother
earth and I am grounded.

THE RUSSIAN THINKS YOU ARE MY LOVER

(for Russ)

The Russian thinks you are my lover with hands that mold eyes that sing and lips that tease and chest I rest upon arms that make me know and legs that drive sanity into my mad world moans that claim you as mine sweat that drips from your neck and so I open my mouth reach out my tongue and our exploration goes on until we are ripe again and sleep that wipes and smoothes our brows.

The Russian thinks you are my lover with deep talks over Turkish coffee cigarette smoke that curls about your face and the dissecting of poems my fingers that brush the hair from your cheek long drives to watch leaves changing color mornings spent in a sleeping bag cocooning our need walks on cold city streets toward poetry readings restaurants, places to stop and watch and belong and understand.

The Russian thinks you are my lover with poems written in bathtubs sipping of wine from your parent's collection CDs played over and over just because photos of you and me this and that and a cat that walks straight toward us late-night phone calls to confess that you think of me even in your sleep white roses waiting by my door on Sunday morning one slow dance and Indian food at 2 a.m. my lips mouthing your name in the dark.

THE REPORT

(after Philip Schultz's poem "The Silence")

You always called with poems,
your voice in love with your work.
I, racked over birthing a line,
laboring for just one creation.

Today the local news reporter spouted
how your car spun out of control. You
were ejected, pronounced at the scene.
The cause, speed, the report said.

I knew it was the lack of poems in your pocket.
We met at a reading. Your voice shimmered.
Your poems flowed from a well they drank from.
I studied your poise, dissected every syllable.

I envied the way the gods touched your pen
and the way men swarmed to sip your honey.
Once, we traded stories of our childhoods
like glory days of battle. "Top this one!"

"Bet your therapist doesn't help much,
but the pills do." Once, I called to say I was
checking out—I could not get past my past.
You were half lit and slurred,

"Take a 2-in-all and chill."
In the Russian olive grove
in my yard you softly sang
Sappho, Plath, Sexton,

as if each note brought the sisters closer,
as if we women could make it all alright.

You knew there was no God
but you also knew there was,
just as you knew he could not save you.

THE DO DROP IN

Push open the door and you have arrived.
Take in the sound of your boots scraping as
you walk through the sawdust on the floor,
the smell of cracked, worn-out leathers
on almost every back, the look of
the college girls giggling next to

the juke box, out looking for some
dangerous fun, the Max posters,
carefully pulled out of Easy Rider,
hanging on the wall behind the bar,
the crack of the cue ball as it sends
the eight ball smoothly home.

A place for those who understand
the beauty of metallic paint,
and plenty of chrome gleaming in the sun.
A haven for the daily nine-to-fivers who
would rather be at an endless rally
in the Bad Lands of North Dakota.

You can find them all, the hard core
and the wannabes, the biker chicks
the tats on their backs,
and the forty-five-year-old lonely hearts.
A pub that allows no long checker games,
but plenty of darts and pool.

MY SON DID NOT SLIP SILENT INTO THE DARK

(for Michael Jason Nuzzo, 1979-1995)

My son did not slip silent into the dark.
This young man battled. He put up a fight.
How can a summer walk snuff out his spark?

Who knew that crossing streets toward Hampton park,
could cause the death of my first born, my light?
My son did not slip silent into the dark.

I walk among the living with grief's mark,
where sunshine's swallowed, making day like night.
How can a summer walk snuff out his spark?

Across the river Styx my child embarked.
There are no words, no deeds to make it right.
My son did not slip silent into the dark.

No birds' bright calls. No sounds of spring to hark.
I've nothing left, just poetry to write.
How can a summer walk snuff out his spark?

Hear how the dogs of death growl and bark!
I bleed as their fangs sweetly nip and bite!
My son did not slip silent into the dark.
How can a summer walk snuff out his spark?

EARLY MENOPAUSE

I'm tired of caring for others—and how;
not born to be a maid, a milking cow.

The knick-knacks nag they need a polish—now.
My book collection demands dusting—wow!

My garden whispers through the window, “Ciao.”
I leave her with weeds, wild, unruly, not plowed.

Where there's no distraction, I go now,
and there's no more barks, no more meows,
and no one requiring care. “No more,” I vow,
before I give birth to my poem-child, proudly.

VICTOR APPLIES THE SWEET SCIENCE

(for Vincent)

No one sees the daily ritual
running miles in morning,
in night, in rain, in hope
to rid himself of ring rust.
With twisted smile he does
stomach crunches, pushups,
jumping jacks. Skips rope
as if tap dancing.

He shadowboxes; ducks, weaves,
sees his invisible opponent jab
and attempt to clinch. He throws an
uppercut, left hook, right cross with
a technique that employs maximum torque.
The combos, he knows like my name.
I watch his footwork, nothing lost to years.
He stays on the balls of his feet, pivots.

He wants to spar.
“Tammy, throw on the gloves!”
I do, along with mouthpiece and headgear,
go into my southpaw stance
even though I’m a righty.
We do our tango. I make contact.
He just lets me know he could.
I think of my sixteen-year-old father
winning the Golden Gloves in ‘44.

All this work, all for another bout,
all in order to step into the ring
to TKO or box toward a decision,
wait for the score cards to be read,
have the ref hold his arm up in victory.

IN THE HAIKU TRADITION

three crows
cawing in the new year
this morning

sunrise stillness
crow caws
serenity shattered

cloud-screened
full moon glows
off, on, off, on.

two sea gulls pass
inland, heading
where

rushing cars
become ocean waves
in my mind.

grove of bare trees,
roadmap
of veins.

white-tail deer
left me four
Montauk daises

sun sinks
glows yellow, orange,
red day tucked in

crickets strum
their violins
soothing sleep

spider spins
waiting for enlightenment
a fly alights

icicles shatter
into diamonds
children gather them

snow tracks
say I was here today
both so fleeting

blue bird perched
on barbed wire
sings a shrill song

network of webs
glisten in
morning dew

blue jays
blackbirds sing me
good morning

TOP TEN WAYS TO COPE WITH YOUR NEW TAIL

10. Proper ladies must keep their tails covered at all times.
9. Gentlemen must tuck their tails away in the presence of the fairer sex.
8. All new-borns must have their tails inked and a print recorded.
7. People must keep their tails to themselves in crowded buses, subways and at social events.
6. If you accidentally touch someone's tail, the standard, "I'm sorry," will still suffice.
5. All employees must wash their tails.
4. Please direct any questions concerning your tail to: Ivegotatail@shakeit.com
3. A pharmaceutical company has developed a drug for tail enhancement.
2. Soon there will be life-like prosthetic tails for those who are not eligible for tail transplants.

And the #1 way to cope with your tail:

The new health-care reform laws will now require insurance companies to cover tail-jobs.

OCTOBER SKY

(for all the sisters)

We are all sea creatures
returning to the shore,
seeking our beginnings,
searching among the grains
to scoop our nest.

The pull of tides, the waxing-
waning moon draws us,
waves pulsing upon a chest
of shore. To that rhythm
we entrust our lives.

We sisters form
a sacred circle, singing
ancient songs, bowing
before the sun,
praying to the moon.

Golden mother, October sky,
stars aglimmer, We are
your daughters, raising
our hands toward your crown,
imbued with knowledge.

You teach us to be
complete. There is no
hollow in us, perfect
sisters in your hands.

You make us whole.

ABOUT THE POET

Tammy Nuzzo-Morgan is the first woman to be appointed Suffolk County Poet Laureate (2009-2011). She is the founder and president of The North Sea Poetry Scene, Inc., publisher of The North Sea Poetry Scene Press and the editor of Long Island Sounds Anthology. She has been honored with a Long Island Writers Group Community Service Award and the MOBIUS Editor-In-Chief's Choice Award.

Tammy, who already holds a Master of Business Administration degree, has also completed her course work for her Master of Fine Arts degree from Stony Brook University Southampton. She is author of six books of poetry, one of which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. She teaches at Briarcliffe College and maintains an active schedule of workshops and performances. Visit her on Facebook or at her website: <http://www.tammynuzzomorgan.com/>.

She is the founder and now the director of an archival/arts center for Long Island poetry, located in Patchogue, New York, that serves as a literary research center and gathering place for poets. News of the center can be found at: www.lipoetryarchivalcenter.com