

WHISKEY BOX: NEBRASKA

I found first the scanned arrest record
for my great grandpa

through the genealogy research
to which I subscribed monthly.

Bad check writing. Sixteen years old. Nebraska.
The family had come down on tough times.

He only found the ledgers, claimed his confession
to the court. It's not like he pilfered firsthand.

Buy of this what you want.
He's not my great grandpa anyway.

He's yours. Your family had come down
on those old and familiar tough times.

Whatever makes you feel better, keep.
The rest toss back, so many tiny fish hooked

on a wide sea of bad luck. You passed those bum
checks, so you'd be in a tale, whatever the role.

Because you went quietly, the sheriff kept
the cuffs loose. This evidence is my record.

WHISKEY BOX: THE HURLER

In the goalie box, a man with no helmet
on a three-day bender
that would seem to know no end.

A refused helmet pitched by a post.
Torn jeans, a yanked-on
Mountain Hounds jersey
and an ash hurl in hand to remind him
he's playing an ancient sport.
He spits into the dry autumn
dirt, the grass of Tucson.

A landlocked sailor with nowhere to go.
He's here to help. This is your life,
counting numbers, for another go of it.
May the sliotars slip past his eye
sockets, spare his orbital bones,
his nose at least. He's on your team.

WHISKEY BOX: A PRIORI

The box of Talisker 10,
go inside
with your fingers
and pull up a flap.

There, there rests
Richard Hugo's lines, not Scottish at all.
Wide forehead
like a Cadillac,

mechanic at Boeing,
forever American,
he spent time on Skye
jotting notes in journals.

Press them, map-flat,
and be content as a fellow
moved to dayshift.
For the Guggenheims,

he fired off poems
for a book. For you,
he left words
elsewhere,

cast onto currents of the sea—
We are what we sing.

TIME CAPSULE

after W.S.

At La Senita elementary
a metal cylinder,
a tube like an artillery shell

from World War II
which my grandpa told me a bit
about, something I'd only seen

on late night, black and white
shows. In there, we place
objects from our age to be

sealed, buried,
abandoned: *The Kingman*
Daily Miner and its

news on already dry
paper: "Another Route
66 Café to Close,"

"Argentinean Copper
Threatens Duval." We
bolster the pages

with our notes,
our now known cursive,
the confusion of

the Q with the 2, an
inverted b and d
there and there. To children

of the future, a distant you,
in the year two-
thousand, I seal

in a toy. Hoth Han Solo,
his bent gun arm gone,
his blaster long lost, plastic

becoming artifact
for the cattle
on the Neal Ranch to

unearth by hoof.
Down the tube, I slide
Solo. Who finds him?

How? Who knows the location now?
Was it ever
opened? Time sealed and

pointed for the future
reader. My old friends,
look here. The wide

open hand unscrews
a top, and the face
I saw peering

into the dusty dark
was always yours—

WHISKEY BOX: THE HURLER UNRETIRED

Jab lifts. Roll lifts.
Just pull on it!

It's a wristy game.
One more season?

On his rump
black short shorts,

the old hurler,
his fingers lace

the cleats. He eyes
the blades

of grass,
one by one

they thaw—

WHISKEY BOX: CITY LIGHTS

Much of North Beach shut down
from the days of my youth—

The Sex Shop shuttered.
O'Reiley's Pub boarded up.

For a dollar "Confucius will tell
all" reads the plaque in front

of the encased mannequin.
I imagine Confucius won't

make change for a five. Reader,
I can tell you this:

I don't want to know
all. I'd go for some nickels'

worth of hints. Why
are the postcards in Chinatown

unchanged? Who took down
the dust piled

"Free Leonard Peltier"
t-shirt at City Lights?

Labor Day. The sun setting
on another record heatwave.

The night approaches
with so much left to not know—

JAMES JAY

James Jay has worked as a bartender, a wildland firefighter, book seller, surveyor, and furniture mover. He lives in Flagstaff, Arizona where he has taught poetry at the jail, the public schools, Northern Arizona University, and given Irish Literature lectures at Northern Arizona Celtic Festival. For nine years, he wrote the “Bartender Wisdom” bi-monthly column in *Flag Live*. He owns a bar, Uptown Pubhouse, with his wife, the musician Alyson Jay. They have two sons, Wilson and Henry and two dogs, Neville and Digby (they’re a wily pack).

When not writing, working at the bar, and running with the kids and dogs, James Jay plays the ancient Irish game of hurling as a half-forward for the Flagstaff Mountain Hounds. Recently, he received the Copper Quill Award, and his poetry has been featured regularly on National Public Radio’s *Poetry Friday* on KNAU. His third collection of poems, *Barman*, was recently published by Gorsky Press.