

### Survivors

The photograph is sturdy in my hand.  
 Though blown up from a smaller print  
 Since lost, it does not curl or wilt  
 To the touch. As strong as history, it bears  
 The reproduction of its predecessor's  
 Creases as handily as these its images.  
 Intention and its absence: the snapshot  
 Dates from shortly after World War  
 II, and yet the plate would seem  
 To date a century or more before.  
 (Its Forties gray seems sepia by now.)  
 In it, the street runs rightwards  
 Thirty-five degrees; three  
 Figures stand across the curb's  
 Diagonal. It's Pennsylvania, and Water  
 Street, high up the mountainside.  
 Slovaks live here; and the odd Pole.  
 Last here live highest, in a way.  
 (Downhill, the Irish, there before us;  
 Further down, the heirs of Englishmen.)  
 We mined—Grandfather mined—until  
 Disease retired him. He stands at left,  
 Bent, frail (but straighter than that pole  
 That took our calls to cities like the one  
 I write this from). His shirt and trousers,  
 Oversized, measure his shrinking. Even  
 His cap's enormous. It shades his face,  
 Mustached like Masaryk's, into a shadow  
 Of a self, a Turin-shroud depiction.  
 Grandfather has one arm, the left.  
 Outstretched; it rests upon my shoulder.  
 (I am ten or so, and on vacation.)  
 Stripes in my polo shirt accordion  
 Outward—out from Grandfather;  
 Down the street. The creases in my jeans,  
 The cuffs upfolded, even make lines

Straining to take to the street again.  
(Later I'll think: this is a Benton  
Lithograph; and academic, by the rules.)  
Grandfather's hand restrains me;  
There's no force in it, except for  
His being who he is. Between us,  
My small cousin—his jeans sagging,  
Cuffs upfolded—stands, his hands  
Clutching each other, uncertain, tentative.  
My left elbow elbows outward;  
Its hand holds a ball, I notice—  
Seam-grasped for proper pitching  
(Except that I'm right-handed). Our  
tennis shoes are scuffed, but new.  
Our jeans are stiff. Grandfather's  
Shirt and trousers sag; his knee  
Shows patching. He is erect in softened  
Clothes; we soft in stiff. My elbow  
Sundials late afternoon on the asphalt.  
We stand there, waiting for death. (We take  
Our turns, Grandfather first.  
Cousin and I will have to wait.)  
Cousin looks like someone who will worry.  
I look smug, am anxious to throw.  
Grandfather looks ready to die  
Of love. (A daughter of his carried  
This photo around in a wallet for years.  
The negative was lost. The creases show,  
Especially at the upper left. In the end,  
A mugger, black, stole snap  
And wallet both; discarded both,  
I guess. (You get it; black and white?)  
Image of image of image of image.  
Cousin and I play on, a game  
That takes us nowhere, neither one.  
Grandfather, I am not running now.

*John Ditsky*