

“Walk a Mile in my Neurons”

by Ciel Downing

A photo of me in my uniform
Looking like a child playing army
Catches my eye in the minutes it takes
To stagger down the hall.

Satelliting around inside my own brain
Like a tiny spiraling skydiver getting tossed
In the turbid froth of white and gray matter
Makes me feel like I'm on a boat;

Grasping wild for thought or word,
That disappear like dust behind bicycles.
A low-frequency soundtrack drones in my eardrums
Accompanied by cranial percussion.

Unsteady, dizzy and sluggish to react or process,
I lurch to the computer playing bumper cars
With the furniture, consciously reminding myself
To shut my slack jaw ... so I do not drool.

All but one finger crumples on the keyboard,
It's usable, albeit awkward—
My palsied head makes it hard to track the letters
Into the words that rise up on the screen:

*For those who served at Fort McClellan, there is no evidence that
The leakage of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare agents
Will negatively impact or harm humans.*

Ciel Downing is an army veteran who resides in the Pacific Northwest on the rugged coast range. Her work has been published in multiple journals to include *The Timberline Review*, *The Squid*, *Word & Image*, and in January of '24, a volume of her poetry is to be published in a book called, *To Walk the North Direction*. She is a previous winner of the Academy of American Poets Prize.