

CHERISHING THE SMALL AND ORDINARY

Poems by

Robert H. Deluty



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In loving memory
of my wife of 37 years,
my very best friend,
and the most extraordinary
human being
I have ever known,
Barbara Medine Deluty

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The Choice of Attention: Poems (2019)
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Cherishing the Small and Ordinary

*The small things of life were often so much bigger
than the great things . . . the trivial pleasure like
cooking, one's home, little poems especially sad ones,
solitary walks, funny things seen and overheard.*

Barbara Pym

What's in a Name?

Upon learning
from their elated son
their newborn grandchild
has been named Luca,
Mrs. Leibowitz bemoans
that her only association
is to the abused child in the
Suzanne Vega song, whereas
Mr. Leibowitz laments
that his only association
is to the Corleone enforcer
who sleeps with the fishes

turning sixty
getting champagne and prunes
from his daughter

turning seventy
getting a bungee jump cord
from his grandson

turning eighty,
getting a five dollar bill
from his mother

the pregnant sailor
defining the word *quay*
as *a berth place*

Ancient Studies prof
explaining it's *Parthenon*,
not *Party on*

Ruth Helen Factor,
a longtime phlebotomist,
going by R.H.

divorce court . . .
a fistfight breaking out
between their lawyers

the *Kia* dealer
telling his minister
he sells *Souls*

her five year-old
characterizing peapods
as *bean bags*

informing his wife
he'll file taxes or houseclean,
but **not** both

sitting by himself
in the diner, perusing
Never Eat Alone

the ironist
loving the fact that dimes
contain nickel

the ironist
adoring the student's note,
Your the best teacher!

their professor
depicting biology
as *life lessons*

fortieth birthday . . .
choosing to change her name
from Kate to Cate

Bronx couple in Spain
asking their tour guide about
flamingo dancers

Uncle Butch musing
which meat makes the best
housewarming gift

telling her husband
everyone hates his guts . . .
except for Jesus

their vet
describing *defang* as
take a bite out of

the bumper sticker
Condoms Prevent Minivans
evoking a smile

tavern owner,
hearing the word *aria*,
thinks *single's bars*

his blind date
revealing she collects
airline barf bags

her blind date
revealing he collects
baby doll heads

their beagle chewing
the diploma he got from
obedience school

linen salesman
asserting that his bedsheets
are fit for kings, queens

deli worker
calling the pickle jars
spear carriers

Mom confusing
monogamous with
monotonous

Pop confusing
depository with
suppository

the kindergartner
informing his teacher why
farts are so funny

the kindergartner
informing her teacher why
time-outs are so mean

Rabbi Wolff learning
his daughter has named her son
Coyote

the sports announcer
describing fortune tellers
as *ball handlers*

maternity ward . . .
seeing on a door the sign
Push Push! PUSH!!

a young dentist
dressing as the tooth fairy
for an anxious child

ninety-year-old man
writhing through a nightmare
about his Gramps' belt

Aunt Merle pondering
which wedding gift to give:
gingerbread or fudge

asked to define *draw*,
their six year-old replying
A kind of poker

high school dropout
dreaming he's a Princeton dean,
his folks euphoric

a sick boy playing
Hasbro's *Operation*
with his surgeon

the insomniac
nodding off while reading
The Promise of Sleep

blind ex-Marine
donating to a stranger
one of his kidneys

feline vet tech
referring to herself as
a purramedic

advising
the sixteen-year-old golfer
to drive safely

post-vasectomy . . .
receiving from his doctor
a gift bag of nuts

the Goldstein brothers
dubbing their banjo efforts
Jewgrass music

Cousin Edgar
explaining how diet can cure
her stage 4 cancer

ninety-third birthday . . .
Great-Aunt Edna crooning
My Way

ninety-sixth birthday . . .
Great-Uncle Sol belting out
Wild Thing

noting her cats
get no foods that clash
with the carpet

the actress singing
in the shower claiming
it's a soap opera

Olympic boxer
viewing with amazement
the gymnast's strength

brain surgeon
viewing with astonishment
the tailor's skill

Grandpa explaining
why he loves the gutter:
It's my mind's home

watching her teen
drive his car through the garage
into the kitchen

Army staff sergeant
deeming Air Force boot camp
a paid vacation

reading the sign
outside their vet's office:

Fifty Shades of Spay

insurance agent
describing captions as
underwriting

Dad repairing
their grandfather clock
in its time of need

Italian tour guide
pointing out tarantellas
are **not** spiders

immigrant parents . . .
Ma pronouncing *veh* as *weh*;
Pa, the opposite

young Craig Jones
discovering his last name
is slang for *craving*

young Emma Johnson
discovering her last name
is slang for *penis*

Uncle Al claiming
he got gas for just one buck . . .
at *Taco Bell*

the dog owner
asserting his alarm clock
has four paws

asked how she's doing,
the Pyongyang scholar stating
I can't complain

the priest and rabbi
discussing one morning
women and bacon

pre blind date . . .
her sister making
escape plans

post blind date . . .
her sister questioning
God's existence

Nana maintaining
election night's spookier
than Halloween

busboys calling
the snide server, a *Star Wars* fan,
Darth Waiter

teaching his sons
the best toppings for burgers
are French fries

the sheriff deeming
re-elected congressmen
repeat offenders

her two year-old
using the bathroom plunger
to hide his face

her three year-old
using the toilet scrub brush
to scratch his back

Granddad expounding
why he holds Grandma's hand:
If I let go, she'll shop

Aunt Brooke confiding
their last name Wellingham
was once Welkowitz

third grader Brett Blake
scowling that no U.S. state
begins with a B

third grader Roy Riggs
frowning that the sole R state
is so little

third grader Yi Yang
wishing that a Y started
Wyoming

the consumer
going through withdrawal
at the ATM

the French chef
confessing to Father Gagne
he loves taco bowls

the Dutch chef
confessing to Pastor Smits
she loves vegan cheese

the kosher chef
confessing to Rabbi Blume
he loves hot cross buns

young Thandie, hearing
Henry's nickname is Hank,
hoping hers is Thank

asked to define
law partner, her father
replying *order*

mohel-in-training
asking his aged mentor
if he has some tips

their son describing
his workplace as *pure hell . . .*
with fluorescent lights

the judge explaining,
in sharp contrast to in-laws,
outlaws are wanted

cranky Aunt Bel
denying it is short
for Belligerent

crazy Uncle Mal
agreeing it is short
for Malodorous

looking at her Dad,
paralyzed and gravely ill,
still fearing his rage

Sydney vet calling
lazy baby kangaroos
pouch potatoes

Sunday School teacher
believing the term *poop deck*
is troublesome

Sunday School teacher
insisting the word *penal*
is pornographic

her teen announcing
he does not want a career . . .
just large paychecks

Grandpa advising
the children, when in doubt,
start mumbling

Maeve Quinn demanding
her spouse deep-six his T-shirt
Irish You Were Nude

Kate Doyle insisting
her husband trash his T-shirt
Rub Me For Luck

the mob enforcer
admitting he is partial
to mussels

the second grader
informing her folks she hates
the spelling of *their*

wedding reception . . .
the bride's first cousins vying
for *Best Ethnic Joke*

wedding reception . . .
the groom's great-uncles vying
for the cute widow

their immigrant aunt
saying the word *shamrock*
but meaning *ham hock*

their immigrant niece
saying the word *Snapple*
but meaning *scrapple*

her in-laws trying
to discuss Trump, Pelosi
without bloodshed

I'm marrying Bruce! . . .

Ma, Pa, Pops, and Gran screaming
in unison *Why?!!*

teenaged job seeker
asserting he'll clear dishes,
but won't wipe tables

teenaged job seeker
noting she'll babysit boys
if they're sweet, gentle

asking his Czech friend,
savoring homemade head cheese,
if she's lost her mind

centenarian
teaching three kindergartners
the Hokey-Pokey

holding her newborn,
she ponders if *Carl* or *Karl*
has more gravitas

the ex-con
lecturing his grandsons
about extortion

the ex-con
lecturing his granddaughters
about check-kiting

a Methodist
queries Rabbi Klein can pork
be kosherized

watching their rich boss,
bending to pick up a dime,
split his *Gucci* pants

the curmudgeon
displaying the plaque *Dogs Loved,*
Humans Endured

Great-Uncle Abe
remembering Kareem
when he was Lew

questioned
what's the plot of Genesis,
Dad stating *Eden*

the nutritionist
regarding hugs, kisses as
vitamins for souls

Jon Jakob Schmitt
wishing to add legally
Jingleheimer

*Whoever said the small things don't matter
has never seen a match start a wildfire.*

Beau Taplin

Fate

Considering Altman, Balaban, Conrad,
Duvall, Englund, Foxworth, Guillaume,
Hoskins, Iler, Joy, Knepper, Lansing,
Mitchum, Newton, Odenkirk, Pattinson,
Quarry, Redford, Shaw, Taylor, Urich,
Vaughn, Wagner, Young, and Zemeckis,
A teen named Robert Xenos believes
He is destined to work in the movies

the cowboy
describing his lasso as
one way to take stock

Athens restaurant . . .
Kansas girls shriek, seeing
their lunch's fish eyes

Bangkok restaurant . . .
Texas boys howl, spotting
their dinner's tadpoles

Hong Kong restaurant . . .
Vermont teens scream, learning
pig blood's in their soup

the pessimist
viewing alpine skiing as
going downhill fast

Bronx elder asking
what kind of putz would shout
Heck! or *Darn!*

Vince and Diane Ball
fighting the desire to name
their baby Crystal

Zach and Linda Bell
yielding to the urge to name
their cat Liberty

world-class chef
creating a gourmet meal
from *Bagel Bites*

terrier owner
characterizing a leash
as *a pet peeve*

married fifty years,
admitting she would rather
bake than cuddle

married fifty years,
admitting he would rather
power wash than chat

his four year-old
calling the *Quaker Oats* man
Mister Mush

her five year-old
describing a ladle as
a kitchen shovel

their six year-old
referring to tines as
fork fingers

noting the warning
for her suppositories:

Do not swallow

noting the warning
for his sleep medication:

May cause drowsiness

standing by the sink,
the plumber claiming to be
at their disposal

Judge John Cameron
learning that his surname
means *crooked nose*

Mayor Dawn Calvin
learning that her surname
means *little bald one*

surprised third grader
finding out there's no protein
in a *Tic Tac*

shocked sixth grader
finding out there **is** protein
in plain *M&M's*

Yale dean recalling,
as a teen, cheating on tests,
plagiarizing

Penn dean recalling,
as an undergrad, trashing
his professors

Brown dean recalling,
as a grad student, being
impoverished

her husband
regarding *Entenmann's* as
a basic food group

two teens debating
whom they hate more: loud chewers
or line cutters

two Moms debating
whom they hate more: latecomers
or name-droppers

two Dads debating
whom they hate more: slow cashiers
or men who say *Yum!*

Great-Gramps trying
his very best to remember
whose keys he's holding

three Nobelists
quizzing each other on
Star Trek trivia

while self-quarantined,
a young couple watching
A Quiet Place

while self-quarantined,
an aged couple watching
Blazing Saddles

Valentine's Day . . .
the chef giving his wife
a quiche and a hug

the liar starting
yet another sentence
with *Quite frankly*

warning her grandson,
a renowned neurosurgeon,
not to be boastful

the twenty-something
trying hard to understand
Bob Dylan's appeal

the eighty-something
trying hard to comprehend
Snoop Dogg's appeal

Bairbre and Kenan Mills
asking friends not to call them
Barbie and Ken

nurse Candace Landon
begging does not to call her
Candy Land

her little brother
asking why are there only
sister cities

a freshman opting
to correct the prof who said
Between you and I

a prof keeping mum
after the chairman utters
The student that failed

St. Patrick's Day . . .
three Irishmen in New York
praying for green cards

chemists, Teamsters
pronouncing *unionized*
differently

young Hazel Smith
wishing that her eye color
and first name matched

young Diane Brown
wishing her eyes, hair, skin,
surname did **not** match

addressing the nun,
his wife's oldest sibling, as
Sister(-in-law) Pat

asking her math prof
why are some equations
deemed *beautiful*

the building owner
calling doorman positions
entry-level jobs

opening night . . .
first movement, the conductor
flinging his baton

opening night . . .
third movement, the oboist
poking the flautist

opening night . . .
fourth movement, the cymbalist
dropping both plates

after marrying
Tim Butcher, Lark Hunter opts
not to hyphenate

their rabbi stating,
in the Bible, the Red Sea
had a major part

the old senator
laughing upon hearing
he's widely despised

Beach Boys fan
regarding earthquakes as
bad vibrations

noting *New Rochelle*
once evoked *Rob Petrie*,
not *COVID-19*

Dad's barrage of puns
triggering in his children
patricidal thoughts

hearing their Dad's puns,
the judge deems the patricide
justifiable

his ex-girlfriend
viewing the bodybuilder
as *vain and veiny*

Ann Darla Hart-Doyle,
their impulsive niece, loving
her initials

turning eighteen . . .
insisting hotel colleagues
call him a bell**man**

British lit prof
describing steeds as
knight mares

addicted sons' folks
foreseeing their old age
as childless

young guitarist
wishing his last name
were Rockwell

her grandson holding
an old atlas, pondering
what *S.S.R.* means

told Mom's a realtor,
their first grader wondering
if there are *faketors*

told Dad's a vice dean,
their second grader asking
why can't he be *nice*

the scholar dreaming
all the bookshelves are empty
in hell

five Irishmen –
Kelly, Boyle, Lynch, Byrne, Dunphy –
musing *Why the y's?*

studying France,
a Bronx boy asserting *Gaul*
was more macho

studying Ghana,
a Queens girl stating *Gold Coast*
was way cooler

pandemic update . . .
a viewer with OCD
stifling a scream

trying to be good,
the four year-old coughing
into his Mom's arm

office manager,
questioned what *duped* means,
replying *Cc'd*

Sidney Mermelstein
requesting that his nephews
call him El Sid

Bonita Emmons
requesting that her nieces
call her La Bo-Em

former astronaut
advising friends how to deal
with a quarantine

ten-year-old Brian
beams seeing his name
misspelled as *Brain*

Greek waiter asking
From this you make a living?
to the activist

pointing out
to his three-year-old grandson
it's *skim*, not *skin*, *milk*

her patient noting
he **only** hits his wife
when it's deserved

their Biloxi niece
pronouncing *linguine*
with two syllables

the Bostonian
informing a Houston priest
what *wicked* means

buying a *Harley*
largely to exasperate
his adult children

ESL student
learning that *much* and *muck*
are not the same

asking Uncle Irv
why Jews are surnamed Gold,
Silver, but not Bronze

asking Aunt Freida
why Jews are surnamed Pearl,
Ruby, but not Jade

asking Grandpa Sol
why Jews are surnamed Stein,
Stern, but not Stallone

Italian cook
pointing out *Denver omelet*
contains *Rome*

Jamaican cook
pointing out *baking stone*
contains *Kingston*

observing
his great-niece dying her hair
with purple *Skittles*

downhill skier
loving to avail himself
of Vail

anarchist's wake . . .
friends agreeing he'll **never**
rest in peace

brides-to-be planning
shelter-in-place honeymoons
mid-pandemic

the ninety year-old
requesting that his wife
jitterbug with him

narrowing it down
to Aaron or Zebulon
for their son's name

narrowing it down
to Lee, Le, Li, Lei, or Leigh
for their daughter's name

Maine parents wishing
one teen would move to Oslo;
the other, Juneau

Nana insisting
only lazy children
use contractions

Gramps insisting
only weak-willed adults
use counselors

six-year-old artist
in Boulder . . . noting her state
is mostly *Color*

eight-year-old builder
in Hartford . . . noting his state
is largely *Connect*

gravely ill man
referring to himself
in the third person

wondering
if his folks were stoned when
they christened him Flint

omelet lover
dreaming, in the afterlife,
hens will attack

in their cell . . .
two old convicts rating
movie mobsters

in their cell . . .
two young convicts rating
gangsta rappers

fifth grader Jules Strong
believing both of his names
trigger bullying

*Do not be grand. Try to get the ordinary
into your writing – breakfast tables rather than
the solar system; Middletown today,
not Mankind through the ages.*

Darcy O'Brien

Econ I student
assuming *frozen assets*
are polar dwellings

Jewish five year-old
calling his teenaged tutor
Rabbi

Grams, her twin grandsons
all sporting olive green shirts,
shouting *We're triplets!*

the math teacher
referring to himself
as *Mr. No. Brain*

a chef named Tim
proclaiming he loves the Brits
Curry and Rice

wishing her father,
just once, would end a message
with *Love, Dad*

church organist
commenting she would love
to acquire a choir

sound-sensitive man
asserting how very much
a noise annoys

his child assuming
good-natured and *well-behaved*
are synonyms

her child assuming
uplifting and *downloading*
are antonyms

therapist's young son
loving his bike and T-shirt

Cycologist

carpenter's young son
loving his tools and T-shirt

Sawdust: Man Glitter

scholar's young daughter
loving her books and T-shirt

Read, Think, Be Happy

a great-grandmother
confusing Glenn, Roger,
and Mitch Miller

a great-grandfather
confusing Henry, Whitey,
and Gerald Ford

Chris Flynn believing
all ballads are more moving
with Irish accents

Sam Katz believing
all wisecracks are funnier
with Yiddish accents

trivia contest . . .
asked *Clark Kent's boss?*, Mom stating
Perry Winkle

trivia contest . . .
asked *Bruce Wayne's ward?*, Pop stating
Dick Gephardt

trivia contest . . .
asked *Popeye's foe?*, Gramps stating
Pluto

still cursing

his brother for voting twice

for Richard Nixon

baseball player

defining the word *mitts*

as *catchers' catchers*

turning eight, changing

her stuffed bear's name from Teddy

to Theodore

his sister-in-law

grinning as he describes

being swindled

her father-in-law

dozing off as she describes

getting mugged

told to exercise,
the obese priest hearing
exorcise

called a worrier,
the old rabbi hearing
warrior

sixth graders
suppressing giggles when asked
to define *peon*

eighth graders
suppressing guffaws when asked
to define *cockle*

tenth graders
suppressing wisecracks when asked
to define *sexton*

Sean Lee O'Brien
raging at his parents
for the monogram

Aunts Rose and Syl
screaming over who loathes
Rush Limbaugh more

mid-pandemic . . .
a homeschooling Mom
drinking on the job

a puzzled child
asking why *awful* is bad,
but *awesome* is good

telling their teacher
those were smiles and laughs,
not smirks and snickers

Grandma refusing
to eat the radish unless
it's cut like a rose

Granddad refusing
to drink the milk without
a loopy straw

a student struggling
with how *chuckle*, *chortle*,
and *cackle* differ

their child hearing
It's easy as pie, asking
Fruit, cream or meat?

OCD wordsmith
loving the word *facetious*:
five vowels in order

sheltered in place . . .
trying to keep his distance
from the fridge

sheltered in place . . .
looking forward to bringing
her trash cans curbside

educating
his two-faced assistant
what contronyms are

the great-aunts
of the young ER nurse
cleaning her home

Pop-Pop
proudly presenting pages
of palindromes

introducing
her nieces Mary, Martha,
Margaret and Bree

introducing
his grandsons Zev, Max, Judah,
Isaac and Deion

frightened immigrant
learning *ough* can be pronounced
eight different ways

peevd Girl Scout Sue Hill
learning turntables are called
lazy Susans

Mrs. Cohn noting
why she drinks no alcohol:
Blocks my suffering

March 2020 . . .
the furloughed barbers
cutting doctors' lawns

March 2020 . . .
the furloughed chefs
feeding EMTs

March 2020 . . .
the furloughed tailors
sewing face masks

March 2020 . . .
the furloughed waitresses
serving the homeless

told *You're my sunshine*,
their six year-old responding
But I won't burn you

Truth Be Told

Asked what he likes most
about being a bookkeeper,
their neighbor responds
Oh, without a doubt,
the job title! How many
other professions have
three consecutive
repeated letters?

judges debating
which was more realistic:
L.A. Law or *Suits*

surgeons debating
which was more realistic:
ER or *House*

roommates debating
which was more realistic:
Friends or *New Girl*

parents debating
which was more realistic:
Roseanne or *Shameless*

husband and wife,
both battling lymphoma,
slow-dancing

the math professor
telling students calculus
is rocket science

Christmas morning . . .
his grandparents arguing
should *gift* be a verb

Dad asserting
Home cooking tastes better
doesn't apply to Mom

Uncle Fred noting
Slow and steady wins the race
works poorly in sprints

Aunt Meg believing
Beauty is only skin-deep
is flat-out wrong

April Fool's Day . . .
realizing his new tattoo
has a misspelling

a young florist
named Lillian Rose marrying
Jonathan Bloom

physics teacher
deeming kilograms *weapons*
of mass instruction

algebra teacher
deeming weak students *weapons*
of math destruction

music teacher
deeming drumsticks *weapons*
of mass percussion

Grandma boasting
she once played a juror
on *Boston Legal*

Grandpa boasting
he once played a corpse
on *Blue Bloods*

Uriah Ullman
stating his favorite word
is *vacuum*

Ursula Unger
stating her favorite word
is *unusual*

hearing the song
Ain't No Sunshine, her grandchild
chiding *Bad grammar*

his Dad detesting
a co-worker for hating
Seinfeld

his Mom detesting
a co-worker for loving
The Brady Bunch

Wisconsin elder
sporting the sweatshirt *Curling:*
Do you have the stones?

the birdwatcher
characterizing *two* as
a small cardinal

the baseball fan
deeming Ozzie Smith
a small Cardinal

Marine Corps vet,
aged eighty-five, still dreaming
about boot camp

Army vet,
aged ninety-eight, still dreaming
about K-rations

Brad Dickman musing
how to change his last name
without hurting Pop

the young physicist
praying, one day, he'll become
an eponym

maverick parents
presenting their daughters
Gail, Gale and Gayle

sheriffs judging
the best movie Earp: Fonda,
McCrea or Costner

therapists judging
the best movie Freud: Clift,
Arkin or Ganz

rabbis judging
the best movie Moses: Bale,
Heston or Kingsley

old prof panicking
he can't recall the names
of his chair or dean

old prof panicking
she can't recall how *effect*
and *affect* differ

fifth grade trombonist
asking if heaven's angels
only play harps

their child assuming
guerilla warfare involves
battling apes

I'm a Dance major . . .
the Barnard student's uncle
responding *Get real!*

I'm a Chem major . . .
the LSU student's aunt
responding *You?!*

I'm a Psych major . . .
the Harvard student's granddad
responding *Oy!*

Detroit food bank
receiving three tins
of caviar

Cleveland soup kitchen
receiving thirty-six pounds
of matzo balls

Guy Young wishing
his surname were not a noun
and an adjective

Aunt Vi christening
her rescued pit bull, Maple:
He's sweet as syrup!

the grammarian
having another nightmare
about *that* and *which*

urged to dig deep,
their teenager remarking
he has no depth

her young niece asking
who decided that *playwright*
should be spelled this way

twins John and James White,
turning twelve, brainstorming how
to jazz up their names

history students
musing which they'd rather be:
hostlers or blacksmiths

the curator
believing art is what
MoMA knows best

Uncle Carmine
driving himself to the ER
while having a stroke

Where's the Midwest? . . .
a Brooklyn boy answering
Like near Buffalo

children in shock
eyeing old photos of Gran
in a miniskirt

children in stitches
eyeing old photos of Gramps
in bell-bottoms

Thank you, Jesus! . . .
their postman Mr. Lopez
waving back

Author's Note

Dr. Robert H. Deluty is Associate Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. A psychology professor at UMBC from 1980 to 2016, he was named Presidential Teaching Professor in 2002. Dr. Deluty's poems and essays have been published in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Pegasus Review*, *Modern Haiku*, *Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy*, *Psychiatric Times*, *Jewish Currents*, the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *Welcome Home*, *Muse of Fire*, *Maryland Family Magazine*, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, *The Faculty Voice*, and many other newspapers, journals, and anthologies. *Cherishing the Small and Ordinary* is his sixtieth book.

