LOOKING AROUND

Poems by

Robert H. Deluty



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To
My beloved Barbara
and
Dr. Richard Burkhart
and the doctors and nurses of
Johns Hopkins Hospital
who saved her life

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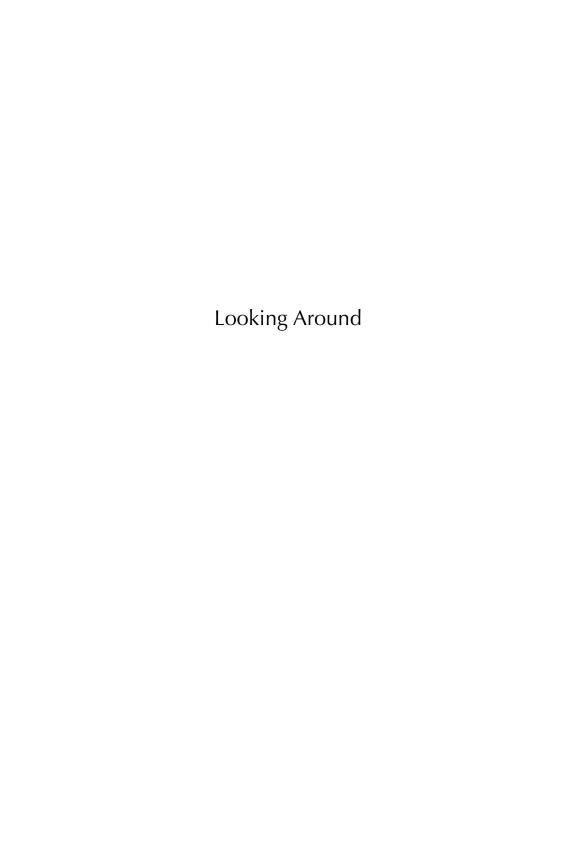
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If, then, I were asked for the most important advice

I could give . . . I should simply say: in the name of God,
stop a moment, cease your work, look around you.

Leo Tolstoy

a young girl fearing jail time for shoplifting one *Tootsie Roll*

film critic noting six of the seven dwarfs were not Happy

bank manager describing ATMs as tender spots

Pop wondering why,
with each year, he roots more
for the underdog

a child whispering at her hamster's funeral He never complained

The Linguist

Getting dressed one morning,
Their nine-year-old grandson
Reasons if briefs and boxers
Are termed *underwear*, and
Raincoats and windbreakers
Are considered *outerwear*,
Then shirts and pants
Must be *wear*

the hog farmer regarding the sty as an oink-filled pen

throat specialist
portraying uvulas as
down in the mouth

Condo 4's owner wiping her muddy shoes on Condo 5's mat

Gramps telling the nurse he's been having lots of pain in his *trouser snake*

three jack-o'-lanterns . . . smiling six-year-old triplets with misaligned teeth

the physicist calling the greatest maestros superconductors

ESL teacher defining *admit* as *let in or let on*

their Dad refusing
to go skeet shooting, noting
I will not kill clay

the ten year-old singing *Begin the Beguine* for his Great-Grandpa

the hundred year-old singing *No Tears Left to Cry* for her great-grandchild data scientist
describing her job as
collect and crunch

garbageman describing his job as collect and crunch

a boy questioning the elderly street person what he does all day

home plate umpire defining the word *out* as *unsafe*

the astronomer referring to himself as *a star witness*

pompous barista proclaiming he won't serve the average joe

baseball coach noting the tone-deaf right fielder can't hit a pitch

two first graders debating which letter is funniest

the bank teller describing one penny as the slightest change

informing her child you cannot give a love tap while holding a rock job interview . . . his teenaged daughter stating *I'm a great leader*

job interview . . . her teenaged son inquiring What do you do here?

young dominatrix describing herself as a whipper snapper

Great-Aunt Mae defining *methinks* as *old-time IMO*

the elder fearing, in heaven, God will ask **her** *What is life's meaning?* their three year-old laboring to sip her milk through a stirrer

Michigan wordsmith noting Lansing's anagram is *in slang*

Delaware hiker noting Dover's anagram is *roved*

Gopher State pitcher noting St. Paul's anagram is *up last*

Tar Heel barber noting Raleigh's anagram is *hair gel* new immigrant addressing the judge as *Your Honest*

at dinner
the famished taxidermist
stuffing his face

the electrician
describing outages as
delightful events

asking his pastor
can you start new friendships
in hell

standing on the ledge,
her depressed teen screaming
Why shouldn't I?

auto racer referring to Eden as *first place*

watching their toddler trying her best to master the hula hoop

Rabbi Katz calling
his teenaged sons, now driving,
schlemiels on wheels

the hair stylist
portraying her salon as
a permanent site

My meal's delicious! . . . his young waiter responding No problem

geology prof regarding demo tapes as *rock samples*

twin boys elating their Great-Gramps as they belt out ZZ Top's *Legs*

Uncle Ed opting for his belly tattoo a *Coors* six pack

characterizing
his high-priced stereo as
a sound investment

hearing armed robber,
a child asks Can you steal
with just your legs?

tennis champion requesting a bagel that's top-seeded

math teacher
describing acute angles
as *not quite right*

physics prof reading
a freshman's course critique:

You don't smile enough

learning her date and she share a birthday: 2/29

anorectic's Mom
noting her own Mom would say
You can't be too thin

a teen wondering which of his relatives won't get in heaven

Isaac Cohn's daughter choosing to wed a Baptist named Chris Bacon

What tastes better cold? . . . the first grader answering

Ice

their son Greg wanting to have his name pronounced with two soft g's

investment banker teaching his dachshund to roll over Mobil exec referring to acne as an oil crisis

money launderer rejecting the order to come clean

Mrs. Deville feeling obliged to christen her newborn, Angel

their five year-old stating she finds *No, you can't* mean and nasty

their six year-old stating he finds *You're too young* rude and unfair restaurateur calling the lunch menu crepe paper

architect
calling the building permit
construction paper

her four year-old asking if baby Jesus slept with a binky

their old man
describing his body as
a father figure

teacher, eye doctor comparing their problems with pupils the toddler
waving goodbye to the leaf
wafting in the wind

tongue-twisting chef referring to omelets as filled, folded food

crushed 6-0, 6-0 . . . the tennis player noting he fell in love

the clergyman
defining the word *pray* as *go right to the top*

dog-walking stoner confessing he can't stay off the grass

Barbara Belle, a weightlifter, adoring her nickname, Barb

Dominick Belle, a weightlifter, deploring his nickname, Dom

Maui postman describing *Aloha* as *HI goodbye*

Why's your Dad special? . . . the six year-old answering

He's real hairy

Why's your Dad special? . . . the eight year-old answering
He knows pig Latin

her prof defining the word *orator* as a figure of speech

Grandma wondering which versions of her parents she'll meet in heaven

pre-K child calling
any bread other than white
wrong

Great-Gramps deeming all bagels other than plain too tasty

Hebrew school teacher, asked *What's an ark?*, replying *A couples' cruise ship*

a linguist smiles hearing the Czech word *ano* means *yes* in English

their teen avowing

Today, I'll definitely
give it my some

ornithologist
characterizing nests as
Twitter platforms

upon learning
the baby's name is Basil,
thinking *Odd parents*

upon learning the girl's name is Hortense, thinking *Bad parents* British athlete describing *trash talk* as utter rubbish

Mom calling Dad

Mr. Right, and herself

Mrs. Always Right

young carjacker realizing he can't drive a stick shift

Great-Grandma Sophie referring to sweet gherkins as *Gentile pickles*

the cashier
defining the word *tip* as
bread in a jar

puzzled child asking why folks sit in hot tubs to chill out

physicist viewing

the nuclear family
as atom bombs

the CFO referring to himself as *the head of lettuce*

circus fire-eater
complaining that management
gives him lots of heat

Southern Baptist describing the Rastas as dreaded Jamaicans young Pete, Jr.
begging his parents to cease
calling him *Re-pete*

the apiarist referring to the beehive as *Home sweet home*

identity thief informing his blind date he works in finance

the rowers
describing their oars
as *crew's control*

Tarantino fan defining the word *veto* as *Kill Bill*

rogue cops noting their favorite color is dark blue

her grandson defining present day as Christmas

the teen screaming his term paper deserved D-, not F

the prof referring to her Tennyson lecture as *Idyll talk*

eighth grade scholar attempting to calculate Maryland's weight four-year-old boy rejecting the seltzer: *Too spicy*

five-year-old girl requesting a salad with no coupons

the mover having another nightmare about pianos

elderly teacher
urging her twelfth graders
not to reproduce

married thirteen years,
his in-laws still calling him
Jane's second husband

their son attaching a tin can lid to a stick to slice pizza

the kindergartner, asked *How much do you love me?*, responding *Half*

the chemist
describing the ions as
never free of charge

his child answering

Pies when asked to name
a basic food group

her child answering

My house when asked to name
a major land mass

Awareness is like the sun.
When it shines on things,
they are transformed.

Thich Nhat Hanh

exhausted new Mom hiding from her eight puppies in the guest bathroom

her five-year-old son choosing a car wash over a trip to the beach

the elder wishing he could tell his grandchildren an ethnic joke

third grader asking at what age can she get permanent tattoos

high school teacher drinking from a thermos labeled *Students' Tears* X-ray revealing their sixteen-year-old daughter got her nipples pierced

Aunt Lou applying to her yellowing teeth white nail polish

at the airport,
her husband holding the sign
Welcome Home from Jail!

the pharmacist
dubbing hand sanitizers
hidden cut finders

teen's Mom responding to You look beautiful with Stop, I have no cash first grade student asking which are better: nouns or verbs

third grade student asking which are more correct: commas or colons

fifth grade student asking which preposition is most useless

Dawn Cisco calling her child Samantha Frances Sam Fran

one-year-old's sitter choosing not to tell Mom he took his first steps hearing *Taxicab*, their nine year-old shouts *Redundant!*

their toddler holding her lips shut at supper until dessert's served

Sprint salesman describing phone cases as mobile homes

pre-K gourmet announcing Brussels sprouts taste like cat hair

learning he got one right on a True/False quiz of twenty items overhearing the Nobel laureate saying *Beer me*

lawyer Meg Abel choosing to christen her firstborn, Bill

California teen shocked to learn there's a Venice in Italy

Eat your broccoli! . . .
her young daughter responding
Can't, my tongue hurts

the dean describing an ambitious young prof as *Nobel-minded*

the Jewish chef
portraying Passover as
a feast without yeast

the miner boasting of his Air Force son, the major

Great-Aunt Enid referring to cats and dogs as *who*, not *that*

her child inquiring
what is meant by the saying
Time wounds all heels

centenarian sharing tips for a long life between cigar puffs the shoemaker defining the word *resole* as *fix a flat*

married one day . . . informing her new husband she hates his parents

married one day . . . informing his new wife he hates her laugh

What are you doing

after lunch? . . . Gramps replying

Dinner, then breakfast

the jailer defining the word *cell* as *sentence structure*

hearing Kanye sing,

Dad asks if there's a volume lower than *Mute*

Aunt Irma describing ironing as de-creasing

post-earthquake . . . seeing scrawled on the crushed house's roof:

Got Rid of the Mouse!

linguists debating which word sounds dirtier: blowhole or kumquat

the priest regarding the worshippers' loud *Amen* as *Mass-produced*

pre-Thanksgiving . . . the cook booking a flight for Turkey and Greece

Aunt Syl showing off her one and only tattoo: Born to Nag

the Brazilian describing Alexa as an Amazon guide

praising his nephew for getting the license plate UNHOLY

Chef Grandma defining *aromas* as *kitchen drawers* a boy wondering whose neck gets broken going at *breakneck speed*

professional mime screaming profanities at his lawyer

Nana claiming she and Gramps were happy once, then they met

trying to convince his four-year-old sister Bigfoot's in the tub

train conductor referring to the altar as *Union Station*

first session . . . asking the shrink how much his toupee cost

math teacher stating many of the world's rulers use the metric system

wedded fifty years . . . noting they've loved each other since nursery school

Brooklyn third grader, asked to name a type of shark, responding *Loan*

Aunt Deb describing her daughter-in-law as a smiling cobra their kindergartner attempting to gift wrap a balloon

telling her nephew never laugh at his wife's choices: he's one of them

first play from scrimmage . . . rookie quarterback lining up behind the right guard

the candidate
defining *elopers* as
running mates

informing the judge if she met his parents she'd understand

Family Update

Asked about his adult children, the retired Boston judge replies
My older daughter is a diplomat living in Marseilles;
My younger daughter is a surgeon living in San Francisco; and
My son is chronically unemployed and living on our couch

the corn farmer describing crop circles as rings in one's ears

Aunt Tam telling her nephew it's short for Tambourine

Uncle Cam
assuring his niece it's short
for Chameleon

auto repairman defining the word *mooned* as *rear-ended*

the twelve year-old declaring to his Grandma *I was born angry*

Professor Alden naming her child Quinn Noelle for the initials

the cat owner defining *neuter* as *make litter-proof*

characterizing
as *a would-be lawyer's trial*the LSAT

their grandchild confusing Jack Sprat with Jack Squat

poor music student regarding her tin ear as a weakness of note

his Dad refusing to join a fitness center without TVs

his Mom refusing to join a fitness center without lattes

Gayle and Vince Berry, big fans of Don Knotts, naming their first daughter Mae

IT engineer regarding his attic as a web site

buying the tee

UNAPOLOGETIC

for her toddler

What did Santa bring? . . . their six year-old answering

Boring crap

Yankee pitcher referring to tripling as hitting close to home

the Brit depicting demolition derbies as smashing good times

asked Who's first?,
their English prof responding
Silent W

the Jamaican noting his Kingston address is *Mon*

canceling
her teen's scheduled manicure:
She OD'd last night

physics prof learning the coed's shoes cost more than his suit

a young girl stating her father is a doctor at *John Sopkins*

the bride's parents, both battling lymphoma, adjusting their wigs

three-year-old twins' Mom calling her daughter *Cuddles*, her son *Psycho*

hit at his twenty, college halfback landing at his sixteen

optimistic child discovering her blood type is B positive

imagining the members of Devo training Whippets

asking the priest if there are senior discounts for exorcisms

baseball player referring to the ump as a count manager

Baltimore ER . . . counting the number of folks giving up, leaving

Baptist boy fretting the Book of Numbers contains long division

the attorney regarding annulments as I do undoers

preemie twins' parents choosing to name their babies Nico and Nicki

cancer survivor cursing herself for carping about the weather his blind date revealing that her nickname is *Attention Whore*

her blind date revealing that his nickname is *Numbnuts*

the beautician characterizing liars as *make-up artists*

young boy mistaking the football player's mouth guard for a binky

young boy assuming the hockey goalie's mask is worn to frighten anxious teen's father recommending gardening over counseling

Uncle Max noting
a money belt is where
cash goes to waist

their young nephew calling his underwear stains leftovers

at the buffet . . . two seniors with canes brawling over the last shrimp

Yale law student feeling uncomfortable ordering a torte at Fenway . . . a child frets, hearing there are big bats in the Sox dugout

Ma making believe she is not listening as the newlyweds fight

the IT prof terming tearjerker movies *e-motion pictures*

for emphasis,
their immigrant aunt noting
the doctor *he-self*

her longtime boyfriend noting *engagement* can mean an armed battle

It's all a matter of paying attention, being awake in the present moment, and not expecting a huge payoff. The magic in this world seems to work in whispers and small kindnesses.

Charles de Lint

feline-hating child pointing out *cat* rhymes with *drat*, *splat*, *rat*, and *gnat*

a fourth grader asking her Dad if a brat could be unspoiled

leaving the toilet,
their eight year-old commenting
Smooth as silk!

leaving the toilet,
their ten year-old proclaiming
A personal best!

elderly man
learning his cancer surgeon
is his grandson's age

a young girl asking

Two of what? after her Dad
shouts Grow a pair!

twin boys debating which they'd prefer in their house: lice, wasps, or leeches

ER patient noting the mattress spring coiled around his scrotum

ER patient noting the *Krazy Glue* stuck to her nipples

ER patient noting the knife in his back plunged by Aunt Mavis married six decades . . . still calling his spouse

My bride

married six decades . . . still calling her spouse

The hunk

two woodworkers
dubbing their soft rock duo
The Carpenters

three proctologists
calling their hip-hop group
Public Enema

four psychiatrists
naming their art rock band
Pink Freud

destitute elder chiding the raging teen:

You too young to hate!

Joan and Ernest Pye nicknaming their baby boy Quentin Todd, QT

Beth and Sidney Dahl nicknaming their baby girl Quelle Patrice, *QP*

ten-year-old wordsmith asserting he much prefers shat to shitted

post-eulogy . . .
Grandpa judging the praise: *Too much and too late*

the prof paring down
most of his student's essay
on editing

two thugs quizzing each other on plot lines from *Law and Order*

two farmers testing each other on characters from *Seinfeld*

two priests challenging each other on quotations from *The Sopranos*

the obstetrician viewing childbirth as labor intensive

history class . . . a sixth grader responding *Karlo Marx*

English class . . . a seventh grader stating *David Coppertone*

geography class . . . an eighth grader writing Hoover Damn

art class . . .
a ninth grader answering *Hablo Picasso*

mythology class . . . a tenth grader replying *Panhandler's Box*

the mobster's doctor informing him his cancer is most aggressive

the vet asserting

Bambi should be subtitled

*A Whitetail's Tale

English tutor defining *sem*i as half in advance

PowerPoint lover writhing through a nightmare about blackboards, chalk

her spouse explaining he should not have been left unsupervised sundowning Grandpa calming down listening to Pachelbel

sundowning Grandma calming down watching The Golden Girls

out of *Crest*,

a child brushing his teeth
with *Comet*

fourth grade boy
describing his sister as
kinda not ugly

sixth grade girl
describing her brother as
brain-dead but useful

mid-surgery . . . his waiting wife and children playing *Risk*

asked what *neat* means, the drunkard's young daughter stating *Without ice*

the prof noticing when he looks a tad annoyed, his T.A. panics

child with celiac in a French bakery trying not to cry

Nana explaining why people who take Prozac are cowards cancer patient's Dad counting the scalp stitches of his five year-old

cancer patient's Mom tickling the hairless pate of her three year-old

Flint receptionist finding Michigan in answering machine

Fresno zookeeper finding *California* in *African lion*

Denver sushi chef finding *Colorado* in avocado roll

dying man praying all four sons will come to his funeral

painfully shy boy fearing he is destined to be a hermit

Aunt Paige cancelling her therapy appointment... out of eye shadow

Uncle Butch nixing his therapy appointment... curling on TV

the shrink's father calling antipsychotics meshuggeneh meds

over breakfast, two child psychiatrists discussing dread

over lunch, three GI specialists discussing gas

the pre-K child informing Grandpa Izzy what *hangry* means

Grandpa Izzy
informing the pre-K child
what *kvetc*h means

his wife rejoicing
in now using the past tense:
I *had* cancer

Valentine's Day fight . . . crushing the torn-off petals of his rose bouquet

her child asking why is *abbreviation* such a long word

the bride's mother referring to the groom as Dr. Son-in-law

his adult daughter,
phoning at 9:00 p.m., asks
Did I wake you?

Aunt Maude portraying Matryoshka nesting dolls as *full of themselves* his date confiding she talks fast when anxious . . . and when relaxed

college junior regarding ATMs as twenty-somethings

gravely ill elder telling her beloved nephew she hates his new wife

gravely ill elder telling his adored niece her piercings are vile

pig meat tycoons describing themselves as squealer-dealers

State of Mind

Learning that *Georgia* is a popular name for baby girls in Atlanta, an eight-year-old boy residing in Concord suggests christening his newborn sister *New Hampshire*

asked in the ER

What brings you here?, the elder responding Some van

oncologist's child assuming the Lone Ranger was *Chemo Sabe*

wondering
at what point his wife moved
from *frank to nasty*

wondering
at what point her spouse moved
from *odd* to *creepy*

telling her teen
his every thought and feeling
need not be shared

at the swimming pool, his three stout uncles vying for *Best Cannonball*

longtime GI nurse nailing the diagnosis with one sniff

Father Doyle's t-shirt displaying the message *Priest Mode On*

Rabbi Kahn's t-shirt displaying the message *Totally Kosher*

Pastor Smith's t-shirt displaying the message *The Sermonator* Texans in Brussels learning too late *chevaline* is horse meat

Danes in Louisville learning too late *lamb fries* are testicles

first grade speller describing silent letters as *real cruel*

podiatrist informing her young son she revives soles

cardiologist
informing his young daughter
he mends broken hearts

in the hospice . . . the old woman whispering *Am I ready?*

in the hospice . . . the old man shouting Beam me up!

fifth grade trombonist, having run out of slide oil, smearing on butter

fifth grade trombonist employing the spit valve as a weapon

their teen questioning are *Mounds*, *Snickers*, and *Twix* finger foods

family picnic . . . Harvard freshman setting fire to Gramps' MAGA cap

her Irish neighbor explaining why *Pat McCrotch* is hysterical

the jazz lover introducing his grandkids to Ella, Louis

out of nowhere, their preteen Ben insisting on being called Rex

baseball manager
pointing out yodelers make
pitching changes too

Variety

With a brother Gary,

An uncle Geoffrey,

A cousin Cynthia,

An aunt Catherine,

A step-sister Gina, and

A best friend Gabrielle,

Thirteen-year-old

Barbara Babbitt

Wishing there were

Both hard and soft B's

asked which job he'd like, her twelfth grader responding Demolition

mid-operation . . . the brain surgeon telling psychiatrist jokes

Name the seasons, Pop . . . the child's Dad, a chimney sweep, stating Busy, slack

on the back of his bald head, Cousin Garth getting eyes tattooed

the chess player referring to castling as a *rookie move*

apologizing to her atheist teacher for saying *God bless*

his wife renaming her negativistic aunt Ms. No-It-All

their four-year-old niece, hearing *Don't drink and drive*, queries *How 'bout milk?*

on her deathbed pondering which child will give the worst eulogy

asking his parents, both lawyers, who'll defend him in traffic court

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. He and his wife, Barbara (a clinical psychologist), live in Ellicott City, Maryland and have two children, Laura and David, and three granddaughters, Ava, Claire, and Diana. 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. *Looking Around* is his fifty-ninth book.