
BUTTONHOOK PRESS 2022 PAMPHLET SERIES
AMERICANA

FAMILY PHOTO OF AMERICA



LYNNE POTTS

AN O:JA&L WRITER'S PORTFOLIO EDITION



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IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN ASLEEP

America wears a helmet when it's learning to ride a tricycle because so many things can happen, *Bam*, just like that; it also wears dog parks and when Sunday comes the TVs wear ball parks.

If you've ever been asleep when a dog barks, you know it's been at the mall hanging with skate boarders while a percent of the population is down the street getting their fingernails purple with stick-on stars.

It also wears goggles so its eyes don't get wet underwater, insists hair-do's stay on the same page, and holds power point meetings with snacks that have tiny orange cellophane halos on sticks.

It's a known, but little advertised, fact that America pees behind gas stations because the door is locked, and if you think Milk of Magnesia is a kind of soother, don't because it might be melted sheet rock.

For me, America is most endearing when it's a child wearing a pair of underpants on its head and you can't see its demise anywhere, even when there is a prayer meeting about it and everybody cries.

WHAT HOLDS TOGETHER

What holds together
a country (once a land)
stretched leisurely between
pointy mountains river
mossy banks, lakes
hoisting islands like flags
they tie-dyed themselves,
corn-on-the-cob season when
dining room glasses go gold
and you have three ears
with butter and salt;
a country, amiable
even in the Main Street shop
where Barbies gather
dust while the owner
reads old Posts or in a diner
where the red lipstick
on the waitress leaks tiny
pink rivulets she can't
see in the gray bathroom
mirror or where your breath
shortens at the site of familiar
handwriting delivered
by the postman pretending
to bite your lazy dog,
a country whose newsmen
hype an ordinary snowstorm
out of proportion and forget
how great it is for building forts
and where I often have
an inking it can't last but
still, like in fourth grade
I raise my hand because
I think I have the right answer.

FAMILY PHOTO OF AMERICA

Where does it exist? Under the semaphore, after the rock band, when the shoe drops? You can't tell with a state of mind— with a state like America, once stone and woods, then prairie wagons, then John Deere with a flouncy awning over the driver, blimps over stadiums, rubber gloves, stainless escalators buoyed up and all with heart, yes—flags and tubas.

Who has not flattened a nickel on a track, I ask. You say, not everyone, and that's America too, the smashed buffalo, eyes glazed by the sun, blood dried to red patties while the band plays on, those in the stands cheering, many with change to buy hot dogs—which is what it's about too—and logs for tracks laid by men from China.

But what about the left shoe you ask: is it a left shoe or shoe left on the step of a small bungalow in Belle Flower, California where a grandmother with knuckled index finger points to the best spot for burying coffee grounds. She's mine—all four sons shot, one in war, two on alcohol, one himself, and a daughter who died early, her crooked index finger now mine.

All here in the picture waving, waving, though which kind of wave you don't know: lovers at opposite ends of Atlantic City's boardwalk, traffic cop in white gloves at school crossings, Red Sox fan behind the catcher's stand, you can't tell in this land where you landed, except you're here, waiting in line with your groceries, with some kind of soft spot, albeit hid in your heart, for America.

REFLECTION WITH REFLECTIONS

Even with the way we learned to cut down, we wondered
there could be so many windows in one house, so may people
in housecoats out for a breath of fresh air. I watched spigots send
water down interior walls of a local bank, front flashing
florescent numbers with stock averages of cotton and handguns.
If all the paper cups in America were laid end to end
they would reach
China just like Billy Tinsley who claimed he dug there
in our sandbox;
and some say America has more pets than any other country
in the world. Also beds for pets and coats and booties.

We say OK to benevolent appliances. We luff in the arms of
dish washers; if we saunter outside in our housecoats, we take
the paper and a dog.

Even Americans who don't believe in evolution know
averages are meaningless. Take the average cup of coffee.
It's a shrouded system where it comes from.

Housecoats are good for houses with an ocean view.
We sell them by the bulk. We have thousands of bulk
and we never run out.

What we have here in the line of spigots and hoses is
about all you can ask for, but some people ask for more.
In fact, most.

For Miss America, you could also say *missed* as an off-stage
custodian taking a nap by the sandbox. Let him stay.
He needs time out.

Of shoes and booties: some, orange with eyes sewed
to look up. You have to ask, now who thought of that?
An immigrant.

What can we say of stock exchanges? We can say very little.
Their walls are glazed with waters, and their numbers
outnumber sand.

We cut down, yes, but want ads are personal and we keep
wanting while the air outside grows gun-metal gray, our pets
fashionable to excess.

JULY 4TH

Once rain on the hot dogs happened.
It wasn't always the same, though stripped
umbrellas stood their own drilled ground

every year wicker rocker, faux window box,
wood-legged table you'd worked so hard
to steady for the occasion. Better not

discuss it now, knowing how we stumble
through holiday frivolities—their attending
confetti, streamers, crepe-paper poppers,

an abundance of fun rising from the patio,
potato salad with excessive exuberance,
everyone laughing until it happened—

which, we agree, is no use to discuss. You
can't worry about the hot dogs. Life's a rainy
party with inevitably soggy poppers.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

More than 150 poems by Lynne Potts have appeared in *Paris Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *California Quarterly*, *Meridian*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *FUSION*, *The Literary Review*, *New American Writing*, *Broken City Review*, *Crazy Horse*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Tampa Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Texas Review*, *Guernica*, *Cincinnati Review*, *SPEC*, *New Millennium Writing* and numerous other journals.

Her first book, *PORTHOLE VIEW*, and a second, *MAME, SOL, AND DOG BARK* were published by National Poetry Review Press. A third book, *THE RELENTLESS PRONOUN*, was published by the Glass Lyre Press.

Selected by the Massachusetts Cultural Council as a 2012 Fellow, she has also been awarded fellowships by Virginia Colony for the Creative Arts, Ragdale, and Moulin a Nef in France. She was a featured poet on WKCR and Poetry Daily—and has read her work at the KGB Bar and Poets House in New York, and at New England Poetry Club, Grolier Book Store (the original!) in Boston and in countless other venues in both cities.

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