

MARY ALICE SMITH

Taanis

I will hold you, taanis  
Until your tiny body unfurls.  
Let the days go by  
As they will,  
And the years,  
I will still hold you taanis  
Until the agony takes its voice  
I will fold my arms around you  
Sing our songs  
Rock this chair  
Til the sobs come —  
And long after  
I will hold you, taanis

(3 November 1988)

Drifting Home

It's spring again  
The budding green that catches my breath  
Even the granite gives off a faint shimmering  
Of new life.  
In all this glory,  
The bodies are drifting home  
From the cold and begrudging grip  
Of the lake of the woods,  
Coming home to find us angry,  
Hardened by this joke,  
Were you ready to go?  
If we knew, the nights ahead would be  
peaceful,  
As it is, we'll be listening, remembering,  
Wondering what your last thoughts were  
Trying to comfort you and urging you on —  
home.

(June 1984)

ANNE ACCO

Mathausen Memorial, Père-Lachaise Cemetery,  
Paris, France

The first time I saw a number 'carved' into  
a human arm,  
I fought for my next breath.  
Horror spread onto the floor,  
Around my shoes,  
A darkening stain,  
It's really true.

The first time, I spoke to a Jew from the Warsaw Ghetto,  
I looked into her face,  
I stopped breathing  
Till she finished her long, lonely epic,  
Around my life,  
A deepening conviction,  
It's really true.

The first time, I saw a Jewish-European cemetery in Paris,  
I was on my way to see the stone marked Edith Piaf.  
I fought the weariness in my bones,  
Till I reached the site so clearly where she slept,  
Around my prayers,  
Mathausen Memorial loomed,  
It's really true.

The first time time I saw on every Jewish Memorial stone,  
The thing that choked my intellect,  
I fought the creeping horror, the necessary reality,  
Till I touched each tombstone,  
Marked Jewish Family, Died 1943  
Every last one died at Mathausen and beyond,  
It's really true and not too late to cry.

