

Substance Abuse Trial

He mispronounces you,
the judge, rhyming your first
with your second name,
making you into something
ridiculous: Gillis Willis Mead.

But you stand as still
as they taught you in the army
when you were a young man trying hard
to keep secret what you knew
about how to kill with germs.
As quietly as we used to stand
on the front porch together at dusk
listening for the first cricket of the evening.

Now you stand accused
of wanting to die, of saying so
endlessly, with needles—and the speechless
track marks recording it all.

The evidence is
a red river, mounting.
It wants to carry you
away like an old chair
some fisherman forgot
to take home. And I want
to shout: listen

—this man
is my father.
I love him.

Is there a place
where all those things
that catch in the throat
gather and shape themselves
into something as soft
as the G in Giles
was meant to be pronounced?

Is *that* where you thought
you were going?

— JANE MEAD



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Editor's Note: I heard this poem on a podcast called *Poetry Unbound*. The poem originally appeared in Jane Mead's book *The Lord and the General Din of the World*, published by Sarabande Books in 1996. I was deeply moved by the way the narrator describes her experience of watching her father confront his mistakes in a courtroom. It is a reminder, perhaps, that everyone who enters a courtroom brings a history, a perspective, a *humanity*. Poetry finds the remarkable in the everyday. It at once expresses a unique viewpoint and is subject to many interpretations. This poem made me wonder: What would her father's poem say? Or the judge's?

On this back page of *Judicature* we try to highlight different perspectives on judging and justice. If you read a poem, see an artwork, or maybe hear a speech or song that reflects a unique view of the work of a judge or the justice system, we would love to hear from you (judicature@law.duke.edu) and perhaps reprint the work in a future edition. And to hear a discussion of this poem (and many others), visit *Poetry Unbound* at <https://onbeing.org/series/poetry-unbound/>. — Melinda Myers Vaughn