

G R E G O R Y S T E N T A

Lecture on Stalingrad

Is it better to die in winter? The question
arose today in my high school history
lecture. —Millions of green leaves fell

when Germany invaded Russia
in the coldest moments of World War II.
Excitement built when I said, “Russians drove

tanks built in Siberian factories; bare of paint,
driven by men who made them, these tanks hit
Hitler’s men hard.” My students enjoyed hearing

how at Stalingrad, Stalin’s snipers thinned
German officers’ ranks. Excitement built again
in the males, as I told how across the front, Russia’s

T-34 tanks destroyed German Panzer divisions,
overwhelmed German soldiers in the allied race
to Berlin. Ukrainians welcomed Germans,

then Russians. One male student laughed
when I said, “Captured German soldiers picked
corn from excrement to survive, fought

over tiny seeds until they had no strength, and fell
in the snow.” It’s always the same when I tell
the story. As I looked out the window on my left,

my European history class discussed problems
Germany had with two fronts in both wars. Outside
the classroom, a wind rattled the trees—I thought

about my brother all boxed up from Iraq
two years ago. He died in the desert.
Green leaves fall, keep falling.

GREGORY STENTA graduated in 2010 from The University of Massachusetts Boston with an MFA in poetry. He currently resides with his wife in Singapore, where he teaches English Language and Literature at an International Baccalaureate school. His youngest brother is a US Marine of whom he is very proud. This piece sprung from the poet’s imagination and the fear he experienced during the times of his brother’s deployments. His recent work has appeared in *Poetry Quarterly*, *Numinous Magazine* and *Haiku Journal*.