

RAWDON TOMLINSON

“Post traumatic growth:” With My Brother on the North Fork of the Red River

“There is something called ‘post traumatic growth’ where you can come out of a situation like that and you can actually feel kinder toward your fellow men and fellow women.”

—James Mattis, retired four star Marine general

“I became a watcher of night skies, of cloud formations, of shooting stars.”

—David J. Morris, *The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*

Once, visiting you, I woke
to empty tequila bottle,
lemons, your shotgun broke
open like a child’s crutch,

its black-mouthed chamber ready
to be fed a scattered shell—
another sleepless night trench
filling: monsoon, sapper.

Two years beyond the night
our son died—when we walked ground
after-shocked and dug him
from grave in dreams, as though

we’d left a door unlocked—
I’d grown the leaden legs
and heart of a suicide.
No thought of family.

Today, in strong November
plains’ light, we hunt sandbars

for cedar walking staffs
gnawed by beavers upriver;

around a silver bend,
hundreds of cinnamon,
blue and green teal babble
and bob in the gentling current;

his labs splash them to sky,
missing the scent of deer
crossing silently behind us;
we scout one of their beds

hollowed in grass and brush
only a doe could make,
clear water cutting the bank
away to the Gulf.

Rawdon Tomlinson is a retired teacher of writing and literature. In addition to three chapbooks, he's published three award-winning, full-length collections of poems. His fourth—*Apacheria Tableaux*—is “making the rounds.” Recent poems appear in *Antioch Review* and *San Pedro River Review*.