

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Fallen Timbers

We came in an old car, pale as blue sky,
the same sky Little Turtle saw
when he and other strong-hearted men
tried to hold back that heavy snow
which was drifting over Indian land.
They won great battles before this last one
lost in August of 1794 to Mad Anthony Wayne.

Here, on a bluff above the river
which flows into the freshwater seas,
at Turkey Foot Rock the Ottawa chief
of that same name rallied
his warriors before he died.
For many years after, read a metal legend,
offerings of tobacco were placed on the rock.

Down in the Maumee River below,
there where it ripples white,
two dozen men stood fishing for walleye,
seeking the touch of another life
at the end of their line.

I borrowed a cigarette, stripped
off filter and paper to hold tobacco
within my hand and as I came
close to that ancient stone, blue-gray
and pitted with pores like a giant's face,
I saw that it still held tobacco,
some fresh, some faded to lichen gray
and the rock breathed, its spirit trembling
my hands as I placed my offering.

New monuments of tall cut granite
have risen there at Fallen Timbers,
but their squared shapes will never match
the earth-worn strength of this land
which can be shared but never owned,
that pledge held like the tobacco
within a remembering stone.