

**The Bridge 2009 - Honorable Mention**

**Erika Szostak** - Los Angeles, CA

**On Spying My Homeless Uncle in a Booth at the Big Hole**

Air rising  
like  
yeast.  
Vinyl  
sticking  
like heat.

Shoulder to shoulder with sugar,  
strangers  
smell of comfort, slush on sodden  
floors:

In the full woolen muffler air of the  
donut shop  
my Uncle Eric sits, missing gloves.

Has it been so many years?- Uncle Eric lacks  
the powdered cruller curls once crowning his  
head,

the teeth once  
lining his gums.  
In the donut shop,

Uncle Eric eats only the smell of it, this  
swollen air  
drinks only unsweetened tea of it, this wet  
air

in the lemon jelly custard yellow  
mug which  
he picks up & sets down on the  
counter -

which he picks up  
again & sets  
down on the  
counter.

A meal is out of  
the question,  
all offers offer  
the table.

It comes to-me then--the absurdity of my birthday  
present  
to him, impersonally given gleaming kelly thin

green chenille throw with matching  
fringed lap  
pillow left in a p.o. box-crystallizing like  
sugar.