

Two Poems by Gail Dendy

Suitcase

Unburdening myself, I pack away last week's
cloudburst, a plastic sheep, five years of hell
at high school, my first, bumbling kiss,

the grandparents I never met, the scent
of bath oil spilt on the mat, a new-born kitten,
raisin bread, mielie kernels. And, of course,

myself as I will be in my dotage, since
the suitcase can expand to hold it all.
Lastly, I shall leave it at the station

without a label or a ticket, already
at its destination, waiting for the stranger
who will pick it up, treasure it, go on living.

Bronze Lur¹



Lur, Late Bronze Age; in the National Museum, Copenhagen

Credit: The National Museum of Denmark, Department of Ethnography

It looks like a highly modernized bathplug,
although that hole in the middle
circled by seven bronze studs
could be quite deceptive.
My wife thinks it looks like
a piece of the sole of a soccer boot.
But I point out it has a tail
like a sting-ray flowing with the current.

¹ A long natural blowing horn, without finger holes, that can be straight or curved in various shapes. Bronze-age lurs were often found in pairs, deposited in bogs (Denmark, Germany), and consist of a mouthpiece and several pieces and/or pipes. Opinions differ as to whether they were used in war, or were primarily for ceremonial or ritual purposes.

She says the bloody thing
could not only fall to pieces,
but the end bit's so small
you'd need very good lungs
to get a sound out of it.

I say the word she's thinking of
is *embouchure*, and I point out, further,
that our neighbour could tell us more
as he was a trombonist.
She says he couldn't have been for long
as he has emphysema.

Looking at it from another angle,
she says it'd be perfect
for our hanging basket,
the one she planted with African violets
and begonias – the ones
I drowned with overwatering.

I reminded her she'd gone away
for three weeks to her mother's
and had left only the barest
of instructions. She replied
I'd also forgotten to mow the lawn.

I should've kept quiet.
Like the lur. After all,
I have no announcements
to make, no reinforcements
to summon. The only ritual
was when the kids left home,
which they did, noisily and untidily.
I notice my wife's still-youthful body
and how it curves most gracefully.
She has such a tiny mouth.

I imagine the lur was made for war.
It summoned the troops, heralded campaigns,
re-aligned territory, frightened the enemy.
My wife does all this, too.

The museum is closed on Mondays.

Bio:

Gail Dendy has the unique distinction of having been published by Nobel Prizewinner Harold Pinter and of sharing a poetry collection with Peabody Winner and Oscar Nominee Norman Corwin. Her seventh book was [*Closer Than That*](#). Her collections have appeared, variously, in Britain, South Africa and the United States, and many are held in the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown; the New Alexandria Library, Egypt; and The Poetry Library, South Bank Centre, London.

Gail has also written plays, short stories, a novel, radio poetry programmes, radio news bulletins, and academic papers and journal articles. Her accolades reflect the diversity of her writing, including, inter alia: Winner: SA PEN Millennium Competition (Playwriting); Finalist: Herman Charles Bosman Award (Poetry), SA Science Fiction Society Award (Short Story); Shortlisted: Thomas Pringle Award (Short Story), Sol Plaatje/European Union Poetry Award 2011 and 2012; Longlisted: Plough Poetry Prize (UK). During 2014 Gail achieved 'Highly Commended' in the Poetry Space Competition 2014 (UK), was [longlisted](#) for [The Twenty in 20 Project](#) (the aim of which was to identify the best South African English-language short stories of the past two decades of democracy), longlisted for [Short Story Day Africa](#) 2014, and longlisted for the [Sol Plaatje/European Poetry Award 2014](#).

Gail is an accomplished dancer, having trained with [Robyn Orlin](#), and at the [Bat Dor](#), [Alvin Ailey](#) and [London Contemporary Dance theatre](#) studios. In 1991 she was nominated for the inaugural AA Vita Award for Best Performer. She is also passionate about human, animal and environmental issues, having participated in a worldwide pro bono project for [Lawyers Without Borders](#) (for which she researched human trafficking in various countries in Africa), and contributed poems to the [Stop the Serengeti Highway](#) project, the anthology [For Rhino in a Shrinking World](#) and the [Art for Humanity: The Art of Human Rights 2015](#) project.

Originally from Durban, Gail is married and lives in Johannesburg. She is the Library and Research Manager for an international corporate-law firm.