

**I take refuge in Ernie our black cat.**

He head-butts my left elbow.  
Nuzzles up against me.  
He won't go away until I pet him.  
He lies down beside me.  
Black fur thick and shiny, his flesh so relaxed.  
At peace.  
I know why.  
This morning in the backyard  
a white-winged dove—  
some feathers, a wing, an empty corpse,  
the head was gone.  
Hunting is what Ernie does.  
This is the way he serves the universe.  
He stalks the wilderness of neighborhood darkness.  
Ernie finally settles in against my thigh,  
my hands return—right hand cupped in my lap,  
left hand atop the right, thumbs lightly touching—  
my back straight, shoulders relaxed  
and I vow to understand through my body  
the incommensurate awakened mind.

## **Me and Ernie the Cat, Summer, 2012**

530 in the morning he scratches at the window screen and meows. He wants his breakfast. I climb out of bed. It's summer so there's the early morning light. I trudge to the door and Ernie saunters in. He's in no hurry. I follow him to the kitchen. Dry food in one bowl. He eats at that while I make coffee. Then a scoop of wet food in another bowl. He moves from one to the other. He doesn't say thanks. When he's done, he walks to a door and expects me to open it. I open it. He sticks his head out and, knowing the coast is clear, he steps out. An hour or so later, he'll stand at the living room window. He wants in. He wants more. Not a lot. Just something to taper off his breakfast. His re-entry takes time. He looks around, he jumps off the window sill, he walks slowly to the door, he looks around again, he steps inside, he walks to the refrigerator. I give him a small scoop of wet food. Most times he goes back outside, but sometimes he decides to spend the day inside, knowing full well that nobody will be home. What makes him decide one thing over the other, I don't know. I do guess, but guesses aren't for real. Usually I won't see him for the rest of the day. Maybe little glances of him stretched out in the damp shade of a bush. Lying stretched out like a spent lover on the concrete. When I come home in the evening he hears my car and stands in the middle of the street waiting for me to stop. I stop and get out. He lies down on the asphalt and wants me to scratch him. I do as I'm expected. If Lee's not fed him as yet, he follows me to the back door and waits. He's hungry. I feed him a bowl of dry food, I feed him a scoop of wet food. He goes back outside and hangs around. When the night comes, he takes his loop through his special wilderness. The neighbors say he walks across the street and into the alley. Others see him on Richmond. Sometimes all the way down on Elm. A few times during the summer he'll disappear for several days. We wonder if he's dead. At least I do. I invent murderous scenarios by cat-hating neighbors. But Ernie always comes home. Like he's telling me, I told you so. Telling me, you should know by now.

## **Black Cat Ernie**

The old cat lies out there on the red brick patio  
outside  
cool morning after a rain  
me standing in the doorway  
naked  
just out of the shower  
damp flesh  
and he rolls over stretches out  
big yellow eyes  
wants me to come outside and pet him  
scratch his belly  
the battle scars  
get down there low near his privates  
and what does it matter  
to the universe  
me  
in my own backyard  
an old white man  
butt naked  
oh it feels so good  
bending over to pet my black cat  
for good luck?

### **Cat in the Zendo**

Ernie is black  
as a zafu.  
Don't sit on Ernie.