



Jim Kerbaugh

Born *sub* Ike –

The era of things kidney-shaped,
A turquoise time;
Full consciousness at Camelot,
But in eastern Oklahoma,
Which hadn't had its fill
Of 1930.

A Southern Baptist neighborhood:
Fellowship and witnessing,
Heavy smell of frying things,
The preacher's grinning face
(Or was it grimacing?)
At work producing prodigious jowls,
Fear and loathing of Fidel
(Beardheaded maniac)
And his protector –
Nikita's jowls magnificent.

Teachers' cat's-eye specs
Front for usually well-meant incompetence,
Prayer meeting Wednesday night –
A sinless week unthinkable.

The cracks were visible:
"We reserve the right,"
Public toilets labelled
"White Men,"
"White Women,"
And "Colored" – that one boarded up.
An older neighbor boy
Stepped from high school
Onto a landmine.

But in summer, at eleven,
Baking asphalt beneath bicycle tires,
Packs of baseball cards
With pink-petrified sticks of bubblegum
To lacerate the mouth.
Shrieked or bellowed in at dusk
To bathe and fall asleep
To the ballgame from St. Louis
On the radio.