

## **POETS RESPOND TO PRINTS**

January 7, 2016 at 6:00 p.m., Channing Peake Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA

### **Susan (Pirie) Chiavelli**

Susan Chiavelli's award winning stories and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *Miramar*, *The Packing House Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Minnetonka Review*, *Rattle*, *Other Voices* and elsewhere. She is the recipient of the *Chattahoochee Review's* Lamar York Prize for nonfiction, and a "Notable Essay" designation by *Best American Essays*. A native of Seattle, Washington, Susan and her husband, Dennis, have lived in the foothills of Santa Barbara for many years.

### **Still Life of a Pear Tree**

*The Scottish surname, Pirie, originates from "people who live beneath the pear tree."*

Remember our Grandmother's three-story house — before it burns to the ground. Pause there, in the dappled shade of her old pear tree with our fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers.

See how the summer light illuminates our young faces and reveals all we don't know of our ancestor's struggles, or of those yet to come.

Touch the gnarled trunk. Look at the happiness gathered that summer. See the fathers disappear into a cloud of leafy green.

Listen to our mothers call out warnings, join the chorus of women's voices echoing across time and ocean. Be careful, be careful!

The Pirie brothers laugh, for they have all returned from war unscathed, and a pear tree is hardly a worthy enemy. They have a natural affinity for climbing trees, say they got it

from their Scottish grandfather. The brothers, relaxed and at home in that tree, feel somehow closer to the ancestors that spawned them, somehow understand the ancient language of wind on leaf.

They don't know why, but their hands have their own memory. They don't know why, but their fingers know where and how to reach for the fruit that's been waiting to snap from the stem.

After the pears ripen, watch the mothers preserve them -- peel, core, slice — drown them in sweet syrup in Mason jars. Watch a drop of red food coloring bright as blood,

slowly stain the flesh of the fruit pink -- the family alchemy.  
When winter comes, remember the mothers emerging  
from darkness with jars of rosy pears in hand,

pears glowing like summer captured in a bottle -- glowing  
even after the tree dies and the fathers cut it down. Glowing now,  
long after everyone's gone -- fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers.

Remember grandmother's pear tree, and how our family  
gathered beneath it. Remember our roots, the trunk, the branch,  
the sweet fruit -- the drop of blood lighting the darkness.



*Ascending Descendants* by David Graves