

Poetry Now!

Memory Poem

Purple

In first grade Mrs. Lohr
said my purple teepee
wasn't realistic enough,
that purple was no color
for a tent,
that purple was a color
for people who died,
that my drawing wasn't
good enough
to hang with the others.
I walked back to my seat
counting the swish swish swishes
of my baggy corduroy trousers.
With a black crayon
nightfall came
to my purple tent
in the middle
of an afternoon.

In second grade Mr. Barta
said draw anything;
he didn't care what.
I left my paper blank
and when he came around
to my desk
my heart beat like a tom tom.
He touched my head
with his big hand
and in a soft voice said
the snowfall
how clean
and white
and beautiful

by ALEXIS ROTELLA

© Alexis Rotella is a poet, ordained minister, and acupuncturist who runs a health center in Maryland. The poem "Purple" first appeared in *East West Journal* in 1980 and has since appeared in many other publications, including the first edition of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

Poetry Idea

Think back to a time in your life when someone hurt you. Try to write about this moment as Alexis Rotella does: a quiet story with big emotional impact.

Beginning:

Think about who hurt you. Where were you when it happened? How old? Try starting your poem with this information, as Rotella does. For example: "At third-grade recess, Stephanie Lawton / told me I was ugly / because my teeth were crooked . . ."

Middle:

How did you react? Tell us in simple language, using an image you remember from the time. For example: "I sat staring after her / as she and her perfect smile / flounced away . . ."

End:

What finally ended the hurt (if it ended)? Tell us. For example: "I don't remember / which of Jody's jokes / finally cracked / my frozen lips that day . . ."

You can use this format to write about all sorts of memories—not just hurtful ones!

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