

## Two Poems by Steve R. Benson

### The Birthplace of Art

“Buddha saw that this world of delusion was really a  
burning house.” - Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, Tokyo

Red flames read the black Braille of burning boards.  
Teeth-clenching firefighters aimed vomiting pythons  
At the smoking shell of our eleventh rented home  
That crashed before dawn over our father-abandoned lawn.  
It was fun watching that drafty old structure fall  
Into shiny chunks of ancient cave-mural charcoal.  
It was fun sketching animals and stick-people on sidewalks  
With charred wood salvaged from the reeking wreckage.  
It was fun joining neighbors in bathrobes and slippers  
Talking across yards under smoke-genies rising  
With spark-spirits spiraling into the stars.

*-Steve R. Benson*

### A Catcher Meets His Muse

“Smell is the muse of memory & therefore the root of writing.”  
-Erica Jong

The only Muse I ever met and caught was called Kenny.  
Every summer at the city pool I splashed into his ken  
With his freckled face, beefy body and goofy grin.  
His can openers off the high board doused lifeguards  
Enthroned above us all on their high chairs looking down  
Their white noses as if they dipped them in some royal cream  
Of which we jealous thrashing mortals could only dream.

Kenny Muse had the best pitching arm on our baseball team.  
Every summer I was his catcher of choice, toiling in the happy  
Dust behind my sweaty mask, chest protector, and shin guards.  
His curve cut across the mystical white pentagram of home plate  
Half buried in the storied dirt of the green diamond glowing  
At the center of the county fairgrounds where the creek flooded  
Every seventh year in a watery thoughtless natural revolution.

In a leaky rowboat Kenny and I caught carp, catfish and bullhead  
Floating over that drowned diamond, paddling with bats and  
boards  
Around the horn, sailing from first to third without touching any  
Submerged bases. When the runaway water returned to its  
normal  
Bed, the sun cooked dead fish and cracked mud into a baroque  
Stink that always makes me think of Kenny Muse, the only muse  
I ever knew and caught and tossed back whatever he pitched.

*-Steve R. Benson*