

Poems with Disabilities

by Jim Ferris

1 I'm sorry—this space is reserved
for poems with disabilities. I know
it's one of the best spaces in the book,
5 but the Poems with Disabilities Act
requires us to make all reasonable
accommodations for poems that aren't
normal. There is a nice space just
a few pages over—in fact (don't
10 tell anyone) I think it's better
than this one, I myself prefer it.
Actually I don't see any of those
poems right now myself, but you never know
when one might show up, so we have to keep
15 this space open. You can't always tell
just from looking at them, either. Sometimes
they'll look just like a regular poem
when they roll in—you're reading along
and suddenly everything
20 changes, the world tilts
a little, angle of vision
jumps, focus
shifts. You remember
your aunt died of cancer at just your age
and maybe yesterday's twinge means
25 something after all. Your sloppy,
fragile heart beats
a little faster
and then you know.
You just know.
30 And the poem
is right
where it
belongs.



Jim Ferris

Jim Ferris is an award-winning poet and disability studies scholar at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His book *The Hospital Poems* is about his boyhood experiences at a charity hospital for children with disabilities. He has been a musician, performance artist, director, playwright, and actor, performing from the West Coast to the East, from Texas to Canada. Ferris, who has a congenital leg impairment, is past president of the Society for Disability Studies, the leading international scholarly organization in disability studies. At the University of Wisconsin, he supervises the instructional staff in speech composition. A winner of multiple teaching awards, Ferris teaches courses in communication arts and disability studies.

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818 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 600 • Washington, DC 20006 • Tel: 202.628.2800 • TTY: 202.737.0645 • Fax: 202.429.0868
www.vsarts.org