**Ode to Vicks VapoRub**

Joan McBride

When I was young and my lungs

were raw meat during flu season,

my mom would bring out

the cobalt blur jar

and rub Vicks over my chest.

With the cold ointment warmed by her hands,

she would trace words,

across the unlined tablet of my chest,

for me to guess.

I would close my eyes

and go far from my winter bed

to a rise of eucalyptus,

menthol, and camphor-green forests

as her sheened fingers

drew chains of letters

that evolved into words

with the scent of summer treetops.

If I guessed wrong, mom

would use her hand

as an eraser and swipe

more Vicks across my chest,

and we would start again.

Simple words to start,

*Cat, plate, door.*

Then phrases

*little girl, blue books, so strong.*

Then sentences

*Go to the store for cupcakes. Make your bed.*

*I like your brown eyes.*

Often, I would fall asleep

to wake up the next morning

with a flurry of mentholated words

across my chest

and my breath

a haunt of spring.