**King of Camp Wigwam**

Lorrie Ness

Bugling would wring us kids

from every cabin,

& careening barefoot to the water

was counselor Steve.

Sunrise marked the start of his daily race

between impulse & resolve.

Rat-tailed & lizard-quick,

he was a living bronze

leader of bare-chested boys.

At barely twenty, he still fit right in

crouching at the shore,

arms heron-necking into the pond,

to nab frogs

before they could swim away.

He had the body we wanted.

Skin crisscrossed with scars that never tanned —

he was living inside his own net

of misadventure.

At dusk, he climbed up the antenna

to handstand on the roof.

Upside down, was benching

the weight of the lodge —

holding it back

from falling into the sky.

After dark, Steve showed us safer ways

of handling fire.

Streaking his cheeks with the cold glow

of smashed fireflies,

he became the signal light for our canoe.

Gliding on the mirror lake,

his hands dipped in the water

as Cassiopeia floated by the bow.

We watched him ladle the stars to his lips,

with no fear of their burn.