

## JAMES HARMS

# Every Night

In his eighties my father moved nearby  
And watched me love my children  
In ways small and smaller, mostly  
In how we embraced at every  
Parting, said I love you in front  
Of strangers, kissed as if the act  
Of placing lips to cheek or lips  
Was a way of sealing the envelope  
Of time, a letter we laid at the feet  
Of hours, our hours together,  
Which we honored daily with one  
Brief embrace after another, affection  
So normal to us and ordinary it  
Seemed strange to have my father  
Remark upon it again and again  
With admiration, a sort of awe.  
And so he began, too, in the last years  
Of his life to say as a sort of psalm  
*I love you* whenever any of us  
Left the room. As if each doorway  
Was an air lock into another atmosphere  
Of familial devotion.

Every night  
I kneel beside my young son's bed  
Not to pray with him or to his sleeping  
Self, but to feel his small chest rise  
Beneath my hand, which measures  
His breath the way my father now  
Measures his days: with chances  
To say, I love you. I love you,  
I whisper to my sleeping son,  
Who snores softly, and rolls over.

**James Harms** is the author of nine books of poetry including the forthcoming *Rowing with Wings* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2017). Originally from Altadena, California, he now teaches in the MFA Program at West Virginia University.

## PETER HARRIS

*Santa Cruz, CA:*  
*House with Mailbox, 2002*  
Digital pigment print on polyester substrate, 6 x 8 in



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