Editor’s Note: The author writes, “I am an asthmatic, and my disorder was particularly severe in childhood when I was hospitalized several times. My poem reflects my memories of that time, including, what seemed to be near-death events.” Clara B. Jones is a retired university professor who specialized in Animal Behavior, conducting fieldwork in Latin America. Her guiding principles are intentional living and restraint without craving.

A Fish Out Of Water

I am no stranger to the fear of death
thrust onto fossil reefs off San Andrés
lost in a forest on Osa
sucked into waters off Puntarenas
pierced by a black palm in Belize
broadsided on Bloomfield Avenue
or to little girls immortalized in grief
Wordsworth humanized
Darwin pathologized
my grandfather spurning God.

I was no stranger to my mother’s manic breath
smearing my chest with VapoRub®
beckoning my allergist to a home visit
Tedral® calming asthmatic symptoms
a six-year-old’s body limp as waning daffodils
helpless as hares pursued by house cats
hopeless as fishermen waiting for sturgeon’s return
stethoscope echoing heaves too shallow for life-support
a non-believer praying for a miracle
in her child’s room
where chameleons changed color
where canaries preened
where curtains were closed to sounds of cars and cardinals.

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DOI: 10.1378/chest.15-1200