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Black Box

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Prose Poem: 250 words

By Rachael Peckham

Black Box

Scattered around a box of my late uncle's belongings, given to me four decades after he died mid-flight, are three tie clips, a pin shaped like *the mitten state* he farmed and flew away from more than once (namely, the escape to Vegas after his soon-to-be-ex signed the papers) and a tube of Neo-Polycin ointment, pinched where his thumb and finger made a fossil of touch. There's part of a Valentine's card in the form of two puzzle pieces, big as soda crackers, cut off at the type: *NE'S DAY FROM*. There's a receipt for dinner he probably kept for the date, on the country's bicentennial, two months before he boarded the plane on a day that skips like a record quit playing. There's the rattle of metal dropped from jean pockets and coveralls he'd un-snap before a shower—quarter-inch screws and enough bullets to put down a handful of calves half-dead from birth or wind that can behead a whole barn. Wind that makes missiles of grain bins. Wind that can shear the power from a twin-engine with just enough force, leaving only a patch for the DEERELAND FLY-IN at the bottom of a black valise box gifted to a niece he'll never meet—a keepsake lined on the bottom with cheap red felt that bleeds so much, the box sits atop a thick sheet of paper and there is so much I don't understand and won't ever know, like why is a *black box* really red?

Publisher's

Note:

The term "black box," as per Wikipedia, "was a World War II British phrase, originating with the development of radio, radar, and electronic navigational aids in British and Allied combat aircraft. These often-secret electronic devices were literally encased in non-reflective black boxes or housings."

The first flight recorders were built in the late 1950s in the U.S. and installed in fire-resistant, shock-proof versions of those boxes. In 1965, the FAA mandated that the black boxes encasing flight recorders be painted bright red or orange so they could be located more easily in wreckage. Even though most airlines around the globe soon switched to orange recorder boxes, the term "black box" had already made its way into general usage. And the misnomer persists.

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holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Ohio University, where she specialized in the lyric essay and prose poem. Her chapbook of prose poems, *Muck Fire*, won the 2010 Robert Watson Poetry Award at Spring Garden Press. More recently, Peckham was a finalist in the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award; the National Poetry Series Open Competition; and the Pleiades Press Robert C. Jones Short Prose Book Contest. She teaches at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, where she lives with her husband, poet and essayist Joel Peckham, and their son, Darius.