

2021 Wind & Water Writing Contest
Honourable Mention
POETRY

Atmospheric Waltz

By Nora-Lyn Veevers

Like a flash mob in the sky the murmuration of starlings assembles in an aerial ballet. My heart skips in awe. Little Brother, your heart arrests the next day.

Murmuration – the phenomenon that results when starlings fly in swooping, intricately coordinated patterns through the sky. Each bird shadows seven nearest partners. Thousands move together as one intelligent, avian cloud.

The first responders knew you instantly, called your squad at the station – *to serve and protect* – police cars, uniforms, ambulance – implored your heart to beat. They found you in your Cadillac, early September morning. Cigarette, Tim Hortons double-double coffee, crossword puzzle. Window down; sunshine claiming the new day. One long inhale? One sugary swallow? One last clue penned?

Cardiac arrest: when the heart's electrical system malfunctions. Lack of consciousness within seconds.

Like a swirling mass, we grouped fast; not believing; ready to defend; swooping in to nest together in our grief. The truth spreading slowly through our big flock – without you, now five and Mom. My niece waited at the restaurant for your regular breakfast date together with your grandson. Drumming fingers on table? Watching for her dad's sturdy frame to walk through the door? She called your home and heard: you better come. Your wife's big brown eyes searched mine – he looked just like he was sleeping, she said. I thought our mother's frail heart would fracture. I hugged her bird-like body careful not to crumble the bones. Stoic, she kept her tears inside. His big heart, said your best friend, he would give anyone anything. He would. He did. Somebody already has his eyes, said your son.

Cardiac arrest occurs suddenly with no warning. Death within minutes.

A murmuration sparks. A waltz in the sky begins, moving as one impenetrable being, ten times faster than any human pilot. Thousands of starlings sweep in on themselves forming one giant globe hanging in sky. Separate. Then gone.