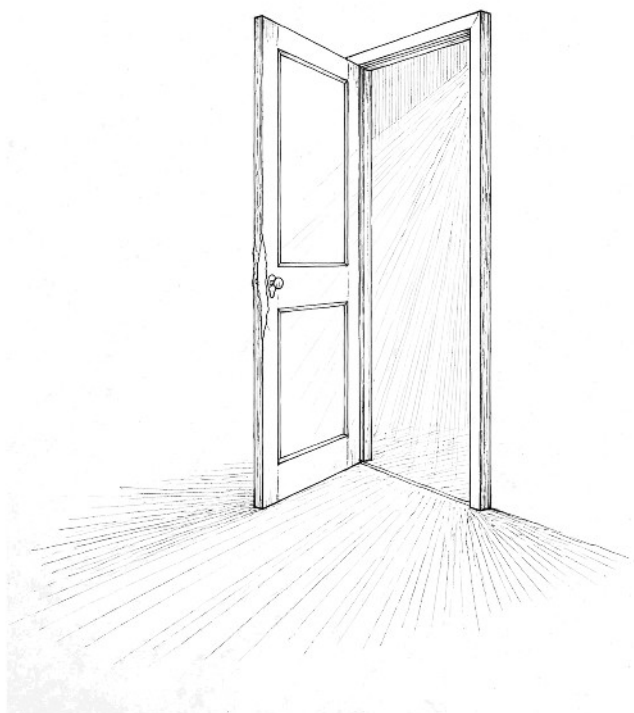


Thresholds



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Foreword

A door is rarely the point of a story. People remember who left, who came back, what was said before the door closed, what waited on the other side.

The door remembers none of it. It knows only the weight of a hand, the swing of a hinge, the small wear of repetition.

These poems try to stand where those two kinds of knowledge meet.

Threshold

threshold (n.) from Old English þrescold — the wood laid down to keep the threshed grain in the barn.

The first doorsills were built
to hold something precious,
not bar something dangerous.

Today I set the grocery bags down,
one paper sack threatening to tear,
right on that line and stand —
one foot in, one foot out.

Screen Door

The spring had a temper all its own —
slammed shut behind me
every time I forgot to hold it.

Inside, grandmother never looked up.
She'd raised her children
on that same detonation.

Now that exit belongs
to someone else,
replaced and hung true,

closing with a pneumatic whisper,
no longer the kind of loud
that a house can forgive.

Storm Door

We swap the screen
for glass in October,
a door in front of the door,
because one door isn't enough.

Our daughter calls it,
“the almost-door.”
It lets winter look in
without touching us.

In May we switch it back,
and the cat is first to notice —
sniffs the bare threshold,
suspicious of a doorway
that has stopped
lying about the weather.

Half-Open Door

It has stopped mid-sentence
allowing a sliver of lamplight
to cross the floor.

Someone left, or someone's
about to come in.
The door won't decide.

I listen but all I hear
are the draft, the light
and the almost.

Keyhole

A keyhole is a door's one eye,
open even when the door thinks it isn't.

As a boy I pressed my face
to my parents' bedroom door
to hear what a keyhole let through;
an argument, or the particular quiet
of two people deciding not to fight.

I know the exact cold of that brass
keyhole against my ear —
colder than anything
either of them said.

Sliding Glass Door

Through the glass, two rooms at once:
inside, your back at the stove,
and the yard fading to blue
behind my reflection.

I am on the deck listening to the neighborhood.
You are inside with the dinner and the television news.
The door between us holds us both,
each a figment of the other's climate.

I slide it open and worlds trade places,
cut grass drifting in, the smell of onions out.

Closet Doors

Pair of bi-fold doors that don't close
in just the way they should,
that don't quite meet in the middle
and lean slightly into the room,
like they are straining
not to let out a secret
that you can't keep forever.

Adjoining Rooms

A door between
locks from both sides,
waiting for agreement.

Neither of us turns the bolt.
I hear you cough, the shower run,
a chair pulled out and settled.

Your radio plays a song we've heard before,
I start to hum along,
but don't recognize the chorus.

Revolving Door

You fall into its rhythm
or you don't go in at all —
tiny rooms of glass
traveling endlessly
but never arriving.

I once sat in a hotel lobby
and watched strangers
time their steps
to silent music that never
let them stop dancing.

There was a woman
who missed her exit twice
and on the third try,
stepped out into traffic,
frowning back at the glass
still turning without her.

Elevator Doors

They part with a mechanical whir
and strangers step into a room
a little bigger than a confessional.

We are a congregation,
all facing front but looking down,
hands folded, watching
an altar of little numbers
that light up, one by one,
our faith in the unseen cable.

A soft prayer chime,
and the seam in the doors widens.
We spill out of the narthex
into the remainder of the day,
already forgetting each other's shoes.

Automatic Doors

Everyone else walks up and the glass obliges.
I arrive and the doors consider me, but decline.
I step back and wave an arm to doors
that don't seem to know who I am.

I watch as a child strolls through,
then a woman pulling a shopping cart.
The sensor looks past me
at something over my shoulder,
convinced I should be ignored.

I wait for the next person
to enter *Shop and Save* and, on her heels,
slip over the threshold
before the doors can close.

The Door That Opened By Itself

The door opens again,
as if it remembered
something it wanted to tell me.

While I wait for the draft to confess,
it shifts its weight—
the way someone does
when deciding whether or not to speak.

I don't move, knowing even
a small gesture might change
what the draft decides.

Open House

The realtor leaves every door ajar
because nothing sells behind closed ones.

I watch a stranger's hand
pause on the banister
at the bottom of the stairs
exactly where mine always does.

It's likely she's already decided
which room the crib goes in
and what color she's going
to paint the walls,
already living in a house
she hasn't paid for.

Border Crossing

The agent asks the purpose of your visit
and you give an answer that is true,
but also not the whole truth.

Somewhere someone has decided
where your story ends
and the paperwork begins.

You hand it over, wait to be believed.
The stamp finally comes down
on your nearly full passport

and you watch the ink dry
into something you're allowed
to be on the other side of.

Mirror as Door

No threshold, no hinge,
just the illusion of a room
the same size as the one
you're standing in.

I once believed the version behind the glass
was slightly more possible than me,
less afraid of what I'd have to say
if I ever stepped through.

Neither of us ever stepped through
from either side of that pane of silver,
both of us holding still, each thinking
the other held the key.

Hospital Doors

They swing both ways,
gurney going one way,
a bouquet of get-well balloons
going the other
past the empty chapel
and the row of vending machines.

I've stood in that hallway
watching double doors
settle back to still,
and saw that a door only
opens and closes—
opens and closes.

Those doors don't know
which direction
carries the better news.

What A Door Knows

A door only knows the weight
of every hand that ever pushed against it,
and none of the reasons why,
not what you're leaving,
not what you're walking into.

That's the whole of what a door knows:
not you or your grief, just the give
of hinges that have done this thousands of times.

The Last Door

My mother, near the end,
kept looking at the far corner of a room
with no door in it, and said,
“I have to go now,”
the way I used to excuse myself
from the dinner table.

I think she saw a threshold
and wasn't afraid of it
the way I would be,
watching from this side,
holding open a door
that wasn't there.

About the Author

“I’m drawn to the places where documentation thins out, where a landscape holds traces of something no longer visible. Much of my writing begins with a fragment—an old photograph, a journal entry, a rumor, a contradiction—and grows outward into narrative or lyric form.”

— David Jibson

David Jibson is the editor of 3rd Wednesday Magazine, board member of the Poetry Society of Michigan and events coordinator for The Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He is retired from a long career in Social Work, most recently with a non-profit Hospice agency.

You can see his work at davidkjibson.com and much of it is available free because he values readers over book sales.