

Fourth of July

*The ground is always hard
beneath the spread of
Fourth of July quilts.*

*And the wait is always
a little longer than
children want to wait.*

*So they lay back and look up
cupping shaggy heads
in stubby laced fingers,*

*crossing browned legs
to jiggle a white sneaker
anxiously in the air.*

*Wish away the daylight
that dawdles now
at compressing its spent color*

*into floating stripes of rose pink
then tucks them away
behind the hills.*

*Together, we wait for this reluctant
night to pull a black canopy
up around her neck then*

*cannons roar and soar and streak!
A thousand mouths gape
in open wonder as if on cue.*

*Earth quivers innards quake heavens burst
and run down the face of sky.
We have duly impregnated this summer with celebration.*



*Our flag, drawn in burning embers,
is seared into the night.
Applause crisply contagiously ripples
some whistle through their teeth.
This Fourth of July fizzles and goes out.
Dark erases all mention of our intrusion.*

*Mothers meticulously fold their quilts.
Children take their fathers' hands, fan out
collecting little family groups.*

*Drawn by unerring magnets to front stoops
they turn to stare back into the empty night
searching for the faces of their lost brothers*

*who must forever come to pay the cost
of our independence,
our Fourth of July.*

Fourth of July, by **Susie Sims Irvin**, is reprinted here with the author's permission from a book of her poems and paintings, Clouds for the Table, published by Meetinghouse Books, Franklin, Tennessee, in 2001. Susie's older brother was killed in Belgium in World War II, following the Battle of the Bulge

Photo by Bill Puryear Hendersonville City Park July 2005.