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# Why Are Your Poems Full of Turtles?

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# Why Are Your Poems Full of Turtles?

## **Abstract**

Because a tortoise named Fleming discovered a drug that, when I caught pneumonia at age six, saved my life.

Because the Charles Atlas Terrapin of Huckenshuck, New York, changed me, in three days, from a 98-pound weakling to a 300-pound All-Pro guard.

Because, watching those bowed reptilian legs hoist the shell's palanquin, then trudge, double-time, across the grass, who wouldn't smile?

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Why Are Your Poems Full of Turtles? was originally published at *Booth*.



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**BOOTH**



**A JOURNAL**

May 15, 2015

## **Why Are Your Poems Full of Turtles?**

by Charles Harper Webb

Because a tortoise named Fleming discovered a drug that, when I caught pneumonia at age six, saved my life.

Because the Charles Atlas Terrapin of Huckenshuck, New York, changed me, in three days, from a 98-pound weakling to a 300-pound All-Pro guard.

Because, watching those bowed reptilian legs hoist the shell's palanquin, then trudge, double-time, across the grass, who wouldn't smile?

Because the Snake-Necked Turtle coils into its shell, while the Mt. Palomar Tortoise telescopes.

Because Dali, the painting turtle, dragged a man with a wacky, curled mustache for miles through Paris, claiming that, "He doesn't whoosh, and knows the secrets of TV."

Because sea turtles soar on currents of blue sea.

Because Captain Cook gave the king of Tonga a Radiated Tortoise, Tu'i Malila, that died in 1965, 188 years old.

Because a North American Wood Turtle named Babe hit 60 homers in one season, and 714 in his career, steroid-free.

Because the box turtle I left, at lunchtime, in a tin box under the noon sun, taught me to grieve.

Because Pasadena's old-money turtles jet-pack fearlessly above the Rose Parade.

Because a Mississippi cooter named Twain wrote 7/8 of the Great American Novel, but botched the end, inexplicably.

Because turtles have survived 200 million years unchanged, while every six months, my mirror commits further perfidy.

Because a snapping turtle, once it bites, won't let go till it hears thunder.

Because when I see a box turtle's orange-and-black head poke from the grass, if *cute* were anthrax, say goodbye to me.

Because astronaut John Glenn would run around his yard, swooping a red-ear slider like a fighter plane, its legs blurring as he sang "Stars and Stripes Forever"; and look what a singer he grew up to be.

Charles Harper Webb's latest book, *Brain Camp*, was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 2015. *A Million MFAs Are Not Enough*, a book of essays, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press in 2016. Recipient of grants from the Whiting and Guggenheim foundations, Webb teaches Creative Writing at California State University, Long Beach.