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Choosing to Empathize (1991)†

Mary C. Dunlap

Moving men.
What a job!
But when
Assemblyman George Michaels
stood racked with tears
stood up in the New York legislature
on April 9th of 1970
and changed his vote from “No” to “Yes”
to repeal the criminal abortion laws
That had killed and maimed as many women
as a small undeclared war
When Mr. Michaels recalled his wife’s reply
in the argument they’d had earlier that day
before he voted, remembered
“In the meantime
thousands of women
will be butchered
in underworld abortion”
let in his son’s emphatic words
of the suffering from
no abortion = violent abortion
in the summer Cincinnati ghetto
his son had learned and lived in
when he George Michaels moved
reversed his course to vote
determinedly for repeal
and kissed his political ass good-bye
knowingly and bravely

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†. A version of this poem has been previously published in the Washburn Law Journal. The copyright has been released by Maureen C. Mason as well as the Washburn Law Journal. Mary C. Dunlap, Mediating the Abortion Controversy: A Call for Moderation, or for One-Sided Etiquette While the Bombs Keep Flying?, 30 Washburn L.J. 41, 43 n.12 (1990-1991) (reviewing Laurence H. Tribe, Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes (1990)).
with more pain before he stood up to change,
says he today,
than in three years of mortar fire at him
Marine Pacific World War II
When this happens
When someone not possibly directly
in the line of fire, on the hook
of the coat hanger
of the abortion-by-drunk-auto-mechanic
of the abortion-by-jumping-off-the-garage-roof-age-18-and
dying
When someone gets it who isn't s'posed to
Then, say:
Hallelujah!
Let's hear it
For moving men,
and, yes, for moving women.