

GETTING DOWN

by Brian Bell

I never really thought about my grandfather,
never really having known him in life,
until I found myself panicked,
stranded on top of my house roof,
having climbed a two story ladder to learn that

getting on the roof is far easier than getting off.
Crabwalking from peak to gutter,
palms and shoe soles sliding along the sandy shingles,
failing in my first attempt to mount the ladder that
bobbed into the clouds a few feet above the roof's edge

like a soda straw resting on a glass rim.
I tried to place a solitary toe on the rung
without detaching my hands from the roof.
Green grass and rhododendron bushes
spiraled beneath the ladder

perched upon that lumpy earth.
Myself at the top of an aluminum lever,
praying for adequate leverage,
I scurried back from the roof's edge,
collecting myself, lamenting having climbed

the roof while my wife was away.
Of all times, after having alternately
convinced myself that I would call for help
or wait for her to return, I thought of
my grandfather, a myth rather than a memory,

a coal miner who had bested his share of fear I thought.
His spirit calmed me; his advice in my mind's ear,
'Focus on the ladder, stand up like a
man and take hold of the rail.'

At the bottom, I thought to look up and thank him.
But alas he was gone.