

# EULOGY FOR THE MONTEREY SARDINE

Gone:  
Silver scaled  
Pesce di mare-  
La Sardinda  
Shiny as the key-top  
Roll-back tin cans  
They vacated  
The Monterey Sardine --  
Cheap protein for depression years  
Feeding front lines  
World War II  
At our home, a favored food  
On slabs of crusty sour dough  
Gone:  
Slippery fish  
Leaving behind  
Hundreds of pairs  
Rubber gloves,  
Black high top water- proof boots  
Worn by uniformed women  
In wide white hats  
Standing at conveyor belts  
Gone:  
Noisy Machinery  
Dexterous Sicilians  
Grandmothers, daughters, and teens  
In oil skin aprons  
On 12 hour shifts  
At thirty three and a half cents an hour

Gone:  
Robust Italians  
Dads and sons  
Pescatores  
Manning Purse Seine Trawlers  
Essential to the war effort  
Calloused-hands idle  
Fish nets no longer  
In need of mending  
Gone:  
Shrill whistle  
Blasts cutting  
Through dark or fog  
From shore-line canneries  
To forest ridges  
Giving workers 45 minutes-  
Arriving mostly by foot-  
To punch the time clock  
As boats  
Low in the water  
Unload heavy hulls  
At cannery docks  
Gone:  
Grown and old  
Children like me  
In the school yards  
Colton or Pine Street schools  
Stepping out for recess  
To a wall of stench  
Soon after siren blasts  
Meant our mothers, aunts, or sisters  
Would not be home 'til late  
No, not until  
The last fish was packed  
At 5,000 tins an hour  
Loaded on waiting box cars

Gone:  
Steinbeck's neighbors  
Doc Watson's Lab  
Flora's girls, Wing Chong's abacus  
Good natured winos  
Starving artists living in  
Old fish shacks for little rent  
The steamy Chinese restaurant on pilings  
Warn tables lit by low wattage bulbs  
We peered through grimy windows  
To catch sight at sunset  
The fleet headed to the wharf  
Gone:  
In the 50's  
Fickle Sardines  
Replaced by streaming tourists  
Upscale boutiques, tee shirt shops  
Pricey eateries, \$300 a night hotels  
Huge parking lots where  
Corked nets were spread to dry  
The Hovden Cannery morphed  
Into the Monterey Bay Aquarium  
Hosting incarcerated sardines  
On view as atonement  
Arrivederci  
Monterey Sardines  
Leaving old timers to swap tales  
Scholars to write books  
Scientists to ponder  
The vagaries of fish migration  
And me to write this poem  
And remember. Remember.

JULEEN JOHNSON

