in the old Massillon cemetery with a hard granite tombstone over his head. He'd gone away, just like me. Told me that the ones who didn't like to roam stayed home, meaning the folks back in the old country who still live on the land they've lived on for generations. Technically the State now owns the land. But centuries into the future if there be any people or land at all the roots of our family tree will still be buried deep in that soil and the tree will be sprouting new buds. Maybe by then the State will have withered away.

I went back to the old country once to visit the relatives. I saw their mud-plaster homes and grape arbors. I drank their good peasant wine and their good peasant food. One of my cousins had married a soldier. He goosestepped over for the introductions, then stood there at attention, icy formal, all straight up in his uniform, hat and medals, proud scowl on his thin lips and blinkless eyes. I smiled at him in my blue jeans and tennis shoes and said "Howdy!"

The goodbyes were harder:

hugging all my aunts,
big buxom Bulgarian women I could hardly get my arms around.
When I shook my uncle's hand
I could feel just how calloused and proletarian it was, how bourgeois mine was in comparison.

So this is what grandpa left. He'd told me all about fighting in the Balkans, deserting the army, stowing away across the oceans, crossing the Peace Bridge, hoboing from town to jobless town until he finally ended up here, me looking on with places of my own to go to before my own chair is empty.

— Richard Evanoff

Tokyo, Japan

WHEN THE IRS COMES KNOCKING

— for Scott Preston

i'm not sure they'll believe me when i tell them that, in this day and age of upward mobility, i have lived on an income of less than 6,000 a year for the last 5 years.

and lived quite comfortably too.
i have this paranoia
of them tearing my book shelves apart
carting off box loads of manuscripts
falsifying my records ....

i have this thought
that, in their eyes,
a taxpayer is suspect if:
either too prosperous or
not prosperous enough, that it should be
against the law to earn less than
middle-class taxable incomes.

RATTLESNAKES AND GUITARS

this Mexican man showed me
when i was a dozen years old
the rattlesnake rattles
he kept in his guitar
for good luck. he shook the guitar
for effect as he played.

i've found it a good place
to store all my spare picks,
i just dump 'em in there
and the guitar rattles, and
when i need another, i just turn her
upside down and empty one out.

HOW DO YOU SAY

on the car radio
the disk jockey just made
the perennial mispronunciation of
Illinois Jacquet's name, making
it sound French with: Já-Kay.
which is how we all said it
until i met Illinois' trumpet-playing
brother Russell and he jumped
out of his skin, "It's Jacket! Jacket!"
which led me to believe
he's been trying to straighten
this problem out
all his life.

A NEW LID

Willie Nelson does this changing hat bit
where in concert
the audience throws up various type hats