

# Becky, not God<sup>1</sup>

Henry Landon Miles

set the hour for their reunion.

She's under the green  
canopy in the closed coffin.

She signed away her body,  
except for her skin,  
so her hip bones might be recycled

into screws to repair broken ankles  
or wedges to fuse spines  
or to let others bend on her knees.

Are those Navajos?  
One is wearing a jacket  
with *Navajo Nation Fair* on the back.

I look over her mourners,  
hoping my prayer  
will be apt.

What did Becky believe?  
What do her gathering  
people believe?

Bishop Tillack chokes up  
on Mormon words  
for a woman he has never met.

The man in the Navajo jacket (as she willed),  
stands at her coffin,  
speaks a language I do not understand,

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1. A version of this poem was previously published in *Touchstones* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 49–51.

places beads, backs away,  
picks up an eagle's wing,  
brushes coffin, grass, chairs, and Grandma Laura.

He lights the smudge  
aromas of sage, tobacco, and sweet grass  
intermingle.

He eagle wings the cleansing smoke  
over her sacred space,  
sits down with four men  
around a rawhide drum.  
They lay their wood sticks on the drum,  
chant long *aye, aye, ayes* and *oh, oh, ohs* for Becky.

The five men grasp their sticks,  
thump an unrelenting beat and  
beat and chant evoke for her

a path of music up the pines  
while a Navajo woman looks on.  
One man chants solo and four answer back.

A distant diesel draws near and  
steel wheels on steel rails and air whistle blasts  
erase beat and chant

like the diesel paused the bishop  
in his ceremony half an hour ago.  
As steel turns to irony

I ponder the coffin in which  
lie and yet lie not  
the remains of Becky, age 29.

CHRISTOPHER BISSETT {chrisbissett@gmail.com} is a poet, registered nurse, and home care case manager at Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. He graduated in English and women's studies from Brigham Young University in 2010. Besides writing, Christopher spends much of his time studying and admiring nature, especially insects, plants, and a lifelong obsession with shells. He lives with his wife, Rebecca, and their five children in Raymond, Alberta, Canada.

LUISA PERKINS is a novelist, essayist, and lyricist. Her book *Prayers in Bath* was a finalist for the Association for Mormon Letters Novel Award in 2017. Her award-winning short work has been published in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* and has been heavily anthologized. She holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

TAMARA PACE THOMSON {breedinglilacs@icloud.com} is a visiting faculty member at Brigham Young University, where she teaches composition and creative writing. She writes mostly fiction and poetry but has published an occasional creative nonfiction essay and book review. Her favorite teaching gig is a volunteer creative writing workshop that she started at the Utah State Hospital. She and her husband have three children and two children-in-law and like to spend their extra time with them.

CHRIS A. PECK currently works as a high school English teacher in Orem, Utah. He has had poetry published in a variety of places, including *Wilderness Interface Zone* and *Dialogue*. Peck has also had essays published through the *Utah English Journal* and *Sci Phi Journal* and has presented at the Utah Valley University Philosophy Conference and at *Sunstone*.

HENRY LANDON MILES grew up in Blackfoot, Idaho and received his BA from Idaho State in 1961 and an MA in economics from American University in 1968. He became a Foreign Service Officer and served in US embassies in Latin America. He retired into Brigham Young University's MA program in creative nonfiction writing and learned what he wanted to be when he grew up. His essay "My Mission Decision" won *Dialogue's* Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest in 2007.