

Michael McDowell

Walking the Sky

For May Robertson McCracken, 1878-1957

In 1917 my grandmother rode into the sky
while walking the lift span of the Hawthorne Bridge.
The Willamette River dropped away from under her,
the wind whipped her dress around her legs,

and she rose to join the gulls circling overhead.
The only pedestrian on the bridge,
saving streetcar fare by walking downtown,
she smiled and waved at the bridge tender above her,

she waved to her children safe at Buckman School,
she waved to her husband at work downtown.
The pulleys turned, and seventeen hundred thousand
pounds of weight sank below her.

As she stood between the two towers high above Portland,
a ship passed under her, loaded maybe with wheat or logs,
and in a few minutes she had descended to a common level.
We call it the day my grandmother walked the sky.