

## Jerry West

Ralph James Savarese

The purest of shooters,  
the ball like a dad ruffling  
the curly locks of his kid:  
all net and no rim...

He died yesterday at 86  
after a storied career  
as player and manager.  
From the obit I learned

he had been beaten  
mercilessly by his father  
and could never, not once,  
“chase away the sadness.”

(Success is like bruising  
your own forehead —  
you don't get back to even.)  
As a teen, he'd sleep

with a shotgun beneath  
his pillow, ready (as I was)  
for the tooth fairy's fists.  
My father's hero —

he had to have known  
about West's abuse,  
he had to have, right?  
At least in the way that Jung

talks of synchronicity.  
First, you dream about someone;  
then, they write you a letter.  
My father destroyed

the thing he loved and loved  
the thing destroyed — all  
at a distance from himself.  
Not a word between us

for twenty-five years.  
Sometimes I picture him  
as a flower wilting in the desert.  
How to refuse the sun?

“Be like Jerry,” he’d say ferociously,  
though I didn’t much care  
for basketball and would have  
liked to hold his hand.

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**Ralph James Savarese** is the author of three books of prose and three books of poetry. His work has appeared, among other places, in *American Poetry Review*, *Brevity*, *Fourth Genre*, *Ploughshares*, *Rattle*, *Salon.com*, *Seneca Review*, *Southwest Review*, and *Threepenny Review*. He lives in Iowa City, Iowa.