

My Grandmother's Hands

Ten children's diapers washed in scalding water,
twelve souls' clothes cleaned with lye,
garments taken in from others to earn pennies,
scrubbed, dried, ironed, folded, returned.

Chickens, fresh-twisted necks,
hot-water-loosened feathers plucked before cooking.
Fresh dough, kneaded, beaten, shaped.
Spitting grease burning cooking scar crevices.
Caustics, rose thorns, slipped knives,
muscles strained, bones rubbed, swollen.

Hard-fought life reflected on aged hands,
gnarled joints, bent fingers mangled
from endless lifting, carrying, scrubbing,
from use without respite, from...
life...

My grandmothers' hands,
badges of honor,
of unwavering courage,
of love,
records of life lived hard and,
through all the challenges—
death, famine, pestilence, poverty, crippling pain—
of life lived well.

I saw them today tipping my arms,
my grandmother's hands;
not my mother's manicured,
polished, oiled, gloved, pampered,
but my Grammy's careworn, life-marked,
well-used, love-blessed,
life-giving hands.

I frowned. I sighed. I smiled.