

## The Year John Cage Was Born · *Patrick Lawler*

The year John Cage was born, his father  
Set a trap. For thirteen days, in a submarine  
Of his own design, John Cage's father  
Stayed submerged—for thirteen days,  
With thirteen men, on Friday.  
And when John Cage's father came up, he said,  
“Well, John, top that.” So a precedent was  
Set that fathers and sons were expected  
To follow. The challenge would be passed on.  
Records in '48 were not so easily established.  
My father's submarine was borrowed  
And in need of paint. I'm not making  
Excuses. The sunlight danced over the dent  
On the bow. They came to the docks to see him  
Off: a man carrying a sketch of the mayor,  
A woman in a floppy hat. The picture  
Of my mother shows her head slightly bent  
As if she were listening to the bumble  
Of a motor car speeding out of sight. The white  
Ribbon in her hair sags like a cripple's  
Shoelace. The conversation centers on how cold  
It will be, on how hot. The one thing  
For certain is that there will be discomfort.  
There will be times when breathing  
Will have to wait. They barely look at one  
Another, my father on the deck, my mother on the  
Dock, straightening the ribbon in her brown hair, as  
Everything around them, for one moment, stays afloat.