

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Today's seasonal poem by Stuart Kestenbaum of Deer Isle grew out of tapping maple trees and boiling sap on his stovetop. "What stayed with me," he says, "is how long it took to get to syrup, and how sweet the syrup could be."

Essence

By Stuart Kestenbaum

We hand-crank the drill through the maple's bark,
pound the metal tap into light inner layers

where the sap begins to flow, this life blood
that will make the leaves unfurl

in another two months, delicately
lined like the hands of a newborn.

But now we step over last year's leaves
and the year's before that

in patchy snow to gather what
we have taken from the tree, the gallons of sap

we boil down on our stove top,
moisture running off the kitchen windows

as we get down to its essence, over three gallons
to make a cup of syrup, so sweet

a transformation, I can't believe I could
have been a part of it. A world that doesn't

end in vinegar, ashes and regret,
but in a sweetness that rises every day

between earth and sky, traveling from the hole
in the side of the tree to our joyous mouths.

Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry is produced in collaboration with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Poem copyright © 2003 by Stuart Kestenbaum. Reprinted from House of Thanksgiving, Deerbrook Editions, 2003, by permission of Stuart Kestenbaum. Questions about submitting to Take Heart may be directed to David Turner, Special Assistant to the Maine Poet Laureate, at poetlaureate@mainewriters.org or 207-228-8263.