

New Poetry**William D. Ehrhart
The Secret Lives of Boys**

Nothing the boy wanted
ever came true. Not the chance
to be a World War Two fighter ace
in 1958. Not the chance to save
beautiful Ursula Netcher
from pirates. Not the ability
to leap tall buildings
in a single bound.

Okay, he got that plastic
tripod-mounted battery-powered
machinegun for Christmas one year,
but it broke two days later.

And he got to pick the football helmet
with the plexiglass face mask
for selling the most
YMCA oatmeal cookies,
but it didn't make him
any better at football.

He got the job
handing out skates and changing records
on Sunday afternoons at the roller rink.

But he never got the things
that really mattered.
The courage to defend himself
from the playground bullies.
Parents who didn't show
one face to the world,
another inside the home.

The chance not to be
the preacher's kid
in a town where you couldn't hide.

He got the double chin.
He got C's in gym class.
He got his brothers' hand-me-down clothes.

He wanted to be a Wildcat pilot,
or maybe a ball turret gunner.

He wanted to rescue beautiful Pam Magee
from pirates. Or maybe Comanches.

He wanted to be
anything
but what he was.
(2008)