

*Hiking with the A.T.I.S.**

Early one morning, he shambled towards us
down the Carry path, his nose pinned inches
from the ground. He padded
in his brown bathrobe and slippers,
mumbling to himself, pensive
as a half-blind botanist searching for his glasses.

He carried his mammoth bulk
like a big duffel bag
slung
between his two shoulders.
If angered, he could have bowled us down
like a set of ten pins.

But Ernie Russ, woodsman and guide,
knew better. He told us to stop.
Then he sucked in his breath
and sent out a long slow hiss—
the sign of menace
in any language.

Startled, the bear jerked his head up
and saw ten statues of children
standing before him. More frightened
than any maiden,
he picked up his slippers
and ran.

*A.T.I.S. (Adirondack Trail Improvement Society)