

Miriam Manglani

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

There are 15 candles on the cake in the photo,
one extra for good luck.
My cheeks are puffed with air like a blowfish,
ready to release their air
and extinguish the remaining flickering flames.

My mom must have taken the shot,
a natural reflex for her in those days
when she lived with a camera strung
around her neck like a dog tag.

My father's face is cropped
from the photo's frame.
You can see his slightly upturned lips, his nose,
but not his little shiny eyes
that I can only imagine were beaming on the special day.

At the age of 14,
A parental detail like that would be immaterial,
but at the age of 46,
him dead more than ten years ago,
I can't get enough of them
and comb through family photos like a detective
looking for the leftover pieces of him.