Dad went out
When he heard his mother had died,
Dad went out
for a walk across the Common.
Alone. He never went out alone.
I may be some time,
left unsaid
by the crunch of the closing door.
My brother and I sat stunned
by our Captain’s private grief,
afraid he would not come back
from the cold, unsure what to say
when he did, the British family of few
words and polar denial. We imagined
him walking alone, bitten by those final
decaying hospital bed memories,
trudging through the mud–
filled meadows,
dripping trees, birds quietened, deer
hidden. I suspected fury and wailing:
curses and tears for Old Gods,
his mind whitening with acceptance.
Our Oates came back dry,
tears tidied away, the farewell to his mother packed
up with only oak and silver birch as witness.
We sat together quietly on the settee.
this wind whispering with acceptance.

I keep Mom’s school pencil case
tribute to her best efforts in school.
Her contribution to family legends:
Scoring 1% in a short hand exam.
Pencil case from New Zealand
stacked strips of Kiwi timbers:
kahikatea, rimu, matai, totara, pukatea,
kauri, and rewarewa sovereign.
Each name a caramel chew of vowels,
deepening orange to chocolate,
brown sinewy, one speckled stone,
the last darkly regal zebra brands.
Post-war case measures in inches,
hinges open at one end with a creak,
apologizing for offering two tubular
slits, room only for writing tokens.
Mum remembers splinters of life:
Pencil case her daily companion
in Cheam County Secondary School.
Her name and F16 etched on the back.
From last year’s exams, her English teacher:
Mr. Fordham’s Father: 74/200
is from Great Runn, Vermont, 1960s.
Emily, her childhood name.

The Words Unsaid
Matthew James Friday © 2019

The Words Unsaid
Matthew James Friday

Recycle this microchap with a friend.
The OPP is a 501(c)3 Non-Profit
Donations welcome—PayPal, etc.

www.origamipoems.com
Every microchap may be printed
for free from the website.

Cover collage by Jan Keough

Origami Poems Project™

The Words Unsaid
Matthew James Friday

Tin Cup Letter Love

Unable to speak the words
I love you–Mum spelt it out using
plastic letters from a tin cup.

She taught me to read at
our kitchen table in Norwich
months before the big move
south and starting school.

One by one, I lucky dipped
brilliantly coloured phonemes,
chewy sounds in my mouth.
I learned the tastes quickly
and my appetite grew. Words,
sentences, pages, whole books.

She arrived in this mother pocket
overflowing with enthusiasm.
A lover of reading, Mum
started me with the second-best
replacement to spoken affection.

Years on, still searching in books,
I understand Mum’s spelling
difficulties: post-War parents
who fumbled parental sentences.

The key words of life self-taught.
I wish I could return to happy
kitchen days before school with
Mum and her tin cup of love.