LIFEBOAT

We walked out of Shea's theatre into an electric hour.
Three weeks of happiness had passed
since the Allies entered Germany, a time of
special events like after-school movies with my parents.
We'd seen Hitchcock's "Lifeboat",
shot in one location: the boat that held
the survivors of a torpedoed liner.
Tallulah Bankhead in a sopping mink,
fishing with a diamond bracelet for bait,
the handsome stevedore, the cynical newsman,
Heather Angel rocking her dead baby,
the nurse, the kindly black steward — and the Nazi.
All cast adrift on a sea of dependency and
suspicion. They kill the Nazi, of course.
We came blinking from the theatre,
and found the street filled with noise.
Newsboys shouting, arms filled with papers —
"Extra! Extra!" "Roosevelt Dies in Warm Springs".
Crumpled faces, red-eyes, men cursing —
"Oh my God" from my mother. My father,
a history teacher, buying a half dozen copies
of the Daily Times for us and his students.
One of the newsboys wore a black band on his sleeve.
Someone began to sing "Home on the Range,"
Roosevelt's favorite song. A few people joined in,
unsure of the words, fumbling its course
from a full throated "Home, home on the range"
along an indecisive passage to the promise,
"the skies are not cloudy all day."
We lingered for a while there on Tenth Street,
my parents talking to people I didn't know.
Finally my father, holding my mother's hand,
took mine and we drove home.
Long after I went upstairs
I saw from my window my father
still sitting in the car, smoking.

Julianna McCarthy

Julianna McCarthy is an award-winning poet based in Los Angeles. Her poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review, American Journal of Poetry, Catamaran, Best Poem, Nimrod, Hole in the Head* and others. Her latest collection, 'Night Surgery,' is due out this year from Blue Horse Press.