

## Museum of Ancient Life

A leaf grins in a rock's face  
as if concealing secrets:  
the quiet of tree hardening to stone  
or amber cupping light, careful  
as water in a child's hands.  
The shelves of debris proceed  
by age—Pleistocene, Eocene,  
Paleocene—a glass geometry cooled  
by the fluorescent hum of  
the Ice Age. Beside them a version  
of a bird leans from his pedestal,  
wings canopied as if caught in  
the updraft of the past tense.  
As we walk the gallery, I am  
holding my son's hand the way  
homonids do in this mural of a family  
crossing the Bering Straits,  
trudging from one era to the next  
on the complicitous ocean.  
They totter on feet still learning  
to bear the upright beast all  
the way to this place where today  
my boy ascends the carpet slope  
toward a forest of bones with  
wonder still blowing through them,  
here, where unpronounceable  
names struggle to survive.  
Where could Eden ever have been  
but here, with no map but  
ourselves, here, where the only  
cost of remembrance is death.

—Michael Hicks

This poem won first place in the *BYU Studies*  
2003 poetry contest.