A UNIVERSE WITHOUT ME

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the light came first
(which no one could believe)
the blinding flash two miles across
with the brilliance of thirty suns

and then the waves of shocked impact
reducing ten millennia
of human intent
to a tale of ash and waste

and then right after
the raging fires
which made all Dresdens
and Hiroshimas
seem like outdoor barbecues

and all human motion and emotion simply ceased

friends caught and crushed in the invisible madness
leaving scarcer than ever a trace of human kindness

and no more time
to plan or to convey
to hope be born or gaze
with any chance of earthbound dignity

and one or two here and there
have survived to tell this story
but we are few
and far between

alien cities now turn to rot
where vaporous humans
tell a ghostly tale
of life
before apocalyptic folly
my daughter died and my wife
and my brothers and my parents
and my sisters and all once lovers

it must have been the flash, the shock, or the burns
that undid them so completely

but it could have been the sorrow

and i would be alone
but for this vestige of my canine friend
just alive and brain toasted
by radioactive decay
and i must watch him die too

it’s dangerous to search for food
but somehow I manage to survive
with this primeval urge
to protect me
from a universe without me

—ROBERT T. McLAUGHLIN, Ph.D., chaired Rivier College’s education division in 2008. He oversees professional educator preparation program approval for the NH Dept. of Education. His three children, he enjoys telling them, are usually cute and adorable; with his wife he provides a home for four border collies, who all are cute and adorable. He founded and chaired the International Society for Technology in Education’s interest groups on innovative learning technologies and digital equity, serves on the national commission on technology and the future of teacher education, and is senior fellow for the Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education.