A Calculus

Sandra Lindow
UW-Stout

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lindows@uwstout.edu

To Miriam, on her graduation from college.

What is the circumference of change?
Measure the finite difference between
a blade of grass and a spring violet.
What is the foundation of family?
How many shovels does it take to turn a garden
four feet by twelve feet in the time it takes a robin
to fly from the cottonwood to the front porch?
What is the volume of two souls when the wind is blowing?

Factor in the sound of soup simmering,
the smell of bread baking, a map spread out.
Define the differential of green beans and snap peas;
Calculate the square root of a maple leaf
divided by the time it takes to turn red and fall.
What is the hypotenuse of the distance
between a mother and her grown child
when snow laps the front door with longing?

If a young woman were to drive from Minneapolis
to California at sixty-five miles an hour
would her mother miss her less or more?
Multiply the infinite quantity of love times mileage.
How many breaths does it take to let her go?
Calculus they say is the study of change,[1]
I never took it. If I had, maybe
I'd be better prepared to deal with your leaving now.