

Reflections In The Desert

Roger Pierce

Presented by

My poetic Side 



About the author

Roger Pierce is a retired Protestant Minister living in Arizona. A U.S. Navy Chaplain for twenty years, hospice chaplain, denominational executive, and local church pastor, Dr. Pierce began writing poetry forty years ago and has produced several poetry volumes, along with books of nature photography.

summary

Hand In Hand

Disappointment

Just Me

Such A Disappointment

Speaking The Name

The Dilemma of the Day

Common Song

Get It While You Can!

Things Could Be Worse

Passing Dream

Does One Matter?

Cold Winter Night

The Morning Of My Life

Get A Job! Who, Me?

Ticket, Please

Wednesday Is Always A Difficult Day

Virtue Vendor

Lions In The Night

Long Ago and Evermore

I Choose The Light

A Man Who Does Not Care

Inseparable

Golden Beach

Betrayal

Fresh New Day

It Just Gets Better and Better

Created In The Image

At The Deepest Center

No Ashes This Year

A Technicolor Day

Masks

Creative Writing 101

Wave Goodbye, Say Hello

I Heard Your Name

In My Father's House

Living Questions

Pegasus

I Miss You So

Red Petals

I Will Pay You Back Next Week

The Sad Story of Red McGuire

Big Mistake

Golden Years

The Day The Carousel Stopped

Some Day

Beautiful Mystery

The Night The Crickets Sang

Magic Morning

Singing Hope

Honeybee

A Lot About Nothing At All

The Artistic Arrogance of Impeccable Poetry

Lost

Life Begins In Half An Hour

Walking Together

Sing To Me

Passing Guest

Hope In The Air

Emerging

If I Knew Then

Adventure

The Lighthouse

Between You And Me

Healing Mountain

Go Slowly

Life Evolves

Beautiful Voice

Journey

Dawn Dancing

Brother Moon

Remorse

Meeting Myself

My Wish

Memories Visiting

The Scales Don't Lie

This Day

In The Course Of An Average Day

Note To A Friend

Just A Little Kiss

Sky Ships

Waiting For Light

May Morning

Gently

Curtain Call

Welcome Light

A Drop Of Grace

Because She Cared

Metal Bird

Friendship

Sounds of Blessing

Demon Chocolate

Pursuing A Poem

Night Sky

This Unique Day

I Am Me!

All Things Matter

Writer's Block

Desert Rain

Clouds On My Shoulders

I Am Living

My Dog

The Murphy Bed

Waiting For The Guest

Blood In The Sky

Perfect Day

My Positive Attitude

A Nation's Struggle

A First Line, Please

Reluctant Night

Songbird's Blessing

Afternoon Rain

Very Fine Day

A Child Is Born

Advice To A Preacher

Christmas Journey

The Star

Wounded Dove

Waiting For Wonder

Bagel Shop

Graceful Hands

Yes, Sherlock, The Game Is On!

Life Rising

Right Knee's Revenge

Yes!

I Never Thought I'd See The Day

Mourning and Moving On

Nodding Offfffffffffff

Grinch and Whine and Pout

Stop The Sermon, I Want To Get Off!

Question Mark?

Circling Crown

Storm

Midnight Raid

Crazy Day

Hugs All Around

Wind At My Back

Is Anyone There?

Sometimes I Think In Rhyme

Anger

Pendulum

I Tried

Between You and Me

This Good Day

Keeping Secrets

So Late To The Party

Animal Verse

Encounter

Behind The Darkness

Bad Choice

Red-Checked Apron

White Collar

Dawn

She Danced

Never Rent To A Crocodile

Speaking The Name

Boating On The Lake

4 A.M.

"If I have not love..."

What If?

What Did He Say?

The Best Way To Bike

Desert Mural

Pathway By The Stream

93 And Rising Fast

Asylum

Death Moved In

Magnolia Memories

Trapped

Monday Mistake

Rising To The Day

Don't Look In The Mirror

Chin Up, It Could Be Worse

Hearing, Seeing, Doing

Throwing Rocks At The Sky

Brighter Days

Red Chair

The Latest In A Series...

Invisible Walls

Song In The Trees

Birthing A Poem

How Fast Is Fast Enough

The Poem That Will Never End

Early Light

Wandering

Beautiful Child

Waking Sounds

For Aaron

Madness In The Air

Today Will Be Today

Morning Walk

Spaciousness

Watching Butterflies

Morning's Visit

Singing To The Mountain

Words

One Man Alone

The Pain of Forgetting

Speak Now

Tiny Hand

Dare To Dream

Faith That Engages Life

Wings

Decisions At Dawn

Don't Let It Slip Away

Cashmere Night

The Very Best Day Of The Week

I Am Unique

And So You Remain Forever

The Almost Poet

Bow Upon String

What if...

I Have Wondered...

You Must Begin To End

Visit To The Dentist

Footprints In The Sand

Step Lightly

The Lion

Rain, Rain Go Away!

The Candy Store

Floating Bird

Fair Winds And A Following Sea

White Wooden Bench

Coming Home

Courage To Press On

Wink and Grin

Clouds At Play

You and Me

Unless We Try...

Press On

I Used To Live Right There

It's The Way It Is

I Stood In The Rain Today

Falling Into The Light

The Garden of Friendships

Tomorrow Trees

Hand In Hand

I pledged to you once I'd stand by your side
no matter how happy or tough the ride,
and you gave me in such loving words
the most beautiful promise I've ever heard.
You said: "I do" as you held my hand
and I counted myself a fortunate man.
Now as we live on the edge of time,
a few years ahead, a lot behind,
I sit in the stillness before first light,
creation is silent, embraced by the night
in an eerie quiet that covers the land
and in that moment I take your hand
as you rest in the arms of peaceful sleep
and I see all the years etched so deep.
Someone might say your hand is old
but what I see is a treasure of gold.
I see children and work and sacrifice,
all the times you paid a heavy price
when life wasn't easy, but you never quit.
And I'll be the first to gladly admit
that your strength is greater than you understand
and it's shown right here, in the lines in your hand.
Rest well, my love, for the morning arrives,
the gift of time which we shall prize
as we walk together across the land,
warmed by the Light, hand in hand.

Disappointment

I tried and I failed.
I wanted to become.
It was in the stars,
etched into the chromosomes
of my creation, destined;
expectations, anticipations.

It is a cruel, icy wind that
cuts through the fabric of hope,
exposing sinew and bone,
leaving nothing but a whimper
and a sigh.

I tried to become all that I
wanted to be and now all
that remains is what I am.
Must I be contented with that?
Shall I become the best that
I am? Am I to strive for the
pinnacle of this?

There is a dagger of disappointment
buried deep in my heart. Tell me,
why does no blood drip from
the wound? I tried. I tried and
I failed. A footnote to what
might have been, a thought in
a mindless moment of time.

Just Me

If I die before I live
who's to fault
just me

I can't blame someone else
who would it be
uncle Alphonse

He lives in Marseille
drives a truck
why him

I alone can live my life
no one else
just me

Blame solves no problems
answers no questions
denies no realities

If I die before I live
shame on me
just me

Such A Disappointment

Disappointments come in all shapes and sizes.
The little ones you can shrug off.
It's the big ones that leave a hole in your heart,
a jagged cut that scars the soul.

"She's not coming? She won't be here?"
"But I tried so hard!"
"And I thought he really cared."

It's not that I feel angry. Not that.
Whether right or wrong, sometimes I blame myself
for the disappointments that descend like a dark cloud.
I bear my share, but I don't carry it all. Others own it, too.

"He gave me his word. Now what do I do?"
"Won't she ever call? I told her I was sorry."
"It's no consolation to hear: 'Better luck next time.'"

Do pieces of one's heart ever fit properly again?
Do disappointments die?
I doubt it.

Speaking The Name

When clouds tinge pink in the early morning
as gray lizards vie for the best sunning
rocks to warm their agile bodies,
and the bobcat's eyes flash golden
in her dark den,

I will stand in the shadow of the green
mountain and speak a name to
unlock the universe.

I will say it softly, reverently at first,
but when the first cactus wren sings
and the dark canyons are filled with
melody, I will shout it for all living
things to hear.

It will be an unmistakable moment
of exhilaration and the earth
will quiver at the hearing.

When all echoes have given way to silence,
I will whisper the name for only the
saguaro to hear, the ancient one who stands
alone on the shadowy ridge.

In that instant, Radiance will wash the
valley in boundless joy, rivers of
light will cascade over granite
cliffs, fill ravines, sink into
dry desert sand.

All the earth will wake to joy because
the name was uttered.

You

The Dilemma of the Day

In spite of my efforts to hold back the
revealing light of day,
the sun rises.

Regardless of my regrets about yesterday
or my fears of this day,
light comes.

In spite of my despair or deep disappointment
about humanity's addiction to violence,
morning dawns.

Ready or not. Willing or not. Prepared or not
the sunlight of morning dawns and
with it possibilities, choices for
creativity or catastrophe,
the dilemma of the
day.

Common Song

It matters not who's right or wrong,
don't lose the joy of our common song.
Let's find a way to see the light
that bathes us in hope at the end of the night.
Whatever happened is long ago.
You and I may never know
how that stone was rolled away,
so many theories come into play.
Let's agree that we will disagree
yet hold a common hope that he
will live on in us, in what we do.
I have a feeling he is not through,
that somehow his presence will lead the way
to a moment in time when we can say:
"In spite of the conflicts that punctuate life,
in the midst of confusion, doubts or strife,
a whispered word fills my weary mind:
live for truth; be generous, always be kind"
and that, my friends, will move me on,
and I will sing our common song.
It matters not who's right or wrong,
what matters is knowing that we belong
to one who lives beyond the tomb,
who, at this moment, fills this room
with a mystery, not one to be proved,
a living light that graciously moves
each one of us to simply be
his life in the world for all to see.
It doesn't matter who's right or wrong.
Come, let's sing our common song.

Get It While You Can!

Ladies and gents, boys and girls,
welcome to the magical world
of illusion, along with sleight of hand,
we'll even throw in a five-piece band.
No ticket needed to come in here,
but do not delay...the end is near!
This preacher can sing and dance and holler,
just don't forget to bring a dollar.
We'll tell you the way to live your life,
how to raise your kids, honor your wife,
you'll learn the exact chapter and verse,
did I say you need to bring your purse?
Every man and woman is going to hell.
Blame that on Adam and Eve who fell,
and you, my friend, are the worst of the lot!
You're a miserable wretch; you deserve to be shot!
But the product we offer will change all of that,
so, ladies first; gents remove your hats.
If you pass this up, you're bound to hell!
This is all legit...we have nothing to sell.
Just bring your wallet...you country clod,
and get your autographed picture of god.
All for a little donation.
You still have time to save your soul.
Make that your Saturday afternoon goal.
Give up the beer and the bars and the girls,
you women, get rid of those seductive curls,
the tight fittin' dresses and high heeled shoes.
Believe me, sister, you're gonna lose
your house, your car and your radio
unless you come in here and get the glow
that comes from singin' and shoutin' and all.
We'll throw in a holy ghost, lacy prayer shawl.

Come get a miracle to remove the curse,
just don't forget to bring your purse.

Things Could Be Worse

I take comfort in knowing things could be worse.
Life doesn't allow us a chance to rehearse
all the things that happen in the course of a day,
the surprising moments that come our way.
They happen so quickly, ready or not,
by luck or chance, some dastardly plot.
A woman in Omaha, while adjusting her purse,
stepped off a curb and was hit by a hearse.
Or that man in Dallas, while walking downtown,
taking in the sights, enjoying the sounds,
just minding his business while looking around,
he fell in a manhole and almost drowned.
When I think my life is a terrible wreck,
I remember that I am just one tiny speck
on the elbow of life, there's no rhyme or reason.
It matters not the year or the season.
Just be alert when crossing the street,
be pleasant and cordial to the people you meet,
and don't rummage around in that designer purse
or you might get a ride in that big, black hearse.
I take comfort in knowing that things could be worse.

Passing Dream

There is a place, just up this trail,
very near the snow-fed stream,
a jagged break in the mountain's face
where I go to catch a dream.

They ride the currents of a playful wind
that sweeps down from the rugged peak
and there I wait, alert to the chance,
that I might hear one speak,

for I am a child of these ancient stones,
birthed by the canyons and trees,
brother and sister to the mountain lion
related to all I see.

This is my home, the source of my strength,
away from life's hollow schemes,
where I can rest in the mountain's embrace
and catch a passing dream.

Does One Matter?

One grain of sand on a sloping white beach
where children build castles before the tide's return.

One obscure star in a universe thick with flickering dots,
the backdrop for angel flights.

One elegant Fir tree nestled among hundreds lining a
rocky outcropping in the Sierra Nevadas.

One atom among 7 octillion in the structural
complexity of a human being.

One glistening Polar Bear almost lost in the
blowing snow that consumes a migrating family group.

One Covid "case" alone in a dimly lit hospital hallway
lined with makeshift gurneys.

One smile, one laugh, one tear.

Would the absence of one yellow rose matter
in the cosmic bouquet of fragrant delight?

Does it make any difference that I am here
and then I am not?

What is the value of one?

Just one.

Cold Winter Night

Beyond the ether and the mist,
far into the blackness of unknowing,
a heart beats, and to its hypnotic
rhythm, planets and stars, tiny bits
of cosmic dust and the glistening
tails of explosive comets sway in
concert with the echo that begins
so powerfully, then fades, inch by
inch, until it vanishes into thinness
and finally into restful oblivion.
Was it there? Was it really there?
How can I ever know? And yet, on
those nights of crystal cold, when
droplets of rain turn into long daggers
precariously suspended from snow laden
eves, I look beyond the limits of low
hanging clouds, into the black spaces
between flashing dots of light in the
magnificent winter sky, and, without
effort or intent, I begin to sway ever
so slightly to the thump, thump of
an echo, faint, felt not heard.
Why else does the universe throb
on a cold winter night when brilliant
stars are performing glissades in
response to the irresistible?

The Morning Of My Life

In the morning of my life
the world was fragrant with
gardenia perfume. Regal oak trees
stood as sentinels over my garden
kingdom where I played tag with fireflies
on humid summer nights. Emerald green
magnolia leaves released great droplets left by
the late afternoon rain, an elixir that bathed all
it touched in the well-being of quiet contentment.

While nations warred and injustice built invisible walls
to isolate and impoverish, I laid on the warm summer
grass and imagined stepping from star to star, oblivious
to the obscene, provoked by little more than the
inconvenience of supper's delay, sheltered a
while longer from all that waited beyond
the garden gate.

In the morning of my life, I
chased fireflies and admired them
in their glass jar prisons, captives of
my pleasure, while others around
me made lemonade.

Get A Job! Who, Me?

I said I'd love you forevermore,
but I didn't realize what was in store.
I thought you said your bank account
was a pretty high six-figure amount.
And now you say you're broke!

I'll love you, my dear, until the end of time
but it would help if you had a dime.
What happened to the money in Grandpa's will?
How in the world are we going to fill
our home with the very best?

I've counted on you to share the load,
but now I'm tempted to hit the road,
cause it seems you've not been honest with me.
I thought all this time we would really be
livin' high on the hog.

I can't think of a thing to do.
Maybe it's time to say we're through.
My hope is gone and my dreams are dashed.
Even your bonds have all been cashed?
What a foolish thing to do.

I suggest, my love, you come up with a plan.
Take out a loan. Sell your van.
I'm not a very needy man,
and I'll be glad to do whatever I can.
What do you mean, get a job!

I said I'd love you forevermore,
but that was last week, clearly before
you told me about your bank account

and the bottom line of a zero amount.

And now you want me to work!

Ticket, Please

I searched in the bright sunlight
that bathed the mountain top, in
shadowed canyons and across meadows
where yellow wildflowers covered rich earth
and timid deer watched from clusters of
proud pines.

I bowed before a pristine altar from which tall,
white candles cast long shadows across the
Cathedral's stone floor, listened as the echo of
two hundred organ pipes filled the almost
empty nave with painfully beautiful sound.
A weary priest stepped, rather reluctantly, into an
elevated pulpit, cleared his throat and spoke
words of blessing not to a thousand, but to
fifty scattered listeners. The passion of praise
languished in an unraveling certainty.

The assumptions of yesterday are the wrong
tokens for this ride. This is a one-way trip.
Transformation is in the travel. Don't buy a
round-trip ticket. Meeting Mystery happens
but in ever changing zip codes.

A book cannot convey it. A building cannot
contain it. Words fill the air with heat and
hubris. Blaming is a child's game. Wishing
won't work.

And that leaves us with what? Ticket, please.

Wednesday Is Always A Difficult Day

Would you mind saying that one more time?
I'm looking for a way to make it rhyme
but luck has abandoned my paltry skill
and I shall sit here and whine until
a miracle happens to come along,
maybe a thought or a lovely song.
What I need are two words that simply rhyme.
Would you mind saying that one more time?

Wednesday is always the most difficult day
to find several words that combine to say
something important for the welfare of all,
including Jerome the Neanderthal
who writes me a note everyday
suggesting that I have nothing to say
and accusing me of losing my way.
Wednesday is always the most difficult day.
But I shall press on for the sake of the art,
for the words I write are straight from my heart.
I do not embellish, cheat or deceive.
I write nothing that causes one to grieve
the proper use of grammar and rhyme.
I count the meter time after time,
but if our paths must sadly part
I shall press on for the sake of the art.
I hope, my friend, you find your way
to a voice that has something important to say.
If you'd ever like to return to this fold
I trust you'll remember that you were told
that everyone is welcome here
although I'd like to make this clear:
if you intend to complain every day,
I'll be happy to help you find your way.

Very happy, indeed.

Virtue Vendor

The Virtue Vendor came to town today,
his wagon filled with assorted goods.
It didn't take long for a line to form.
I hesitated, but I knew I should
restock my supply of Patience and Peace,
and while I'm at it, I'll ask if I could
have a small container of Joy.

The Vendor rolls in about once a month
with everything a man could need,
boxes of Kindness, sacks full of Hope,
Generosity, too, to fight off our greed.
One time he got sick and missed a month.
You should have heard us beg and plead.
You just can't live without Virtues!

I rue the day when the Vendor dies.
Some dependable person will take his place.
But the Vendor knows what this village needs.
We can't get along without a case of Grace.
We all wonder who the replacement will be,
it will take a strong person to keep up the pace.
What's that? Who, me??

Lions In The Night

The lions stalk in the heart of the night.
They come, slipping across the grassland like
liquid gold, pausing to sniff the pungent
night air, keen to follow the scent
of flesh and to explore the firelight
reflecting yellow off large boulders
surrounding the nocturnal watering hole.
Just as sleep wraps her soft arms
around weary travelers, a twig cracks,
leaves dried crisp in the savanna sun
rustle while soft shadows dance on the
canvas tent wall.
There is no mistaking.
A sniffing, deep throated rumble
defines the reality.
Danger walks through
the night.
Death is close by.
Be silent.
Do not move.
Wait

Long Ago and Evermore

If we ever pass the way again
and chance to meet one day,
I will sense there is something about your smile
and I will stop you and say:
Will you tell me, please, the way to your heart?
I've been there in other days,
perhaps long ago in another life
but I cannot remember the way.
I mean no offence, but I know your voice.
By chance, do you recognize mine?
There is something about you that takes my breath.
Is this some mysterious sign?
And then, still perplexed, I will take your hand
and our touch will unlock the door
to the glorious memories of love we shared
long ago and evermore.

So, when we pass this way again
in a week or a thousand years,
take no offence and don't be afraid,
I simply want you to hear
the words from my soul I'm compelled to say:
Tell me, please, the way to your heart,
I've been there in different days.
Was it long ago in another life?
Please help me remember the way.

Here, hold my hand.

I Choose The Light

Do not confine me to your world of pity.
It is cold and small, a shadowy world
from which come cries of the broken,
weeping from the disillusioned
cowered by simple words wrapped in
arrogant piety. I cannot bear the chains,
the imprisonment of my soul.

Speak instead with words of understanding,
gift me with the grace of affirmation
and I will fly on the fresh breath of your speaking.
Love creates. Pity destroys.
How quickly a new world emerges
from the ether of sound.
Words transform the moment.

I will wake no longer to whispers of shame,
to tear stains on my pillow.
I have heard a strong Voice that speaks
words of concern, not condemnation,
a Voice from deep within myself.
I am born into hope. I leave behind
the shackles of dark days.
I choose the Light.

A Man Who Does Not Care

Indifference, as a way of life,
is a remedy for pain.
I avoid all tumult and all strife,
I do not seek to gain
the advantage or the upper hand.
There is no benefit
in speaking out or taking a stand,
only the foolish commit.

I do not care what people think,
nor what they say or do.
Life's too short to stand on the brink,
complain or gripe or stew.
I'll go my way with confidence,
my decisions are my own.
I ask no cheery recompense,
I walk my way alone.

I am a man most satisfied,
content with how things are.
There was a time when I really tried,
but that was a shooting star
that blazed across the evening sky
to no avail at all.
I learned a lesson. Why even try?
Results are far too small.

I'll live my days with indifference.
Concern for the other is fine
but my way of life makes perfect sense
when most of the world is inclined
to take and take, but never give,
tell me how that is fair?

So, I'll go my way and continue to live
as a man who doesn't care.

Inseparable

The heavens proclaim the glory of God,
but God is not there.

Stars and moons, suns and a million
planets announce the creative power
of God, but God is not there.

Words, songs, poems and sacred books
declare God's reality, but God is
not there.

I sought God in all these ways, and more,
but God was found in none of them.

Even the houses of God, on busy street corners,
in little villages, cathedrals and store fronts,
wonder at the emptiness, for God is not
there, either.

Last night, when the house was quiet,
the children in bed, and a gentle peace
settled on the busyness of the day, I prayed
for communion with the Holy Presence,
a place and time of encounter.

I waited in the darkened room, hoping.

And then I felt a voice, not heard but felt.

"Do not fear emptiness. I AM both emptiness and fullness.

You will always know me deep within your being.

I cannot be apart from you, nor you from me.

We are of the same breath.

Inseparable.

Golden Beach

What I would give to hear your voice
and hold your hand once more.
I never knew how hard the choice,
nor what life held in store
when on that glorious day in May
we walked the golden beach
and felt the touch of ocean spray,
a moment too grand for speech.

I remember warm sand, a silken breeze,
your hand resting gently in mine,
embraced by a moment of graceful ease,
two people lost in time.
The sun dropped low in the western sky
when you turned and spoke my name.
I knew by the look in your tear filled eyes
that nothing would remain the same.

If only I could touch your hair,
feel your heartbeat next to mine.
But here I sit, consumed by despair
on this beach where the sun refuses to shine,
and the laughing ocean is sad and still.
O my love, my life...why?
There's a gash in my soul that nothing can fill,
it's useless to scream or cry.

Have mercy, Kind God, on this broken man
who walks the golden beach,
littered with memories and shattered plans
beyond his mournful reach.

Betrayal

No depth of love, no grace of forgiveness
will ever alter the look on his face, the
expression burned into the marrow of
my memory.

When he turned to me, even before the
last note of the rooster's cry, there was
no frown of anger. Disappointment did
not register in his eyes, nor the reproof
of one superior to the other.

He simply gazed upon my trembling
shame as I stumbled, trying to
run into the darkness of
my betrayal.

The passing years have not healed the
wound in my heart. I bear it, even
though I know his love is without limit
and his mercy restores life.

Perhaps I need this dark memory
in order to live his life in place
of my own. The light is
so much brighter when held
against the darkness.

I carry my shame, not as a badge
of self-pity, but as an offering
I place at his feet each day, an
assurance for my soul that as I
am loved, so must I love.

As I have been seen, so must I see.
My penance exacts a heavy price,
made bearable by a tomb that
no stone can close.

Fresh New Day

A new day arrives in the arms of the early morning
darkness. Both wait patiently for the signal.
Soon it will come, unmistakable, moving
quickly. The first finger of light, the scout,
will determine earth's readiness and when the
moment is ideal and the signal given,
giant engines of light will begin to pulse and,
like ocean waves, build and build until
no restraint is possible.

It is in this moment that early morning darkness
gently places her charge into the flow of light
that, when released, will fill the sky with
orange and yellow wonder.

Streams, even rivers, of light pour down rugged
mountainsides transforming stone and ancient
trees into glowing markers for day's arrival.
On it comes, light upon light, shadows are born
replacing darkness, birds wake in their nests and
sing to the new day, cattle raise their heads from
pillows of soft grass, inquisitive. Two young colts
in the adjacent pasture romp and leap in their
early morning energy.

The earth, and every living thing upon it,
breathes in the fragrance of freshness.
The new day, in full array, is here.
Glory! Glory! Glory!

It Just Gets Better and Better

Sleepless nights sometimes produce amazing insights. Revelations. Epiphanies. Gasping moments of varying degree. It was a few lines in a book that rolled the stone away this morning.

First the insight, then the commentary.

Faith grounded in experience becomes richer over time, particularly as one approaches the Ultimate Experience.

Consider two trains leaving the same station at the same hour. One is the Certainty Express, the other the Mystery Local. The Express doesn't stop at local stations because it is driven by destination and schedule. Point A to point B. The Local picks up and drops off passengers at all the stations along the way. No two stations are exactly alike, but each is rich in its own color, scenery, history. Sometimes the layover is long enough for one to walk the platform or drink coffee from the little shop inside the depot.

Twenty years ago I knew something was happening, but I could not categorize or name it. Question marks began to replace exclamation points.

Lashings that held the cargo in place started to unravel. Brilliant colors on the paint-by-number canvas lost their luster. And as each year passed, right up to this 2 a.m. hour in the year of my eighth decade, clarity gave way to mystery.

Faith grounded in belief is a non-stop ride. An experience of little villages and whistle-stops along the route is regarded as a contaminant.

The few lines in the book I mentioned earlier were highlighted by a hand other than my own, but they were meant for me. They made the

obvious point: belief can't grow, experience
can't stagnate.

To re-state the obvious: faith grounded in
experience grows more profound, more
delicious as one approaches the encounter
with the Fullness of Mystery. Don't expect
too much too soon. It's all about the ride,
not the destination. If one dares to live the
questions and appreciate the ambiguity, to
foster a faith grounded in experience, the
scenery gets more beautiful along the way
and the coffee tastes better and better at
each stop.

Until finally the journey is done and the
Ground of Experience is waiting for you
on the platform. Welcome as the fullness
of discovery and the completeness of
Reunion.

Created In The Image

"Almighty God, who created us in
your own image..." So begins the prayer
written in the book of tradition. Image?
What is that?

Resemblance? Character? How can one
bear the image, especially when each of
us is different? An identical twin, perhaps?
Unlikely, given my humanity.

If only tradition's volume had said "created
us with the potential to become..." then I
could let it go, check that box. Inherent in
all, recognized by many, pursued by some
is The Capacity To Imagine, the image
by which I was formed in the nutrient
womb and released into the sandbox to
play with the other children.

I am, you are, we are gifted into life by
a Mystery whose nature is imagination
and whose hope is that I will shake off
the sand, step out of the box and find
my Way using the instruments and the
insights of Holy Imagination.

"Sacred Breath that imagined chaos into constellations,
darkness into light, and formed me with the capacity
and the urgency to imagine..." So begins the
prayer written upon every human heart. So we
bear the nature of God.

At The Deepest Center

Let there be, and there was.
At the center of all things, there is Light.
I am, you are creation consolidated in
one breath of time. We are every
mountain pointing to the sky,
every eagle riding wind currents
in the Rockies, every purple lilac
filling the valley with peaceful
fragrance. Exteriors provide identity,
uniqueness, but inside, the musical
notes are all the same, intricate
mechanisms identical. At the
deepest center of myself where my
first drawn breath still moves
with the rhythm of my heart,
there is a pinpoint of light, the
linchpin of life, the place where
the moment of myself becomes
a miracle. So for you, my friend.
So for you, my sister. So for you,
my brother. We are creation
contained in one click of the clock.
Let there be light,
and there was
and there is.

No Ashes This Year

I need no ashes sketched
into my forehead to
bring home the
reality of
death

Mortality is magnified by
the relentless ravaging
of a virus among a
people who are
not able to
be apart

Ashes are redundant
when death is so
prominent. I'd
much rather
have a
smiley
face

Ashes to ashes
dust to dust
I get it

A Technicolor Day

There is nothing usual about this day!
Let me tell you why.
So many people are prone to say
"Each day's the same. Why try?"
But this day offers a different way,
just look at that glorious sky!
Do you see how the colors dance and play?
A painting no one can buy,
an artist's palette on display.
I think I hear a cosmic sigh.
It is a Technicolor Day!
Good days come and good days go,
nothing special, I would say,
but then, for reasons we don't know,
along comes the perfect day
when earth creates a spectacular show,
a wonder-filled display.
Colors are vibrant, tall pines seem to glow.
It's nature's grand array,
and what is there left to say?
Can it be any other way?
This is a Technicolor Day!
I shall write a poem or sing a song,
maybe climb a mountain peak,
find a friend to take along,
we'll do something quite unique.
This is a day when nothing is wrong.
The thrills are for those who seek
with determined will and courage strong,
not the frightened or the meek.
So, take my word and hear what I say:
come join us as we dance and play
in this unconventional

highly eccentric
Technicolor Day!

Masks

Nothing beats a smile on an overcast day,
the big toothy kind that seems to say
all is well...no, make that great,
but you'll never know my emotional state
behind this wretched mask.
It does no good to smile anymore
in the long, somber line at the grocery store.
Hungry people pass the milk and the cheese,
the look in their eyes leads one to believe
that evolution is at it again.
I fully expect, at the end of this year
to be told the thing that I most fear:
the pandemic was over six months ago
but it was prudent to act deliberately slow
so a few more masks could be sold.
I've been seeking a way to invest some cash
in stocks and bonds, not Wall Street trash,
but substantial, solid, risk free notes.
I've sought and received several very good quotes
and I am now a mask tycoon.
I can make you a deal on an N95,
the kind that is sure to keep you alive
through storms and floods and hurricanes,
travels on buses, in cars, on planes.
I'll make you a deal for two.
Lest you think my good fortune unethical play,
it's just the good ol' American way.
Find a way to exploit a human need
then act from proven human greed
and you'll make a ton of dough.
So, put on your mask when you're out on the town.
You can slip it off when no one's around.
Buy a case of masks, or maybe two,

it's the American thing to do.
And it pays for my villa in Spain.

Creative Writing 101

There once was a man who lived on a hill...
and so the story begins.
Would you like to play this simple game
and say how the story ends?
Create the content as you see fit,
make it drama or comedy.
You have the power to form the plot,
you can say just how it will be.
Take a break from tradition and accepted thought,
leave the diagram behind.
Focus, instead, on the art of the word,
imagine, and you will find
that your story flows like a winding stream,
surprising turns here and there.
And all you do is unleash your mind,
decide you haven't a care
about how many lines appear on a page,
if a colon is the mark to use.
Lay aside the rules and the style.
From your soul, not your mind, take the cues.
And so, my friend, be daring and brave.
Tell me, what have you got to lose?
Give wings to your story and let it soar,
consult your inner muse.
And if, in your effort, you fail to show 'em,
well, next time around, try writing a poem.

Wave Goodbye, Say Hello

Water circles the drain,
round and round
then surrenders to
the inevitable exit.
So the faces of memory,
so the strength of muscle and joint.
Transitions from yes to maybe,
certainty to wondering, plurals to
singulars, hours to minutes,
grasping to gratitude. No going
back. Nothing to retrieve.
Little to carry. Few regrets.
Light to darkness to light.
Minutes to hours, hours to
infinity. A taste of love to
an ocean of grace.
Wave Goodbye. Say Hello.

I Heard Your Name

I listened to my heart tonight,
a soft, peaceful voice,
tranquil, serene,
and it whispered your name,
like a feather floating on
cosmic breath, a golden leaf
drifting aimlessly down and down
until it fell into my upturned hands
raised in grateful prayer.
Your name.

I heard a song tonight, a sweet sound
that filled all the empty places
in creation and soothed the weariness
of the universe. The source of the
song remains a mystery. Maybe it
came from the glorious mountains
stretching to touch the sky, perhaps
from endless and eternal rhythms
of seas and oceans, or from the two
graceful eagles floating effortlessly
in the updrafts of acrobatic joy. But
more likely from the exquisite passion
of lovers whose magnificent delight
arose in the wordless language of
eyes upon eyes.

I listened to my heart tonight and
I heard a song, never before
sung and never again. Its haunting
echo penetrates every darkness
and causes yellow roses to bloom
on the green lattice work.

I listened and I heard
your name.

In My Father's House

We've asked all around, but he's not here.
And with that, the parents could feel the fear
increase by the minute as they searched for their child.
The streets of the city were known to be wild,
no place for a twelve-year-old boy.
"Come, Mary, let's search in the marketplace.
Someone there might remember his face.
When we've asked all the vendors and looked in the shops
we'll go next to the Temple, perhaps our last stop.
He's been missing for at least four days."
Joseph felt his heart begin to race.
In the back of his mind he could not face
the unspeakable thought that his son was gone,
so all through the night, until just before dawn,
they walked the streets, calling his name.
Exhausted and broken, both now in tears,
they imagined their worst possible fear.
Kidnapped. Stolen, to be sold as a slave.
O God, please not an unmarked grave.
And then two strangers walked by.
Said one to the other, "That boy is so smart!
He questions the scholars, knows the Torah by heart.
What other child, at twelve years of age,
could pose those questions like a brilliant sage?
That Jesus is one smart boy."
Joseph and Mary sprang to their feet,
ran through the crowd, crossed the street,
climbed the steps to the Temple door
and then heard the voice of the child they adored.
Jesus was teaching the teachers.
"O, child we have found you. Yahweh be blessed!
For these four days we have had no rest.
Why have you caused us this terrible fright?

We've searched everywhere, both day and night.

Can you explain why you stayed behind?"

"I had no choice. I had to stay.

It seemed to me the perfect way
to explore ideas with these learned men.

What better place for me to begin
than in my Father's house?

Later that night, when the child was asleep,
Mary and Joseph tried to keep
their voices low as they spoke of the day,
their fear turned to joy, and the confident way
Jesus thought like a man, not a child.

"His remarkable birth, old Simeon's words,
Anna's delight, what we've seen and heard.
Joseph, my love, more and more we see
how life is changing, he's destined to be
a man who belongs to God.

"Angel Gabriel's words ring still in my mind,
after all these years, we're beginning to find
that our little boy is not ours alone.

The day will come, when he is grown,
that his name will be known far and wide.

Joseph and Mary slept in peace that night,
knowing that Mary was certainly right.

The Magi's words, that star so bright
came to focus on this Incarnate Light.

Their child belonged to the world!

Living Questions

They say it helps,
but it doesn't.
That there is comfort,
but there isn't.
To live questions
is to sacrifice certainty,
and certainty is an
awkward ally.
Questions more often
confuse than console.
But questions were never
meant to be the soft
cushion of consolation.
There is more what
than why in life.
If you don't want the answer,
don't ask the question.
Why comes later.
Always
later.

Pegasus

The window to the universe is flung open.
Light bursts into the room.
Bright light. Intense, friendly light.
Clouds of familiarity vanish
beyond the curvature of the cosmos.
I have ridden Pegasus from first consciousness.
The great wings empowered and protected.
We soared. But now I have learned to fly.
I have no wings, only imagination.
I create as I am created.
Sagittarius draws his great bow and
sends a shaft through the heart of my
need to understand or possess. Red droplets of
life fall to the ground and everywhere
they touch the earth, a song breaks
through, a song whose lyric is audible
only to infant spirits in an infinite sensibility.
Today celestial wind sweeps through the
cosmic window of my soul, and I am unburdened,
weightless to wander, neither pursuing nor
pursued. I am unencumbered. Nothing was
and nothing will be any more.
I Am is now all is.

I Miss You So

On the 5th of April in '92
the air was fresh and the sky was blue
and I didn't know what I thought I knew
and I said some things about me and you
that were not exactly, perfectly true
and I knew you'd say that we were through,
but I can't take it all back now.
I didn't think I'd regret that day
but in hindsight now I have to say
I made a mistake and I'm willing to pay
whatever it takes to find a way
to bring you home and have you stay.
How can my words begin to convey
how much I miss you both.
So please consider my heartfelt plea.
I think if we talked we both could see
a possible way that we might be
happy together and jointly agree
that our parting is not a fait accompli
and we don't have to fight and disagree.
Just bring my dog back hom.
Of course, I miss you, too, my dear.
I'm so alone when you're not here.
I wake each day with a nagging fear
that you'll turn away, not wanting to hear
that my life's a wreck; I'm being sincere.
I promise I will not domineer
if you'll just bring my Fido home.
It's good to get this off my chest,
as I close this note with a simple request:
pat Fido and give him my very best,
tell him to eat and get his rest,
that this parting is something I truly detest,

that he's the best dog in the whole Southwest.
And I hope you'll come back, too.

Red Petals

A strong wind blows today
stripping red petals from the
bougainvillea, tossing them
in the air, swirling, tumbling
remnants of disconnected life.
The fascinating dance is set
to the music of futility, songs
of hope lost, ballads of beauty
tarnished by cynicism and
deception.

Some red petals still hold to
the stem. Tenacious but
trembling. A matter of time?
Perhaps.
Clearly a time that matters.

I Will Pay You Back Next Week

I made up my mind just the other day
to call up Dad and hear what he'd say
when I told him that all my bills were due
and I wondered if he might agree to come through
with a modest loan to get me by.
Sometimes we don't see eye to eye
when it comes to dollars and cents.

My Dad is not the richest of men,
he can squeeze a dime til Roosevelt grins.
I hoped I might catch him on an upbeat day
so I could happily hear him say:
"How much you need, son? Glad to assist."
So I made the call and here's the gist
of what he had to say.

"When I was a kid back on the farm
I never used my Dad as a good luck charm.
Whenever your back account runs too low,
I take it for granted I'm the first to know.
Here you come with your hand stuck out
and I know exactly what your visit's about.
How much do you need this time?

My Dad has a way of painting thing black!
I don't think he believes I'll pay him back.
But I will as soon as my ship comes in.
Not my fault that the horse didn't win.
I had good odds on the basketball game,
but wouldn't you know, my luck's the same.
I lost the last loan I got.

So, what would you do if your account ran dry?

I'm not lazy. I really try.
But I can't win enough to even get by.
Last night at poker I began to cry
when I laid down my cards and saw I'd lost.
My lifestyle has some pretty high costs.
I wish Dad would understand.

He says I ought to get a job,
but that's what I heard from my Uncle Bob.
My cousin in Dallas said that, too,
my sister in Maine declares she's through.
To tell you the truth, I'm really beat.
I've been locked out of my high rise suite.
A family should care for its own.

What have I done to deserve this fate?
How come bad luck always fills my plate?
I bet on a filly and she left the gate
in what appeared to be a hypnotic state.
She ran in circles, never finished the race.
Whatever happened to heavenly Grace?
Hmm. I think I'll call the preacher now.

The Sad Story of Red McGuire

He played that song about a hundred times.
He knew all the words, remembered the rhyme.
Before long he was down to one silver dime
and he couldn't play it anymore.
You know, they used to dance on this hardwood floor.
They'd sing with the band and yell for more,
Old Red and Bernice didn't know what was in store.
Lots of water under the bridge since then.
A little older, a lot wiser, I guess,
lifted up by good times, pulled down by the stress
of trying to live high and always impress
people that didn't matter anyway.
They had it all in the palm of their hands
and then it was gone like ocean sand.
Nothing worked the way they planned,
and they ran out of courage to try.
He said: "A quarter, please. Just one more play,
then I'll move on, get out of the way."
He just couldn't think of a reason to stay,
so he headed on down the road.
I heard he got sick in Tennessee,
about as sick as a man can be.
Then death came along and set him free.
He had a quarter in his hand when he died.
I don't know what split them apart.
They loved each other from the very start,
but some time, some way he broke her heart
and he died a lonely man.
Guess I'll keep that song on the record machine.
When somebody plays it, it will always seem
that he's sittin' over there livin' his dream,
waitin' for her to come back.
You just never know from day to day

how these months and years are going to play.
I'd be hard pressed to even say
if it makes much sense at all.
But I'll miss old Red and his Stetson hat.
I'll lift a glass and remember that
the table over there is where he sat
and cried into his beer.
Red tried too hard and pushed too fast.
Maybe that's why it didn't last.
He could not let a moment pass
without tryin' to impress Bernice.
A moral to this story? I really don't know.
Maybe...when you love somebody, go real slow.
Take your time so love can kinda' flow
like a quiet mountain stream.
Well, sorry friend, gotta' close up now.
There's an acre waitin' for me to plow
and I gotta' tell my Sallyann how
I love her more than she knows.

Big Mistake

My dreams have come true
cause when I met you,
without a doubt I surely knew
I'd found a perfect gem.
So, I can't understand why my friends all say
that I will regret this remarkable day,
that what I see I do not get,
that I will eventually throw a fit
when the real you is revealed.
Now, is there something I'm missing here, my dear?
We've both been honest, completely clear.
Your name goes on my bank account,
what's mine is yours, any amount.
And here's my credit card, too.
But there is one question I have to ask.
It concerns a few years of your past.
My friend said you used to work the streets.
I guess that means that you would greet
the homeless who needed your help.
Another friend told me she was appalled
when she saw your photo on the Post Office wall.
I told her to put her mind at rest.
You'd probably won a beauty contest.
I'm proud of you, my love.
And, one more thing and then I'll stop.
This one will make your lovely jaw drop.
My family attorney wrote to me,
advised that I should try to see
the probation list at the local courthouse.
So, I dropped by there the other day,
and this is very strange to say,
someone has your very same name,

and they made a bundle in a swindling game.

Coincidence for sure.

So, all my love I send to you.

The day I met you I truly knew

that you are a prize, a perfect gem.

Let all my friends be glum and grim.

They don't know you like I do.

P.S.

I just met a man at my front door,

and I don't understand what he came here for.

He was serving a warrant for someone whose name

was spelled like yours, exactly the same.

How people make mistakes!

Some people make big mistakes!

Golden Years

I know I've seen you somewhere before.
You used to bag at the Albertson's store!
No? Don't tell me. I'll get it this time.
My mind is as sharp as a brand new dime,
though I hear people comment, behind my back,
that my memory has slipped a little off track.
Cruel and cutting words, indeed;
how some people love to plant those seeds
that grow into brambles and thickets of doubt,
they have no idea what they're talking about.
Just because I went out for a spin
they have no reason to laugh and grin,
everyone gets lost once in awhile
and look at me, I came home in style
in the back of a Sheriff's car.
Well, enough of that; it's such a bore.
Now, I know I've seen you somewhere before.
Of course! You used to bag at the Albertson's store.

Well, whatever happened to patience and tact?
I think it still matters how people act.
I truly thought I knew her face,
just couldn't track the time or the place.
But I'm old! Come on, give me a break!
Someday you'll see what effort it takes
to put on your shoes and comb your hair.
My wife and I...now we make a pair.
We're both so much sharper than some people claim.
We just don't remember each others' names.
Ah, but I know I seen you somewhere before.
Didn't you used to bag at the Albertson's store?

The Day The Carousel Stopped

On a gray, sunless day,
an oppressing day,
hot, wet air drips from motionless
trees, ground animals scratch deeper
into the earth seeking survival in cool soil,
the dour sky, empty of birds and flying creatures,
languishes in lethargy. A sullen day.
An apocalyptic day.
Everything struggles for breath.
Once bright colors are mere shadows of their
former vitality. Behold, an eerie foretelling of
earth's last gasp when the residue of life will be
a mound of ashes and
a memory.
A day of arrogant absurdity.
Elysian fields forsaken,
marrow sucked from the bones of the earth.
Wasted wonder.
We, carnivores of consumption,
devour ourselves one deceit at a
time until the plate is clean and the
cupboard is bare.
Neither promises, nor prayers,
no political posturing
can rewind the tape.
We suffer from stage four
self delusion, casual conceit.
On a gray, sunless day,
a sullen day,
the carousel stopped and
all the horses stood still.

Some Day

The day will come when the oceans, rivers, streams
and brooks will speak with one voice -- we are not
simply alike, we are the same. We are water
that nourishes the earth. We are one substance.
We may not look alike, but we are of the same
essence. We are many expressions of the
same being.

The day will come when oak trees and pines,
aspens and cedars, maples and palms will
speak with one voice -- we are diverse sameness.
Deep inside we are one with each other. We
may not look alike, but we share a fundamental
commonality. We are many expressions of the
same being.

The day will come when birds and flowers
and grasses and four-legged creatures will speak
in natural harmony -- and they will reveal the
obvious, the undeniable, the indisputable:
everything is everything, everyone is everyone,
I am you and you are me. We are we.

Some day. Some day. Deeper than color,
broader than language, beyond birth and
boundaries...some day human beings will
be moved deeply by the sacred heart beat
of creation and finally realize the inherent
cosmic rhythm that binds all living things
together. And they will look upon each other
with heart eyes, and their joined hands will
rise toward smiling stars and pleased
planets.

The oceans, the rivers, streams and brooks,
the oaks and pines and all the trees in all
the forests, the bright blooming flowers and

the graceful grasses will dance in a joyous
breeze blowing across pastures and meadows
where four-legged creatures will rise on their
hind legs in tribute to the human beings who
have awakened to the world of we, the
universe of oneness.

Some day.

Some day.

Beautiful Mystery

At first glance, the small green sack blends with slender
leaves on a branch of the potted Milkweed plant,
then without announcement, there appears
enchantment with wings.

Tentative, curious about wind and sunlight
and all the wonder in her awakening,
hesitant as she unfolds the glory
of her being. Wings! Amazing, beautiful
extensions of herself. Painted with glorious
color and design, her wings spread in the
morning breeze, flutter as she begins to
understand their use, open and close,
again, again.

Comes the daring moment, the never before
moment. Wings spread, willing to explore what has
never been done before, she rises in the gentle
embrace of the Wind, moves her graceful
wings in perfect harmony.
She ascends.

The shattered confinement of what she was
is left behind as the elegant creature
climbs higher with the Wind - a
spectacular being gracing the world
with loveliness.

The beautiful mystery.

The Night The Crickets Sang

In a chamber of memory, not often explored,
there lives a night when the crickets sang,
a sweet summer night with lilacs in bloom
and the chatter of children as they played in the dark,
their firefly jars lighting the way for young soldiers
who laughed as they marched off to war.

But even strong soldiers grow weary at night,
and soon each was opening his old Mason jar
and releasing her fireflies, a curtain of light,
dancing and swirling, amorphous delight.
I watched as each porch light went out
one by one and a hush fell over the empty street.

And as my head touched the cool pillowcase,
at the moment when Sleep placed her hand on my brow,
somewhere deep in the sacred silence of night
a despondent cry, painfully clear,
shattered the dreams of the sleeping child.
A wandering creature, fearful and lost
in the maze of abandoned love,
howled at the stars, bayed at the moon
in hopes of hearing someone call its name
and guide it gently to the safety of home.

I felt my heart beat hard in my chest
and I wept for the helpless abandoned, alone.
How can I sleep in this comfortable bed,
how can peace fill my hours till morning arrives
when a helpless creature whimpers alone,
hopeless and broken by no fault of its own
on this remarkable night when the crickets sang out
and the universe heard one little voice

asking the way to come home.

Magic Morning

I opened for business at 5:18 a.m. today.
The window blind went up, revealing the magic
world that never changes and always changes.
Almost golden clouds, still and placid, suspended
lightly in the eastern sky, prepared to explode
in color as soon as the sun decided to climb over the mountain.

A large, white-bloomed oleander barely moved
in a very discreet breeze, the happy sun-face with
three little bells attached at the bottom, smiled from
its place, suspended from an oleander limb.
Beyond the face, two hummingbirds argued over the
same purple penstemon, and the street was empty.

It was peaceful.

Soon, though, the gentle morning will be overwhelmed
by wave after wave of life's necessities. Dogs will scratch
and sniff, pull at their leashes, irritated that their owners
would stop for conversation. Exercise walkers, shoulders
back, heads up will stride into physical excellence. A woman
on a three-wheeled cycle will come barreling around the
corner, her large black dog pulling her around the block.
Next the serious cyclists, helmets and tight fitting
jerseys atop narrow wheeled \$1,000 bikes will come
rolling down steep driveways and be off to a
20-mile challenge. And, finally, an assortment of
cars will emerge from garages and putter off
to places beyond this little world.

Morning is magic.

It comes to life the same way every day, but no

two days are exactly alike. Looking through the
magic window is a challenge to spot the little
variations, uniqueness among the sameness.
Perhaps that's the key. I fear the day
when the score card lists only sameness
inning after inning, the disappearance of difference.
No runs, no hits, no errors.
Grab a hotdog.
Go home.

The game is over.

Singing Hope

What if the birds just disappeared?
What if the sounds that fill my ears
and greet the dazzling early light
fell silent on the earth,
no longer proclaimed the joyful birth
of release from the darkness of night?
Perhaps that's the meaning of death.

A life without song is no life at all.
Hear the love in mother Quail's call
as she gathers her children to her side,
and the Mockingbird's melodies.
I cannot imagine how life would be
if those joyful songs from the Maple tree
fell silent on the waking earth.

Today I shall sing as I walk along,
join my voice to Creation's song
let loose by the mountains and valleys below,
a call to the reverence of life.
I shall find my place in Creation's choir,
become the song for this troubled hour,
sing hope into this frightened world.

Honeybee

It was a curious sound floating by my ear,
almost unnoticed. Faint. Intermittent.
Gone. Back again but not for long.
Whirring.

A delicate honeybee, wings fanning the air,
contending with death, unsuccessfully,
burrowed in the gray hallway carpet.
Captive of stucco walls and screen doors.
No place for a bee. Death trap.
Too many days without sweet pollen and
shifting breezes.

No resistance to human touch.
No objection to resting in the palm of a hand.
No complaint about nestling under the fig vines in
the back yard. The soil is deliciously warm.
The air fresh.

Death will come sooner or later. No options.
No deals. Reality.

So how to die? Swallowed by a ravenous
vacuum cleaner. Tossed into the garbage from
the old silver dustpan? Scooped up in the
coarse fiber of a paper towel?
Indignity.

Better to dissolve into the earth. Better
to return to molecules and ancient moments.
Better to die into life than into death.
Much better.

Give me a place where the earth is
warm, where rain and sunshine
combine to create. Give me the earth.
Give me again the place from which I came.
Give me the soil of my soul.

I will know that place and it will know me.
We will embrace for a short time and then I
will be off to a new star.

A Lot About Nothing At All

My long-time friend, Jonathan Paul,
has a lot to say about nothing at all,
opinions and theories, conjectures and more
but he finds that whenever he takes the floor
one by one his friends all recall
the ribbon-cutting at the shopping mall
or the urgently needed telephone call
waiting for them in the booth down the hall.

And there he stands alone.

The first time it happened he wondered why.
To his queries they offered these honest replies:
Bad luck, my friend. That's all we can say.
Who would have thought on the very same day
we would all rise at once and sadly convey
our deepest regrets, apologies, too,
for the way we were all abandoning you.

Emergencies happen, you know.

He's truly a very fortunate man
to have such friends who, when they can,
sit at his feet and hear him extol
the origin and value of a Tootsie Roll,
a subject that's haunted the minds of men
and sent them searching again and again
the journals and ledgers of long ago.

Intriguing! That's the word.

So, my very best pal, Jonathan Paul,
who knows a lot about nothing at all,
was recently hired at the Harvard School
where nobody thinks him a blubbering fool
but a rare acquisition of wisdom and grace,

a pearl of a catch for the honorable place.
Perhaps they've not heard him expound and extol
on the merits and value of the Tootsie Roll.

That's Tootsie Roll 101.

In a year of two I'll hear the news
that Jonathan Paul has paid his dues
and now can sit at the President's right,
a lofty spot for the man who might
convince the world, without a doubt,
that is brain is as big as a brussels sprout.
This is my friend, Jonathan Paul,
who knows a lot about nothing at all.

The Artistic Arrogance of Impeccable Poetry

Look, he's done it again! I should be prominently positioned and you should be over there, in the third stanza, and that plebeian phrase two lines down should be banished. Dreadful! Sloppy, just sloppy!

Well, he never claimed to be a poet. He always says: "I'm just a verse writer."

I know, but a poem is meant to flow with delicate majesty. At least all the words should be in the right places, powerful words and gentle words and haunting words. Oh, a poem is an expression of the soul, not an amateurish arrangement of words, not a childish "now what rhymes with Pocatello." I'll wager he uses a dictionary of rhyming words when he scribbles all that silliness about his toothache or that insufferable "Ode To A Toadstool". How many absurd topics can one man conjure? A poet. Ha!

Well, you have to...

Don't defend this amateur word arranger. Now move to your proper place at the end of this sentence. Only elegant words gather here. Every word has its place in the perfect poem, a lesson yet to be learned, obviously. Forgive him, Poet Gods, this Wordsworth wanna'be and all his illegitimate, ill-formed scratchings. Relegate this pseudo poetry to its final resting place, adjacent to the obituaries in the morning newspaper. Page 47 will do. Cheeky sod!

Lost

There is a peaceful place near a quiet stream,
a place I'd really like to see.
It calls my name, haunts my dreams,
a place where one can truly be
at peace with the world, completely free.
I just don't know where it is.

I long to find some place of joy
where meaning resolves life's disarray,
a place where laughter romps and plays,
good neighbors share, their glasses raise
to celebrate these halcyon days.
I just don't know where it is.

But perhaps it's not a place at all.
A darkness stalks these empty days,
taunts me through this wretched haze
where confusion lurks to claim its prey.
I've lost my soul along the way.
And I just don't know where to find it.

Life Begins In Half An Hour

Life begins in half an hour
when the morning sun wakes fields of
yellow flowers on the mountain slope
and sleepy streams roll quickly toward the sea.
Dew polishes slick green leaves,
and only the nose of the gray rabbit
can be seen sniffing morning's fragrance
from the mossy opening to her den.

It is too early for wind's song to begin
but in the giddy anticipation of
first flight, young hawks
stretch their untested wings
and wonder about the leap into transparent
nothingness, the sensation of being pulled
to the ground by gravity's force
and fear's grip.
Ah, but the moment of stability
when the strength of wing overcomes
the grasp of gravity and the whole world
changes from sinking to soaring.

The most glorious words of poets and pundits
fail to describe that electric second
when the curved wing of nature catches the sun warmed
current of first light and the call goes out across
meadow and ridge, through aspen groves all the
way to snow covered peaks:
It is time!
It is time?

Walking Together

Tell me a song that touches your heart
and I'll sing it to you as you close your eyes.
Point out a place you've wanted to see
and we'll fly with joy through cloudless skies,
for I want only in my earthly life
to bring you joy, my beloved wife,
to see the laughter in your sparkling eyes,
to hear you speak my name.

Six decades ago we joined our hands,
so young, uncertain, and yet not afraid
to walk side by side in a journey of love,
trusting in all the choices we made,
believing that we could face the unknown
no matter what challenges we were shown
and find strength to handle any card played,
in even the toughest times.

Look back with me, Love, and see, as I do,
the Mystery that has played such a crucial role
as the years have come with garlands and grief
exacting a cost and a heavier toll
than we ever imagined that lovely June day
when we knelt at the altar and heard a voice say:
"Your vows are sacred...Till death do you part.
Live always in selfless love."

But it must be said in grateful response
to the generous God who has been our light,
great joys have blossomed along the way
and we have been blessed both day and night,
upheld and sustained through all these years

blessed in our joy, consoled in our fears.
We walk these days by faith, not by sight
along The Way that never ends.

Sing To Me

Sing to me, Love,
the night is cold
the wind is a blade
that severs my soul
and leaves me afraid,
adrift and alone.

Please, take my hand
the way isn't clear
there's no one in sight
no friendly face near
to offer a generous word

I'm afraid to go on
the danger is great
I cannot imagine
a worse human fate
than to walk in the darkness alone
Please, take my hand in yours.

I've called your name
but I hear no reply
in the midst of the night
all the stars cry
and the harvest moon, once so bright
refuses to shine anymore.

I cannot bear
to go it alone
the still, cold air
cuts to my bones

Please, Love, sing to me.

Passing Guest

A shining ribbon of road stretches into the faint distance,
fading memories color the landscape left behind,
particular moments, new friends, days of unreasonable
joy, miles of faltering steps, spirit soaring, soul in
despair, all blend into one undeniable reality: I am
a Passing Guest in this life, a sojourner on the Way.
Where I began is distant memory, a destination is
beyond imagining. Each day is now, each encounter
a lifespan. This continuous concourse shapes and
forms all who descend the valleys, all who dare
the climbs. The journey is its own reward; along
the Way mysteries become memories
The Host is gracious to all who pass this way,
bread and cup adorn the plentiful table, nourishment
for the journey. Rest renews, peace embraces all
who seek it. Guests, in deep gratitude, share the
essential substances of life. Each serves the other's
need. No one is turned away.
This road will carry me toward an awareness that I
shall never fully attain. Each step is closer to the
doorway of discovery. I am drawn by the coaxing
of an unexplainable rhythm which sounds remarkably
like the beating of my heart. I am a Passing
Guest in life, a sojourner on the Way.

Hope In The Air

There is hope in the air.

I feel it. I feel the pulse of it
throbbing just below the
surface of my worry and
weariness.

Its presence overcomes the voices,
fills the empty spaces now drained
of energy. The elixir of new life.

The absolute embodiment of the
Absolute.

Receive the bread. Lift the chalice.

Become what you taste.

Be who you are.

There is hope in the air!

Do you feel it?

Emerging

Don't look back
Don't give in
You've come this far
The road is ahead, not behind
Voices promise the new
They call from both directions
Trust me, they say
Mine is the way
Listen to your mind
Hear in the quiet places of your heart
What is true
Where is light
Yesterday's pain
Tomorrow's possibility
A difficult choice to make
There is no choice

Blame is a barrier to freedom
Anger an assault on yourself
What was, was
What might be waits
The way ahead is neither smooth nor straight
But not strewn with broken pieces of life
The dues are paid
The key is in your hand
Don't be afraid
Don't look back
You're stronger than you dream
You've come this far

If I Knew Then

If I knew then what I know now
I would have found a way somehow
to take my share and bear the load
to walk together down that road
but youth and immaturity
did not allow my eyes to see.

Now time has passed, the clock runs on
it's far too late to sing my song
but if I knew then I would surely try
to pluck a star from the velvet sky
and braid it into your golden hair
to prove to you how much I care.

And now...now it's far too late
to wish that I could set things straight
to think that we might roll back time
to hope that you might be inclined
to set aside your bitterness
forgive my foolish selfishness

Someday I'll write a poem for you
honest words long overdue
the shame and sadness of my life
are the memories that invade my nights
dreams that taunt me with "somehow"
if I knew then what I know now.

Adventure

Take my hand and let us be away
to an adventure. There, the path
through the shadows of elegant
cactus kings whose highest needle
spines scrape flecks of blue from
the soft morning sky. Come, let
us be away.

When our friendly path vanishes
into scrubby bush and the earth
begins to rise toward the distant
summit, we shall stand at the base
of the ancient granite wall, shadowed
and solemn before the warming of the
April sun. With arms raised and
hands open to receive, we shall ask
of the mountain an invitation and a
blessing, the sacred honor of climbing
through jagged ravines, over sun
speckled boulders, among low drifting
wisps of cloud.

We shall laugh at the frolicking
Coatimundi and listen to the concert
of two Cactus Wrens filling the air
with brilliant notes of joyful welcome.
Here in this thin place of stunning
awareness, the summit above and the
quiet valley below touch and a door
opens to breathless wonder.
Come, take my hand and let us be
away to an adventure.

The Lighthouse

Passing years round sharp corners of absolutes,
and like the hot iron gliding across my plaid
shirt, smooth away unwanted memories, erase
them as if they never existed.

Intractable time. Solicitous time that uses the
sharp knife of experience to strip away layer
after layer of counterfeit certainty until the
pebble size core is exposed to the scrutiny
of honesty.

In the cellar of my consciousness, far back
in the shadowed recesses, a tender flame
dances with a liquid shadow, back and forth,
bending and swooping, tormenting time,
not as a statement of "maybe" or "perhaps"
but as a defiant "yes!"

So this is how it works?

As the sun drops low over the Santa Catalinas,
I leave aside the debris of doctrines and the
certainty of creeds, unbendable absolutes
melt, and my voracious ego devours itself
as the last barrier to the little dancing flame
in the shadowed corner of my knowing.

Time is now both adversary and appealing
adventurer. Time is the appraiser of belief
and the host of honest reflection. In the
rear-view mirror of my almost eightieth
decade, I see the highway strewn with
the corpses of untenable theses but when
I look ahead, do you see it?, there on the
horizon, that little dot of light. It is the
lighthouse of my awareness. And with all
the scars of humility and the bruises
acquired along the way, I call out to the

Keeper of the Light: "I know!"

Between You And Me

It's the same song I sing everyday,
a sad tune that won't go away;
the words and the melody stay,
a painful price I now pay
for the love that got lost halfway
 between you and me.

I can't say when the music died.
I woke one day and tried
to renew that feeling inside,
but no matter how I lied
the distance was just too wide
 between you and me.

I don't know how to make it right,
how to fan a spark to light,
how to know if we just might
be more than casually polite
and rediscover love's delight
 between you and me.

Maybe it's time to just move on,
learn the words to a brand new song;
admit that somehow we both were wrong,
laugh and say we'll have to be strong
then quietly weep for love that went wrong
 between you and me.

Healing Mountain

I found a piece of myself today.
It went missing just last week
when, self-absorbed, I lost my way
on a climb to the snowy peak
that crowns the mountain and greets the day,
a haven that so many seek.

In summer sun and winter snow,
as if called by a mystic voice,
I am drawn from my comfort here below
to a journey that offers no choice.
I cannot resist the mountain's glow
nor the chance to praise and rejoice

in the beauty that lines the difficult route,
soft shadows and contours of stone,
a springtime breeze, meadow flowers that shout
to the heavens in glorious tones.
The soul of the mountain calls the devout
to a place where one can atone

and leave aside all guilt and shame,
be washed in the soft mountain rain.
I found a piece of myself today,
dislodged by merciless pain,
but, now, refreshed on this mountain way,
I'm restored and whole once again.

Go Slowly

There's more to life than building speed.
The blessings come to those
who tend the garden's common chores
and watch the flowers grow.
We're too much "Hurry up!" and "Fast!",
sad captives of the crush
of deadlines which dictate the pace
of never yielding rush.
Much can be said for those who take
the time to feel life's flow,
who see, not blurs, but silver tears
roll off a fragrant rose.
Where is the virtue or the joy
for those whose every hour
is calculated to increase
their love affair with power?
I'm out of step with those who run
to grab the golden ring.
I'd rather finish distant last
and hear a sparrow sing.

Life Evolves

Until yesterday, or was it the day before, I counted time as an endless stream of sunny beach days and silken sheet nights. Shear curtains tossed by a soft easterly breeze could not discourage the fragrance of lilacs blooming just below the bedroom window. Today, though, I am puzzled by words in the morning paper that have lost their crisp, clean edges, and golden leaves on the maple tree now muted into a faded yellow memory. It is really no surprise, just a corner that I prefer not to turn.

Life is rarely a straight, smooth road, but a series of intersections, each an invitation for choice.

Life evolves.

Beautiful Voice

Beautiful Voice, sing to me once again
in this exquisite morning.
Slender leaves of the tall oleander rest
motionless, unable to follow the wind's demands
because of your song's enchantment.
Birds hang still in the air, wings extended
as if in flight, but halted in time by the
melody rising higher and higher into
the cloudless blue sky.
The echo of your song flows down from the
mountain, washing the valley in
joy and wonder. Deer and bear pause their
foraging, stand motionless in awe while
forests of pine and clusters of aspen
bow to the grandeur of this magical moment.
O Beautiful Voice, your song embraces the
depths of all being and we are breathless,
stunned into an astonishment of the sacred.
Sing! Beautiful Voice

Journey

Yesterday I was
Today I am
Tomorrow I will be

Learning
Waking
Understanding

Inherited certainty
Puzzled inquiry
Evolving mystery

Their story
My story
Our story, chapter one

An indifferent child
A curious man
A wisdom holder

Carefree
Concerned
Compassionate

God out there
God in here
God

Dawn Dancing

Just before the sun crests the jagged mountain ridge,
as a pink throated hummingbird darts from flower to flower,
I will climb a silver ladder to the flat roof of my desert-stucco
home, and there I will wait, impatiently, for a touch on my shoulder.
I will turn, slowly and deliberately, not wanting to appear too anxious,
to be embraced by a fresh morning breeze funneling down
through slot canyons, propelled by deep mountain ravines.
And we will dance.
My invisible, energetic partner.
We will dance into the day.
In time, when the sun's rays flood the valley, warming the
landscape and all living creatures, the dance is done and morning breeze
drifts aimlessly over housetops and stately saguaros toward great
columns of brilliant white cloud in the north sky.
The dance is too short.
The departure always abrupt.
But I am grateful for the visit and for the joy that comes
from dawn dancing.

Brother Moon

Brother Moon, do you wonder
at what you see?
Do you weep at the sight
of savagery?
Do you feel the agony of
Sister Earth as she
is plundered by the
Little People who think themselves immortal?

Do you see the dismantling?
The River. The Ocean.
A Forest here. A quiet Prairie there.
All in the name of Greed, the
seductive god of the Little People,
the deity of destruction.

Sister Earth cries, not for the pain
of her own loss, but for
the blindness of those who, long ago,
were entrusted with Her care,
Stewards of a fragile Treasure.

Foolish Little People,
singing the songs of their own
salvation,
blind to the beast that waits.

Remorse

The song was never so sweet
until the last note faded into silence.
I've heard it a hundred times before,
but perhaps I've never heard it.

The winter morning on the mountain
is crisp, even breathtaking. A
thin layer of ice on willow branches
cracks in the frosty wind, the exact
sound of the first bite into a
perfect apple. How I long for
the delicious chill of that
early morning.

Why do I now harbor remorse
in the heat of this searing
desert summer? Was my soul
never moved by the glory
of the sun glistening off
fresh snow? Did I once say
thank you.

Maybe we only know the rich value
of something, or someone,
when the song is done, or when
the snow is melted, or when
love has gone away.
I remember the healing
balm of silence when the
screeching of life becomes
unbearable, the beauty of
a good friendship when I
feel so alone and abandoned,

the certainty of a Sacred
Mystery when the way is
dark and I am lost.

In the spring of my self-absorption,
so much is missed, seen but
not seen. O, but in the frozen
days of stark reality, it all
comes clear. So clear.

Meeting Myself

The journey is always filled with torturous pain
mingled with solitary breaths of reprieve,
head above the surface gasping for air
before being pulled under by the
intensity of raw discovery.

The deepest chambers of the heart
are not to be entered flippantly.

The reward for casual arrogance
in the shadowy descent
is the searing blade of truth.

Pretend neither indifference nor
a mere passing interest in the
quest, for whatever steps
from shadow to light
will redirect
reality.

Life ends and begins in the dark chamber.
The possible awaits the probing.
To burst from darkness to light
is to fly for the first time,
to breathe stardust and
moonbeams.

My Wish

When I die, let me fall forward,
propelled by the purposeful energy that
saw light's first dance with planets
and stars.

May my hands be full, not
empty of effort or attempt,
lifting, in one hand, a torch
to light the way and offering
a morsel of bread in the other.

May I leave behind only
shallow footprints easily
caught up in a friendly
breeze and scattered over
shadowed valleys in
the rugged stone mountains.

May I fall gently into the
Mother's great white apron
where she will wrap me in
the fragrance of freshly
baked bread and sing a
song into my eternal heart,
a gift of welcoming love.

When I die, let me fall
forward into the earth from
which I became substance.
Let me sleep in the sweet
meadow grass among the
yellow flowers.

Memories Visiting

Late last night, just as I blew out the last candle
and pulled the cool sheet to my chest,
I caught a whiff of your gentle fragrance
floating just above the empty pillow beside me,
and I heard you call my name in the sounds of
the stream that curls its way through the tall pines.
Sleep never had a chance. Memories burst into the room
from all the familiar places and moments we used to share.
I heard you hum that silly song about little gray clouds.
I'm sure I saw your reflection in the starlight on the window pane.
An owl called in the distance and I thought of your
beautiful, astonished face when you first caught a glimpse
of the elegant night visitor.
As the memories floated by, gifts of grace,
I felt a tear slide down my cheek and fall to my lip.
It tasted just like the ones I used to kiss from your face
when you wept in deep sorrow or delicious joy.
O memories, have mercy.
I am not able to bear your full weight.
The wound is yet too raw.
The hour too soon.
Pass me by for now.
At least for
now.

The Scales Don't Lie

I ask you, my friend, to picture this,
your imagination, please:
He steps on the scales at 4 a.m.,
the numbers flash and tease.
He starts to weep uncontrollably,
steps off and drops to his knees.
"Why, O Lord, do these scales hate me so?
What have I done to displease?"
And he waited in silence until a voice
spoke to his awful dis-ease.

"Get over it, pal. The scales don't lie.
You're fat! And we both know that's true.
Lay off the carbs and the chocolate pie,
step back from that frothy brew,
eat smaller meals, no seconds allowed,
and I promise that if you do
your waist will shrink and you'll feel so good.
What I'm saying is perfectly true!"

He rose from his knees and hugged the scales.
"Thank you, my dearest friend.
I think your voice has saved my life."
But this story does not end.
He now heard a voice behind him say:
"My love, do not pretend."
And he turned to see his loving wife,
his partner and lifelong friend.

"First of all, those scales don't ever speak."
She kissed him on the cheek.
"It's time to make a sensible plan
you'll follow week by week."

You're fat and you're lazy, you sit too much.
Your future really looks bleak.
You'll probably die of a heart attack
because of the way you eat.
Your blood pressure's up, you're short of breath.
Are you going to concede defeat?"

Well, his face was pale but he knew the truth.
He had to give it a try.
He had to eat more healthy foods,
either that or say goodbye.
So as they embraced and started anew
he whispered, with a sigh:
"My Love, our strength will see us through,
but where did you hide that great chocolate pie?"

This Day

When I speak may the sound
of my words convey calming
peace and every word be true.

When I greet strangers or
friends may I do so without
hypocrisy, prejudice or arrogant
judgement.

May I consider that I breathe
because the miracle machine of
my body still functions. I occupy
it for a short time.

May I feel the pain, share the
laughter, contribute something
worthwhile, honor gratitude
in my infinitesimal spot in
the world.

When I fall into my bed tonight,
may the stars twinkle a little
brighter, and sleep come as a
comforting friend because I have
lived this day with gratitude, not
grandeur.

And may my dreams carry me to
the Source of my thoughts and
wishes. Today will have been
one beautiful step in the
journey.

In The Course Of An Average Day

In the course of living an average day,
I try to think of things to say
that will bless the ones who pass my way
and lighten their load a bit.

"Hello, my friend. How are you today?"
And I wait for something he might say
but when he turned and looked my way
his frown was word enough.

Was he rude? Oh, no. I don't think so.
His head was down and his gait was slow.
There is pain in his life that I don't know.
What good would judging serve?

I'll drop by his house later today
and offer to listen if he wants to say
anything that will gently pave the way
to finding joy again.

In the course of living an average day
I watch the world go by my way
and I think if they stopped, they all might say
"Dear God, unite us in peace."

Note To A Friend

It's nice to have a friend like you,
someone who's kind and always true,
whose gentle spirit conveys concern,
someone from whom we all can learn
the way life should be lived.

I'd like to hear what you have to say
about a just and honest way
to overcome the hate and strife
that seem to be the rule of life
in these confusing times.

Do you honor a hope for the days to come?
Do you think we'll ever be able to plumb
the depths of injustice and human greed,
to speak to the causes of human need
that infect our culture's health?

We seem afraid to confront the fools
whose shallow minds and selfish rules
hold in contempt the rule of law,
who laugh at mercy as a moral flaw
while filling their pockets full.

What has become of the principled man
who stands his ground, devises a plan
to address not the symptoms but the root and the core
of insidious actions that open the door
to misery and human despair?

Yes, I'm glad there are people around like you.
Folks who show us how to get through
the grave disappointments we find everyday

in those who belittle and work to betray
the values that charted our course.

Thank you, my friend.

Just A Little Kiss

Just a little kiss.
That's all it was.
Nothing to brag about
to the boys.
But my bragging was
60 years ago.
Oh, my.
Just a little kiss.
She sat in the red
stuffed chair
and she smiled
before and after.
That's good.
Oh, boy.
Just a little kiss.
It meant something
special to both of us.
Little kisses
communicate, too,
you know.
Oh, yeah.
Just a little kiss.
I bent low.
We touched.
I straightened up
and my back
popped.
Ouch.
Oh, no.
Just a little kiss.
But perhaps next
time she will
stand up.

Avoid the
chiropractor.
Oh, dear.
Just a little kiss.
That's all it was.
No. It was more.
A sacred morning
moment.
Sacrament.
Oh, yes.

Sky Ships

Shimmering heat shafts, like twirling transparent
ballerinas, rise off the molten asphalt pavement.

They dance up and up until the dry desert
wind whisks them away, captives in the
clutches of the afternoon's misery.

These early days of Sonoran heat consume
life. Leisure activities only last week
were calendared for any day, any time. No
longer. Human activity is defined by the clock:
sunrise until 10 a.m. and sunset until the last
strands of light fade away. In between, even
the shade is inhospitable, completely devoid
of kindness.

My response to this invading annoyance is to
sit in the cool of my study near the large
windows and watch a slide show of
contented clouds float by. Imperceptible
movement. No rush. A gallery of ruffled
white smudges on a soft blue canvas.

The most effort expended is their gradually
changing shapes. Great puffy white billows
do form the most creative images. I swear,
one looked just like Jimmy Durante.

The heat is here. Its heritage is much longer
than mine, than humankind's generally. I
am a guest. For that reason, I temper my
complaints and imagine myself in the cool
layers of atmosphere, napping on a soft, fluffy cloud,
riding the great sky ships into distant dreams.

Waiting For Light

It appears that I have nothing to say.
All I need is a word or a lyric phrase
to ignite a thought, set the stage,
but here I sit in this milky haze,
waiting for light to shine.

I wonder if Byron or Keats ever thought:
"I've nothing to write. I'm going to bed!"
Do you think they worried and fretted and sought
elusive words that finally led
to poetic despair and doom?

I've been at this keyboard since 4:32
and I've nothing to show except empty space.
You'd think that in time even a few
dazzling words would find their place
on this otherwise pristine page.

Curses on poetry, meter and rhyme!
I'll never again set pen to page!
It will, indeed, be a very long time
before I pretend to be the sage
whose words soar to lofty heights!

But perhaps my muse should have one more chance.
What if, in the light of a brand new day,
my soul engages the challenging dance
and those bashful words come out to play?
Who am I to deny the world!

May Morning

Life is meant to be lived with the windows
down on a cool May morning.
Best above forty miles per hour.
That's when the breeze flutters the
hair on the back of the neck
and the temptation is to stick
your head out the window to
feel the full effect of delicious,
crisp air.

Pity the poor fella in the next lane.
Windows up tight.
Hands at 10 and 2 on the wheel.
He looks like he's driving to his
own funeral. Grim.
I would wave if he looked my way,
that not likely.
Have a nice day.

If I had a convertible, I'd put the top down,
turn the volume up on Rocket Man,
push the pedal down and sing
along with Elton.
No convertible, though, so it's
windows down, all four, a thumb drum
on the steering wheel to the beat
of that soaring piano.
"I'm not the man they think I am,
Oh, no...I'm a Rocket Man."

Yes, madam, I'm having a good time.
This is the morning of all mornings.
Haven't you noticed?

Gently

Let me lay in the sweetness of the familiar,
the place where memories have been etched
into the stones of time, where sunshine weaves
its way through the dancing arms of cottonwoods
as the wind swirls and dips in early morning, crisp
air. I want to die gently in a place that is home
in my heart.

Speak to me about sacred moments and silly
moments. Help me smile my way back into
the shadows and the sunlights of yesterdays.
Re-member the memories with me. Place
your hand on my arm. Let life touch life.
I want to die gently to those moments and
to this moment.

Hold my hand and sit very still in the peaceful
silence as I listen for the sound of my name
floating through galaxies, footsteps drawing
every closer as the Infinite approaches, perhaps
an irresistible song that falls upon me, note by
note, like those glorious golden leaves in a
glowing autumn. I will say "hello" to the
welcome emissary from eternity and wonder
what adventure is beyond this moment.

I want to die gently into the benevolent
Mystery that has played hide-and-seek
throughout my span of days. In a mirror
dimly...now face to face.

Gently.

Curtain Call

In that magic moment, just when morning light
is strong enough to chase away the darkness,
I raise the curtain, and the play begins.
A leaden-colored sky, dark and remorseful,
cannot hold back the Light. Little windows
of blue open and close among the slow-moving,
sullen clouds. Momentary invitations to
Mystery.

On the bird branch of the white-clad oleander,
a little sparrow sings the first aria of the day.
Her black feathered throat quivers as she
bathes the morning in rolling waves of song.
The hummingbird pauses at the penstemon
to hear the invocation, the wind dances with
green-trunked Palo Verdes, and scurrying
ground animals pause to take in the music
of the morning.

Near the peak of the mountain, Long Horn
Sheep, heads raised toward blue seeping
through cracks in the clouds, stop their
grazing and listen to the echoes of delight
from the valley below. Bravo!

Encore!

Welcome Light

An unobtrusive stillness fills the frame
of my window this morning.
Large clusters of white-petaled flowers
droop at the ends of tired branches.
The oleander looks exhausted from holding
the big clusters up for all to see.
Dark, sullen clouds hang low but
refuse to move an inch, determined to
barricade my window from the sun's
efforts to announce the new day.
It's a 5:30 standoff.
Sparrows, perched under sheltering adobe eaves,
don't seem to mind the shadowy part of the day.
Their songs add hopeful joy to the
gloominess. And then the inevitable happens.
Nothing, it seems, can hold back the sun.

Around the edges of those gray, sulking clouds
a border of yellow forms, then expands its
width until the cloud begins to glow. As if
responding to a signal, wind arrives and
shoves grayness away, revealing blue sky
and shafts of unstoppable light.
White clusters of flowers perk up and
begin to move slowly at first, the hint of the
dance to come, then bob up and down
like children reaching for the ice cream cone.
It all happens so quickly. But then morning is
like that, predictable but a bit of a tease.
Good morning, welcome light.

A Drop Of Grace

In the somber evening of this overcast day,
while walking among the ancient sentinels
at the base of a shadow etched canyon,
I felt the touch of a single droplet of
moisture on my arm. Slight touch.
Gentle touch.

The stately saguaros turned to watch my reaction.
A gray dove, snuggled in the arms of
a weathered mesquite tree, offered a
deep throated purring sound as a gift
to the moment. Her audible murmur
resembled what I imagine a smile would
project if he could be heard.

Instead of beading and falling to the
ground, the transparent droplet spread
in shape and size, moving toward my hand.
I stopped. Everything stopped. The universe
paused. Creation took a deep breath and
witnessed an extraordinary encounter. A
single droplet bathed the moment and me.

One drop from the enormity of universal
Mystery, from a Heart that in the sacred
moment beat in unison with my own,
one miniscule, momentous drop
caressed skin and soul with exuberant
awareness, unsteadiness like the plates
of the earth shifting, deep joy, startling
connection.

One small drop of Grace is almost more
than a human being can bear.

Because She Cared

Moms, of course, as everyone knows,
pinch your cheeks and tickle your toes.
They "ooh" and "aah", you're one perfect star,
when all the time, what you really are
is a Freshman off to the dorm!
Then comes the day when you're late for the train,
off for the office, pressure and strain,
when in your head you hear the refrain:
"Now, dear, get your boots on. It's going to rain."
The voice of someone who cares.

Last night my daughter sat down with me,
upset, distraught, as I could see.
"I don't think I'm smart like all the rest.
I try. I really do give it my best.
I do wish Grandma was here."

The road has been long. Not always straight.
Age has been kind, but the hour is late.
All the grandchildren gather around my bed.
I pinch their cheeks and pat their sweet heads,
like someone else used to do.

I'm told there's a place we all go to meet.
I don't know where, or the name of that street,
but when I arrive and pass through the gate
she'll be waiting right there...it's never too late:
"Did you brush your teeth today?"
"Yes, Mom. I did."

Metal Bird

Wings spread wide to catch the early breeze,
her head lifted, elegant for the climb into
a cloudless, blue desert sky, she waits,
constrained by a metal harness that holds
her to the white flowered oleander bush.

She watches as mating doves nest in the branches
above, darting hummingbirds taste the sweetness
of pink blossoms on a neighboring cactus.
Her metal body, suspended in space, quivers
in the wind. There is no flight for the metal bird.

Does she long to break free, to inhale cool, early
morning air, look down onto the tops of cottonwoods,
fly freely through shadowed canyons in the Catalinas?
Poor thing bound to the earth. From my window
I watch small gray sparrows land gently on a nearby
oleander branch and sing to her, a beautiful range
of happy notes to say "Hello" and to wish her well.

Friendship

Sit with me awhile
Speak of happy things
Smile away the darkness
Soften my sadness with the
sheer delight of your presence.

Let us dine on the sweet bread of life
I will toast the days gone by, moments of
mystery and majesty. You, the hope that
tomorrow will be gentle, each day the revealing
of a new dimension of the pilgrim self.

Tell me stories of your journeys, the streets you
walked, mountains conquered, tell me of love that
filled your world with lilac and rose, of dreams that
never came true. I will listen with my heart and find blessing
in the feast of conversation. Then when the candle burns low,
I will close my eyes in the final sleep
and set my course for a distant star.

Sit with me awhile
Speak of happy things
Smile away the darkness
Send me on my way with a
quiet gesture of peace.

Sounds of Blessing

A lovely winged melody rose from
the white flowered branch of
the oleander this morning.

The singer nestled among the narrow
green leaves, lifted her rusty
brown head and filled the
morning air with elegant beauty.

Her song was a gift, her
presence a revelation of
joy matching the intensity
of the sun electrifying white
flower clusters.

Through my window I watched
the fragile body thrust forward
to push her song through tangled
branches and into the currents of
a congenial morning breeze.

The quiet harmony of the universe
is forever enhanced by these brilliant
sounds of blessing.

Demon Chocolate

Each morning I rise, my intentions intact.
I know what to do. I know how to act.
I've vowed to abstain from the wages of sin,
but then I pass the chocolate tin
and I melt like butter in the microwave.
There's no hope for me, no chance to save
this wretched excuse of a man.

Last week my wife tried a crafty plan.
She put the tin on a hallway stand
but emptied the goodies and hid them away.
Where they had gone, she refused to say.
I woke with my usual firm intent,
searched the whole house until I was spent,
then went back to bed in a huff.

I'm not a slave to the chocolate delights,
my willpower's strong, self-control is just right.
Don't suggest I'm addicted, out of control,
don't give me your pity or try to console.
I'll rise above this troublesome strife,
take steps to improve my unfortunate life,
it's time, I think, to get a new wife.

I put an ad in the local gazette,
waited to read the responses I'd get,
but the paper, alas, must have gone on strike.
I'm sure there are queries I'd certainly like,
but no one's shown interest in living with me.
It's beyond all belief, I surely agree.
Demon chocolate! The Devil's delight!

Pursuing A Poem

The parade goes on. It never stops.
No beginning. No end.
Thought after thought after thought
overlapping, bumping into each other,
faint, loud like a bassoon.
I try to be patient but it's hard.
Surely one will fall out of line,
drop onto my page and surrender to
the Oxford Book of Synonyms.
No. Those thoughts are poetically resistant,
teasing and taunting my 5 a.m. mind.
I'm sure I heard one giggle as it passed
by an hour ago.
Then, in the inhaling half of a deep sigh,
it happens.
"Excuse me," I hear, "would you like to dance?"
"Oh, yes I would."
And off we go in the magical pursuit of
an elusive poem.

Night Sky

Wait with me into the dark night.
Light softens and shadows grow long.
Songs of the day drift into a smoldering
campfire, glowing ash hoping for one last
explosion of sparks onto the black canvas of night.
Birds watch in silence. Only the owl defies night's appearing,
floating his baritone sound on the west bound wind. In time, a
call returns with the assurance of presence.

Let us sit together in silence and listen to the earth sigh.
Then, when the moon touches the top of the
tallest pine, let us lay upon a bed of
golden leaves and watch the stars
play among the tree tops.
May our last thought before sleep be wonder,
the last words whispered to the night be blessing,
may angels descending take delight in all
pilgrims who smile into the
night sky.

This Unique Day

Today will be like no other day
in the long journey of creation.

The sun will appear,
people will come and go,
laugh and curse,
rejoice and weep.

A bird will sing from
the laurel bush, and
the mountain will look
out over the brown desert.

I will pray for human
understanding and kindness
and feel a stab in my heart
at the depth of our insensitivity.

But this day will be like no other
because today I will hum a tune
and hear your harmony in my
soul. When I walk through the
garden, I will see your smile
in brilliant colors and soft
shadows. I will speak your
name to the wind, and the
world will be embraced
in blessing.

I Am Me!

Somewhere between here and there,
just at the intersection of maybe and yes,
I decided to be me.

I have been someone else for a long time.
We have shared a name, but little else.
Appearance is important for him,
impression, acceptance. I've gone along
for the ride.

But now those things are no longer on
my values list. I will be what I will be.
I will sing off key if that pleases me, lay
on the grass at the park and count the
stars, say what I mean and mean what
I say. I will be me.

And every day I will tell myself,
you are you,
and that's just fine.

All Things Matter

Does one star matter among pinpoints of light?
The sky is filled with the eyes' delight.
Millions of gifts of light in the night,
so why does one star matter?

Does one child matter who goes hungry tonight?
He sleeps in love's arms in the soft evening light,
and his parents cry at the pitiful sight
of their child who won't wake tomorrow.

Does it matter that we're on a treacherous course
to demolish the earth with little remorse?
Our delicate home that is clearly the source
of our lives in this cosmic parade?

A hawk, a tree, all that live in the sea,
why should they matter to you or to me?
Who cares that we can no longer see
those gifts of grace in the world?

So why on earth should a bird or a bee
make any difference to a man like me?
There's plenty more for people to see,
so why does one thing matter?

Why?

Writer's Block

Laptop is open, fingers poised,
TV is off, limited noise,
ready to write astonishing prose
when, as every writer knows,
nothing happens!

No words fall sweetly on the page.
I nod and doze, perhaps a stage
all writers face as they mature,
but of this fact I'm very sure:
this stinks!

They call it "writer's block", I think,
but I suspect there is a link
to this odd thing called climate change.
I have been feeling rather strange.
That's it!

A rabbit's foot might do the trick.
I'll browse through Amazon and pick
a tin foil hat that I can wear
to keep the neutrons from my hair.
I'll write!

I was released just yesterday.
They took my hat and charm away,
but said the treatment helped a lot,
that it was not a climate plot, so
I'm back!

Laptop is open, fingers poised.
What cares about unwanted noise?
I put two radishes in my ears,

my mind is sharp and very clear.
Let's write!

Desert Rain

Gray clouds abandon the turbulent sky
and fall to the earth, precious
drops descending, as if escaping
a grasping cosmic hand
wanting to hold life
to itself.

Brittlebush dances in the swirling wind,
waiting to be washed of the
dust and drought of the
desert, thirsting,
longing.

In a few hours the rain subsides
and the refreshed desert glistens in
sun rays breaking through
reluctant clouds, thrusting
light through jagged
opening in the
softening sky.

Dust settles. Mesquites breathe clean,
moist air. Desert flowers stand a little
taller, glow a little brighter. Ground
animals peak from deep burrows,
drawn by the smell of water.
All is as it should be.
As it should be.

Clouds On My Shoulders

Very early this morning, while walking along
the edge of first light, I became
conscious of a wonderous reality:
clouds falling on my
shoulders.

They dropped from the sky disguised as gentle
strands of water, light rain
polishing the streets and
reflecting, like a mirrored surface,
traffic lights and high beams
of passing cars.

Liquid cloud, best received as a gift
and worn with humility, is a touch of
grace that washes away
sanctimony and self indulgence
as it drapes a piece of heaven
around often reluctant
shoulders.

This morning, much to my delight,
clouds fell upon my shoulders
and wished me well on my
journey from darkness to light.
I was grateful for the
company.

I Am Living

I am not surviving,
I am living.

I'm not holding back, I'm pressing on.

I'm not running from yesterday, I am
dreaming into tomorrow.

I'm not cursing my wounds, I'm
learning from the pain.

I'm not crying over my failures, I'm weeping
tears of gratitude for having tried.

I'm not silent, my heart is singing.

I'm not alone, I am the keeper of Divinity.

I am not surviving,
I am living.

My Dog

My dog insists on a morning walk
about 5:30. That's A.M.
It's still dark.
I comply.

My dog is determined to smell every
rock and every bush in every yard. She
looks at me and says
"Stand there and be
patient."
I comply.

My dog leaves her natural calling card
in the neighbor's yard,
turns and stares at me.
"Well, pick it up."
I comply.

My dog lays at my feet when I sit in my
recliner in the family room.
She whacks me on my foot
with her heavy paw until
I rub her on her back leg.
Whack.
I comply.

My dog loves to chase a ball in the park.
Now, though, she's old with less energy.
When I throw it, she flops down on the
grass and looks back at me.
"Well, go get it."
I comply.

I am well trained.

The Murphy Bed

The clerk said my room was 205.
I answered: "That's fine. I'm tired from my drive.
I'll eat a quick bite, then turn out the lights.
I have no desire to see all the sights."

The room was tidy, though rather small;
a desk, a chair, but no bed at all.
It was then I noticed just above my head
the handles that lowered the walled Murphy Bed.

I unzipped my bag and heard a faint sound.
But I was alone, no one around.
I could only make out a word or two,
but as I listened more closely, the message came through.

"I'm trapped in this wall! Been here since two.
Can't feel my hands. My feet have turned blue.
Pull this thing down and help me get out.
Believe you me and have no doubt,

I'll never again try a Murphy Bed.
It's hard to sleep while on your head
when you're mashed against this concrete wall
with nowhere to go and no one to call."

When I opened it up he was on his head.
His feet were blue and his face was red.
Oh, the words that the poor man loudly said!
A helpless victim of a Murphy Bed.

Waiting For The Guest

I wait for the visitor to arrive,
one known to me only by
reputation. New to my acquaintance.

My house is clean, at least as clean
as I can make it. I've taken out the
trash, swept the dusty corners, even
shined the brass candle sticks.
Everything is in order.

I debated about making a meal we
might enjoy together. But I suspect
there will not be time. People who
know him say he doesn't stay long.

I will wait as patiently as I can, but
I am nervous. I want to make a
good impression. But then I guess
everybody does. I will shake his
hand and ask him to sit for a
little while.

I am ready for his black sedan to arrive.

Blood In The Sky

Two young men, wrapped warmly in fur hides
of buffalo, slip quietly from their ponies and
sit in the damp prairie grass. The night sky
twinkles with pinpoints of starlight. But it
is not stars they seek in the black sky. They
have never seen the Blood Moon before.
In fact, it was a story they learned as children
but they never considered it truth. The Elders
made up a tale about the red moon that climbs
into the sky so infrequently.

But tonight they stare curiously at the very thing
the tribal Elders described, a red ball suspended
above them, red like blood from the buffalo hunt.
Neither young warrior speaks. No words
form to describe the sinister spot of blood
in the sky. A sign? An omen? Darkness
around them deepens as the last faint traces
of moonlight disappear. All that remains
is the unexplainable red circle set in the
blackness.

They sit for almost an hour in the presence
of the blood sign. Then, without a word spoken,
they rise, leap to the backs of their ponies,
lithe dancers in graceful motion. Still looking
at the ominous blood light, they ride swiftly
to the camp, outrunning crimson droplets
that fall from the sky's wound.

Perfect Day

If even one bird fills
the air with song,
if February sun falls warm on my face
after a crisp winter morning,
if the musty, sweet aroma of fresh
coffee rises to the rafters,
if the stone face of the mountain
glows in the soft, golden sun at dusk,
if in the distance the melancholy sound
of a train whistle
awakens my imagination,
if I laugh, hum a tune, sit with a friend,
it will have been a good day.

And if you smile and touch my
hand, it will have been
perfect.

My Positive Attitude

Today I will be in a very good mood.
I will have a positive attitude.
Even if things don't go my way
I will watch my words and thoughtfully say:
"Relax, my friend, I take no offence.
I've no need to practice my ego defense.
Today I am in such a very good mood.
I'm sure you've noticed my great attitude.
It was nice to bump into you today,
but now, please excuse, and I'll be on my way.

That condescending imbecile!
To talk to him is to get my fill
of nonsense spewed in very hot air!
All I can do is sit and stare
as he talks and talks from his empty head
about some book he says he read.
He bores me so: I want to scream.
It's as if I'm stuck in a very bad dream!
If I see him coming another day,
I'll turn and run the other way.

It's so nice to be in a very good mood
and to feel this wonderful attitude.
Consistently now I find that I
am filled with peace as I honestly try
to show the world a better way
to live each day and how to play
the game of life without the need
to practice anger, hate or greed.
Unless, of course, I find I still
encounter that blabbering imbecile.

It's so nice to have a good attitude.

A Nation's Struggle

Try to imagine what life would be
if folks of goodwill could finally agree
on the value and worth of all humankind,
and the sadness of those who are left behind.
This is a time when passions burn,
and citizens live with a deep concern
about law and justice that are set aside
in favor of power and shameless pride.

We will not survive distortion and hate.
We cannot endure nor claim to be great
if we disregard the tenets of truth
and destroy the hope of our nation's youth.
The future is set by what we do now.
The choices we make will determine just how
the planet survives and how we create
a climate of trust as divisions abate.

I never dreamed I'd live the day
when this great nation lost its way,
succumbed to petty tyrant threats,
was forced to look with deep regret
at how we've lost all self respect,
compounded by our sad neglect
of principle and honor's role
to guard and keep the nation's soul.

A First Line, Please

The very first line is all I need.
From there I can fly with incredible speed
as words just appear and fall into place.
I can fill a page all in the space
of a minute or two, line after line,
meter and rhyme, what a lovely design.

Writing a poem is not a hard task.
Just sit down to write and continue to ask:
"What in the world shall I write today?
A sonnet, a jingle, just let the words play
and see how they fall on my clean, white page.
It's a poet's conundrum, age after age."

So here I sit. It's dark outside.
Let it be known, I really tried
to create a poem that soars with the dawn,
but my mind is so cloudy; excuse my next yawn.
It's not beneath me to beg and to plead:
a first line is crucial so I can proceed.

Do you happen to have a first line or two?
I'll be forever indebted to you.

Reluctant Night

Night is long in coming.

Leaden gray clouds linger through
a colorless afternoon and gladly
surrender to the reluctant advances
of evening.

The world is a slow motion movie
run at half speed.

Darkness, stalled somewhere between
El Paso and Yuma's sculpted
sand dunes, is disinterested and
unhurried by a breathless sky.

It is doubtful if stars will even show up.

The moon? Anybody's guess.

Night, though, has always been unreliable,
ill mannered and temperamental.

I once knew a man who waited a
week for night's arrival but finally gave up
and moved to Finland.

Songbird's Blessing

Don't weep for what might have been.
Remorse is a black hole infested with
jagged splinters of glass, razor sharp
reminders of misplaced trust and
hollow promises.

A dove flutters in the talons of the hawk,
resigned to what will be while a dozen
sparrows watch from a sagging power line.
Soft gray feathers float in circles on casual
breezes, then disappear into the green
leaves of marigolds and magnolias.
Predator and prey glide as one into
the eaves of the red barn nestled
in a tall stand of corn.

Not far away a songbird, ignoring, indifferent
to the vibrations of anguish, rises from the
highest branch of a time scarred oak
to pronounce a benediction, perhaps a
blessing, on the wounded and the wonderful.
Each in its turn.
Each in its turn.

Afternoon Rain

Steel gray skies arrive on blustery gusts of frigid wind.
Birds, barometers with wings, abandon their feeders
to seek shelter deep in the arms of a familiar willow.
Golden leaves, recent arrivals in the currents
of yesterday's storm, swirl around the
base of a tall, slender cedar.
It will happen soon.
It will come.
Wait.

Faint tapping sounds announce the first arrivals
as droplets strike the skylight, advance guests
from darkening skies. Then fat drops
detonate on sidewalks, gather into
small pools, merge to become
a steady flow into the grated
gutter on the corner.
Sonata.

Sounds are everywhere. A percussion orchestra
supported by kettle drums of thunder and
mixed voices in the wind. The music
of rain echoes along the boulevard,
spattering, harmonizing in
puddles and ponds.
Adagio.

Everything is washed clean when the black sky
begins to lighten, turning soft gray as if
depleted, exhausted by the effort.
The music stops. The baton
rests. Everything glistens.
Quiet.

Very Fine Day

Today will be a very fine day.
People will listen and hear what I say,
the market will rise, blood pressure fall,
I'll meet the new girl who lives down the hall,
the bus will run exactly on time,
I'll get a new flat and won't have to climb
three flights of stairs to this lonely old room
where I hear every night my neighbor's bassoon.
He's learning to play from a library book
and last night at ten the chandelier shook
when he hit a note that's never been played.
I banged on the wall but the offer I made
never stopped his practice from ten until two.
I'd move out tomorrow if only I knew
what to do with my sister's white cockatoo.
Do you?
In spite of it all, here's what I say:
Today will be a very fine day!

A Child Is Born

He made his first sound in a hay filled manger.

Born to a poor family in a
ravaged land occupied by foreign soldiers,
forced to flee to another
country because of political brutality.
Refugees.

Life was hard. They managed
on little and faced hard times together.
His parents named him Jeshua.
Mother and Father loved him
very much.

He was born in a one-room hut in El Salvador.
Poverty stricken,
Father could not find work.
No money to feed his often hungry family.
Constant violence surrounded them,
violence spawned by political corruption
and crime.
No choice but to
flee to another country to survive.
Refugees.
Mother and Father named their infant Juan,
and they loved him very much.

The adult Jeshua spent his life caring
for the poor, advocating on their behalf
and calling people to love each other.
He spoke against political and religious
corruption and lost his life for it.

Time will tell about Juan.
Eight-years-old now and

separated from his family in a foreign land
that was supposed to provide safe haven,
housed with 15,000 refugee children
in a detention camp.
Time will tell.

Two refugee boys separated
by 2,000 years.

Advice To A Preacher

Words matter,
never to be tossed casually from
pulpit to pew like confetti.
Saturation is a weak strategy.
Light a sky rocket, not a sparkler.
Trajectory, timing, tempo are
important ingredients in the recipe.
Content helps, too.

The effort is not meant to please,
certainly not to entertain like
a stand-up performer.
Command of the language is good,
a bit of knowledge helpful,
integrity essential. Say it with
poise and passion, then sit down.
The rest is out of your hands.

Will anyone remember day after
tomorrow the point, the poem,
the story, the elegant exposition
of an obscure sentence in a
book that few read? Probably
not, but then the life expectancy
of the spoken word is mere minutes.
In the off chance that the worlds
of hearer, speaker, and Spirit
collide, it's worth it.

Preach with head and heart.
Tread gently on tender ground.
If you say it, mean it.

Love them anyway.

Christmas Journey

"Would you explain all this to me?
Why am I tied here to this tree?
And who are all those people there
saying goodbye to that young pair?
Are they going on a trip?"

"Yes, indeed, and so are you.
I overheard a word or two.
She's about to birth a child,
but they must travel many miles
to get to Bethlehem."

"Okay, I see what is in store.
I haul the bags just like before.
Just once I'd like a lighter load.
It's not a very easy road
from here to Bethlehem.

"Well, here they come, I guess it's time.
But wait, why does the woman climb
upon my back? Can this be true?
A lovely child, and lighter, too,
than all the tents and poles.

"I will remember this fine day
and I will cherish, come what may,
the honor and the gift bestowed
to carry such an easy load
all the way to Bethlehem.

"By the way --
What is the young girl's name?"

The Star

"It's hard to believe but the news is true.
The choice is made, and they picked you.
From all the stars who wanted to go,
you are the one who will brightly show
the way to Bethlehem."
"How can it be that they chose me!
I'm not convinced I can really be
bright enough to show the way
to the place where Mary and Joseph stay.
What if I burn out!"
"Calm down, my friend. You'll shine just fine.
Your light is strong. You'll be the sign
to guide the world to that special place
so everyone can see the face
of love in a manger stall.
"Now, get some rest. The time draws near.
Lay out your course and have no fear
for you are picked from all the rest,
undoubtedly the very best,
to guide the world to him.
"And, by the way, when you look down
on the sleepy little village town,
shine softly on his gentle face,
hold him in a sweet embrace,
and say hello for me."

Wounded Dove

Her slender, delicate body shook from
heart pounding vibrations that radiated into my cupped hands.
Half closed eyes, rumped soft gray feathers, aware but not alert,
the young dove, stunned from the window crash,
was on her back when I scooped her up
from the patio floor.

A hawk, elegant agile pursuer, gripped the metal fence railing
above her with his razor talons. Enraged by my interference,
the beautiful predator screamed when I knelt above her
quivering body, ruffled his wings to intimidate, then flew
to a low mesquite branch to let out his obvious anger.

The names he must have called me!
In time she calmed, relaxed into my hands and
watched me through little black slit eyes.

Hawk danced from limb to limb,
unwilling to give up the prey.
Determined in his task as she was in hers.

Life or death? Food or famine?
The contest played out before me,
the reality of all the beauty and brutality
that surrounds us.

I asked her if she was going to live or die.
She closed her eyes and breathed softly.

Waiting For Wonder

The first step to astonishment is patience.
Wonder is not on call.
Amazement does not respond to an alert timer.

You have to sit on the back porch in the green
rocker and talk to a hummingbird,
or lay a blanket on summer grass, stretch out
and watch the stars go by.
Try standing very still on the mountain
ridge line where all sound is banished except
for the wind's laughter.

If you hurry astonishment you'll just get a
head full of frustration and your heart
won't beat any faster.

Patience, my soul. Wait for the wonder.

Bagel Shop

Sitting with a friend in
the bagel shop, chewing on
a toasted Everything slathered with
creamy honey-almond, talking about
nothing important and everything important
is as good as it gets.
Nothing better.

I lead a simple life? Yes.
I like an Everything now and then? So?
Honey-almond cream cheese tastes
wonderful, so it must be good for you.

So, what's your problem?

Graceful Hands

Hands take the brunt of life's beatings.
Bruises, burns, broken bones. Too many dishes and
diapers. A wrench slips. That fall on the icy sidewalk.
Hands protect, defend and absorb life. And they grow
old, living roadmaps, sometimes a little twisted off
course, fingers that don't point as straight as they
used to. History books at the end of each arm.

But hands also bless. Held reverently in prayer,
uplifted over the altar, reaching out to embrace
the lost one returning home, soothing the skinned
knee or wiping away tears, engaging in acts of
tender mercy.

I hope for my surgeon to have steady hands,
my friend to have helpful hands, my lover to
have gentle hands, the people along the way
whom I have hurt to have open and forgiving
hands.

May I find in my own hands the will to help
others, even when it's inconvenient; courage
to take on the hard task. But most of all,
may grace fall from my hands on all who
pass my way.

And when these days are done, may my
tired hands reach out to yours, Waiting
Spirit. May I find rest in the hollow of
your sacred hand until it's time to rise
and ride a new star.

Yes, Sherlock, The Game Is On!

Every morning I rise before the sun, sip coffee,
scratch the dog, and wonder about the nature
of God.

I enjoy the first two.

About the third.

I put words on a piece of paper, arrange them
with inquisitive care, rearrange them, underline,
replace, bold face, italicize, erase, rearrange.

Pre-dawn wisdom about the Inscrutable is an
erasure smudge on an otherwise blank page.

I find it difficult to draw comfort or courage from
a collection of smudges. I would sleep late and
give up the chase entirely except the dog loves
to be scratched; I don't want to damage the
South American coffee industry, and I think
I would miss the hide-and-seek game.

I know I would miss the occasional ten second flashes
of insight, the strangely satisfying arrangement
of five or six words once in awhile, or the little
tingle in my back that I've thought comes from
rubbing Maggie with my left foot while she snores
at my feet.

Maybe Lennon and McCartney were right.

"There will be an answer. Let it be."

Maybe.

But Maggie needs the foot rub.

Coffee growers can use the money.

And, The Elusive One seems to enjoy the chase.

Always comes back for more.

So.

Life Rising

Today a chrysalis will crack open and
the planet will vibrate in the shock.
A life wave released into the air
will cause oceans to churn, pine trees on the high
ridge will sway with uncontrollable joy.
Sheets draped over the clothesline will snap in the
virgin breeze that sweeps through creation.

She will extend golden butterfly wings for the first time,
as if the first ever to rise from darkness into Light.
Never before has this delicate creature
encountered a moment that will
welcome and wound.
When her moist wings catch the first breeze,
she will rise. And so will I.
She will leave behind all that used to be
and she will climb toward the warm sun and the
embrace of welcoming clouds.
She is born for beauty.
Nothing else.

I will follow her as far as my eyes will allow,
until she becomes a tiny speck in the vast sky.
Then, but with sadness, I will release her
to become blessing for other eyes that
will widen at their first glimpse of a golden star,
other voices that will whisper excitedly to each other,
"Look!"

Brilliant scientists can explain the facts
of this brief moment in time.
For that I am grateful.
But, I choose mystery,

infused with sacred meaning,
founded on an unyielding hope
that golden wings rising toward the sun
will always invite us to look up and smile.

Right Knee's Revenge

My feet have carried the rest of me 28,105 days,
and now my knees are beginning to resent
the adventures.

My back is not too happy, either.

Today my right knee, RK, decided to
announce its growing resistance to following
feet's directions. The proclamation came as I
stepped out of a very small car no one my
age should occupy, right knee rebelled, I
heard two distinct popping sounds that
scared birds out of a nearby tree, felt a
hot poker jabbed into the flesh just below
the mid-leg joint, and noted that RK
refused to bend for the necessary exit
maneuver.

The gymnastic moves necessary to exit
the toy car are sights to behold even when all
the moving parts cooperate. But when RK
acts like a spoiled, pouting child, catching
all the other joints and muscles by surprise,
the result can be catastrophically amusing.

"Can I help you up, sir?"

"No," I told him. "I'm just checking
the underside of my car. Been a while
since I've looked. Wanted to make sure
everything's working properly."

"Right."

I noticed that he glanced
back over his shoulder as he moved
away across the parking lot. He tried
to hide his smile, but I could read his
20-year-old, agile mind. "Poor old guy.
Must have some dementia. He thinks
he's at home in his garage."

The underside of the little car looked
pretty good, by the way, but the
asphalt was really hot in that parking
lot.

Come to think of it, the hot pavement
did make my back feel better.

Yes!

Do you remember
the fenced off land
near the Texas border town?
The place with the tents
and the guards at the gate?
Do you remember?
Not a resort.
No golf course or pool.
Camp? No, that misses the mark.
A playground, amusement park?
What name should I apply?
Ask the people
who live there each day
under rules that restrict and control,
behind fences and walls secured from the world.
Line them up and ask them all:
"Would you like to see your family again?"
"Do you miss them here in this place?"
On the Mexican border
a strange roar was heard
near the place where the
innocents live.
The earth-shaking roar
resembled the sound
of a Texas tornado
reaching its crest.
And the sound was clearly a heart breaking
"Yes!"
So say the 14,000 kids, each
guilty of being a child with no home,
confined without a family to care,
no familial arms to love and embrace.
Their crime is their color,

the language they speak,
ethnicity, heritage,
race.

14,000 children lost,
perhaps forgotten,
in the maze of news headlines
and latest events.

I wonder how kindly they'll remember
these days when they're twenty
and angry at life?

Along with the wonderful things
we have done as a nation
of reasonable folks,
we've made some big
mistakes, too.

The children's confinement
on the Mexican line may
come back to haunt
our worst dreams.

Does anyone remember
the Tornillo town
where children
wonder and
wait?

14,000

I Never Thought I'd See The Day

These words are printed on a sign,
discovered every day online,
heard broadcast on the local news,
discussed where people share their views.
New motto for our land?

I never thought I'd see the day -
when leaders sworn to represent
ignore the reason they were sent,
in favor of a ballot box
or photo ops on channel Fox.

I never thought I'd see the day -
when truth was tossed aside for lies,
the nation's meaning jeopardized
as we become a laughing stock
for jokes that ridicule and mock
the sad but comic show.

My list grows longer every day:
unprincipled, immoral, incapable, corrupt.
To what extent can we disrupt
the basic values we hold dear
to live in shame, divisive fear?
For in a time we can't predict,
we'll realize this deep conflict
of politics and culture's norms
has changed the fundamental form
of who we really are.

A friend once told me, long ago,
"when things are tough, I caution you:
there's really nothing you can do;

sit back, enjoy the bumpy ride.
Integrity just put aside
until another day.
It's all a game we play."

Well, friend, out there, not far away,
concealed, for now, within the haze
of pompous greed, a voice is raised.
One message, one alone the voice repeats,
six words that float through towns and streets
for everyone to hear.

We are better than all this.

We are better than all this.

Mourning and Moving On

All things that live, die.

They must. Ninety years or so is about
as long as any human can take this. Bears and
birds and bluebonnets have their own
alarm clocks, but the principle is the same.

When something or someone beautiful dies,
mourning emerges. Grief, mourning, call it
what you will: it is a requirement of a healthy
human life. Mourning serves a purpose,
but it, too, has to stop sometime.

The reality is so important: Mourn fully and
completely. Mourn painfully and joyfully.
Then, move on.
Life calls in many voices.

Someone told me the other day that they could no
longer accept the God-image they had
carried for years. It no longer made sense,
sustained, empowered, touched deeply.

But, he said: I mourn the loss.
God hasn't died for me, but the ways I
experience and encounter God have changed.
The image in my mind just doesn't work anymore.

I will tell him, when he's ready to hear it,
that his mourning is the doorway to an even
deeper, more extraordinary friendship with
a God-image yet to come into sharp focus.

There is no fixing something
or someone when
death comes.

There is remembering,
but not retaining.

All things that live, die.

And the best we can do is to
mourn and move on.

Nodding Offfffffffffff

Tuesday morning, I think about nine,
I was feeling good, doing fine,
reading a book, completely resigned
to sppppppppppppppp
More recently, at a grocery stop,
I sat in the car while my sweetheart shopped.
I said to myself: "She won't be long."
and I was humming along with a
beautiful sonnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
This nodding off is getting me!
What if I'm driving and hit a tree!
Or, eating soup or bending over
to tie my shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
Isn't there a remedy
for this malady that torments me?
Is getting old the culprit here?
What really causes me to fear
is the thought that Mother Earth might quake
and souls ascend to heaven's gaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.
Hello! Hi! Anybody here?

Grinch and Whine and Pout

Before my feet hit the bedroom floor
I had it all worked out.
What a fabulous morning this will be
to grinch and whine and pout.
Last night he said a thoughtless thing
and it cut me to the core.
Today is my day to rise with a smile
and then to settle the score.
I bear no hard feelings for his nasty remark,
the emotional stress he has caused,
but I'll surely get even; he'll get the point.
I'll give him good reason for pause.
As my head leaves the pillow I tingle with glee
and I welcome this memorable day.
I vow to be mellow; Oh, yes, I will
after making old sweetie-pie pay.
Oh, what a beautiful day!

Stop The Sermon, I Want To Get Off!

Sometimes I think the hardest thing
a preacher has to do
is know the sermon stopping point
and simply say:
"I'm through".
"That's it".
"No more".
"I've told you all I know".

You'd think a preacher would be taught
the rudimentary skill
of bringing sermons to a close
before the people start to doze
and fall out of the pews.
But the problem here -
clear as a bell -
is most preachers are very happy to tell
far more than they really know.
It takes time, you see,
to reach point 23
in a measly half an hour.

A word of caution, if you will.
The phrase "Now one more thing..."
can cause one's heart to leap and sing
because the sermon's near the end.
But back up just a step, my friend.
There is no guarantee
that "one more thing" might really be
the last and final word.

The same is true with other terms
like "as I close" or "I'll summarize".

But worst of all, the cruelest joke
is "in conclusion then".
You may as well sit back and grin
send out for pizza,
take a spin,
call up your mother's sister Gwen,
shoot the breeze then check again
the prospect of an end.

Question Mark?

I am a question mark.

?

I used to be a period.

.

Few are the times I have been known
as an exclamation point.

!

Although I have a history of declaring.

I now live questions and when one is
answered, I move to the next one on
my list.

Absolute certainty is a crutch of the fearful.

"Defending to the death" is a sure way to die young.

Half empty glasses don't last very long. They
certainly don't quench a big thirst.

I am a question mark.

?

You...? . () & + !

Circling Crown

The mountain emerged from the black
nighttime sky into the glory of morning's light.
And around her head she wore a crown,
a circle of wispy, grayish cloud that
wound itself round and round,
announcing the elegant arrival
of day.

It's enough to take one's breath away,
the contrast in soft, engaging light and the
fading shadow of night's retreat.

Unless, of course, one doesn't see the
spectacle played out on dawn's grand stage.

Unless, of course, one looks at his feet,
walks through the dawn with his eyes on
the ground, focused on phone calls,
appointments, and things that the new
busy day will inevitably bring.

To miss the circling royal crown, afire
from rays of eternal light, to miss
the mountain's gracious smile
is not to live at all.

Storm

There is chaos in the air.

Petulant skies darken, steel gray clouds,
antagonistic, layers in fading light, overlapping,
integrating. A palette of exquisite shades and textures.

An indifferent wind, sensing the cross currents of
spatial change, recreates herself as turbulent
tantrums. With unrepentant resolve, she severs
the bonds of all restraint.

A fragile hummingbird, barely an ounce of feathers and bone,
struggles to hold her own in winds swirling off the vine
covered stone wall. Bewildered and buffeted, she rides
the fickle currents with cautious glee.

The slap of fat raindrops creates an irregular rhythm as the
sky drips the first hints of a deluge too heavy to hold.

Dozens of toy tin drums tap out an unrecognizable
tune as drops ricochet off metal ramada roof slats,
staccato splashes. Other droplets fall on crimson
rose petals, roll gently through the soft curves,
coaxing them open like a lover's teasing lips.

With scant warning, celestial timpani kettles rumble,
birthing a rolling thunder that grows louder and louder
until fire streaked cymbals split the sky into jagged,
spiky chunks of darkening cloud, determined to embrace
a menacing purple horizon.

The earth languishes in anticipation as the storm
calculates its trajectory and torment, draws in the
full volume of explosive air, then with renewed
ferocity propels the pent-up ferment across the land.

No more silken drops of rain. Now skin stinging
lashes of water whip the bending trees. Malevolent
bursts of wind, prompted by sinister laughter from
a savage sky, carry small, sharp-edged stones into
windows and walls, hissing, growling, daring the

convulsing palm tree to stand erect and face the
fury head on.

For hours the Wagnerian cacophony rises and falls.
Pitiless. Without mercy. Mad pleasure, driven and
destructive, contained in cosmic breath.

Then, as if spent from the relentless bombardment,
the storm limps toward the mountain and its own
destruction, leaving behind ragged remnants of its
wrath. A once elegant oak tree, moments ago regal
in its southern plantation heritage, dangles helplessly
over upended lawn chairs. Its roots are washed clean
of earth's evidence.

A bent and broken lawn umbrella, green canvas dislodged
from twisted support arms, sprawls on the grass; the
mortally wounded abandoned among destruction's
debris. Faint mist lingers but only long enough to gloat.
Soon a face, tentative and watchful, peers from the
back door of the red brick cottage to calculate the
costs, remember what normalcy used to look like, and
mourn the passing of potted gardenias and scattered
fig vines.

Just over the bare stalks of a young citrus tree, a little
patch of blue sky squints through an expanding gash
in the blanket grayness. It is a welcome sight.
It holds promise.

Midnight Raid

I pulled it off and no one knows.
There is no evidence to show.
I covered all my midnight tracks
by treading softly on the cracks
that always make a popping sound
which meant that I'd for sure be found
with jelly on my face.
At midnight I sat up in bed
with Killer Dave's delicious bread
cavorting through my sleepy head.
A little peanut butter, too.
Perhaps some peach preserves will do
to make this quite the night.
The essence of this midnight raid
is all about attention paid
to little things that could go wrong;
a light that's on a bit too long,
a metal spoon that hits the floor.
Catastrophes galore!
But on this night there was success!
In fact, this may have been the very best
food pantry raid I've ever done.
There's not a clue, not even one
to give away my stealthy quest.
This raid surpasses all the rest.
What's that, my dear? What did you say?
A dirty spoon is in the tray?
No, no, my love! It wasn't me!
Recall my peanut butter allergy?
And I don't like the peach preserves.
Oh, no! Wrong word!
Alas, my raiding days are passed.
I guess good things just cannot last.

A workman comes at two o'clock
to fit a brand new kitchen lock.
I'd try again, but what the heck,
she wears the key around her neck.

Crazy Day

It started wrong, or so I thought.
This day, it seemed, was clearly fraught
with doom, despair and hopeless gloom.
A dark haze settled over all the room
as I stepped from bed to face the dread
alive in my soul and circling my head.
No fun on this bland day.
But the pesky Black Cloud that woke me at six,
friendly, cute and full of fun tricks,
challenged my thinking and wanted to play
in this "let's take a chance" unusual day.
So, Cloud and I devised a plan
to shape the day in ways that pan
convention's predictable course.
Dressed in pink shorts and red tennis shoes,
a v-neck T-shirt in four shades of blue,
I entered the steamy shower stall,
New York Yankees hat and all,
soaped up a bit just here and there.
Oh, Cloud and I are quite a pair!
The fun had just begun.
I dried off completely with diced apricots;
believe you me, it took quite a lot!
My shirt I wore turned inside out,
put on my jeans that were quite stout
from soaking during the shower time
in applesauce and seaweed brine.
That caused a little chafe.
Now came the task of socks and shoes,
and here I share some happy news,
Black Cloud suggested that we try
a way that no one can deny
is just a little looney-tunes,

like eating caramel and prunes.
Shoes first and then the socks.
When I went out to see my friend,
he stared, then said: "I will pretend
that you've still got your wits intact
when I observe, in point of fact,
it looks like your are under strain,
and you've completely lost your brain!"
He held no punches back!
I've had time since to think this through
and I confess I hardly knew
the pain of eccentricity
from my ill conceived complicity
with Black Cloud who, Oh by the way,
blew off to play another day.
He never said "Goodbye".
So now I dress with care and style
and think of that strange little while
when up was down and right was wrong.
It was a very lovely song,
just slightly flat and well off key.
The other side of mixed-up me.
I am just who I am.
Again, you ask? Well, I just might.
Who knows when Black Cloud could delight
to float into a midnight dream
and conjure up a crafty scheme?
If and when he does appear,
he'll find one rule is very clear:
Shoes on first, then the socks!

Hugs All Around

Isn't it nice to have a friend
and be one?
Won't it feel good to lend a hand
and receive one?
When I enter the day with a bad attitude
it seems like everyone's got one.
I'm accused of being a grumpy old sod
but I'm not one.
Today I think it's hugs all around;
yes, I'll give one.
The first person I meet I'll sweep off their feet,
of course, in a way that's completely discreet.
And I'm sure I will hear my sidewalk friend speak:
"Get away from me, you dirty old freak!"
How sad it is that people don't see
the kid that lives on in both you and me.
There is one.

Wind At My Back

May the Wind be at my back today,
a friendly breeze that whispers
encouragement in my ear and
chases away all my anxious moments.

May the Sun warm my journey
and cast light on my path
so that I do not lose my way
or stumble over my distractions.

As I walk, may I be aware of the
finch's Melody and the artistry of
kaleidoscope Clouds, shifting, rolling,
recreating themselves and the world.

May the Words I speak
to my neighbor and to the
stranger be genuine and kind.

May the Words I speak to myself
be the same.

And, in the evening of the day,
may my Shadow speak kindly of me.

Is Anyone There?

Is there no one there who can hear the wind?
Or see the majesty of forests and mountains?
Or smell the sweetness of citrus groves in bloom?
Or remember golden grain waving in a prairie breeze?
Or hear the call of elk from a distant ridgeline?
Or taste the delight of the garden's offering?
Mountain peaks and canyons see clearly.
Rhythmical, rolling oceans recognize what is real.
Rivers carved into the earth do not deny the obvious.
The vast cover of sky pleads for pure air.
Forests, elegant and ancient, stand silent in their intuitive wisdom.
And all the while, we, stewards of a sacred gift, languish in lethargy
and laugh in the delight of defiance.
Ignorance is yesterday's excuse. Rejection of reality is a ploy for power.
Absurd arrogance rings through the marble halls of the elected elite.
Shame stalks the polished powerful.
What do we tell our children? And their children?
How do you look into her face and wish her well?
What do you say to him about his unfolding future? His dreams?
How do you say to the incredible grandeur of our earth home:
"You are superfluous. My passion is power. My goal is greed
that fills my plate. I AM."
Is there no one there who can hear the wind?
Anyone willing to listen?
Someone able to hear?
A voice, a heart, a conscience that cares?
Surely this is a bad dream from which we will awake.
This cannot be the legacy of the grand experiment.
Look into their wondering eyes and try to explain
the meaning of nightmare.

Sometimes I Think In Rhyme

Sometimes I find myself thinking in rhyme;
not every day and not all the time,
but when a new thought decides to emerge,
a thought that's resisted the urge to be heard,
I race to my keyboard, sit perfectly still
and wait for the rhyme and the meter to fill
my empty page, that contemptuous place
that scorns my attempt to fill all the space
with glorious words, such beauty and grace
that within a few days I'll hear my phone ring
and a voice will direct that I pack all my things
and move to New York; Oh my, what a dream!
Can it be that my words have obtained the esteem
of the Pulitzer group that waits breathlessly
to examine the rhyme and the meter they see
from a would-be poet like me?

Sometimes I find myself thinking in rhyme;
not every day and not all the time,
and when the urge comes, I sit with the thought,
consider my options and decided that I ought
to go take an afternoon nap.

Oh, well.

Anger

Anger is conceived among the
broken fragments of life.
Shards of disappointment,
sharp slivers of resentment.
Shattered pieces of former
happiness, distant contentment,
struggle to reconnect in some
facsimile of what used to be.
But it is unrecognizable.
Failed resurrection from the
rubble. Anger, now propelled
by the futile reconstruction of
what was, rides the vehicle of
patchwork promise.

From the pile of brokenness,
chipped and cracked reality
is cemented together by jagged
seams where smooth surfaces
once reflected brilliant colors.
Enameled reds and greens, once
flowing each to the other in
complimentary embrace,
stubbornly reject overtures
of reunion. The pieces don't fit
anymore. Anger thrives on shame
and guilt, injustice and deep
lacerations of the soul, wounds
that realign the universe.

Stronger, yet vulnerable to
reason's voice, anger is devoured

by brutal rage, the darkness
that strikes with venomous intent.
Not to injure but to annihilate.
Not to infuriate but to immolate.
Self-control surrenders to the
hurricane velocity of invective,
insult and abuse.
Is it surprising that disappointment,
despair, and disillusionment are the
paving stones to disintegration?
From the rubble and the ruin
of human brokenness,
anger emerges,
indiscriminate,
incensed,
intent.
And in the end, rage becomes
the assassin's bullet.

Pendulum

There was a time, not long ago,
when handshakes sealed the deal.
A promise made was always kept,
no truth could be repealed
to hid deceit and lies.

There was a day when honesty
was held in high regard,
and those who helped a fellow man
received their due reward
from friend and foe alike.

I fear that honor has been lost,
good manners compromised,
and in this day of spite and rage,
we've all but closed our eyes
to calculated lies.

Perhaps that pendulum will swing
back toward civility,
and we'll recall the value of
good will, integrity
before the hour is struck.

May all our hopes for charity
and all our finest dreams
grow in the soil of human worth,
find water from the stream
that flows for all to share.

I Tried

At the end of the day, at least I can say:

"I tried."

No battles were won, no victory songs sung,
but I gave it the best that I had.

I'll sleep well tonight with a simple insight
that will govern the rest of my days:

The price that I paid and the effort I made
were worth all the time and the pain.

There's no looking back; regrets will attract
the sadness of guilt and remorse.

I gave it my all and I will stand tall
because in some ways, I did win.

At the end of the day, I can honestly say:

"I tried."

Between You and Me

It's the same song I sing everyday,
a sad tune that won't go away;
the words and the melody stay,
a painful price I now pay
for love that got lost halfway
 between you and me.

I can't say when the music died.
I woke one day and tried
to renew that feeling inside,
but no matter how I lied
the distance was just too wide
 between you and me.

I don't know how to make it right,
how to fan a spark to light,
how to know if we just might
be more than casually polite
and rediscover love's delight
 between you and me.

Maybe it's time to just move on,
learn the words to a new love song;
admit that somehow we both were wrong
laugh and say we'll have to be strong
then quietly weep for love that went wrong
 between you and me.

This Good Day

For all the good that's done today
For kind words said along the way
For children's laughter, joy and play
For Love's surrounding, come what may
 I lift my grateful voice.

May human kindness flow through me
May peace abide in all I see
May thoughts express more We and Me
May hands and hearts and minds agree
 that life is very good.

When this good day is finally done
When I behold the setting sun
When my full race is finally run
When shadows part I'll know the One
 whose hand extends to mine.

Keeping Secrets

Three folks can keep a secret shared if two of them are dead.
Otherwise the secret's out, everything that's said.
"Keep it to yourself," I've heard, and "Please don't tell a soul"
which are, of course, the perfect ways to guarantee it's told.
"I've been informed, in confidence, that you-know-who's in town,
but please be very careful, dear; don't let this spread around."
"Spread around! For goodness sake, I'd never say a word!
You can trust me! From these lips nothing will be heard."
A lie! A lie! A bald face lie! No secret's safe today!
You might as well hire on a blimp with neon light array.
Take out an ad or post a sign or call up channel three.
Your secret's in the public sphere for all the world to see.
So be aware that when you next reveal a secret thought,
don't waste your breath with "Mum's the word"; instead, I think you ought
to take to heart this proven law, it's truth so aptly said:
Three folks can keep a secret shared if two of them are dead!

So Late To The Party

So late to the party. So late to a
revealing of depth and substance.
What delays the discovery of the
genuine voice that finally speaks
with so few moments before the
hour strikes? So much to say
now freed of constraint or caution.

Songs to write. Verse to create.
Symphonies and sonatas to send
into the world. Why not when
energy and passion flowed hot?
Now the slight tremor makes the
pen unreliable. Memory, once
the trusted master of fact, betrays.

Only now, despite the span of
years, the dam breaks and long
waiting words, restrained by
necessity or circumstance, rush
through the fissure to find air
and life and urgent expression.

The challenge is inherent in the gift.
Now is the time.
Speak. Create.

Animal Verse

Dinner Guests

Few worms are regarded as good dinner guests.
They try very hard, they give it their best,
but try as they may, their forks just don't work,
and when drinking their milk, it's their habit to slurp.
Not to mention, Oh my, an occasional burp.

Dancing Buddies

Bear and Bulldog dance very well.
Who leads? Who follows? No one can tell.
They twist and turn and shimmy and shake.
Those two red hot dancers, they make the floor quake
while bystanders resort to a quick double take.

Morning Walk

Claude the Crane and Harry the Hawk
set out one morning for a leisurely walk.
They skipped and jumped and tumbled and ran
through sticky mud and bright white sand
then sat down for tea and a penuckle hand.

Encounter

The gift emerges silently, gradually, from the darkness.
It cannot be seen, only instinctively presumed.
It exists in the ether of morning waking.
Tentative at the first revealing, it becomes
confidently bold as minutes pass and
competing gifts surrender
for another day.

It stands alone, as one presented to a
dignitary or a royal court. Then,
still sitting on the side of the bed,
feet dangling into the day,
I extend my mind as a gesture
of welcome.
We both, the gift and I,
recognize the possibilities
of our friendship, and
we both smile at the
prospects.

The day begins with a gift, a single word.
Encounter

Behind The Darkness

Morning is here but not yet visible.
Somewhere behind the black
sky covering Morning waits.
Her appearing will be gradual,
slow in the revealing as a
kind recognition of my
waking consciousness.
When she feels the
time is right, She
will paint the sky above me with
shades of soft yellows and reds,
blend them into a wordless wonder.

We will say "hello" and together
we will open the door for
Day's arrival.

Bad Choice

Bad choice this morning.

I should have chosen door number two.

My invitation to the day arrives about four a.m.

Red numbers flip all night, glowing 2s and 3s and 6s.

When the magic circuits align, an eerie tone trying to
sound like a bell, jars the potted plant and sends
the dog into spasms.

The irony is that I can predict, with stunning accuracy,
the prizes behind both doors. And I still chose number one!

The remarkable reward behind door number two is a
combination of soft red blossoms in the big blue pot,
rich green vines clinging to the stone wall, colorful
birds splashing water as they happily bathe in the
large water bowl, peace and morning serenity.

Pull the curtains back and there you have life-giving
tranquility. I know it, but I chose door number one,
this electronic box I hold in my hand.

The penalty for choosing this door is the unnerving
portrayal of bizarre life on the globe. A spoonful of
name calling and hateful anger, a gulp of scandal,
another of tensions and fears. Mother used to tell
me to chew each mouthful at least ten times. It
doesn't help. I still want to heave my Cheerios.

No one to blame but myself.

Bad choice.

I should have chosen door number two.

Red-Checked Apron

She always arrives quietly.
I look up and there she is, dimming the lights,
adjusting the window shades ever so slightly.
Night is never pretentious. There is no fanfare
for her appearing. It's almost like she tip-toes
not to surprise but to move in silent gracefulness
in order not to disturb or startle.

When the moment is right,
she dries her hands on her red-checked
apron, bends low and embraces all
of us who are weary. She gathers in.
Room for everyone.
No exceptions.

In her arms there is pleasant comfort,
relaxing trust and gentle refreshment.
A delicious drowsiness descends,
a blurring of all the things that have
occupied the moment. Just before
the final light fades into darkness,
she whispers my name.
"Look. Look through the window."

Turning under the cool touch of soft sheets,
there, embedded in the black sky,
are pinpoints of light, white dots
dancing to silent music, tiny
explosions of brilliance in every
direction. Here and there and there.
"They will watch in the darkness."
But even the magical sparkling lights
slip from view as

Sleep arrives.

White Collar

In the darkness of justification, words get lost in the blackness:

Nothing happened at my church

It wasn't my pastor

In the courtroom of excuses, empty words ring hollow:

Well, what can I do?

It happens everywhere

Fear, denial, self-protection, unspeakable pain, personal and
systemic illness remain, and the greatest of these is.....

\$3 Billion payout

Feed he hungry

1,000 children

Care for the poor and helpless

We don't believe this is widespread

And the truth will make you free

I'm sorry

Too late

Dawn

Dawn, wrapped in silken yellow robes,
tiptoes along the mysterious joining
of earth and heaven --
crouched low
stalking
poised to leap into the sky,
arms thrust wide,
to scare the night away.

She Danced

The day before she died, she danced.
In the center of the old farmhouse kitchen,
in front of aunts and uncles, without hesitation,
with no remorse, she danced.
Her dark shoulder length hair, now dusty wheat,
short and coarse from chemicals meant to
slow the assault of her relentless stalker,
slender legs wrapped in blue tights no
longer tight, steps measured, more tentative,
she danced.
When she smiled the sun came out.
When she looked into my eyes she
warmed something deep. Speaking,
she sounded like a low pitched melody,
not harsh, not wounded but settled
and serene.
Tired from the dance she rested only
to come back refreshed, to smile joy
back into our lives again. And then
the day was over and she went home,
deliciously exhausted, bearing new
memories to add to the old. And she
went to sleep.
But, the day before she died,
she danced.

Never Rent To A Crocodile

Kangaroo and Cockatoo
became best friends at the Memphis zoo.
They'd wile away each Saturday
content to laugh and sing and play
until one starry summer night
they both received a dreadful fright
when Crocodile, with a crafty smile,
announced he'd come and stay awhile.
"Now, sir, that's fine but I'm inclined
to say to one who's so refined
our modest place for you, Your Grace,
has no fine ambiance or taste.
Don't be in haste. Let's find a place
that's not so vulgar, not so base.
Oh, wait! I know the way to go.
My memory is getting slow.
Just down the block you should take stock
of Harry's place. Just go and knock
at 22 North Avenue.
It's new and clean. It has a view!
The chickens there, oh what a pair,
will make a deal that's very fair."
He forms a smile, fine crocodile,
which means in just a little while
he'll set a pace to go embrace
dear Harry's tasty chicken place.
With plaintiff sigh and clever eye
the reptile turned and said goodbye.
Poor Cockatoo and Kangaroo
assessed the hour they'd just been through.
"Imagine, dear, him living here!
Our days would pass in dreadful fear.
I'll tell you more of what's in store.

Those chickens had better lock the door!"

Speaking The Name

When clouds tinge pink in the early morning,
as gray lizards vie for the best sunning
rocks to warm their agile bodies,
and the bobcat's eyes flash golden
in her dark den,
I will stand in the shadow of the green
mountain and speak a name to
unlock the universe.

I will say it softly, reverently at first,
but when the first cactus wren sings
and the dark canyons are filled with
melody, I will shout it for all living
things to hear.
It will be an unmistakable moment
of exhilaration and the earth
will quiver at
the hearing.

When all echoes have given way to silence,
I will whisper the name for only the
sahuaro to hear, the ancient one
who stands alone on the
shadowy ridge.
In that instant, Radiance will wash the
valley in boundless joy, rivers of
light will cascade over granite
cliffs, fill ravines, sink into
dry desert sand.

All the earth will wake to joy because
the name was uttered.

You

Boating On The Lake

When I look back on that strange day,
I think of how we made our way
across the placid, glass-smooth lake,
a sturdy boat, a shallow wake
as we pulled on the oars.
But then, with unexpected force,
dark clouds rolled in. Our peaceful course
was battered by high waves and wind
that surged and howled and tried to send
us to a watery death.
I heard within the raging storm
a voice that said, "There's no alarm!
Take heart, my friends, for I am here.
There's nothing now that you should fear.
You'll live to tell the world."
He then appeared atop the waves!
The confidence and love he gave
filled all our hearts with joy and hope,
propelled our fragile, threatened boat
to safety on the shore.
Some years have come and gone since then.
I've told the tale and there have been
so many who, in faith and trust,
have said with wonder that they must
locate this unique man.
I tell them that he's very near.
He has a way with storms and fear.
He lives within all human hearts
and calls out when the ragings start.
"Take heart. I'm right here, too."
(A meditation on John 6)

4 A.M.

An unexpected sound at 4 a.m.
Humming, idling engine
in the darkness
Now a second one
Light reflections, red
and yellow,
seeping through
slatted blinds
Flashing
Pulsing on the wall
A stretcher empty going in
Not so returning to the sea
of shimmering lights
A motionless figure,
released
Sound fades into silence
taillights disappear
into darkness
a street light casts
long shadows
on the sidewalk
The street is still
The house dark
Stars watch
The moon
weeps

"If I have not love..."

Strike the gong

Again

Again

Hear the lovely melodies, the rich tones.

Play a love song for your beloved.

Ring the cymbal

More

More

Its piercing note floats through the air,
soothing the restless babe in her cradle.

Earn a PhD

Write a book in 77 languages.

Speak them fluently to a pretending world.

Pat yourself on the back.

Empty eloquence

Soulless sound

The world wounded by pretense
and a poverty of love.

Love, and all her synonym relatives, creates
something better. Love cannot do otherwise
anymore than cymbals and gongs can play
a symphony.

What If?

If birds could fly
and fish could swim,
if rain fell down
and flowers grew up,
if the sun rose in the east
and stars shown at night,
if love was stronger than hate
and truth more powerful than lies,
if the universe was unending
and me along with it,
Wouldn't life be interesting.

What Did He Say?

I am quite knackered today, you see
last night we were knees up and anxious to free
all inhibitions and silly decrees
when along came a plonker, a tosser for sure
who said he would give us a nice driving tour
of castles historic and lush countryside
if only we'd pay for this wonderful ride.
Well, now I am gobsmacked and just whinging on
because this brash ponce took my dosh, now he's gone.
I'm skint as I write of this dastardly deed
and feeling right grotty, I have to concede.
I'm all collywobbles and wonky inside
because this old pillock took me for a ride,
looted my quid, then showed his brass knuckles,
tipped his felt topper and said: "Bob's you uncle!"

The Best Way To Bike

My Schwinn and I are now best friends.
We've logged the miles and fought the winds,
climbed nasty hills in pouring rain,
survived the crashes and the pain
to ride another day.
My helmet's scratched, my gloves are worn.
The jersey that I prize is torn.
But through it all we've done our best
to tackle every cycling test
and cross the finish line.
My stationary bike, you see,
located near the big TV,
holds coffee mugs and viewing guides
while I set back, enjoy the ride
and never move an inch.
I've never ridden on the street.
Why risk the dangers one can meet,
when in my bedroom, safe and sound,
my friend and I can race around
imaginary roads.
My bike and I have miles to go
but we will take it nice and slow
as I lean back, peruse my book,
imagine all the times we took
the medal for first place.
I highly recommend to you
imaginary cycling through
the lanes and trails of France or Spain.
Avoid the heat and driving rain.
"Oh, Dear, a refill please."

Desert Mural

Morning yawns and stretches as she
puts her feet on the warm desert floor.
When she stands and takes her first
step into the new day, her smile
penetrates the lingering darkness.
Young wrens peek from their saguaro homes,
already mindful of the desert's dangers. A pair
of Harris hawks gracefully glide in
widening circles, keen to spot the
slightest movement below. In the
distance, perhaps just beyond the
clump of Prickly Pear cactus on the
ridge, coyotes talk to each other
in high-pitched squeals. They have
the scent. The rabbit's time is
limited.

Doves, watching the unfolding drama
from the tallest arm of a deep green
saguaro, add their unique song to the
coyotes' now guttural growl. As if on
cue, two green-tinted lizards lumber
across partially exposed rocks, searching
for the perfect sunning spot. Under a
low Brittle Bush, a quail family gathers
to make a run for the next safe haven
twenty feet away. Mom and Dad will
quickly lead the ten chicks, each about two
inches tall, across the exposed sand
to avoid predators in the air and
on the ground.

The living desert responds to the day's invitation
in a beautiful mural, vast and vigorous.
History and future are exposed in this

grain-sized patch of creation resting
on a spinning ball floating through a
universe that is, itself, an
unnumbered member
of an unsolvable
mystery.

Pathway By The Stream

Yesterday I looked at a pathway
lazily wandering beside a small
stream at the base of the
mountain. It disappeared
into a grove of mesquites
and left me standing
there.

Yesterday I looked at a pathway
with my eyes. Today I see
that pathway with my
heart.

So many things I look at each day.

So few things I really see.

I look quickly. I see slowly.

One is for identifying. The
other is for inspiring. Too
often I forget the other.

93 And Rising Fast

I'll try again to face the day
but, Lord, I know what I will say
when, in the broiling mid-day sun,
the needle points to 1-1-1.
Please get me out of here!
Tomorrow, if the word is true,
the dial will tell us 1-1-2.
Each day a slow but steady rise,
so I will shout into the skies:
"Ok, I've had enough!"
But there's no end in sight, you see.
Next Friday's temp is 1-1-3.
And Saturday is 1-1-4.
I cannot take it any more!
I think I'll book a cruise.
As time goes by and my years pass,
I've come to understand at last
that I'm not suited for this heat.
I need to live where I can greet
a cool, refreshing dawn.
Vermont, Fargo, Saskatchewan?
I'll flip a coin and pick the one
that boasts of cooler summer days.
Who needs these brutal burning rays?
But here I am today.
It's 8 a.m. My day is done.
No biking, hiking, morning run.
It's 93 and rising fast.
The bet is on that I can't last
beyond a week or two.
Dear God, who makes the good earth spin,
would I be guilty of a sin
if in these hot, oppressive days

I turned my heat distorted gaze
to good old Boreas?

(Boreas: In Greek mythology, the god of the north wind and cold weather)

Asylum

At first light they fade into the desert floor.
A shallow wash, strewn with empty plastic
water bottles, marks the barren spot
as a momentary haven on the way to
Uncertainty.

One small shoe, partially buried in the
Sonoran sand, faded pink, is all the
memory that remains of the six-year-old
whose long black hair was braided into
pigtails, whose clear brown eyes held
definite traces of terror.

The family, seven in all, travel silently
during dark hours, hushed, crouched
low. Helicopters roam, flashing
search lights on saguaros, kicking
up sand in low passes. Vehicle
headlights, rattlesnakes,
fist-size scorpions, brutal robbers --
chances of making it to their
destination are slim. They know it,
but asylum, safety from murderous
gangs, consuming corruption and
devastating poverty pushed them
forward toward a hope just five
miles ahead.

Tornillo. A gateway to possibility. America,
the holy harbor for the helpless. The
guiding lamp is raised beside
the golden door.

But the desert travelers have not read
the headlines, heard the rhetoric.

They have lived on hope and little else
as they journeyed across an unwelcoming,

hostile sea of sand. They are soon to
discover that planted in the sand beside
the tarnished golden door is a sign:
"No hay vacantes -- no eres bienvenido."
The lamp has gone out.
Beyond the golden door
the land is dark.

Death Moved In

Death moved in the other day.
A soft knock on the front door
and there he stood.
No invitation. No welcoming party.
Expected, but no champagne.
He will stay, he said, "just a little while."
The sacred inevitability.
Friend? Adversary?
I am reluctant to fluff his pillow
or serve him orange juice in the morning.
I know what is about to happen.
When he packs his bag to go,
he will pack an additional one.
When he walks out the door to leave,
he will take half of my heart with him.
This is, for him, a number on a list,
a stop on the road.
For me, the slow unraveling of my
reality, tearing apart the fabric
of my soul.
He will leave me with memories and madness.
I will watch them disappear around the corner
and I will weep.

Magnolia Memories

Streets are barren. Humid June
air hangs heavy along the avenue.
Only the grackles move, flitting from
branch to branch in a majestic old
southern oak. Morning is not far
away.

Swollen gray clouds, promising to
gift the town with nourishing rain,
take shape in the first light of day.
Magnolia leaves dance in a gentle
west wind. The quiet is surprisingly
loud. Street lamps begin to dim
as first light breaks over the mountain.

A leafy archway spans the avenue where
graceful oaks reach across, strong arms
entwining to create a shadowed tunnel.
Wide sidewalks lead to stately white-
columned homes standing in elegant
ease, lavish in southern heritage and style.
Grand magnolias, history's observers
of human pain and pride, are dressed
in fragrant ivory blossoms. They stand
side by side, soldiers on guard, in
thick St. Augustine grass, the lush
carpet of respectable southern lawns.
A mockingbird, riding an oak branch
in a distant tree, insists on singing
again and again her version of
"pretty, pretty, pretty," a song
carried by the breeze like a soft
blanket covering the sleeping
community.

Efforts to capture the essence of
this droplet of time are difficult. A
canvas can capture only one thin
moment, not the flow of time.

Photographs, precise and powerful,
cannot reproduce the range of
emotions buried deep in the wounds
and wonder of the place. Words on
a page are elusive and often prone
to misunderstanding.

One must stand in the shadowed
tunnel, breathe in the fragrance of
history, listen patiently for faint
sounds of musket fire, overhear
magnolia leaves whisper long held
tales of triumphant and terrible
times, feel the earth tremble from
jarring canon fire and the force of
young men falling to the ground.
Remarkable history is catalogued
in magnolia memories.

Trapped

A guest in my brother's home
Five a.m.
Dark bedroom
Wife asleep
Tiptoe to locate clothes
Crack shins on suitcase
Hold back painful scream
Open bedroom door slowly
Noiseless success
Step into dark family room
Close door gently
Take two steps into darkness
Hear deep throated growl
Freeze in place
Listen
Take one step forward
Hear growl again, closer
Retreat to bedroom door
Open, no regard for noise
Wife sleeps peacefully
Sit in corner rocking chair
Write poem in darkness
Listen for scratching on door
Trapped

Monday Mistake

I rise at four to greet the day,
my wife's asleep and so I say
my morning prayers, explore the news,
make coffee, toast and then I view
the glories of the morning dawn,
a lovely moment quickly gone.
Time to dress, sleep must wait,
time moves on, can't be late.
Shower, shave, select my tie
out the door I've got to fly
to catch the crosstown city bus.
My boss get mad, makes such a fuss
when workers show up late.
An hour passed, no bus appeared,
a situation very weird.
It's always right on time each day
and so to my complete dismay
I've time to sit and read the news,
the headlines, sports and book reviews.
The morning paper stand is near,
I'll grab a copy, then run here
in case my bus comes down the street.
My job awaits, I've got to meet
the timeclock's solemn face.
The paper open on my lap,
two words jump off the page and snap
my brain to startled disbelief,
well, blow me over like a leaf!
I'm in a stunned, confused condition
for on the front page, top position
are shocking words, "Sunday Edition".
But, isn't today Monday?

Rising To The Day

When a spoonful of soft morning light
seeps through the slatted blinds,
the first half-awake movement
is a groggy shift to my right side toward a
small brown clock on the bedside table.
Glowing red numbers watched all night
from the clock face, vigilant as they
flowed through minutes and hours,
recurring red strokes of light portraying
time's passing, clever luminous figures
contorting their electric bodies.
Sunlight begins to drip from the partially
open blinds onto smooth ceramic tiles.
Morning appears as slender white lines
on the cool floor. A strange sense of
obligation, perhaps debt, floats
in my cloudy, waking brain. Debt.
My first emotional encounter of this new
day with a bedside clock.
Sitting on the edge of the still warm bed,
feet dangling into the day, I begin the
Ritual of Rising, the canticle of my daily
wondering. How shall I spend myself in this day?
Where will revealing light penetrate darkness?
On whom will rain fall as a cleansing shower
or as painful tears let loose by an angry sky?
What difference will it make that I rise into
this particular morning?
No answer comes to fill the soundless
moment or to satisfy imagination's curiosity.
Verses of the morning hymn rise in hope, then languish
in a vacuum of silence. A mute world waits for
wisdom's clarity.

Today, pulled between the solid floor and
the soft pillow, as I watched Morning's paintbrush
create fanciful designs on the wall, I heard
a thought, faint at first, singing its way to
the center of my consciousness. On the wings
of sweet melody came hopeful words.

"Rise and Discover."

Don't Look In The Mirror

My doctor's such a gifted man
whose confidence goes hand in hand
with knowledge, wisdom, expertise
in ways that thwart and then decrease
my chance of getting sick.
He knows the meds, the protocols,
the facts on bad cholesterol
which is a red flag on my chart
and goodness knows he is so smart.
I trust him with my life.
But recently, I'm sad to say,
a problem has come into play.
When asked about my aches and pains,
arthritis, gout or muscle strain,
his answer is the same.
The answer starts with just four words
which I prefer be left unheard.
It's all nonsense and can't be true
but facts exist I can't undo.
The mirror doesn't lie.
My doctor's words, politely said,
remind me that the days ahead
will prove that autumn has arrived,
my summer days are now archived.
I'm batting in the ninth.
His answers to my questions start
with those four words that do impart
a clear awareness of my stage
expressed in words: "Well, at your age..."
I hear it every time.
He's such a nice and pleasant man.
I only wish he'd understand
that in my mind I clearly see

a strong, unwrinkled, different me.
Until I take a glance.

Chin Up, It Could Be Worse

Last week I lost my grip on life,
a thousand things went wrong.
My doctor said, "Fill out your will".
The market stalled and went downhill.
My son sent home his college bill!
 I'm trying to be strong!
I thought I had control of things
until my neighbor called:
Someone stole my riding mower,
the cops are pounding on my door
exclaiming words like "Vice", "Hard Core".
 I need a Demerol!
How much more can one man take?
My luck has got to change.
But now they say my bank's gone broke,
my car insurance says "revoke".
You want a dog that's not housebroke?
 My life is just too strange!
My best friend stopped by yesterday
to talk about this curse.
He said: "Don't worry, it won't last.
Today will fade into the past.
Don't let yourself be so downcast.
 Chin up, it could be worse!"
And sure enough my friend was right.
The blues I now disperse
by thinking calm and happy thoughts,
refusing to become distraught,
resisting life's unfair onslaughts --
 and everything is worse!

Hearing, Seeing, Doing

1.

I heard a speech the other day given by an
eloquent speaker whose name I can't remember.

I'll think of it in a minute.

He chose his words very carefully, mannerisms
and movements fit the tone of the talk perfectly
at just the right moments.

His powerful voice, deep and resonant, made
the words sparkle. Everyone should hear him.
The topic? It was, uh... It was about... It'll
come to me. But my point is, you should
hear his guy!

2.

My wife and I went to the movies a couple of
weeks ago and saw one of those digitalized,
action-packed, technologically terrific, out of
this world creations. Great stuff!

Funny, though, but one scene took me right
out of my seat and sent me back to Missoula.

Open prairies, far horizons.

Strange, isn't it, how something you see can
send you skipping back down the corridors
of memory? I must admit that I missed the
middle of the movie because the memory
was so compelling. You ever see something
and momentarily forget where you are
or what you're doing?

3.

Last month my friend invited me to go with
her to a shelter where women and children
sleep if they're homeless. It was a big, gray
metal structure, like a warehouse, filled with
rows and rows of cots. We were part of a group

helping out with meals that day and I was
 stirring a big vat of oatmeal
when I felt my shirt sleeve tugged. For the
next hour I sat on the concrete floor and
talked to with the most beautiful six-year-old
you've ever seen. She told me stories. I
told her stories. She showed me a picture
 of her father who left last year.
She said she missed him very much. School
was fun, she added, when I get to go. We
ate oatmeal together, laughed at each others
jokes, wrote our names on pieces of paper
and exchanged them. When her mother called,
just before my friend walked away, she gave
me a big hug and said, "thank you".

My world changed that day.
I changed.
Everything changed.
The way I see people.
Value them.
Care about them.

The hug did it.

Throwing Rocks At The Sky

He said: "Let's throw rocks at the sky tonight
when the stars come out to tease us."

So we sat near an old china berry tree,
his pile of rocks, and my pile of rocks,
lounging in the musty smell of dead
china berries mashed into the damp
soil around us: soft, sweet decay.

He threw a smooth stone, hit a limb and showered our heads
with hard yellow berries, gnarled,
juiceless beads reluctant to leave
the branch but drawn by their own
force to the earth.

I threw a flat one. Spinning, humming, it jumped
from my finger tip but whirred away
to nowhere. Soaring, silent arch.

He took a round one, said it felt like a musket ball
in the war, smooth and cold; rolled
it in the palm of his hand, a dark
creviced planet trying to escape its
circular captivity.

Then he hurled it at the sky with a grunting breath
that thrust it on its way. We both
watched the darkness swallow it,
and then a star went out but I
never saw it fall to earth.

Brighter Days

I shall wait for brighter days
and bluer skies.
I know they will come in spite
of the moment's darkness.
I know a crimson rose will appear
on the trellis beneath my window
and
yellow daffodils will dance with
the west wind in the evening.
Not if, but when.
If not today, perhaps tomorrow.
An inward certainty.
An assurance that fills all
the crevices of the soul.

In that time peace will prove stronger
than the coldness of violent minds,
hope will rise above the shroud
of disappointment and doubt,
truth will smile as deceit and arrogance
are disrobed
in the pure light of honest discourse.
I am impatient for the new morning.
The night is long.
The candle burns so slowly.
The mockingbird waits to sing
in brighter days under bluer skies.

Red Chair

His most illuminating thoughts spring to life
from the red chair, the one there
in the corner under the rather
unremarkable metal floor lamp.

The green chair would be out
of the question. It lacks the
capacity to produce creative
imagination. Only the red chair
can prompt the pen to pristine
white paper, inspire adverbs to
amazing heights, or construct a
lovely poem for his wife on the
occasion of their anniversary.

The red chair is a mystical
haven in which his brain flies
free to think and create in
flowing prose or melodic
poetry.

Some suggest the red chair's
unnatural nature is related to the
luxuriously thick sitting cushion,
or the hefty padded arms like
Aunt Clara's when he visits her on
Saturday mornings. It does not,
however, cast its spell on everyone.

A neighbor sat in the red chair
for an hour yesterday and never
had an important thought, not one,
much less a creative insight. Although
one would not expect that of him.
Apparently the magic seeped slowly
into the joints and sinews of the
red chair from the unconventional life

of a local resident, a woman who
acquired it in India many years ago
but recently relegated it to the
curb for a final pilgrimage to the
county dump.

Rescued and resuscitated, the
red chair occupies the creative
center of his universe, for which he
and it are grateful. When he sank
into the soft cushions this morning
the red chair gave him a warm hug
and whispered, "I've got some words
for you."

The Latest In A Series...

She rose early this morning, scanned the
chapter on Roman History one more time
before the second period test, got dressed,
walked slowly to the front door, then
hesitated as if she didn't want to open it.

*Santa Fe, TX; Palmdale, CA; Ocala, FL;
Raytown, MD; Gloversville, NY*

The blue uniform is neatly pressed, badge in
place, shoes shined. That's the way he
was taught at the Police Academy. As
he walks to his squad car he
thinks about the morning headline.

*Lexington Park, MD; Seaside, CA;
Mobile, AL; Birmingham, AL;
Jackson, MS*

Senior English has been her love and her
specialty for twenty years. She teaches
with passion and deep commitment. Today
she weeps at her desk before the class arrives.

*Mount Pleasant, MI; Norfolk, VA; Itta Bena, MS;
Savannah, GA; Parkland, FL*

He went to bed angry and got up the same
way. Being treated unfairly, he said.

Taken advantage of, he claimed.

He sticks the semi-automatic pistol
in his belt, under his shirt, as he
gets into his car.

*Nashville, TN; Oxon Hill, MD; Los Angeles, CA;
Philadelphia, PA; Benton, KY*

The minister addresses the congregation with words
of hope and healing. Then he prays for an end
to all the violence in the country, especially
violence directed toward innocent children.

"Lord, do something to stop this."

Italy, TX; Winston-Salem, NC

Twenty-two school shootings since January 1.

Twenty-two and counting.

"The latest in a series of school shootings..."

is the standard beginning for the recurring
newscast that terrifies every parent and
family. And shames us all.

Prayer is good.

Constructive, determined conversation, too.

Action is best

Invisible Walls

No floating feathers.
No dazed bird on his back.
Just an imprint on the large
glass window, evidence of
a contest with an invisible wall.
The other day I hit a wall,
but I saw it coming. The bird
didn't. I had already begun to
apply the brakes. I knew what
was about to happen.
The project had gone south,
nothing was working like it was
supposed to, my interest was
drained, all resources depleted.
I looked up and said to myself
"That's it. Finished."
Thud.
On the other side of an invisible wall,
clear transparent glass,
things usually look so good,
so easy, so manageable.
Just reach out and take it.
Come and get it.
But it's not always that simple.
Invisible walls hurt,
body and emotions.
Ask the three hummingbirds
I've picked up from the concrete
patio after each bent his beak on
the glass door.
But,
a little tenderness, a gentle stroke or two
on the head, an encouraging word

seem to work and off they
fly until the next invisible wall
comes along.
They happen.
To everyone.
Feathered friends,
folks like me.
They hurt.
Life.

Song In The Trees

Sometimes, when the cool morning breeze
is just right, all the noise in my mind is
napping, and I sit perfectly still in
the green slatted rocker on the
back porch, I hear a song
floating through the oak
trees down the hill.

It rises and falls like a lullaby sung
in a loving whisper as the infant's
eyelids give in to sleep. There are no
words, not even an easily discernible
melody. Some mornings I just want to
hum, be part of the song I do not
understand. An inherent invitation calls
me into the musical mystery.

I dared to try yesterday. As oak leaves shook
with delight at the wind's appearing, an
irresistible invitation became too
strong to ignore. I opened my
mouth to sing and breathed
in the missing pieces of
my soul.

I sit most mornings now on the back
porch anticipating the sun's welcome
arrival and those charming musical
notes dancing with oak leaves and eager
branches. I still don't know the song,
but it seems to know me.

Birthing A Poem

To create a poem is to see beyond words
sprinkled on a clean page. As the touch of oil and
brush on canvas discloses a brilliant sunset, so
a poem is conceived in the art of delicate
positioning and the imaginative coupling
of common words.

A poem is a careful, sometimes inexplicable acknowledgement
of sounds, a musing light that flickers in the corner of the
mind, overshadowed often by the rush of ideas racing
through the brain, declaring their importance,
demanding accommodation and attention.

An idea flares.

A poem glows.

In a vital way, a poem addresses the
heart of humanity as both prophet and
prescription, providing the imagination with
thoughtful possibility or inquisitive observation.

An aligning of words in shape and form unknown
before, never constructed in exactly this unique
manner, a poem leaves footprints where none
existed before, an imprinting upon creation of
impressions and symbols uniquely born for the
moment. Once done, a poem, regardless of
accolades or applause, lives forever, never
stops floating through a universe that is
conscious of the distinct worth
of a little flame waiting in the
shadowy corners of a
human mind.

How Fast Is Fast Enough

There was a time when the slender
pointer on my speedometer
lived on the high side of the dial.

I used a lot of gas, burned a quart
of oil now and then, but
the ride was worth it!

Then, speedometers had hands
that moved around a circular
dial in direct relationship to
the decibel output of glass packed
mufflers. My back fenders wore
skirts, my rear end was dropped
two inches, and the wide white
sidewalls gleamed surrounding
flashy chrome hubcaps.

That's about the best you can do
with a '41 Chevy sedan.

Not a lot to work with.

Today time, ingenuity, and plastic
have redefined the car I drive.

A digital speedometer tops out
at 150, but I don't make it
much above 60 these days.

I don't seem to be in such
a hurry anymore. I actually
enjoy seeing things along the
way, really seeing, instead
of insisting that the wind
ripple my hair, which
now be a physical
impossibility
according
to my

mirror.

I used to think about speed, horsepower,
cubic inches, and superchargers.

I slept with Hot Rod magazine
under my pillow.

But,

it's a different world,
a different time, and
I'm a different man.

Now it's energy saving,
environment, hybrids and GPS
since the edges of my memory
aren't as sharp as they used to be.

The trip is slower, the
chassis has changed, but
the journey is equally
exciting.

In last Sunday's sermon, my pastor
asked, rhetorically, "How fast is
fast enough?"

Well, I think it was that,
and now it's this,
and that's the way life is.
And that works for me.

The Poem That Will Never End

A hummingbird nest
is a great place to rest
if you're tiny enough to fit in.
A pool in the sun
is remarkably fun
but always protect your fair skin.
A home by the sea?
It's apparent to me
that I should possess one or two.
And if I should win
the lottery, friend,
I'll be happy to share it with you.
The temperature here
is getting too near
an astonishing 110.
But what can I do?
Just sweat and stay true
to this poem that will never end.
I wish I knew
what this rhyme's going to do.
These words are making no sense.
If I could just cease
or merely decrease
the onslaught of wordy nonsense.
But they fly to the page
as if in a rage
to fill all the spaces and lines.
I'm out of control!
Oh, Lord, save my soul!
Let me leave all this rhyming behind.
It all started well
but now I can tell
this poem's become quite a chore.

There's no end in sight.
I might as well write
until I fall dead on the floor.
Please, words take a rest!
I'm doing my best
to maintain a good attitude.
But night draws so near
and it's perfectly clear
this poem will never conclude.
Someday when I stand
in front of The Man,
I'll ask a favor, please Sir.
I respectfully say
I need a delay.
With this I pray you concur.

This poem began
when I, a young man,
set pen to paper one day.
The volumes I wrote!
The lines and the notes
contained what a poem should say.
Now decades have gone
and I've carried on
with no end in foreseeable view.
I'm old and I'm tired,
and I've often desired
to announce with bold voice: "I'm through!"
But words will not cease,
nor will they decrease.
All day and all night they descend.
My life's a footnote
to the fact that I wrote
The Poem That Will Never End.

Early Light

Against the blackness of early morning
my reflection in the glass patio door
is multiplied, an optical delusion. Two
of me returns my gaze. Which is me?
I overlap myself.

My hope for this new day is an awareness
of a sacred singularity that celebrates
difference, yet joins all things, all beings,
in the reality of The One.

I hope for faith grounded in wisdom,
trust and kindness...harmony of thought
and will as the result of the peaceful union
of divergent voices...and peace replacing
the taste of greed and violence in our
mouths.

Faint light peeks shyly around the partially
drawn curtain. Morning is not far behind.
Slowly she moves across the garden,
climbs deep green vines clinging to the
stone wall, then casts her smile on two
sparrows as they toss fresh water into
the air from the shallow birdbath.

Early morning's somber light suddenly
bursts golden as the sun makes clear
the arrival of day, erasing all reflected
delusions.

I am one with One.

Wandering

I woke this morning
determined to experience
the day in a different
way. Today I will wander.

No plan. No compass.
Completely at the call
of imagination.

I will be a determined
deviant ignoring imposed
expectations, presumptions,
and road maps drawn by
those with calculated
destinations.

I will taste, smell, and hear
without analysis or dissection.

I will appreciate at least
fourteen things, learn something
new, and pay attention to all
that appears improbable.

By sunset I will have been
grateful for something insignificant,
helpful to a stranger, and aware
of an impossible possibility.

I will be free of all lists,
schedules, and
calendars.

Perhaps I should print all
this as a guide to the
freedom offered by
simple wandering.

Beautiful Child

O beautiful child, rise within me.
Show me how to laugh and live.

There is a beautiful child
in all of us.
She lives in the deepest place
of our souls
where spontaneity and surprise
overrule the grimness of getting
through the day.
She flaps her arms to soar with
hawks through feathery white clouds,
falls down in delight to examine
a blue flowered weed
pushing its way through the sidewalk crack,
cartwheels down the bread aisle
at the market,
and asks the homeless guy on the corner
his name.
She is fearless,
innocently faultless,
disarming in a gentle way,
unpolished,
easily provoked to dance.
She thinks that if she stretches
tall enough she can
really reach a star.

O beautiful child,
wanderer in my soul,
rise within me.
Soften the jagged
edges of my life.

Waking Sounds

Early morning sounds, eager
to be heard, float impatiently through
the house, waiting for sleep to
loosen her grip and the final
curtain to fall on dreams that
will puzzle in the waking.

The dog's raspy breathing,
muffled whirring from the
refrigerator, a rush of air as
the furnace joins the orchestra,
the house's snaps and pops
as it stretches in the
retreating darkness.

A sound symphony.

May my awaking open my
ears to all the sounds of life,
those that bless and those that
curse. May I be compassionately
conscious of sounds that rise from
human need, as I am gratefully
aware of melodies gifted by
beauty and joy.

And in my waking to life's sounds, may
I resolve to speak and act with
understanding and kindness
throughout the day.

May I become a sacred sound.

For Aaron

In the course of thoughtful living,
life altering decisions are shaped
from a recipe of careful analysis,
examined alternatives, and
reasoned consideration.
It is the wise way to live.
But on that day,
when fear hardened into
cold terror,
pondering possibilities was
the last thing in panicked minds.
No reasoning.
No alternatives.
Impulse without calculation.
Reaction not rational response.
In that breathless moment he
stepped into the pathway of death,
goodness denying the demonic.
Sacrifice rising to the sacred.
No one will ever know what
went through Aaron's mind.
We will never understand
the instant impulse to
shield the child,
save her life
and lose his own.
One died so that one could live.
The question lingering in the aftermath
is not "why did he do it?"
but "why was it necessary for
such heroism in such horror?"

To be willing to step in front
of a bullet for a friend is the
epitome of courage and compassion.

To be willing to confront the
circumstances prompting
such a sacrifice is to look into
the mirror and see ourselves.

"Greater love has no one that this,
that someone lay down his life
for his friends."

John 15:13

Aaron Feis

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

Parkland, Florida

February 14, 2018

Madness In The Air

There are days when I watch
her sweep through the house,
swing the blue backpack over her
right shoulder and dash toward
the door.

I hear the soft trailing of her voice,
"Bye, Dad. Love you."

There is a joy the comes in that moment,
a sensation of sweetness that lingers
when I pick up the towel she used
or pull the covers up on her bed.

No one can fathom the raging pain
of knowing that she will never walk
through that door again,
never laugh at my silly jokes,
never again roll her eyes as she
ignores fatherly advice.

Never.

I sent her through that door this morning
to learn and to laugh and to grow
into the young woman she was
destined to become.

Now the stained blue backpack
that I clutch to my chest confirms
the horrid truth:

There is madness in the air.

They tell me tears will come.

Perhaps.

Maybe tears will soften the rage
that electrifies my mind and
binds my body in this chair
facing the door, the door
that will never again

welcome her home
to my heart.

Today Will Be Today

Today will be like no other
day in the history of humankind,
perhaps in the dusty annals of the expanding universe.

Today the oak tree in my front yard
will sway differently in the winter wind,
not like it did yesterday or last month.
Today will be its own unique dance.

My wife will be her self
in a way that neither she nor I have known before,
not really the same person I
began to love sixty years ago,
not even the same person I embraced sixty minutes ago.

Maggie, our black Lab, will scratch her floppy right ear
like she does many times everyday
but not like she has ever done before.
Not the same. Not today.

Voices drifting from the neighbor's yard,
a bird's song rising,
slate gray clouds hanging low
in the December sky,
my heart's rhythmical throb,
the train whistle calling me
from miles away,
even the silence that nourishes my soul,
nothing will be the same as ever before.

What was was.
What will be will be.
Today will be today.

Morning Walk

This morning a mockingbird
sang to me
from the highest branch of
an oak tree on the far side of
the barbed wire fence.

Her song trebled and tumbled
across the pasture;
rolling notes
up and down the scale,
spilling out into the bright morning,
filling the air with
joyful elegance.

I am happily reminded
that joy is found in the song,
in the singing
in the unrestrained release of
soul and spirit
given to the world,
freely.

May the song of my life
bring joy and peace
to all who
hear.

May I sing with hope
born of trust,
nurtured in the mystery
of living.

Spaciousness

In the seventh decade of my life
I am beginning to understand that
life's richness or poverty is determined
by the size of one's soul,

That narrow, constricted souls
allow so little light, tolerate so few mysteries
and moments of wonder, provide such
limited space for sacred imagination,

That the revealing of life's fullness
is somehow connected to
the soul's spaciousness,
an expansiveness that is not
afraid to make room for all
that is breathtakingly beautiful
and all that is brittle and broken.

I no longer seek to understand
or even to experience, only to
be daily aware that the
size of my soul is sufficient to
contain more than my mind can
grasp, that in the limitless soul space
I am able to hear a gentle voice inviting
me to sit down in awe among the
yellow flowers on the mountain.

Watching Butterflies

Today I watched butterflies
from a lacquered brown bench
in the shade of an elegant
Morning Glory tree.
Soft green leaves fluttered,
anticipating the desert morning's delight.
In a sun speckled dance,
they swayed to the notes
of a silent symphony
meant only for the trees to entertain.

Purple sage blossoms reached out to the
darting tongues of
grateful hummingbirds.
Invisible wings vibrated the air,
graceful ballerinas pirouetting to
the music of the morning.

From the branches of a twisted, ancient mesquite
a silhouetted Robin,
dark and motionless in the shadows,
raised his voice,
a grand announcement
of their arrival.
And they appeared.

Polished golden nuggets
suspended in the air.
Brilliant yellow delicacies
floating gracefully
on fickle shafts of air that
drove them higher,
then caught them gently as they fell

in momentary emptiness.

Yellow butterflies. Everywhere,
filling the blue sky
with the exquisite joy of play.

Morning's Visit

Morning comes calling like an old friend
stopping by to chat awhile.

"Sit down," I say,

"and tell me of your journey
through the morning stars.

Tell me, does night retreat reluctantly?

Is the sun easily awakened
to fill the world with light?

Do the winds speak
kindly as you pass through?

Are the mountains welcoming
when you glide over them
and descend so gracefully
into my valley?"

Morning comes to sit awhile
and with each arrival she
fills my spirit with
cosmic wonder,
my heart with hope.

Singing To The Mountain

This morning, as first light seeps over the mountains
and drifts into my valley,
I will stand on the sandy crest behind my home,
face to the glowing peaks,
and I will sing to the sunrise as she wraps her arms
around the summit.

Vibrant green from sweet winter rains,
canyons and rock falls emerge from soft shadows,
coaxed into the day by a paintbrush dipped in
orange amazement.
I will add my voice to announce the unfolding.

The melody will be measures of greeting and gratitude.
I will cup my hands around my mouth
and I will megaphone
the fortissimo
of my heart.

Mountain sheep will lift their heads from dewy grass,
soaring birds will swoon in the updraft of delight,
atop the highest peak aspens and pines
will sway in the vibration of
note upon note.
Little gray rabbits will stand on their hind legs,
twitching their ears;
even the rocks will pulse
in the crescendo
of sheer joy.

My companion in song
will be the tiny desert wren
perched on the highest branch of the mesquite

behind me.

She glories in song.

She will be the descant of all creation,
the combined voices of every living thing that
cannot hold back the praise.

We will exhaust ourselves in song
until we can sing no more.

Then,

she on her high altar perch
and me,
sitting in the hand of the warming earth,
will listen to the echoes and
reverberations
returning as the mountain's reply.

Words

Words no longer have wings.

They are conceived in long held convictions but they fall lifeless onto the page.

Somewhere between the brilliant idea and the black ink they are exhausted of meaning and become corpses neatly spaced on an empty page.

I do not mourn the death of dogmatic utterance.

Hollow words satisfy only those whose minds are barricaded by the dark fear of what might be.

No remorse.

I smile at the wonder of ambiguous uncertainty.

One Man Alone

What if tomorrow is not like today?
What if the things I wanted to say
are lost in the winds of permanent change,
friends are gone and all that remains
is one man who walks the world alone,
a man who invites the lifeless stones
to sing the last chorus of the very last song?
Where did we err? Tell me, what went wrong?
I am cursed to live my days and nights
among mountains and trees, beautiful sights
crafted as gifts to the human race,
but there was no smile on the angel's face
as she boarded the fluffy, departing cloud
and spoke to me, the one-man crowd:
Make friends with the stones, unfortunate man,
for all this is yours, and here you stand
alone, abandoned by the source of your soul.
The warnings were there and you were told
that killing the earth would exact a price,
but you turned your back to that sacred advice.
You pillaged and raped the vulnerable earth,
the dirt God scooped up to give you birth.
So, now it's yours, all that you see.
This is the way it will always be.
If all my tomorrows are just like today,
to whom shall I kneel and honestly say:
I'm desperately sorry for the pain of the land,
the pain I've caused with these greedy hands.
Is it too late for mercy, too late to forgive?
What can I offer? What can I give
to buy one more chance before it's too late?
Completely alone? Is that my fate?
I so regret the seeds I've sown,

for here I stand, completely alone.

The Pain of Forgetting

Today I remembered fourteen things,
the square root of seven, how a Lark sings,
the sound rain makes on a Spring afternoon,
the lyrics to popular Broadway tunes,
but that, in itself, is no claim to fame,
for I can no longer remember your name.

Few things in life terrify more.
Nobody told me what was in store.
I look at your picture, your beautiful face
and I feel the shame, the awful disgrace
of losing myself along the way,
forgetting your name, unable to say
why I am here, why we're apart,
why this dagger of pain in my heart.
I am no longer the man you knew.
I am lost, my love; what shall I do?

We were never promised life's fair shake,
but always told it's our to take
if we have the courage and will to try.
Some days we'll laugh, some days cry,
but I never knew until today
that the pain of forgetting could be this way.
I simply can't remember you,
the joys and sorrows we've been through.

Today I remembered fourteen things
but why does the Robin no longer sing?
Why do I wake with a sense of fright,
alone and confused in the darkness of night?
Where the stars that used to shine?
Where the one forever mine?

Fourteen things, proven and true?

Do they matter at all if I don't know you?

Speak Now

I wish for a voice of golden tone
that would rise through the clouds
to the sacred throne,
among the angels and the heavenly host,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
best known on the air from coast to coast
as mascots of those who shout and boast
about what it means to love this land,
who dictate the times to kneel or stand
as a patriot child of blood and tears,
plucking the strings of our hate and fear.

I've always wished for a velvet voice,
but with the wish comes a difficult choice.
Do I wait for my dream to finally come true?
In my heart I know what I must do,
speak now while courage rises strong,
speak for the poor, address the wrongs
that create the discord, increase the strife
suffocate hope, disregard life.

I have no choice but to speak the words,
say the truth, demand to be heard.
When thoughtful reason comes into play,
perhaps we will know a better day.
But now, in this moment, I am compelled to say
that justice and mercy must lead the way,
that solutions reside, not in pompous words,
but in truth that always demands to be heard
when courage and hope join hands.

Tiny Hand

I am going home by a different way.
I knew there was danger when I heard him say
he would like to kneel before the child.
His face was flushed and his eyes were wild.
Fear was written across that face.
"Report back to me exactly the place
where I may go and meet him, too."
I think I know what he would do.
The risk is too great, the danger real,
so I shall pack and quietly steal
away in the darkness of night.
I shall find another way home.

I am going home in a different way.
I will always remember that glorious day.
When our eyes briefly met and he smiled at me
I felt the earth tremble and I could see
the face of God in this little boy.
I felt a great rush of perfect joy.
When I reached to him and his hand touched mine,
I felt my heart break, a heavenly sign.
I expected a palace, a royal estate
but that, I know now, was a great mistake.
A holy essence was revealed to me
and because of him I shall always be
transformed, a different man.

Two little words. Do you see?
Is he God revealed or a curiosity?
I'm going home a different man
all because of that tiny hand.

Dare To Dream

When I was a young man, just finding my way,
I planned all my steps from day to day.
I tried to avoid uncertainties,
opting, instead, for what would be
safe and practical ways to proceed,
choices I knew would clearly lead
to outcomes that I could predict and control.
Avoiding unknowns was my foremost goal.

But as the months turned into years,
I began to see that failure and tears
are teachers as much as rewards or acclaim
and I vowed to change the rules of my game.
I will no longer hide from my fears,
I will embrace and hold them near,
not as a force that calls me on,
nor as the light that signals the dawn.

Tell me, what is life without the chances we take,
and who are we if we do not make
every effort to live beyond expectations and schemes,
to turn from our fears and live into our dreams?
Looking back over all the years that have passed,
I discover deep joy in saying, at last,
in the years that remain, be they many or few,
I shall live in a way that I once never knew.
More of my dreams and less of my fears,
wisdom attained over all these years.

Faith That Engages Life

It all began with "dos" and "don'ts":
"I promise I will...I promise I won't"
He heard "shame on you, such a naughty child;
you'll go to hell if you act so wild."
The warnings, the threats, condemning words
shaped the lives of all who heard.
So, why, when he's grown to be a man,
would he buy such a self-destructive plan
that denies the worth of his humanity,
that substitutes shame for humility?
Is it really true that by amazing grace,
that because Jesus suffered and died in his place,
that he is no longer a "wretch like me",
that what Jesus did somehow set him free?
Does religion discount common sense?
What's the point of reason? Must we dispense
with the work of our minds, endorse the pretense
that denies we are all children of Light,
blessed and gifted in Creation's sight?
All the "dos" and "don'ts" don't matter at all;
it's not about mangers or humanity's fall.
It's about believing that life is good
and that the gospel of Jesus, when understood,
engages life, instills hope and joy,
gathers up our childish toys
and gives us, instead, the courage to see
the fullness of life as it was meant to be.

Wings

You have to have wings to imagine
how else could I fly among glittering stars
spread a picnic lunch on the face of Mars
drive Bill Elliott's Indy car
shoot a round twelve under par
enjoy my Russian Caviar
play Mozart on my old guitar
finally finish my long memoir
happen upon the perfect sea star
and throw it back to the sea
Don't know about you, but it occurs to me
that you have to have wings to imagine.
Now, you may think I'm behind the times
but life makes more sense when all the words rhyme
when word-sounds create lovely harmony
that's when I begin to see
how alike we are, you and me,
made of the same galaxy dust
designed to live with simple trust
to fly with eagles, sing songs of praise
be filled with joy in the best of days
to see in the darkness the little light
that calms and soothes my deepest fright
the tiny flicker that seems to say
"don't worry, friend. I won't go away."

I really don't care what people say
for me there simply is no other way
Do you mind if I say it once more today?
You've got to have wings to imagine.

Decisions At Dawn

I have choices to make at the dawn of the day,
and what I decide very well may
determine the fate of humanity,
everything rests on little old me.
But I shall not surrender to evil or fear,
let me make this point perfectly clear.
You, too, have a role in this dawning day.
So much depends on what we say,
but even more on what we do.
I ask you, friend, to think this through.
Let's live this day as if the last,
honor the moment, release the past,
look for the best, expect nothing less,
love from the heart, help clean up the mess
that violence and greed always leave behind,
live from the heart as well as the mind.
Yes, I have a role to play in this day.
With courage and faith, come what may,
I'll live for the best, the highest good.
Do you think there's a way, that maybe we could
walk together across the stage,
make a difference somehow on history's page?
We have choices to make at the dawn of this day.
Together, let's choose what to do, what to say.
If we have the will, there will be a way.
Here, take my hand. Let's welcome today.

Don't Let It Slip Away

Don't give up on hope,
don't let it slip away.
If it's all you have and nothing more,
find a way to make it stay.
In spite of despair, defeat or doubt
this could be a life-changing day
if you swallow your pride, drop to your knees,
humble yourself enough to pray.
If hope is all that remains in your life,
do everything you can to make it stay.

All is well and all is well,
no matter what the headlines read.
Here in this moment of frustration and doubt,
you have the one thing you really need.
It's called hope and it comes to the brave and the strong.
Don't wring your hands, grovel or plead.
Stand up and face the challenges head-on.
Defy the odds, plant a seed.
A forest grows from so simple a deed.

Don't give up on hope,
don't let it slip away.
Once gone, it's so hard to restore.
Muster the courage to seize the day.
Don't hid from the challenge,
don't run away.
Stay!

Cashmere Night

The cashmere night fell soft,
drifting, flowing,
draping the shadowed mountain
in an elegant onyx robe,
filling canyons and crevices,
painting jagged stone bluffs in deep, rich blackness.
Soon the gift of quiet followed,
the noise and clatter of the day
subdued and finally
silenced.

We watched the sun slowly
sink into a watery horizon,
last rays becoming shafts of
dusky gold.
We hummed a simple tune,
wordless accompaniment to day's departure,
until I realized that my sound alone
bade farewell to the visible.
You slept. So gracefully, as if you had
been swept from my arms and
carried away with the last notes of
the fading song.

Gently, so gently I lifted you from the
warm grass and, like an acolyte carrying all
that is sacred, I walked along the
moonlit path to the place where
earth and heaven embrace.
You smiled once, still deep in sleep.
And the vast sweep of stars, newly arrived in the
infant night, ceased their twinkling
in deference to the sheer delight

of looking upon your face.

The Very Best Day Of The Week

Yesterday I was asked to say
the name I considered the perfect day,
which of the seven I thought to be best,
far superior to all the rest.
It took a second, or maybe two
for me to state what I already knew.
It certainly won't be Monday.

If Sunday's considered the week's first day,
yet still is a day for relaxing and play,
then Monday becomes a grim number two,
and it's back to the workplace, so much to do,
files and phone calls, a belligerent boss.
I really think it wise if we toss
Monday off the list.

Let's move from seven to six fine days,
eliminate Monday so that I might say
the name of the weekday I admire the most,
so lift your glass to this meaningful toast:
Here's to Thursday, that most remarkable day,
the one of which most people say:
Thank God, it isn't a Monday.

I don't understand the reasons why
grown men break down; they weep and they cry
when the sun comes up on a Monday morn,
some of them wish they'd never been born.
I wonder, though, if Tuesday will mind,
for it won't take long for people to find
that it's Monday all over again.

Yesterday I was asked to say

the name I considered the perfect day,
when out of the blue, like heaven sent,
came the very best answer: I have no comment.
But I still don't like Mondays at all.

I Am Unique

I learned today what I never knew:
I am unique, just like you.
I'm one of a kind on the face of the earth.
My uniqueness began on the day of my birth,
and no matter how much I complain or try,
I'll be this way 'til the day I die.
Maybe longer.
My thumb print belongs only to me.
Uniqueness determines how I see.
Nobody else can claim to be
exactly, precisely, unequivocally me.
I told my wife all this interesting stuff
and she replied: "One's probably enough."
So, if I am unique and you are, too,
my life-long dream will never come true.
I've always wanted to be like you:
composed, serene, red-white-and blue.
You're the kind of person I'd like to be
but I guess what you get is what you see:
the uniquely, ordinary, common me.
Get ready, St. Peter, I've a question or two
before I decide if I'm going to step through
the doorway marked "Eternal Life."
I'm asking this on behalf of my wife.
Am I forever just what you see,
any chance there might be another me?
Is my uniqueness a blessing or is it a curse?
Could I be different; better or worse?
Ok, I got it! I understand.
I am forever this unique man.
I think I'll wait before breaking the news.
She might decide she's nothing to lose.

It's not easy being unique like me.
And since you are, too, don't you agree?

And So You Remain Forever

The sun rises slowly in the eastern sky,
reluctant, hesitant to release light into somber darkness.
Songbirds of the morning have prepared glorious overtures,
but now, but now those symphonies seem inadequate,
and a sacred hush settles over the mourning valley.
Yesterday songs issuing from the forested mountainside
announced the joy of the new day, but that was yesterday and
you were here
you were here
you were here.

I've never felt words so misshapen in my mouth,
sharp-edged words that cut and tear,
never minding what or whom they bleed.
How can the universe change so rapidly,
succumb to the ferocity of grief
so majestically? All because yesterday
you were here
you were here
you were here
And now you are not.

There is a jagged tear in the fabric of life,
our lives. A cold wind paralyzes all efforts to smile,
but we know time and memory will slowly seal
the unwanted, unexpected wound,
suture the sadness back into wholeness again.
And some day, soon we hope, we will touch the
place in our hearts where there was once unspeakable grief,
and we will smile, dare to laugh because
you were here

you were here

you were here

And so you remain forever.

The Almost Poet

My friend and I had a talk today,
and to my surprise I heard him say
that he's given up all efforts to write
with style and grace, not the usual trite
little rhymes that garner a giggle or two.
Those days are gone. He says he's through.
That from this day forward, for better for worse,
he will stick to shallow, mindless verse,
the kind one finds on greeting cards,
a few simple words that aren't so hard
for the average mind to comprehend.
Yes, mark this day, poetic friends
as the culmination, the sorrowful end
to become what, in fact, he could only pretend.
My friend shed a tear when he told me the news,
said he'll miss the joy of admiring reviews
in poetic journals, collections of note.
He stuttered and stammered, had a frog in his throat
as he waved goodbye to a dream unfulfilled.
His parting words, I can hear them still:
will you do me a favor as I go over the hill?
Can you tell me a word that rhymes with tranquil?
So, goodbye to my friend, The Almost Poet.
Can you think of that word? Anyone know it?

Bow Upon String

Glide, beautiful bow, across the waiting strings,
softly at first, caress the waking sounds,
timid sounds, reluctant to be revealed.

Gently, bow, ever so gently.

Feel the notes quiver at the marriage
of bow and string, shimmering sounds that
come from the belly of the exquisite instrument,
the consummation of creative embrace.

O, breathless moment, as notes accept the
beautiful inevitability of combination, connection,
until soundless voids echo, vibrate;
all that is dry and lifeless blossoms in the creative
mix of note embracing note, linking, losing individual
identity, willingly, joyfully
to become the nectar of angels.

Now, bow. Now. Move with passionate precision.
Thrust and parry. Dance upon the strings
until they release the last ounce of
life's luxury and necessity.
Give us bread to sustain,
wine to fill vacant chalices.
A swallow of the sacred.
O, magnificent bow, flood
the soul of the universe.
Make Music.

What if...

Why is she alone?
Maybe waiting for a friend, a lover?
So delicate, understated charm.
What if I cleared my throat, maybe
she would look around. Or, what if I
knocked my water glass over. She might
turn, full face of beauty.
What if...

What if I just walked over there and said
"I think I love you."
She might laugh, think it was a joke,
or that I was trying to win a bet.
But what if she smiled and threw
herself into my arms.
What if she kissed me and said,
"I love you, too."
Maybe.
What if...

What if we got married and moved to Portland.
Three kids, two dogs, a nice house in the country.
I could read to her every night and she
could laugh at my corny jokes.
What if she said, "I've never been this happy before"
as we walked along the Columbia River bank
and I picked a little white wild flower and stuck it in her hair.
What if...

See, she's getting up. Turn my way, please.

Here. Look this way.

She moved gracefully to
the front door, paused for a heartbeat,
her left hand on the doorknob.

Uncertain about what to do?

Where to go?

Then she stepped into the night,
the little bell on the door frame sadly
announcing her leaving.

And she was gone.

The lighted sign over the bar flickered twice.

What if...

I Have Wondered...

Have you ever looked back and wondered "why?"
Some days are pearls under clear blue skies.
Songs fill the air, mockingbirds sing,
no end to the beauty that life can bring.

Then there are days, when, for no reason at all,
the sun won't shine, temperatures fall,
it's frigid and dark, a wretched day
when joy is undone and swept away.

Do you look back at the life you've lived
and wonder what blessing you've been able to give
to family and friends over all these years
in the midst of sunshine and sometimes tears?

I've wondered as I look back to see
the paths I've taken that shaped and formed me,
the purpose, the meaning? These years have flown by
and now in this moment I sit down to try
to see how the pieces have fallen in place.
Times when good fortune or unrecognized grace
caused me to turn to the left, not the right.
To attempt, to endeavor, sometimes in spite
of all the odds that say "Don't try."
And I've looked in the mirror to ask, simply, "Why?"

Have I made a difference? Did I build or destroy?
Did I leave the footprints of peace or joy?
These haunting questions fill my mind
and sometimes the answers I cannot find.

And I wonder how I will be inclined
to interpret the score on this life-card of mine.

Runs, hits, and errors...some of each
but each one a moment that tried to teach
that life is simpler than I try to propose,
the answer most often is right under my nose.
It's the people I've loved, and who've loved me, too.
It's the times we pulled each other through
the good and the bad, hand in hand.
The times we've been called to courageously stand
for justice and truth in the darkest hour.
The times I've admitted that an un-namable power
prompts the better part of me,
and, in my blindness, helps me see
that perfection is not the goal to seek.
Fulfillment is to bless the poor and the weak.
Have you ever looked back and wondered "Why?"
Only to hear: Stand up and try.

You Must Begin To End

You have to start to finish.

You must begin to end.

Only a fool or a lazy man
expects a reward, but never began.

Nothing comes on a platter of gold.
How many times have you been sold
a lie that sounded too good to be true,
something you instinctively knew
would never work and didn't?

A word of advice from a friend, if you will.
No result will come unless and until
you roll up your sleeves and give it a go,
pace yourself, start out slow.
And before you know it, you've made it through,
if you want it done, it's up to you.
How many times have I heard people say:
"Well, this is certainly not my lucky day."
Well, luck, my friend, is what you do,
from start to finish, seeing it through.
And that's because this saying is true:
You have to start to finish.
You must begin to end.

Visit To The Dentist

God give me strength to face this day!
Something terrible is on the way.
I feel in my bones a sense of fright.
My heart beats fast, my muscles are tight.
Ominous is the proper word.
My wife says my fear is simply absurd,
but she doesn't face the terror I do,
she doesn't know what I'll go through.
"Open wide." I hate those words,
the scariest words I've ever heard.

First comes the pick and then the drill.
"Don't wiggle or twitch; by all means sit still."
His voice sounds like Satan, raspy and gruff.
I say to myself: "I will be tough."
Then I hear the sound of the drill,
whining and screeching, a deathly shrill.
"Be sure to tell me if you feel any pain."
This man has a drill and he's completely insane.
I can feel the enamel begin to fly;
tears roll on my cheeks as I start to cry.
I forgot to tell my dog "goodbye."
If you see my wife, tell her I tried
to be a man and endure the pain,
but, alas, I succumbed to the terrible strain.

"Okay, my friend, all my work is done.
Enjoy the day and have some fun."
You mean that's it; I'm free to go?
I wonder if anyone will ever know
how I cringed with fear in this lay-back chair,
endured the limit my mouth could bear?
I never worried. Completely relaxed.

No one will know the embarrassing facts.
Unless, of course, you spill the beans,
and you know exactly what that means.
You'll be sorry for what you will miss;
You'll be off my Christmas card list!

Footprints In The Sand

If only your eyes could see what I see,
behold the beauty that stands before me.
The eyes of my heart see beyond the years.
I'm drawn to your eyes and there appears
a young woman who took my heart away
and has held it gently day after day
for more than six decades, amazing years
buoyed by joy, unmoved by fears.
Yes, if only you could see what these eyes behold.
The remarkable beauty of your gracious soul.
Few men are blessed as I am today.
I could not have walked life's winding way
unless you agreed to walk by my side.
Without you I'd have no reason to try.
Here, my love, hold my hand.
We will leave our footprints in the sand,
visual reminders that we were here,
that we danced in the morning, crisp and clear,
until, in the distance, the returning tide
could be heard in joyful song.

Step Lightly

Step lightly.

Footsteps of greatness
go before you.

Follow, if you dare. Place
your foot gently into the
impressions of integrity,
the steps of Saints.

Do not waver
when the inherent wonder
flows through your body.
Never take the next step
for granted.

You are treading where
few people have gone.

Leave them as you
found them.

When you come to the end
of the visible footprint way,
make more by your
life, your honor,
your integrity,
your heart.

Step lightly.

You are
on
sacred ground.
Press on!

The Lion

Lions sniff the air at midnight,
nostrils draw in the sweet smells of savagery.
No rush. Let the enticement come slowly on the
conspirator breeze. The deer and her fawn
are not aware of the golden eyes squinting into the darkness
as the majestic creature's respiration sinks to shallow
sinister sounds, little puffs that move the red-matted
short hair along the elegant jawline.

With fluid ease, he rises, muscle by muscle, limb by limb,
onto padded paws that conceal razors sharpened by
bone and sinew. Death is not a game with the lion.
It is surgical precision, the first cut made when the
anesthesia of fear has done its work and a merciful
numbness filters through muscle and mind.
The prey is poised in a stupor of surrender.

Now comes the first light of the last day
for two graceful deer who walk casually toward the
sweet grass, plump and moist, near the stream
of revealing, unaware that the reflection in the
mirrored water will be the giant mane
loosed in the breeze and
sudden darkness.

Rain, Rain Go Away!

A part of me says: "Oh, no. Not today!"
How inconvenient! It gets in the way
of errands I'll run, the places I go.
I guess I'm glad it isn't snow.

Rain is fine in its time and place,
essential, I know, to the human race,
but why today and all this week?
I'm getting madder as I speak!

The Boutique bags will be sopping wet.
I must put up the top on my new Corvette.
I'll ruin my designer labeled shoes.
See how much I've got to lose!

Rain, rain go away.
Isn't that what children used to say
when rain pelted down, they were stuck inside?
I'm sorry, but it's hard to hide

my disappointment, anger and pain,
all because of this untimely rain!
The downpour today I consider dumb!
I'll just sit on the floor and suck my thumb!

Why can't I have what I want today?
Why does rain have to get in the way?
I consider the timing very odd.
I think I shall have a talk with God.

It's been a while since we had a chat.
Sometimes I'll ask for this or that.
But today my message is very clear:

Make it rain somewhere else, away from here

because I have important things to do.

Apparently God didn't think this through.

So here I sit in my red Corvette.

I will not tolerate getting wet!

The Candy Store

I'm trying to figure out the purpose of life.
Got a minute? Can you give me a hand?
Is there rhyme or reason to this troubled time?
Whatever happened to heaven's plan?

Peace and justice; goodwill to all.
I've heard those reasons before.
But I keep waiting for that glorious day
when someone will open the candy store

and we will all sit down and eat our fill,
share the sweetness we all hold dear.
What is our purpose? The meaning of this?
Can you help me, please? Can you make it clear?

What if it's just "be happy each day?"
What if that's the bottom line?
Live for yourself and the good of all?
What of the need for heaven's signs?

How ever this started, eons ago,
long before history, before time and space,
we now have the means, but what of the will
to make this earth a remarkable place.

Perhaps it's our nature to question the cause.
Maybe we're made to pursue the more,
but I'd simply be happy to sit with you
when the doors swing open to the candy store.

Floating Bird

Beautiful bird, casual elegance,
held suspended, motionless
in strong ocean winds

dune grasses bend,
reverence offered to
the delightful mystery
of the moment

confident beauty,
wings tucked, defies
reason and law, breaks
through limitations

invites the inquisitive
to float in the hand
of the invisible

Fair Winds And A Following Sea

Give me fair winds and a following sea,
a hearty crew and a starry night,
I'll sail from this harbor, wind to the lee,
sails unfurled: what a marvelous sight.

The sea calls my name and I must go,
she whispers to me, entices me on,
and I succumb for I already know
the power and thrill of that ancient song.

Twenty-five years I've walked the decks
of frigates, corsairs, men of war,
went down with The Nathan, a terrible wreck.
There is no counting the number of scars.

And yet, here I am, ready to sail,
to haul the lines and take the wheel,
to wave goodbye from the portside rail,
to feel the waves caressing the keel.

There's a port out there I've yet to see;
beautiful women, exotic sights.
Sign on, my friend, come sail with me
across the oceans on starlit nights.

White Wooden Bench

He sat very still on a white wooden bench
in the shade of a Live Oak tree.
His thick white hair, always neatly combed,
fell across his forehead, locked
in place by sweat beads
on moist skin.
My Grandfather never said the word "no."
"Play with me, Granddad." "Let's go," he would say.
"Catch me," I called out in a game of tag
as he chased me around the yard.
His breath came slowly one afternoon,
in raspy gulps and irregular gasps.
As a child it never occurred to me
that someday I would stand in the yard
by myself, throw the ball to a vacant
spot where he used to stand, or
sit alone on the white wooden bench,
longing to hear him call my name,
remembering his open arms of love.
The old white bench is splintered now;
nature has taken the upper hand.
But I go there sometimes, my child in my arms,
and she plays at my feet as I sit
in the shade of the aging
Live Oak tree.
Sometimes I think he sits by my side,
watching my daughter play,
and I hear in the wind the sound of his voice:
"Well done, young man. Well done."

Coming Home

I turned the corner, and there it was.
It was as if I had never left.
Uncle Hugh was carrying a chocolate pie
and Aunt Lila had sliced ham as they
went in through the back door, across the
screened-porch and into the kitchen.
Cousin Richard and his sister, Marylin,
were playing tag in the front yard,
laughingly ignoring all warnings about
not stepping on the Iris plants blooming
purple in the flower bed.
When I got out of the car in the driveway,
I could smell the sweet aroma of Grandfather's
pipe tobacco and hear bursts
of laughter swirling in the air.
It suddenly occurred to me that I was
standing on holy ground. There in the window,
look. Mother's lovely smile as she called out:
"He's here!"
And then the screened porch door opened
and there stood my Grandmother,
wiping flour from her hands onto a
blue and white apron, then extending
her arms, reaching out for me.
"We've been waiting for you.
Come on in."

Courage To Press On

Just when I think it's over and done,
battles fought, victories won,
I settle back in my easy chair;
no worries to taint this cool evening air.
I sip Tequilla that swirls in my glass
and remember the days when we had to pass
on fancy things, like concerts and shows;
strange how the river of life tends to flow.
Just when I think the hard part is passed,
the peace I deserve has come at last,
the bottom drops out of my perfect life,
and I'm faced with familiar heartaches and strife.
I was taught that all things occur by design,
that the great Hand in Heaven draws all the lines,
and we carry out the sacred plan,
even though it's unknown to the average man.
I've come to believe that the point of it all
is getting back up when you're knocked down or fall.
It takes courage to live eight decades or more;
little do we know what things are in store
for the average guy who works 12-hours days,
loves his family, goes to church, even prays
for the poor and the hungry who camp nearby.

He brings them food, refuses to try
to understand all that comes his way,
for him, and others, it's enough to say
that life isn't always easy or fair,
especially when the gray streaks through your hair.
No, I can't say that I understand
the ups and downs of some heavenly plan.
I don't have time for philosophic thought;
I'm torn between "should" and what I ought

to do for those who suffer and fail,
the sick, the dying, prisoners in jails.
Is this life about me and what I achieve,
about all the treasures I'll bequeath and leave
for my children to sort and then throw away.
It's not that I'll have very much to say.
I come back to the thought I mentioned before:
I have no idea what's in store,
and of all the traits that man can possess,
the courage to press on is among the best.
For, just when I think I've succeeded and won,
the trap door opens and I take the plunge
back into worry and the pressures of life,
back to that place of anguish and strife.
It's the cycle that happens time after time,
unexpected, unwanted, no warning sign.
If I could have only one thing in life,
now that I've lived through a lot of strife,
I'd ask for courage, enough for each day,
and I'd caution each person who is heard to say:
"Love is the greatest treasure of all."
Perhaps, but when life crumbles and falls,
it takes courage, raw courage, to love once more;
I'll take courage to face everything in store.

Wink and Grin

Hype and Spin

Evil and Sin

Wink and Grin

State the Lie - Again and Again

You Lose - I Win

Take It On The Chin

Turn The Page and Begin Again

Ain't Life Fun In The Loony Bin!

Anybody Ever Heard Of Win-Win?

Clouds At Play

Strands of soft gray cloud drift aimlessly
through corridors of pine trees
dressing the slopes of a wounded
mountain, scarred by flames
from forgotten embers,
residue of recklessness.

Wisps of almost-white cloud
tumble in friendly updrafts,
no rush to be anywhere in particular,
no destination.

A hide-and-seek game among
clusters of needles,
thin ribbons of white
gauze wrapping themselves
around plump branches,
joy cut short by the shiver of
a branch at the top of a sentinel pine,
the tallest tree that could see
beyond the others and
sense approaching change.

Wind! The tree called out.

Wind arrives!

In moments trees sway,
limbs touching limbs as wind
rounds up her children
and guides them up and up
until they disappear into
somber layers of brooding sky.

You and Me

I thought I could conquer the stress and the strain,
but I only fool myself.
I thought I could walk alone on the way,
but I don't know which way to go.
The earth was once a friendly place,
but sometimes it's hostile and cold.
Once I admired the wisdom of age,
but now that just means "old."
Snap your fingers and the time is gone.
Not many verses left in the song.
My hope is that the right and the wrong
will balance each other out.

My mind says "Yes", my body "No"
I know what it means to go slow.
Has this hill always been so very steep?
This way? Or, that? I forgot.
Pain comes to visit more often these days.
The pharmacist knows my name.
I remember the days of hard work and sweat.
Now the days are about the same.

Snap your fingers and the time is gone.
Not many verses left in the song.
My hope is that the right and the wrong
will balance each other out.

But I know today the sun will rise.
Nothing can hold it back.
Today I'll see an old friend or two;
few things better than that.
I'll laugh at a joke, hear a bird sing,
talk on the phone to my child,

Regret the choice of hot sauce at lunch.
I should have taken mild.

I don't regret the passage of time.
That's the way it's supposed to be.
And no matter the season or hands on the clock,
it will always be you and me.

Unless We Try...

Don't push too hard about yesterday;
some memories are hard to hold.
Vivid pictures, best forgotten, live on still.
They slice to the marrow; shatter the soul.

Young ones with courage, futures to make,
just children with so much to gain,
grow old very quickly when the rockets burst,
when they taste the cup of bitter pain.

Maybe the old ought to fight all the wars.
Save the young to build and create.
But then old men were once young men, too.
Do you think we waited much too late

to live together with justice, in peace?
How many white crosses must line the hills?
How many names etched on a wall?
How many tombs and graves until

we finally arrive on common ground,
the place where hope can thrive?
And we, imperfect though we be,
strive hand in hand to keep peace alive.

Do you think that day will ever come?
Opportunities come and go.
Is there goodwill enough in the human heart?
Unless we try, how will we know?

Press On

A month ago, if you asked me then,
I would have said, "I'm through."
The sky fell in pieces around my feet;
it makes no sense to simply repeat
all the meaningless things I do.
I've tried to find a way to escape
this arid, vacuous time,
but all my efforts have been for naught.
I've applied techniques that I've been taught,
but I found neither reason nor rhyme.
Until that day when you stopped by
and mentioned two simple words.
"Press on," you said, "and don't give in.
Brighter days will come when you begin
to follow these words undeterred."
So, I take each day with its good and its bad,
and I try very hard to be strong.
I give it my best to the end of the day,
then at night in my bed I humbly pray:
Give me courage, my God, to press on!

I Used To Live Right There

If tears could stop the flames,
hell would have vanished days ago

Ashes of memories
debris of dreams

So long to gain,
so quick to lose
hold tightly to nothing

Fire leaps and laughs
but it's not funny
Fire dances
while I stand anchored in ashes

My neighbor is my neighbor no more
My neighbor is me
We merge into madness

I wish I had the courage of that man
who waves a garden hose at
the monster

Life can be serene
Life can be savage
This is savage

Thirty years to scrimp and save and sacrifice
thirty minutes
thirty minutes
and it all turns to embers in the wind
my life twinkles in the sky

Last night I slept in the warmth
of my bed in the embrace of peace
tonight on the hard floor of a warehouse
next to a man who weeps
in the darkness

Uncontrollable flame
devouring flame
evil flame
makes a mockery of fairness

I thought I knew what courage was
until I watched him, helmet and
boots and heavy coat, walk
into the heat of hell and
spit in the monster's
face
until
I saw her pulling
a heavy hose across the
threshold of a once-house and sobbing all the way

I used to live right there
now? I'm not sure
I think it's everywhere

It's The Way It Is

So, I said to my friend:

"Is this the end? Did the Fat Lady sing last night?"

And he said:

To be brutally fair, I don't care.

My job's on the line; I've got kids to feed;

I don't have time or the urgent need

to ponder the future of climate control,

or consider the latest political polls.

My parents need care that I can't buy,

and if you insist I can tell you why

this world is upside down.

It's guys like me who've been pushed aside.

I've got feelings. I've got pride.

The world is changing far too fast,

and I'm the guy who's going to be last.

I don't understand the speed of change;

it's not within my "intellectual" range.

I work twelve hours everyday

and then I hear the news guy say:

The job market's booming; inflation's down;

the stock market's up; we're on solid ground.

Well, I used to believe in the American dream

but the deck is stacked; it's a political scheme.

Tonight we'll have soup I've watered down;

the Food Bank is closed or I'd go around

and ask for some extras: some bread and beans.

I can't remember the last time we ate something green.

The guy in the White House? Yeah, I put him there.

I don't really know what's right or fair.

Maybe in the end, it'll all be the same.

He got my vote because he knows my name.

So I don't have time to enjoy success.
There's no way out of this stinking mess.
But I won't give up; I'll continue to try.
In the meantime, fella, here's a stick in your eye.

I Stood In The Rain Today

I stood in the rain today.

Hands upraised, face looking into
little droplets of life falling, falling,
striking my forehead, sliding across
the bridge of my nose, bluish-silver
collections of holy molecules, each
one part of the next, all the same
but different.

I stood in the rain today,
mind open, spirit drinking the
sacred sky as it tumbled to the earth.
Metaphor? No, gentle reality carried
on the breath of the early morning.
It didn't take long for the droplets
to dissolve the crust of protection
I wear, the porous armor that
satisfies my need to be
safe in the midst
of serenity.

Have you ever looked up to see
love falling upon the earth?
Open your mouth; taste the
sweetness of grace. Feel
the intoxication grow.
Allow yourself to be
swept away into
the endless
river.

Falling Into The Light

I am falling into the light
at the center of all mystery;
robust, revealing light.
It grows stronger as I draw closer;
a miniscule dot in the darkness,
blooming, flowering, welcoming
into passion and principle.
Endless falling.
No stopping now, no way
to avoid the relentless inevitability.
This light confronts; it does
not console; it reveals
with no regret.
Pure light penetrates all
pretense and embraces
any soul that dares fall into
sacred oblivion.
Neither grieve nor mourn;
pick a bouquet of wild yellow flowers
from the meadow and
I will smile into your eyes
once again.

The Garden of Friendships

Many flowers bloom
in the garden of my friendships.
Seeds, transformed by time and
nurture, are the perennials of pleasure;
rich colors and sweet fragrances the
gifts each flower brings.

There are no boundaries for my garden;
no flower is excluded. While different
in shape and size, each claims its place
and each provides joy to the one
who walks between the rows,
stops to speak gratitude to
rose and violet alike,
cradles the wildflower with the same
tenderness as the orchid.

Just there, in the corner of the garden,
by the brook, is a trellis of morning glories.
I sit on the small wooden stool in the
cool of the morning, watching as
they come awake, as each opens
its delicate white pedals,
roused to waking by the
gentle touch of first light.

Each garden treasure is a living memory
planted in the soil of shared experience,
cherished in the laughter and tears
of another day. It is a gasp of grief
when a beautiful bloom begins
to fade, when an empty place
in the garden is reason to kneel

and touch the earth.

Many flowers bloom
in the garden of my friendships.
And I shall walk among them
with reverence and sacred gratitude.

Tomorrow Trees

He patted the fresh turned earth
around the little sapling, moist sandy,
almost fine in texture. It was a gentle pat,
like a father reassuring an anxious child:
"It's all right, little one. You are safe."

Soot and ash, mixed into the rich soil,
reminded those who passed this way of a
once-glorious forest that spread over the hillside.
Picnics under tall, stately pines. Hiking trails
winding through deep valleys, over
frothy streams that collected into a
singing waterfall.

Then the ravage. A spark, a flame.
The sounds of weeping from so many
touched by the timelessness of
breathtaking beauty, only now in
memory and misery.

Until one day when he arrived with his friends.
An odd assortment with no boundaries in age
or cultural position. They unloaded pallets of
little cups filled with nourishing dirt from which
slender green shoots held
promise and prayers.

The pile of empty cups grew as the land gratefully
adopted the seedlings, one after the other until
the scarred hillside took on a faint green glow.
When, in due time, the last tomorrow tree was
planted, patted and blessed with a prayer of
courage, the small but determined band of

forest-makers drove away, leaving the
thankful earth to her task,
the joy of her calling,
the making of new life.