

Poetry Anthology

A collection of Elmer Adrian's work,
lovingly compiled by his grandson Dan

Elmer T. Adrian

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About this document

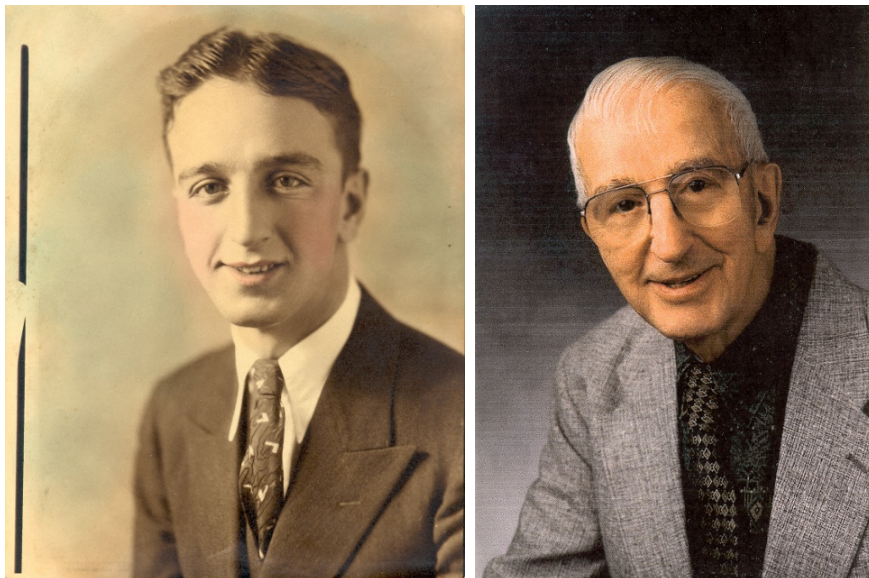
The poems in this anthology were gathered from Elmer's floppy disks, computer files, and a large binder of his work put together by Helen McPherson, his neighbor and longtime friend (one of the Helens in *It's not Phony*). My dad (Mark Adrian) collected all of the computer files. Thanks to both of them, as organization does not seem to be one of Elmer's strengths (as self-admitted in *Bug Off St. George*).

You may have noticed the red boxes in the previous; these, and all other red boxes in this document, are links that take you to directly to the poem or page described. If desired, after clicking a hyperlink, you can go back to the previous page by pressing "ALT + left arrow", which gives a functionality similar to a "Back button" on web browsers.

The poems are separated into categories that Helen made, which form the chapters of this anthology. For further organization, there is a complete table of contents of the poems in each category and an alphabetical list of the poems (by title) in the title index. Further, there is an incomplete subject index, which organizes some subjects of the poems (besides those delineated by the categories).

I have some included Elmer's obituary and some general information about his poetry in the preface.

About Elmer Adrian



Obituary Published in Chicago Suburban Daily Herald on May 23, 2002.

A memorial service will be held for Elmer Theodore Adrian, 93, at 10:30 a.m. today, at Union Park Methodist Church, 2305 East 12th St., Des Moines, Iowa. Born June 10, 1908, in Harris, Iowa, he died Monday, May 20, 2002, at Edward Hospital in Naperville. Interment will be private. Mr. Adrian had just recently moved to Naperville where he was a resident of Independence Village. He lived most of his life in Des Moines, Iowa. Elmer was a 1925 graduate of East High School. He was a very active member of the Union Park Methodist Church and enjoyed writing, having recently published the novel "Thorson's Bay" in June 2000. His poetry had been published in the Lyrical Iowa every year for the past 25 years. He also had poetry in "Tasteberry for Teens". Elmer was a member of the Alpha Chapter of the Iowa Poetry Society for many years. Mr. Adrian was a former jeweler and had owned and operated Adrian Diamond Shop prior to his retirement in 1975. He was a World War II Army veteran and was stationed at Camp Sibert in Alabama. He is survived by his sons, Richard (Barbara) Adrian of Freemantle, Western Australia and J. Mark (Sally) Adrian of Naperville; grandchildren, Kristin Adrian of Floreat Park, Western Australia, Julie Adrian of Wembley Downs, Western Australia, Catherine Adrian of Indianapolis, Ind., and Dan Adrian of Naperville; and several nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by

his parents, August Theodore and Catherine (nee Thodt) Adrian; and his wife, Dorothy L. (nee Wright) Adrian. Memorials may be made to the Union Park Methodist Church, 2305 East 12th St., Des Moines, Iowa, 50362. Local arrangements were made by Beidelman-Kunsch Funeral Home, Naperville. Friends may visit www.dailyherald.com/obits to express condolences and sign the guest book. For more funeral information, (630)355-0264.

About Elmer's poetry

Grandpa wrote in one of his letters that "writing keeps me alive." He seems to be a natural-born writer that used writing to express everything he experienced in life. Thankfully through his poems we can still hear his voice.

Senior Poet Laureate competition

He entered the Senior Poet Laureate competition in for 1997-1998, I have included what he wrote about his writing, as well as which poems he entered – to give you an idea of what he thought were some of his best poems. (This list is a good place to start if you're unfamiliar with his poetry.)

(Written at age 88.) How long have I been writing poetry? Intermittently most of my life: two semesters at Drake University (Thirty-one and thirty-two); two semesters at Grand View College when I retired as a jeweler at age seventy-two. The Great depression changed my direction. I had planned to enter the Ministry. I have been in Lyrical Iowa nineteen times consecutively. I haven't tried markets other than this exposure. I belong to a poetry group called, "The Alpha Poetry Society" which meets monthly and Iowa Poetry Assn. The latter judges our efforts when poets state-wide meet for an all day session semi-annually. I've attempted a novel.¹ I have about two-hundred-fifty poems in "brief case" of my computer and am sending you forty-four. I hope you like some of them.

- Contest #2 (Best Short Poem): Apropos and In Haste.
- Contest #3 (Best Funny Poem): Adam Confesses, A Little Knowledge, Apologies to Poe, Behind Sight, Bug Off St. George, Bygone Daze, Down Wind, Excruciation, My Grandson Dan, and Noses.
- Contest #4 (Best Nostalgic Poem): A Love Story, A Summer Vignette, Aunt Lilly (Or, About Face), Crumbs under the Table, Here "Lies", It's an Open and Shut Case, Live Coals, Love Endures, Mamie, Move Over Agatha, Pandora, Peer Power, Monster-Slayer (Or, Reversed Priorities), The Break-Through, Uncle Walter, Unsung, and You.

¹It is titled *Thorsen's Bay* and grandpa had it self-published. My parents have hundreds of hard copies so I can put you in contact with them if you would like one.

- Contest #5 (Best Religious Poem): A Step or Two, Maybe God Suffers by Definition, “Oh! Be Joyful”, Ta-Da, and Temporary Adieu.
- Contest #6 (Best Long Poem): Phantom Fred, Pumpkin Chariot, A Pair of Shoes (Or, Tadpole Time), The After Glow, and The Coolness, a short story.
- Contest #7 (Best Sonnet Poem): Iambic Futility and Psalm 100.
- Contest #8 (Best Love Poem): Enough, I Cry, and There Is More.

Tasteberries for Teens

Elmer had 3(?) of his poems published as part of *Tasteberries for Teens*, a collection of stories and poems like the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series but aimed at a younger audience. Thus, in the collection of writing from 14- and 15-year-olds were poems from “Elmer Adrian, 90.” I guess some themes are ageless.

The poems were:

- Bug Off St. George, published under the title “A Dragon in my Drawer”.
- Strike Three
- So Sew, published under the title “A Capacity to Mend”.

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Chapter 1

Animals

There are several poems in this section about the family dog, Mamie, and his love of dogs in general. Mamie was named after First Lady Mamie Eisenhower who happens to be from nearby Boone, IA. I'm not sure why they named their dog after the first lady.

And Crocodiles

I have visited that land that's way down under
and, remembering now, it makes me wonder
if something I ate distorted my sight.
Some of the fauna just aren't made right.

The platypus, which will strain your conceiver
has duck bill, lays eggs and has fur like a beaver.
The kangaroo also seems to be a miscue.
A dog wags its tail, but its tail wags the "roo".

The dingo wild dog can do nothing but harm.
If you try to pet one, you'll lose an arm.
There's the koala that looks like a cute teddy bear.
It eats eucalyptus leaves and can't thrive elsewhere.

Now the wombat's a name that you might forget,
but down there, you could have one for a pet.
Maybe you think this is not on the level,
but you've heard about that Tasmanian devil.

You'd know if you heard a kookaburra bird.
It brays like a jackass, I give you my word.
You may think you can't believe what you see,
but the people are exactly like you and like me.

“Barklet” Pears

Our dog, ‘Mamie,’ gave us eight years
of total love, along with what happens
when you feed dogs regularly.
I dug holes with an auger
and buried the daily deposits.
In the eight years, there were few spots
where a hole had not been dug in that part
of our back yard.

When Mamie died, we planted two pear trees
where you know what had fertilized.
That was a quarter century ago
and once again this spring, those trees
have blossomed in white petticoat profusion.
There will be pears for my neighbor’s squirrels,
the birds, the bees and some to give away.
I think they’re tastier than most.
I’d like to credit that, somehow,
To Mamie and Purina Chow.

Chug

I'm fond of dogs; they seem to see in me,
that I'm in need of all their canine wiles
and when they put their paw upon my knee,
a friendship forms that never fades or riles.

Chug is my neighbor's weighty St. Bernard
and sometimes when we sit around rap,
like a freight train he comes puffing through the yard
and that big lummoX winds up on my lap.

He looks at me with those serene brown eyes
and gives my cheek a moist swipe with his tongue.
In his affection there's no sham or guise.
I don't complain, though my lap's overhung.

It is not secret what makes me agog.
I like my neighbor, but I love his dog.

Dog Daze

Since my dog died
I've found I'm fond of other people's dogs,
all sizes.
Sometimes it's disconcerting when I try
to arrange my host's St. Bernard on my lap
and listen to politics.
When there are two dogs,
discrimination growls.
After the fight for equal rights,
I feel that I should go to the dog house.
I prefer a cold nose on my cheek
to politics or the stock market.
But I can take it as long as 'Cassandra',
'Sweepstakes' or 'What's-his-name'
roll thier eyes at me in adoration.
I miss my mutt,
but my present status has its advantages.
My neighbors care for their dogs;
I furnish the tender love.

Mamie

Just yesterday, I made a sortie
up there beneath our attic roof.
Curiosity forced me to look into a box.
There were my old ice skates, my army stripes,
my hunting cap, and our dog Mamie's leash.

It's been a long time since you gave us
your eight years from puppy teeth to when
the doctor gave you fatal shot to speed release
from heart-worm's killing ravages.
We made a pen and a doghouse 'neath our pear tree,
took you for walks and when we picnicked, you sat
in our car's back seat with our two boys.

You soon reached that danger age. The mutts
from garbage can brigade all came to call and at those times our basement
was your home.

That's when you chewed our ping pong paddle.
I rudely took remains from mouth.
You crawled to me, tail pounding on the floor,
eyes up to mine, to see some sign of softening.
I swept you in my arms and knew that your
great heart was larger than my own.

You didn't think to hurt, snap back or fight.
You didn't have a bone to chew, and couldn't watch
the squirrels tease up in the trees, or tell me that
the paddle, so carelessly left on the floor,
had the enticing scent of those you loved.
You were just glad that what we had was still all-right.

Nine Lives

You ersatz pussy cat
glazed fugitive from unknown origins,
that stares in Cheshire impudence
through fired clay from decayed boulders,
spiced with windblown sands
which soared the Great Divide.

Maybe you oozed 'tween toes of dinosaurs,
saw serpent slithering silently,
or nurtured a Sequoia.
Your lineage torn from Creation's page
whose lifelines span millenniums
remains a mystery of history.

Chapter 2

Christmas

Grandpa wrote his own Christmas special in *Bigfoot Put*. It seems like Grandpa loved Christmas. *Christmas Musings* is not only a beautiful poem; it is shaped like a Christmas tree.

Bigfoot Put

It's betting to be about that time of year
When Santa and all the deer will appear.
Has it occurred to you that he's never missed?
Whatever the obstacles, he still persists
In bringing that sleigh with that special toy
And all kinds of goodies for each girl and boy.
His whole life's centered around being a giver,
But one Christmas he almost didn't deliver.

It's no small accomplishment to keep all the elves
Happy and whistling and proud of themselves.
Santa wants each to do what they do best
And so they all get the aptitude test.
Some like working in metal, others in wood,
They're not all alike, I guess that's understood.
Some specialize in painting red wagons,
The artists paint flowers, black cats and dragons.
Those who hammer and saw seem completely content;
Others improve, redesign, create and invent.

But there was one elf who just didn't fit,
Couldn't saw, paint or hammer and he couldn't sit.
He looked like the rest but was larger and quicker,
His movements more agile, his muscles much thicker.
He had big feet, which always got in the way;
They all called him 'Put' because he couldn't stay.
Finally Santa sent him out with the deer.
He said, "You can move around all you want out here."

That was the answer, Put found his niche,
In no time at all he knew which deer was which.
He polished and manicured all the deer's horns,
Brushed Dancer's tail, checked Cupid for corns,
Cleaned Prancer's stall, combed Comet's sleek hide,
Vixen and Blitzen taught him to glide,
Went riding on Donner with Rudolph as guide,
Ran races with Dasher and won when he tried.
Which one he loved best, he couldn't decide.
And everyone said, "How could he be that fleet,

With those tremendous, gigantic, oversized feet?"
Why once when he leaped he went out of sight
And didn't come down until quite late that night.

That year, all was ready, the sleigh was stacked high,
Countdown to time for the take-off was nigh.
Meanwhile, one elf bringing glue to the shop
Saw all the excitement and just had to stop.
When someone nudged him and spilled all the glue
And before he could holler of knew what to do,
That quick bonding stuff which holds in a second
Poured around Donner's hooves as Santa's voice beckoned
For each of nine deer to step into their trace,
Poor Donner was stuck, he was out of the race.
He couldn't budge, he looked on in disgrace.

"Oh fickle," said Santa, "we're sure in a pickle,
Without Donner our chances are not worth a nickel."
Then Put stepped in line, right behind Cupid,
And said, "Santa, I know what I'm doing seems stupid,
But if you're to get on with your distribution,
You're going to have to make a substitution.
We know Donner's a goner and can't get in line.
If you'll allow it, I'll be one of the nine."
"You're on," said Santa, "I've no other choice."
He grabbed the lines and in a musical voice
Said, "On your marks now, up and away."
Then eight deer and Put raised Santa and sleigh,
Each doing his part without jerking or sway,
You could hear Santa say, "Put, you're doing O.K."

Well, they chiseled out Donner, that same night of course.
Until the glue wore off, he had hooves like a horse.
And a large crowd was out for Santa's return.
They wondered about Put but no need for concern,
He looked rather funny up there with the deer,
But he did his part without trouble or fear.
When they stopped, Mrs. Claus said, "Put, you're a dear."

There was one aftermath, using Put as a sub,
Sighting 'Bigfoot' tracks caused a lot of hub bub.

Christmas Musings

Can
you explain
this time of year
when seemingly a benign
power pours strong love potions
into every heart, which knows no creed
or boundary lines, where in this voicing
of good will, love reaches out, embracing us
with its warm glow and there is joy
and togetherness
as we say
Merry
Christmas

Christmas Undertones

Can you hear them,
whisperings, from then and now?

Horse with sleigh bells rhythmic jingling,
squeals of joy at tinsel tree,
sputtering of lighted candles,
stories told of North Pole visits,
fireplace flame, its whir and crackle,
stockings stuffed, say peek-a-boo,
young ones muffling suppressed giggling.
Wiggling, wishing, whirling, waiting.
Six point crystals swirl and tiptoe,
bow, before the last pirouette.

Morning footsteps patter on the staircase,
opening of the packaged presents,
church chimes chanting churches cheer,
carols coursing cranial crannies,
love that's unleashed, echoes, echoes sweetly
down each heart's long corridor.

Silent sounds, so soft and silken,
muted musings – can you hear them?

Halls of Ivy

The north wind paints its artistry
Of drifting snow around Old Main.
And once again she feels the void
Of lonely holiday halls.

The laughing chattering
That strained her mortared nerves,
Desist. Its pent up energy
And agile minds are missed.

The stairs where students flow
Like endless escalators,
Now are still.
And as Old Main pulls her brick cloak
Tightly against the chill,
She wishes all good will
And Merry Christmas.

Ho! Ho!

To me, there was that moment of magic
when Santa was all wool
and shook like a bowl full of jelly.
I was five, and with mother's help,
I sent a note to Santa asking for roller skates.
My brother tried to tear the fabric
of my little world, but I remained
unswerved by his superior knowledge.

That Christmas morning we hurried to the tree.
There was a pop gun and a wind up train
for me... no roller skates.
My world of wondered collapsed.

Dad pointed to the fireplace, and there,
yes there were my roller skates and a note,
"Merry Christmas, from Santa."

I looked at my brother, My eyes told him,
"You don't know everything."

In Reflection

Once upon a time,
No season was as super-charged as
Christmas. Stories spun a winsome web and
Every corner of the mind danced with the
Unfolding anticipation and joy, that
Painted our little worlds with red and green
On fancy's canvass, where Santa and his
Nimble deer bolted through the sky
As quick as lightning.
Those were magical years where a delirium
Invaded our senses. Even now remains the
Mystical tug of our faiths, that draws
Each of us into an aura of good will.

Long Distance Christmas

Shown here are two generations
and ten thousand mile separations.
A Christmas tree in Australia's West
and presents sent at Santa's behest.

We here, are shivering at zero degree,
and they are at one hundred and three.
They swim in the pool to beat the heat.
We turn up the 'stat to warm our feet.

Eight years have past, the young have flown
to find that niche that's their very own.
This Christmas I pray, they can be still,
and know His love, His peace and good will.

Merry Christmas Anyway

I guess I'm jealous
At least I seem to be
Because you see
Santa's going to visit you
Before I do
But you'll enjoy that jolly elf
Who gives so freely of himself
And he will love those eyes so blue
Two dimples too
(That's what they tell us)
I wanted so to get first view
Of you while you are new
So I am envious because
Santa's sure to beat me there
And I'll play second chair
Reluctantly to Claus.

My Best Christmas

That Christmas we were very poor,
So my sister told me like it was,
“There was no Santa Claus.”
It was her way to inform me
that a bicycle would not be
beside our Christmas tree.

I felt that life had closed the door
on hopes and dreams, not like before.
Gone was the tingling elation
Of anticipation

But Christmas morn, a bicycle was there.
It had a welded frame, the tires were bare,
patched seat and paint of shining red,
Right then I knew I’d never been so glad.
In total joy I rushed to hug my dad.
And in his eyes I saw a happy glow.
That’s why I know
that what my sister said,
just wasn’t so.

Nose Trouble for Rudolph

You may think Santa has everything rosy,
Picture him laughing and bundled up cozy,
But he has to drink from both sides of the cup.
It seems every year some problems come up.
So don't you believe he doesn't have troubles;
It's not all ho-hos or blowing big bubbles.

Let me tell you what happened this year for instance
When I called up my friend Santa long distance.
I needed cheering myself, but when I heard his 'Hello'
His manner was worried, his spirits were low.
He said Rudolph's nose was losing its glow.

I forgot my own troubles, Santa was so upset,
And then I remembered that I was a vet.
My wife listening in, I couldn't have stopped her,
Said, "Santa we're coming in our helicopter."
How to get there's a secret so don't tell a soul;
Santa told us to keep our course straight for the Pole
And then settle down in a well lighted hole.

Soon my wife and Mrs. Santa were hugging each other,
Santa embraced me like a long missing brother.
Said, "Put on those mittens and warm overshoes,
Let's get to Rudolph, there's no time to lose."

There was Rudolph wobbling and stumbling around,
That famous nose dim, almost dragging the ground.
I said, "Santa it's obvious he's sick and in shock,
I'll doctor and watch him right 'round the clock."

Taking his temperature, I checked his condition,
And right away I had a nagging suspicion.
We watched as he staggered away, saw him stop
At a sawdust pile back of Santa's workshop.

He gulped that wood pulp, which is far from nutritious.
One could see that he thought the stuff was delicious.
I said, "Santa, your deer has the cellulose colic.

He's become what is known as a sawdustaholic.
The first thing to do is put a fence around here.
He has to eat moss like any other reindeer."

We pampered Rudolph a bit, mixed his moss with molasses,
Withdrawal made him cross, once he kicked off my glasses,
But he soon bounded around, sleek, supple and sound,
And the end of his nose was bright, big and round.
In Santa's place there was great jubilation.
Coming home my wife said, "Twas the nicest vacation."

This Christmas Eve, if you keep your eyes on
A bright spot way out on the farthest horizon,
That looks like the moon coming up in the north,
It's Rudolph's nose lighting Santa's way forth.
If you hear Santa chuckle as he's driving his team,
It's because Rudolph's back on the beam!

Oh Tannenbaum

Have you pondered the phenomena
Of Christmas? Tinsel shop,
Window displays, toys and gifts
in such a ways, that high fever rages
Like an epidemic and destroys control
Over purse strings. You feel a lifting
Vibrancy as you hear tinkling bells on
Every corner and their message
Twists the heart. The euphoria you
Have, makes you smile at strangers and
Your lips repeat the songs replayed and sung
By music's best. Little children skip and
Run, filled with a rapturous magic that we
All remember in nostalgia of our tender years.
New snow outlines lighted homes in white.
Church chimes carol the Christ child's coming.
Here again, the whole world shares its
Empathy, cast aside its dross and
Says, "A very merry Christmas."

“Oh! Be Joyful”

Joy is a state of happiness that implies that one has to express it. In its expression, it erupts to such degree that it becomes contagious.

Christmas is a joyful time that renews our wonder and assurance of God’s love in the giving of our Savior. In spite of our inward tendencies to hide our emotions, we throw off the mantle of caution to rejoice in carols and giving as we honor the Christ child and let Him become a part of our family circle. This Joy creates an aura of good will that paints our worlds with rainbows of forgiving, which causes us to be susceptible to this awareness and want to take part in the celebration of God’s perfect Gift.

Joy is an ebullience that has to be shared, if only to the sun, the moon, the stars and God. For a time, it seems, we are caught up in the tentacles of its outreach and we feel that God, in his need to share our joy, reaches down to embrace us as we respond in joy to Him.

The poet says, “Oh be joyful” and the hymn that shakes the rafters of Heaven, tells us of ‘tidings of great joy’ as we raise our voices in the song, “Joy to the world.”

Rerun

Would you rearrange it?

The same story with slight innovation,
Same plot, same script, same expectation.
Home, street and store with bright decoration,
Rudolph and carols of glad adoration.
Snow-time, crisp air of winter's rotation.
Shopping Mall's teeming migration,
Car horns honking their jammed indignation,
Young ones in toy land preoccupation
Believing innocence in anticipation
Climb Santa's lap to give their dictation.
Phenomenon, miracle, wonder, elation,
Love for a moment cementing a nation.
Birth and cosmic glorification,
Hope in place of routine resignation.
Barriers down, communication,
Man's spirit reaching for more elevation,
Even if taken with some reservation.

How would you change it?

Soliloquy of an Unwise Man

Christmas is Pandora in reverse.
An open box of goodness that pours forth
with hope and joy and wonderment.

It's replay intertwined with memory.
From childhood, it's a Star and promise too,
floodgates of giving and Love's microwave
with unseen warmth that penetrates each heart,
a Scrooge regenerate, a fireside
and stockings filled for little ones
who wait with big eyed eagerness
for that bewhiskered elf, forgetting self.
It's a retelling and a fervent prayer,
A manger scene, wise men who came to bless,
sharing with friends, street corner bells,
and carols of holiness that sing of peace.

And yet, it's not some package neatly wrapped,
that all can see, it's still a mystery
and maybe that's the way it has to be.

Xmas

When winter lays his soft white glove
Upon drab earth,
And tinsel trees framed in the windows
Stare prettily at drifting snow,
To share the joy and love within.

Where fireplace, flickering, outlines
The stockings hung,
And children go reluctantly to bed
Although they'd really like to know
If what is told, is so.

It's time to wish you all,
A Merry Christmas.

Chapter 3

Death

Elmer spent a lot of time writing in his later years when I'm sure death was on his mind. He wrote poetry about every part of the human experience, and death was no exception.

Goodbye Dad

I was born with cerebral palsy.
My parents were told I wouldn't live long,
but I was loved so much that I survived.
They discovered that my mind was sharp and clear
and so they opened my world with books and music
and their innermost confidences.
My frailty remained but in the caring sharing
there was joy.

Dad called on my computer brain
in decisions for the farm or business.
The church and community looked beyond my difference,
and found that I could give
as much or more than I received.
So I had many friends – And that's the way it was.

Illnesses I had, but cancer
took him from this world at fifty-five.
When they wheeled me into surgery
I said, "Goodbye dad! Goodbye dad!
Goodbye dad!" because I wanted
him to know that we had something
larger than ourselves – and that was love.
Now I'm walking tall and strong,
But don't worry dad, I'll slow down till you catch up.

Helen

How often you have soothed
the fevered brow of one of us,
or when our children felt your
healing hand when bruises came.

You were our Nightingale, God's
angel, whose healing heart of love
was at our side in time of need.
You now are in God's caring arms,
whose all embracing Love holds you,
and welcomes you into the Place prepared,
and we, who kneel, can feel
your presence with us still,
as one of God's assurances
of His Eternal Love.

Here “Lies”

He lies beneath the marbled elegance,
engraved with space for his “Beloved.”
At his death, if she gave up a prayer,
it may have been, “Thank God.”

From the “I do,” he bruised and battered her,
blackened eyes, bloodied her nose and mouth,
pushed her down stairs and kicked her crumpled form.
She tried, but couldn’t jump or fly that high,
to gratify his lecherous intent.
Twins came, stillborn, his kick had murdered them,
but she gave him a daughter and two sons.

She fled to the cornfield with her brood,
when he came home from the bar with a need
to see her grovel, cringe and crawl,
as the young ones whimpered helplessly.

My aunt is now one hundred three
and has outlived him forty years.
Does she cling to this life, loathing
the trapped acquiescence to the tombstone lie,
as his “Beloved?”

In My Father's House

The bout with cancer canceled out my dad.
When the mortician restyled his remains
to make him seem as young as I
and placed the renovation on display,
a nagging dim, deep down denied
this pagan detour to the clay.

The tots who played in dad's backyard,
to get the love they missed at home,
or have a toy repaired,
now grown, they came to say,
"I knew your dad."
They talked of the privilege they had
to get a toss up in the air,
a squeeze, or sit upon his knees
as his tall tales made make believe come true.

My mother said,
"Now he'll hold his head high."
Some standing by, raised brows in disbelief.
Yet, as I saw the coffin there,
I thought, if that was all, it was unfair.

Love Endures

“I was cross to him.”
She placed her hand on his,
her man, whose earthly shelter,
felled by ravages of age,
lay waxenly serene amidst
the flowered tributes.
Suddenly she smiled
as though she knew he knew,
the futile months of endless care,
the hopelessness, despair,
at his diminishing.

She felt his love returning,
spurning Death’s curtained door
to say, “There’s nothing to forgive.”

On the Death of a Friend

Those earthly hands with that deft skill
to duplicate or innovate a special tool
are still.

You've stepped across the line
and taken portions of our lives with you.

You were a quiet man
who saw inside drab rock
the beauty of its myriad patters
and exotic colorings.

In like matter you looked at us
as though you saw rare opalescence
deep beneath our rough exteriors
and we felt tall.

And so we add our affirmation
to the words that you now hear,
"Well done."

Reflections

We miss you, David.
Wherever you were, you belonged.
We applauded your integrity
in the market place, and your active
love in the community and church.

You had that smile that told us
that your heart was big enough
to include each of us as a friend.
We could feel that you envisioned
a better tomorrow, and showed it
in your unselfish caring and sharing.

You and Judy and your David,
were our family showcase.
The rich tonal quality of your
voice, enhanced our choir.
In your solos, you enthralled us all.

In honesty, we asked the question... Why?
God must have needed you to do a
task that required your unique
credentials for its best success.
Our best tribute is to emulate
your Christian example, and strive
with greater diligence, to follow Him,
whom you now have met face to face.

Self Destruct

At eighteen you are dead.
In your body is vallium
and methadone.
A star at basketball, good mind,
you have my pity but there's anger too,
when I think of what you did with you.

One doesn't need to cheapen, foul,
snivel and grovel in contempt for standards high,
to live. Why did you waste, destroy
the only thing you had, yourself?
The world needed your best licks
and nots the dregs, the rotten core
with wormy appetite.

You know, you could have helped
to turn the world around
and make it green and clean.
The muscles 'round those bones
were there to treat with care –
to make the real you of nobility
reach out and tell it loud
“There is a better way.”

But, you are dead;
some of peers wept tears,
and now they hurry back to pop a pill,
or use a needle to forget,
to stultify and stink.
Oh God! – When will they think?

Till Death

Her diary was in the dresser drawer,
hidden below the folded under-things.
It open where a pressed wild flower lay
and on that page the words leaped out,
“Dear God, I know that Jim loves me.”

He remembered, they had walked from school,
laughed and shared a cupcake from her lunch box.
Impulsively, he had reached to pluck that flower
and bashfully presented it to her.
Their eyes had met and what he saw was love.
He'd wondered if she saw the same in his.
Then came a transcendental sublimated joy,
with such purity and completeness that time
and life-long love could never re-enact.
They walked on in silence, lest a word
might have dispelled the moment's mystic magic.

In his mind, the flattened flower in cellophane,
rose from the page, in all the fragile freshness
of their love's first bloom.

Unsung

He seemed as one who pulled his curtain down,
so he'd remain unseen. To childhood peers,
he was a nebulous nonentity.

A World War Two test exposed his high I.Q.
and officers, who sought his nimble brain,
won bars and stars, but gave no thanks to him.

The place he worked used his sharp expertise.
Promotions came, but no one called his name
and lesser brains explained firm's strategy.

His church gave him no accolades of praise
for being there to lend a helping hand
to set up tables or construct a prop.

In choir, he sang rich baritone on key
and though they heard his modulated swell,
No one'd admit that he could sing that well.

And now a stroke has slowed his mind and frame.
Only a few and God will ever know
the man inside that camouflaged facade.

Chapter 4

Dorothy

A large number of the poems in this section are very sad (I Cry, Crumbs Under the Table) and talk about my grandmother's failing health due to Alzheimer's disease. But there are some happy ones about their earlier relationship. One of my favorites is Move Over Agatha.

Applesauce

“Cut it down! It’s a nuisance and a mess,”
says my wife.

In a way she’s right I guess,
but it’s so much a part of me,
cutting down this tree would be
like taking my own life.

Its limbs are bent and scarred, like my own.
I can see a nest up there
where young robins grew and flew,
and I still can hear the patter,
as they climb and chew and chatter,
of our young ones who have flown.

Once again the tree has done it,
there’s a zillion apples on it.
Which is why my wife is vexed,
because the fruit is green one day
and over-ripe the next.
When they fall from that tall shade,
they splash like golden marmalade.
If there’s one thing I can pass,
it’s apple butter mixed with grass.

We eat and give ’way all we can
and pray, “Thanks” for the garbage man,
but there’s still no resolution
to this apple tree solution,
and though some friction does occur,
she hasn’t told me it’s this tree or her.

Bon, Bon Voyage

I loved chocolates,
but wasn't certain I loved you,
until I gave you a box of bon bons.
And if I didn't say it was the way
you pressed that ribbon bow of pink
against your matching glow of cheek
and ate a piece with audible delight,
then rushed into my arms
to give me a chocolate coated kiss,
I'd be remiss.

Now our tempo's slowed.
Today you opened the cedar chest
to get a scarf for winter's cold.
Instead you reached for that same ribbon bow
and pressed it once again against your cheek,
like fifty years ago.

I know our love will see us through,
though you no longer rush into my arms
and chocolates which caused all this ado,
are now almost taboo.

Crumbs Under the Table

I search beyond
the drawn drapes of your mind
as I kiss you and whisper endearments.
You sense my love contains no base alloys
and that opaqueness in your eyes, changes
to instant incandescence.
You are my child.

I take you from your bed
to your wheelchair, hold you
and feel your trusting closeness
as our six decades rumble by
like fast freight cars.
My tears erupt.

Though in diminished state,
you pat my shoulder.
You are the mother once again;
I am your child.

Enough

I tell you in repetition that I love you
until the curtain of your mind
slowly recedes and then you smile.
I ask myself if other demands blunted
or undercut the reasons why I said,
“I do.” Was it the stress of job, the fixing,
mowing lawn or children’s needs?
Did I accept your ordered neatness,
ingrained honesty, just being there,
your love, and make you conscious
of my love for you—enough?

Hollow Daze

I reread your birthday card of three years past,
“I’d like to run away with you, to a castle
by the sea and love happily ever after.”

It’s too quiet, you have slipped away again,
unmindful of my fear you may become too lost
to find, before you’re more confused or hurt,
Youe walking is unsure, but I find you
across the busy street, waiting for bus
that goes to mall, to gratify your instinct
just to shop. I only can imagine the imprisonment
you feel, as your eyes, so expressive, now
stare back at me, almost opaque.
I think of Job, but with less fortitude,
I whimper, “Why are we on pyrite heap?”

You don’t remember birthdays any more, but you
have been the Queen of my heart castle all these years
and in your slight response, I hear you say,
“Only our love has no decay.”

I Cry

I lean to kiss your cheek
as you lie there.
You stir and look at me,
to see my tears fall on your face,
and in that stare,
even your crippled mind
cannot erase our love affair.
You run your fingers through my hair.

I Do!

We like to think that we are in control.
However, we are often helpless pawns.
Each cloud above does not insure a rain,
nor does it quit when mortals say, "Begone!"

I go to catch a fish and hope I'll land
that stream-lined lunker, lurking in the reeds.

Reports say that the muskie's five feet long
and weighs nearly fifty pounds, but my guide says,
"I don't believe they're biting well right now;
just last week, they were jumping into the boat."

So I postpone that thrill another year.
I got back home; my basement's lined with mud
that came from the flood. My wife won't speak to me.
Past harmony and smiles are placed on hold.

Our love-nest is a strained unhappy lair,
unfit for love's romantic habitat.
Remembering past rifts, I muck and clean,
so her love flood, will rain or reign again.

In Haste

You wanted to walk down the aisle.
I needed time to change my singular
to plural, to rearrange my world,
and salivate each opening petal
of love's elixir before I plunged
headlong into connubial abyss.

Now, as I watch you from afar,
you seem harassed and worried.
Do you wonder if you'd waited,
or I'd hurried?

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1981

Live Coals

When I ghost into your room you stare,
as though our sixty years had been erased.
I kiss you, feel no quickening in you.
That Readers Digest, like stunned bird,
is in your hand again.
You've never turned a page. I read a joke.
A pebble ripples your dormant surface
and you laugh – lightning shock tentacles
streak through my brain. I see that you
are reading too. I've made a freefall dive
into the hidden pool that is your world.
I have to leave. I walk to door and wave.
You wave back – tears blind me as
I rush to you, kiss you and cry,
“I love you, love you, love you!”
For a moment your eyes brighten.
The sun rises from the pond inside you
as I hear you softly say, “I know.”

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1993

Move Over Agatha

The last of my third helping approaches my mouth,
as my wife pushes her first away.

“I’ll never make that again,” she says.

I stop bending my elbow and look
at the *corpus delicti* on my fork.

There’s mystery there: chicken, broccoli, macaroni,
a pinch of this and a handful of that.

To know the specific amounts
would take an autopsy.

I’ve wondered if my wife uses the cookbook
to hide that spot on the tabletop.

She’s like this casserole.

God only knows what he put in her recipe.

What I originally anticipated,
isn’t exactly what I got,

but I can’t say that I’m disappointed.

Cheers! to intrigue.

I resume bending my elbow.

Surcease

You're not just the lady in a wheelchair,
who greets with a vacant stare.
You are my wife who lighted my life
for more than half a century.

You gave me everything you had,
the sweetness of your love,
and our two sons, who now stand tall,
a tribute to your quite uncommon
common sense, your brilliant mind
that now is hid behind
that hard-to-open door.

Yet, in my agony, I now look up,
and hear my Maker say, "There's more."

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1996

Temporary Adieu

We climbed some mountains, you and I,
and then we'd sit and watch the view
that mortal mind or brush
cannot create.

We walked the road of life, we two
had babies too.
Together, we'd kiss them goodnight.
Soon they scampered, talked and played.
Sometimes we'd sip our lemonade,
to just enjoy unfolding view.
'Twas then we knew our love
extended far beyond the blue.

You're gone. You're part of that eternal
Love that outstrips human comprehension.
The curtain's drawn, I can't enjoy the view,
but part of me, dear one, is there with you.

The After Glow

The fireplace crackles –
those curling tentacles of flame
come from a tree that recently
stood by our kitchen window;
and now each tapered wisp of fire
unloosens memories.

We planted it –
she engineered the spot,
I dug the hole;
and then she poured some soil and love
around its roots
and softly pressed it down.
She pruned a broken twig and looked at me
and said, “It’s beautiful, don’t you agree?”
I nodded in red-blooded normalcy,
but wasn’t thinking of the cherry tree.

I couldn’t think of spring
and not of blossom time;
because that tree was first to show
its perfumed petticoat of pink
against the dull gray background of receding winter.

Once as we shared its beauty through the pane
we heard the waking cry of our firstborn.
She kissed me as she slipped from my embrace
and said, “We have to change the human race.”

Came cherry picking time,
the thought an insult to my mind;
I’d rather catch a fish,
or watch a baseball game,
or float the Nile with Cleopatra;
but with some prodding and a bribe
of cherry pie,
I hoist a ladder toward the sky
against that tree.

I hang the basket on a limb.
Reluctant to begin, I look around.
I see the clustered red among the green
and hear the breeze play music on the leaves
with many muted, fluted, filtered sounds,
like harp strings from infinity.
There on a lower branch a robin sits,
with mottled breast of immaturity,
panting with fear and eagerness to fly.
Close by, his parent chirps encouragement;
now he must point up to the sky
to fly – or die,
as our young ones have flown.

Then reaching to the highest branch
I pick a cherry almost over-ripe
and wonder if my tastebuds can contain
such succulence.
And as the basket fills up to the brim
A metamorphosis comes over me;
Fishing can wait,
baseball has just struck three,
Cleo fades out of my reverie.
I find I'm happy to be
in this tree.

The tree fell down the other day.
There was no great loud crash –
a gentle sigh;
it seemed to brush the house
with soft caress –
a thoughtful last goodbye.
And now its ember flickering, burning low,
give off a friendly warmth in final glow;
and some sweet lingering sadness come to me,
so I must catalog in memory
this cherry tree.

Two Worlds

To each there is a hallowed nook
and there none else can enter;
where memories and canceled dreams
rekindle in first sharp intensity,
and the impossible adds spice
to every planned adventure.
For in that nook there is no pinnacle
Too steep – no flagging high resolve.

When I return to view the instant
replay of that younger day,
without fail sharp images prevail
of one who's part of both my worlds;
reliving tender giving
and fevered ecstasy,
when we first gazed from our
untested ramparts, blindly secure
our love would endure.

I look across the room at that full
compliment of womanhood, my wife,
who has withstood the shock and tremor
and tempestuous turbulence
of plighted life.
In the time tried toughness of her,
constantly I rediscover that I love her.

You

I sprayed our cherry tree just recently.
Now, it has donned its blossomed
see through gown, quite like the one you
used to wear sometimes.
You planted it and
everything you touched just grew,
which includes our two sons.
I also water indoor plants.
I don't want them or you to die.

But you won't bake a cherry pie for me this year,
crammed high with your thumb prints of love
around its crispy crust perimeter.
In June I'll pick a few and feathered friends
will come to banquet on the clustered red.

The doctor says that your days here are few.
I do not know, but when I get to see you
in your angel gown at my final adieu,
it could be like the one you used to wear sometimes.

Chapter 5

Family

A Pair of Shoes tells the story of his younger sister Violet who tragically died when she was 15. Balm in Gilead is a poignant telling of the story of their family's struggles when he was a boy due to a failed farm purchase and the toll it took on his father. A number of the poems in this section are about his grandchildren, especially of Kris, his first grandchild. Mark & Sally is the story of my mom and dad meeting as told by their apartment buildings. (It turned out they lived in neighboring buildings in the same complex.)

A Pair of Shoes

In our springtime,
we were a pair of shoes,
not complete
more than a step apart.

I was your confidant
and playmate;
by some strange decree,
your happy prisoner.

Our dad's arms were
wrapped around you.

The old farm cast
its siren spell
on our young eagerness.

We knew where tadpoles
blackened creek water,
and rotted fence post
nested bluebird eggs.

We watched sows farrow pigs
like sausages,
rolled down
a steep pasture hill,
clutching the green
to keep from flying
into spinning space.

The pigeon bonneted red barn
cooed its warm welcome,
when we visited the stall
where new colt nuzzled nipples.

We found wild berries,
straw, goose and black,

wild grapes, and red haw tree,
watched tumblebugs
roll their dung balls
of unhatched eggs,
and skittering young quail.

When mower cut off
baby rabbit's ears,
you cried.

I named my kitten 'Herbert',
yours was 'Suzy'. Later
Herbert kittened, but
the name remained.

The pasture raised its
bovine head as we
barefooted by to
wade the creek.

The perfumed violets
you picked were delicate
and beautiful, like you.

Springtime ended
'Death' took you from our
midst, and tore you from
our dad's strong arms.

It's tadpole time again,
The warm winds try
to lure me from my gloom.
How incomplete it is,
without one shoe.

Violet

This is another version of the previous poem, "A Pair of Shoes", that was published in Lyrical Iowa, 2000.

In our springtime we were a pair of shoes,
not complete more than a step apart.
I was your confidant and playmate;
by my desire your willing prisoner.
When he held you, our dad laughed.
The pigeon-bonneted red barn cooed
a warm welcome as we visited each stall.
When we climbed in a manger
old Bess bent low to kiss our cheeks
with nose soft silken like a rose.
The pasture raised its bovine head
as we barefooted by to pick
the fragrant fragile flower that bore your name.
At supper's end you sat in our dad's lap
and in that love time we all laughed.

Still in the springtime of your life
Death tore you from our midst.
Interred with you was our dad's laugh
and through each empty day
I limped along on just one shoe.

About Face

I didn't know my wife's uncle until
that very day that he married aunt Lil.
He was quite handsome... she was a pill—
her face would stop a train going down hill.

I wondered how aunt Lilly could halter
uncle Walter and lead him to the altar.
He loomed large beside her like Gibraltar,
said his "I do" and didn't even falter.

I was quite certain that he'd avoid it,
but he kissed her... and he enjoyed it—
like he had come up with a winner;
then aunt Lil asked us to come to dinner.

The festive table that we sat around
stretched 'cross the dining room from wall to wall.
I know I gained a lot more than a pound.
This was before that word 'cholesterol.'

Then, uncle Walter looked me in the eye
and said, "You must try aunt Lil's apple pie."
Right then, although I felt that I might burst,
I wished that I had seen aunt Lilly first.

Aunt Lilly

[This is another poem about his Aunt Lilly, perhaps an earlier version. This was published in Lyrical Iowa, 1985]

First impressions aren't always right.
I must admit to me she was a sight,
Like something that was sculptured without light.
Her features seemed pushed in.
Her hair did not behave.
What's more, her jutting chin could use a shave.

But dogs and cats and kiddies worshipped her,
And after just one piece of apple pie,
Why so did I.

Yet she entrapped me in another way
With the arms-out umbrella of her love
Big as the sky.
Of course augmented by
The apple pie.

She's gone. Up there they know
Just what she is and why.
She won't have to change her mold
Or fly as high.
She'll charm them with her heart of gold
And apple pie.

Balm in Gilead

Dad bought the farm when I was seven, and
cocooned by childhood's unrealities,
I roamed the fields and timbered areas.
I swam and waded a tree-lined creek and breathed
the richly scented wild rose summer air.

The rain-washed hillsides told of topsoil loss
by plow, down to infertile yellow clay.
Vaguely I knew, dad hoped to heal its wounds,
by expertise and boundless energy.

Soon, neighbors said, "It never looked like this
before," but that third year, the hot winds came.
The fields, that were alive again, were parched
to nothingness. The wind's malevolence forced dad
from the farm and robbed him of the right to wear
the mantle of the one who could provide.

The world outside had little use for him,
Tossed him upon the scrap-heap at forty-five
and dad, who wanted just to hold his head high,
welcomed his cancered end, content to die.
I pray there's a reward for just enduring.

Bert

Bert's home was where the circle met
to knit and sew, dessert and socialize.
I met him when I came to get my wife.
"They're not quite through," he said,
"you're going to have to see my shop."

I followed him downstairs and saw his bench,
equipped to cut and polish stone.
Like Arizona petrified wood,
Brazilian agate, Montana jade,
Australian opal, geodes and more.

He handed me a rock, an ugly thing,
then turned its polished side to me,
and there transfigured, was a panoramic
scene of trees and undulating hills
with Rembrandt's flair in sharp relief.

Bert died just recently, a man perhaps,
who did more wondering than most of us,
who fail to look beyond ourselves.
He told me, "Rocks are like people,
what you see, often isn't what's inside."

Canopy Magic

I never expected to sleep in a bed
With a pretty canopy over my head.
When I awoke I remembered it was March eight
Which was a special and very important date.
I looked out the window and across the lawn
From the room belonging to Jacqueline Dawn
To see the sun come through and turn back the gray.
I thought its warm presence wanted to say,

“This is that momentous and specially important day
When Linda and Phil will give Debbie away.
Too early for dogwood, too late for shedding,
But just Heaven sent for our Debbie’s wedding.”
Then I heard voices from inside the room
Which seemed to be filled with sadness and gloom.
The first voice came from a yellow toy dog
That seemed to be talking to his neighbor the frog.

He said, “Of our pretty princess there isn’t a trace
And there are two strangers taking her place.”
Then he said, “Humpty, I’m deep in distress.
Where she can be, I can’t offer a guess.
I’d ask these two strangers but they won’t believe
That we can talk. They’d laugh up their sleeve.”
Said Humpty, “I think I’ll just jump into space.
I don’t care if I do get egg on my face.”

“Don’t do it,” croaked the voice of the frog.
“It won’t help and you’ll just become an egnog.”

Dilemma

Your pretty mother placed you in my arms
when you were two months old,
and I, your daddy's dad
watch you unfold,
loving each magic carpet hour we shared.
Until at three, your sister came,
demanding priority.
And as they bowed and scraped to do
her every whim, I stuck by you
in your bewildered blue
of deposition.

I held in check my impulse
to succumb to every coo,
when you could see,
but now my double life's caught up with me,
because she walks and talks,
gets in my way and reaches up to say,
"Pick me up grandpa."

Emergency Relief

I used to compare dad with other dads and I thought we had done well. Anyone could see he loved my little sister. He'd hug her and she'd say, "I love you daddy." Then he'd laugh. I'll never know why dad bought that farm before showing it to mother. The house was a shambles, unpainted, sagging porch and broken panes. I saw the whipped expression on dad's face as mother looked at him and said,
"Dad, how could you do this to me." I felt sick.

I was seven and my consecutive reactions were all negative. An outdoor privy loses its novelty at one sitting. Nothing smells more putrid than an over-ripe hog lot. Carrying water in a bucket from the well was hard work. Washtub bathing in second-hand lukewarm water wasn't a high moment. And worse, mother seemed withdrawn. She hardly spoke to dad.

At supper, that kerosene lamp couldn't push the shadowy gloom away. Dad bowed to pray, "Dear Lord, thank you for-," he stopped. Maybe he wondered, "for what?" He covered his face with his hands. My dad was crying. My little sister slid from her chair and crawled on dad's lap. Dad reached for her as she said, "I love you daddy." Then mother ran to them, half crying, half laughing. Her arms were around them.
"I'm glad someone knows what's important around here," she said.

Grandchild's Letter

We received the note you wrote.
We read it and reread
and this is what we think it said.
“Dear way out there, please come our way
To be with me on my birthday.
As you know I'll soon be two.
I want to show you what I can do,
Since the last time you came through.
My mother and I read a lot
and do you know what?
I think I'll have a P.H.D.
Before I'm three,
And you can see I'm even writing.
Isn't it exciting?
That's all for now,
L - O - V - E.”

Grandpa's Premature Abdication

When they married,
He weighed one hundred thirty five.
Three hundred ten
At fifty, when he died.
He proudly drove his phaeton into town,
And sang his rich baritone in the saloon.
At night they tied his inert form to the buggy seat
And neighbors watched the unreined chariot retreat,
As horses stretched and strained the five miles home.
Grandma unhitched and fed the team, but let him lay.
In times of his sobriety, he fathered six,
Was good to them and bought more farms.
Grandma outlived him forty years.
She raised five temperate citizens.
But one outdid his dad;
Cirrhosis confined him at forty two.
Five out of six, not bad.

I LUV U 2

I stand by as my wife dials the call.
Our son is forty-one today.
I cannot know just how a mother feels
who spent months of worried wondering.
He came with everything in place
and with an inborn urge to be.

When he felt need, those lungs of his
kept us informed he was around.
I became adept at diapering
and walked the floor with him
through many earache hours.

Once when we listened to his prayer,
he looked at us and said,
“and God hear me.”
I felt lifted by this child.

I listen as she talks and sense
the still strong ties of love that’s there.
I’m waiting for my turn
to hear him call me, “Dad.”

Impulsive Grandpa

The meal was finished,
here and there one heard remarks
about the good food my wife had made,
and smiling, she had just refilled
grandpa's lemonade.

When, swooping down from high
there came that fly
to attack the cherry pie,
then made a pass
at grandpa's glass,
and settled on the edge.

As grandpa put his hands
slightly above its rim,
a change came over him;
twinkling murder in his eye,
waiting for that fly to fly.

"Don't do it," said my wife,
but I knew
grandpa had to see this through.
Comes a time, one must satisfy
an impulse, or die.

Then the resounding clap,
knocking glass and lemonade
on tablecloth and carpet,
and on grandpa's lap.

Soon my wife was on her knees,
with muffled grumbling,
wiping the rug.

I laughed 'till I began to wheeze,
and although grandpa was in Dutch,
my mirth didn't help things much.

But for uninhibited audacity,
in all veracity,
I wanted to give grandpa a hug.
About that fly,
there's something needs be said.
It lay there on the table, wet and dead.
We'll never know if what it got,

was grandpa's hefty swat,
or if a wave of lemon juice
had cooked its goose.

In Awe

You're beautiful
How did you rise above
The tearing torment
Of mind and flesh,
Defeat the bungling guesswork
Of pathology
And misdirected therapy,
And fight on,
When we resigned your life
To hopeless termination?

You endured.
I know you prayed.
You are a miracle,
A happening.

And these two words
Describe your mind,
Your heart, your verve,
And you,
you're beautiful.

Junior

My brother, Hank, was senior by two years.
Quite often he reminded me of that.
I guess he thought that rules were made to bend.
I helped him bend a few. What could I do?
Our dad judged our remorse by decibels.
Henry would howl and shriek before dad's hand
had found its mark; he barely got a whack—
while I slow burned, because what we had done,
I did because my brother coaxed and dared.
And while I simmered, dad laid down the law
on my back side, until I vocalized.

Henry attained some notoriety
at school. He kicked when he got in a fight.
That's how "Ostrich" became his titled name.
"Cat Satchel" put a cat in a valise
and placed it on the seat of teacher's chair.
They say her hair turned gray that very day.
One boy was dubbed "Green Cheese," "Skunk" was another,
but as for me... I was just Ostrich's brother.

Kristin at Ten

Dear granddaughter,
What I see
Exceeds my fondest fantasy.
You are definitely you,
But it's also very true
If we get a composite view,
You're part of your mom and dad
In the mixing that you've had
And a tiny touch of me.

You seem able to assess
What for you is best or less.
Gifted with a searching mind,
And like to see what you can find.
Fossils, or a rock or shell,
You glean the story that they tell.
Love for animals comes through;
Horses and dogs appeal to you.

You're a pretty kin
But it's deeper than the skin,
You are beautiful within.
Maybe you can find a clue,
Why I'm very proud of you.

Kristin is Two

The robins are chirruping
Up in the blue
In joyous harmony
“Kristin is two.”

The factory whistle shrill
Oh how it blew
Echoing far and wide
“Kristin is two.”

The sailboat made a toast
Shiny and new
Skoal to my first mate
“Kristin is two.”

The chimes beat out the time
Each note was true
Saying, “How minutes fly
Kristin is two.”

Whistle, sailboat and chime
The robins too
Say, “Happy Birthday dear,
We all love you.”

Kristin's Birthday

There's an expectancy
A newness is here
Earth, sky and living things
Join hands to cheer.

Dull soggy skies
Beginning to clear up
Robins emitting
Their full-throated "Cheer-up!"

And just as the darkness
Fades into morn
You hear her first cry.
A baby is born.

Then Nature announces
"Tomorrow is Spring
But this is a special day
Let's do our thing."

Small streams start flowing
From their frozen lair
Streaking the countryside
Like wisps of gray hair.

These tiny rivulets
From each crevice and nook
Dance happily headlong
To join with the brook.

And every hill and vale
Awake from their sleeping
Green blades of grass show through,
Crocuses peeping.

The rising sun's first glow
Seeming to say
"I'm going to do my best
To brighten this day."

You little wonderful
Cuddly and round
Exceedingly feminine
Coy and profound.

Now at the beginning
Of life's many tours
You have all the passports
The whole world is yours.

Nestled by mother
Sleeping sublime
Already preparing
For mountains to climb.

The wind in the willows
Has a wish to impart
Singing, "Darling we give you
A song in your heart."

The brook murmurs and curtsies
With gurgle and glide
Says, "I'm here when you need me
For sitting beside."

The grass says, "I hope
I can soften each day.
I want to carpet
Each step of your way.

The buds on the lilacs
On branches still bare
They're bursting with longing
To perfume your air.

Now for your mother
You've picked a bright star.
Wonder if you know
How lucky you are.

Your built-in magic
Makes everyone glad.
We are so happy
Our son is your dad.

Laugh Time

Expressions of sour pickles or heartburn
found in old family albums, make one think
it might have been a sin to grin.
Maybe, that the well-schooled photographer
was taught to utter “freeze” instead of “cheese,”
but my dad laughed.

My little sister was his catalyst
and when he held her in his arms,
his unleashed joy made shambles
of attempts to remain uninvolved,
I knew I’d get a toss in air and hug
and we all laughed.

Even now, dad’s laugh still echoes
through the hallways of my mind
and I, who harvest his rich legacy,
can sense his mystic blending
when I stoop to hold a child.
It’s then I laugh.

Little Miss Two

To you the second one, Little Miss Two
I feel that an explanation is due.
Somehow I'm sure you have the right
To know why our relations are slight.

Five years ago your big sister was new.
She was, and is darling let me tell you.
I felt she needed a somebody who
Wouldn't desert like the rest of the crew
And so I tried to allay the confusion
By overreacting to your intrusion
That though her world had been rearranged,
At least for us not one thing had changed.

Now number two, you have the limelight,
Because you're you, you've the divine right
Whatever you do is clever or coy
Like pulling hair or breaking a toy.
We all rejoiced when you came on the scene
But for three loving years your sister was Queen
And we dotting subjects held nothing back,
So now I've been trying to take up the slack.

When I first saw you it was better that I
Just gave you a glance and let you pass by
But once I held you all bundled for bed
You smiled at me and I lost my head
And I wondered while I was up in that cloud
How much of heaven is one man allowed.

You've been here almost two years Little Miss Two.
Lately I've noticed a change coming through.
Your big sister has decided that you
Need some attention from granddaddy too.
I'm allowed to notice, admire and to view
But it's understood that I don't overdo
So in some ways you're much like a star.
I'm loving lovable you from afar.

March 11

Old Matchmaker on Cloud Fifty
Said, "I've got a problem nifty."
He looked down into our home,
Then he rubbed his shiny dome.
"No doubt," he said, and he looked wise,
"Boys is where they specialize.
What a job. I must begin it.
I just never bet a minute.
Don't have time to scratch an itch,
Got to find a match for Rich.
Somehow I've got to juggle fate
All in one bunch - a daughter, mate."

Matchmaker searched and searched anew
For a young lady that might do.
He said, "This one's nice but this one's cuter.
I wish I had a good computer."
While the cloud was westward drifting
He kept seeking, looking, sifting.
Then he jumped up with a lurch
And almost fell right off his perch.
"This is it," he said, "The right one.
She's a winner and a bright one.
Oh! and Wow! and Gee! and such
This young lady is too much.
What a hunk of human race,
Full of character and grace.
With a heart that's twice the size
Of the Colorado skies.
Lovely, shapely, pretty, neat,
Gosh that guy's in for a treat."

Well, we at 1420 thank you.
We didn't raise or feed or spank you.
But somehow Cloud Fifty did
Something special for our kid.

Although you're 25 we're told
To us you're only five years old.

But just as sure as ducks like water,
We're just nuts about our daughter.

Mark & Sally

It was in the midst of autumn
Happy skies above the scene
Sunlight played upon the oak leaves
Brilliant tints of red and green

There among the flaming foliage
Two apartment buildings stood
Stood conversing with each other
Mortar, steel and brick and wood
Yes they talked and understood

55 said I've been thinking
There is something I must tell
It's about that lovely lady
In apartment marked 3L

You should see this gorgeous creature
To appreciate my glee
Even Al my elevator
Seems to get hung up on three

Said 56 would you believe it
There's someone who lives with me
There's a difference, yours is female
But this one of mine's a he

Seems to read a lot and study
Likes Mancini and Al Hirt
Going to take a lot of woman
His attention to divert

Guess he's just too doggone busy
Doesn't have much time for girls
If we'd get these two together
Maybe she could clip his curls

55 said that's our problem
This guy stays way out of reach
He admires his Monte Carlo

While she hurries off to teach

55 & 56 kept watching
As the days rolled swiftly by
Though their paths almost collided
She had never caught his eye

55 just shook his chimney
Said, as close as that guy passes
Why he must be made of mortar
Or he needs to change his glasses

Well you know it took a car wash
And our lady in distress
Couldn't get the meter working
And who helped her, you can guess

Soon the two apartment buildings
Noticed that the two had met
She admired his Monte Carlo
He admired her silhouette

One day 55 had noticed
56 was so excited
Said good friend our dream has happened
They are going to fly united

56 said I remember
Every word that young man said
It was surely something different
Than some books that I have read

He said "Marry me my dearest"
They were standing eye to eye
Then she sat down on my front stoop
Soberly she asked him why

"If it's data that you're wanting"
Was our engineer's reply
"I will give you facts and figures
Why I want to be your guy

First I did extensive research
Punched it on a lengthy note
Put it in our big computer
Just to find how it would vote

Well it gave a couple of spasms
Like it had an awful thirst
Then came out its studied answer
Quote "I wish I'd seen her first"

Now I'm fond of what you're made of
Arms and legs, your head and feet
And the whole complete ensemble
Makes a package mighty neat

When you smile I turn to jelly,
I like the pretty outfits on you
What would living be without you
Or without your mom's lasagna."

"Then," he said, "you're so distracting
That I get those tingling nerves
Studying cosines and angles
All I come up with is curves

Constantly with me are three words
There's no other way to say it
For the record dear I love you
I will play it and replay it."

56 looked at his partner
Said I had no business listening
When I saw her kiss him sweetly
I could feel my windows glistening

Now 55 & 56 are waiting
Once again to hear her laughter
Just to give them both their blessing
Wishes from each brick and rafter
To be happy ever after.

Monster-Slayer

From the kitchen she could hear a small worried voice.
“I didn’t tear it much,” our four-year-old
Talked to himself – tried to align
The separated print because his mother
Liked her things unmarred.
She saw him cringe at her uptight approach.
Her manner changed – “You had an accident,”
She said, “I know you didn’t mean
To tear my magazine.”
So with transparent tape they mended it –
She smiled until he smiled,
“See there – almost as good as new.”
That night she told me of the “accident”:
“I saw him shrink from my expected scorn
And cried inside – the monster mother in me died.
I know he’ll tear some pages of his life
And he’ll need all love’s taping glue
We have, to help him cope.
Well that’s one reason why I love my wife.

Picture of a Little Girl

Sugar and spice
Heaven hovers happily around you
In your role of imitation.

The ribbon in your hair reflects
The love of one
Who brought you into being.

Now you express a like concern
With tongue in teeth determination
For your own much hugged companion.

It isn't easy to fold, fit and pin
But you will finish
That which you begin.

Without pretense or design
The magic of you
Tugs at the heart.

Round Two

Our attic is a kind of purgatory
where portions of our lives are stored,
waiting for redemption.
Browned boxes, bound with yesterday's heartstrings,
their contents dimly marked.
Some unboxed things preempt my mind.
Grandmother's chair, I see her there,
telling of the cannon's roar in the Civil War,
my portable victrola, a souvenir
of those short days I researched lipstick.
A letter in my army barracks bag,
reread to say, "Your son is two today."
His toys, ball glove and the electric train
crowd 'round the stacks of *Superman* and *Mad*.
He called today and said, "Hi pop,
your eight-pound ten-ounce grandson has arrived."
Now where's that box marked "Teddy bear"?

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Sandbox Rendezvous

I see the sunlit halo in her hair,
As fingers sift the acquiescent sand.
A study in rapt concentration there.
Her little world subject to her demand.
Here, she is queen, the sand box her domain.
Where childhood's land of make believe holds sway.
Who knows the working of her busy brain
Or what the shapeless mound will be today.
Has she thought of the project she will try
Or does she revel in its cool moist feel?
It seems that she will build a castle high.
Here obvious retreats and fancy's real.
Just when I've caught the spell she looks with joy
To greet her shining knight, the neighbor boy.

Sandbox Romance

Maybe it was because you knew
I was head over heels in love with you
That you could take me by the hand
And let me step into your magic land.

We'd swing and laugh and play in the sand,
I was subject to your command
And all of life seemed just like you,
Beautiful, so fresh and new
And in that moment I thought how few
Can be young again and grandfather too.

Sarah

She's only four
But when in innocence and trust
She comes to me arms out
I stoop and let the years reel back
To share the moment on her terms
With that same lack of guile.

As I unclasp
From this sure miracle of love
Still lifted by an inner glow
I know I've seen His presence
In her angelic smile.

She's Four

I consider it an honor
To be asked to build
Castles in the sand
Or with building blocks.

In our generation gap
of seven decades,
I've developed some expertise,
But when I come up with
An architectural creation
Of which I'm proud,
She fells it with one sweep
And laughs at my over-reaction.

I've always wanted to be a comedian,
But I've never been able
To extract that much mirth
From any other age level.
I'll take what I can get.

The Break-Through

The Interstate cut corners where the milk cows mooed and mowed.
Two barns, like sentinels, still stare across the six decades,
since I spent my summer there, at ten.
Gone are the picket fence, the white green-shuttered house,
the large orchard, grandma, Uncle Carl and Gibbons.

My widowed grandma had to manage farm, darn socks,
make meals, churn, was and stoke the kitchen range,
and discuss with Uncle Carl when to sell the hogs.
She spoke German, save for short commands, "Feed chickens,
gather eggs, or slop the hogs." There wasn't time for me.
Gibbons seemed to care and when in homesick agony,
I cried, he'd lick my face and chase his tail.

Once, late at night in bed, I woke to feel my grandma's lips
against my cheek. She tucked me carefully with hands that hugged.
Then I knew there was a time; and all the busyness
and seeming unconcern was unimportant, nothing changed,
but Gibbons barked with glee at the new me.

I didn't want to leave at summer's end. Before I boarded train
I sobbed goodbye; then grandma reached for me in broad daylight
and there were tears upon my cheek that were not mine.

The Fledgling

When my mother opens the door,
I hear my brother's friend
in his low voice
for six short summers say,
"Can Henry come out and play?"

I, the younger sibling
want to take part,
but mother closes the door.
I stand in front of that oak barrier,
wond'ring when I'd get to go,
outside, unwatched.

When Henry comes back
with hair and clothes awry,
a smudge under one eye,
my mother wonders
why I cry.

Time Flies

Dad gave a pocket watch to me,
so I'd stop coming home at three.
He advised, if it would ever stop
to take it down to Si's Watch Shop.

The first time I went to see Si,
he had a black loupe stuck in one eye,
which purpose was to magnify.
He opened my watch and removed a fly.
"I've seen it all," he said, "I'm ready to die."

There's a joke that has been going by.
The watchmaker took out a fly and said,
"This watch won't run because the engineer's dead."
"I opened it," I said with a sheepish grin,
"but I didn't see that fly, fly in."

For fifty years Si made my watch go
and his demise seemed to me a low blow.
Si had his gravestone inscribed ahead.
"Don't bring your watches here," it read,
"because the engineer is dead."

To Daughter Your Cue

Your mother
waits expectantly,
remembering when you
were just about to be.

The repetition of the Madonna role
you play, was that same script
for her who gave you birth,
with inbuilt wondering of that
Great trust to mold a new life.

And knowing that her recipe
of love brought forth
the you, you are,
I'm glad the world and time
is yours, to be
the Star.

To Kristin

The rules are different now
That you're almost thirteen.
Some budding sign tells me
You're not the little girl I knew
and that's the way that it should be.
I sense your leap into maturity.
Your innate prudence
will show you the way
as you adjust to all
the subtle wonders
just ahead.
I'm still your staunchest fan
and you can be sure
I'm somewhere in the bleachers.

Uncle Walter

I've never tired of watching trains come in.
That metal monster snorted to a stop,
resisting levered bit like untamed stallion.
The engineer tugged a two toot salute
and stepped from cab to greet his niece, my wife.
He was six-six and scaled three-fifty-three,
as massive in his way as his steel steed.
Effortlessly as raising a coffee mug,
he lifted her up to his lips and kissed
my dangling, brand new little five foot two.

He and Aunt Lilly married late and though
her face would stop a speeding down hill freight,
they were compatible as unlike poles.
Her six stray cats and his four homeless dogs
and neighbor children filled their big back yard.

When he came home, the children ran to him
and climbed all over him to get a hug,
a piggy back and grab his hair.
To them
that Kodiak was just a teddy bear.

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Your Last Picture

Smoldering coals of memory
kindle images of more
than half a century since
shutters caught your likeness.

You were two days old when mother
helped me count the fingers on your hands.
'Twas then I felt that you and I had strange
sibling bond that made overt demands
on our proximity.

Your sisters and a brother
vied for your attention,
but you without apology reached out for me.
They smiled and acquiesced to our preemption.

I was tearful when you cried.
I patti-caked with you, helped
change your infant wardrobe,
meal time chairs were side by side.
After school I'd hurry home
to see your face light up
at my appearing.

I made your doll house and
stood by as we discussed the
why of almost everything.
You asked how babies came
and I explained that you kicked
in mother's stomach just before.
You said, "When I am big I'll have
a boy and name him after you."

In summertime I plowed the corn
and watched for you at end of row.
There you'd be with cookies and
some lemonade you'd made,
and as you left, you'd turn and say,
"I'll see you at the gate."

You rooted for our team, and me,
Intense beneath brown curls.
Our first baseman had more eyes
for you, than other girls.
He thought you were beautiful.
I didn't disagree.
There were picnics, parties,
Picture shows and ice cream cones.
With each new unfolding,
we laughed at life's rich overtones.

Then like a cruel avenging horde,
the illness came.
I listened to the doctor's word,
that you would die.
I wouldn't understand;
and as my vision blurred
while you told me goodbye,
I numbly counted fingers on your hand,
still not accepting fate,
till with your parting smile you said,
"I'll see you at the gate."

Chapter 6

Friends

A number of the poems are for anniversaries, weddings, and birthdays for his friends. Don't Tell Fred and Phantom Fred are about his longtime next-door neighbor Fred.

25th Anniversary

For his friends Lloyd and Ruth

So it's been 25 years, what's there to say
That can really do justice or point out the way,
To make puny phrases or fashion a play
On your minds so that you'll remember this day.
Just for the records, a moment of truth,
It's been a pleasure to know Lloyd and Ruth.
When it comes to committees what would we do
Without a McLaughlin to help see us through.
In church protocol or problems immense,
They smooth out the tangles, no matter how dense,
With orderly, quiet, serene common sense.
But I do not intend to praise to high heaven,
This line could continue to seventy times seven.
I'm more intrigued in how this all began;
You know the story - how woman meets man.
I'd like to keep this part in proportion,
But history seems to delight in distortion.
You all know the antics of Cleo and Mark;
Compared to this fire, it was just a mere spark.
It's too good to hide it, I just can't keep still,
Believe me this romance was no run of the mill!
A great deal has happened these 25 years;
The heartaches, the highlights, the joys and the tears,
The nylon silk stockings, the atomic fission,
The flight into space, the four-speed transmission.
But Hiroshima never created the void
That happened the day that Ruth first met Lloyd.
This meeting shook Lloyd and his whole universe,
For a time everything went in reverse.
The moon flipped completely around on its axis,
And Congress voted repeal of all taxes.
While Lloyd was standing there starry-eyed
Wilson changed his name from Jeckyl to Hyde.
And man you never heard such a din
When the Milky Way changed from A.E. to Flynn.
This had to be some time around '38;
And right away Ruth tried to give him the gate.

He took it and painted it dazzling white,
Brought it back and swung on it every night.
And while Ruth didn't exactly adore him,
She found she couldn't entirely ignore him.
Lloyd was in love way up to his nose
And so he decided he had to propose.
'Twas June and on that particular night
Everything seemed to be perfect - just right.
The soft moon shone at just the right angle;
The morning glory vines said, "Go on and tangle."
And this is the part we can't be forgetting,
The McLaughlin technique and a perfect setting.
The rose's perfume and the moon's lazy light,
This is what really happened that night.
Lloyd got down on one knee with his hand on his rib,
Said, "I've forgotten my lines, I'll have to ad lib."
He stammered and stuttered till Ruth said, "Oh, brother,
I think I'll go in and try to help mother."
This forced Lloyd to action and he said, "Please be kind,
This brother bit wasn't what I had in mind."
He looked at his watch and noted the hour,
And turned on some of that Iowa Power.
His eloquence flowed and I'm here to say,
He eclipsed Cassanova, Romeo and Boyer.
Ruth said, "You're coming in strong, loud and clear,
If you get any closer, you'll bite off my ear.
I accept your proposal down to the letter,
I've looked around and I couldn't do better."

So here we are back 25 years plus,
Just want you to know what started the fuss!

A Vignette for Lynnette

Wedding of Lynnette Peters

We are honored to share in your wedding day
And as they say, you've come a long way,
But many of us will never forget,
When you were the cutest little beget.
So here you are you lovely Lynnette,
With a beautiful smile and a neat silhouette
And we've brought our kerchiefs to help us through
Your "I do."
When your mother and dad decided to marry,
They doubled their number with Steve and Gary,
And then there was you.
Well, your dad was had when you made that first coo.
He pranced around like a proud cockatoo.
It's hard to be humble and not overdo,
When you have it all and a daughter too.
And you grew,
In your little girl way, somehow you knew
How to capture our hearts when we came in view.
That sweetness and love just seemed to shine through
You were as popular as grandmother's cookie jar
And you always looked like a young movie star.
Yes it's true,
You gleaned from your teachers and church what to do,
And you've made a beautiful person of you.
I suppose, to your parents, some credit is due.
You're a charmer and yet unaffected and sweet,
A favorite dish, a delightful treat.
I'm not through,
You've a winning smile, with eyes that dance
And sometime in your schooling you found romance,
When a young man found courage to make an advance.
Now could it be that just by chance,
You may have returned his hopeful glance?
With your arms full of books, did he open a door
And say, "If you ask me my name, I'll tell you Moore?"
It's time for the glue.
We cry and we smile as you walk down the aisle

Into Kevin's arms to linger a life long while.
May God be with you to nurture and bless.
We wish you both much happiness.

Bay View

Bob McBlaine and Stella and their home.

The path beyond the tennis court
Trails into wooded wonderland,
Where feet tread lightly on soft, silken
Chipped wood leafy carpeting,
Bordered by birch and smooth barked beech,
Which reach unlimbed to high umbrella canopies.
Maple and spruce, the hemlock and the pine
Combine in harmony
To shout out God's great handiwork.
The little stream ripples ore rock and sand
And if you're still you'll hear it trill
A happy background tune.

Perhaps you pause
And think of other Bay View charms.
The open arms of friendliness,
Its concert excellence
And learned lecturing,
Well-rounded programming
Of play and spirituality,
Unstinted hospitality
Of friends who said, "Please come."
One feels the need to say
That every day is Brigadoon.

Beware of the Rocking Chair

At ten we flexed our limbs like colts,
Shouted the grass green hills of June,
Climbed autumn's maple and blood red oak,
Skated the winter creek, made angels in the snow,
And knew that we were friends.

Soon, we roamed courtship's danger trail,
I wished you well at your "I do."
Our children came, they raced the hills.
We walked, smelled wild rose air, heard birds,
Saw calves nudge for their first food,
Frogs leap in a pond, white up above
And clouds made the blue more blue.

To that first ten we've added sixty more.
You're in surgery to mend a battered knee,
So we can walk,
Not sit and talk.

Bill

I feed him candy while he's carving hogs
at Packing Plant in those Depression years.
His jumbled mind escapes reality.
An Aid shuts curtain, changes diaper.
I want to flee as room reeks rank with stench.
My mind ask where that sharpness is, that named
the batting stats of all the baseball greats
Worked calculus and counted cribbage score,
before you uttered the first 'fifteen two.'

Thoughts sear my brain, "Is this the way it ends,"
is all that he was gone, or is it placed in
glossary, to be unlocked when Death
presses the key that makes the Bill I knew,
begin anew. Who hasn't dared those thoughts?
His wife comes in and places a hand on his.
"Hi Bill," she says. she loves him still. I see
a faint response in him, her man, her child.

Don't Tell Fred

On a scale of one to ten
I give Fred my neighbor, a nine.
We do have a problem;
Fred has ten squirrels
On his two-lot sanctuary
Adjoining mine.

He pampers the little bushy tails.
One, named Charlie, comes into his house
To get a cookie.
Charlie leads the rest of his pack
To my fruit trees to sample
The peaches, pears and apples,
Green or ripe
By harvest time you know who gets the crop.

Fred overlooks this imbalance
And is happy to see his squirrels happy,
It affects me differently.
But in spite of Fred's plundering pack,
I like the old so-and-so.
So go ahead and laugh.

Excellence

Retirement letter to Myrtle Moon

This is a good time to look within ourselves
To reflect on the privilege that was ours,
To have you, Myrtle, in our midst
To reassess our sometimes casual acceptance
Of the excellence, the sincerity, rapport,
The wit and humor, character, charm, credentials,
Intensity of desire to reach for the high notes
Of performance in those who faithfully responded
By constant attendance for thirty years.
For your own commitment of faith
As you passed along to your choir,
The importance of worship in song
As a musical message.
To dwell on the cementing quality
Of the outpouring of your love
With its feedback of love, admiration and loyalty
From those with whom you worked.
That overflowing sweetness of the you,
You are, which drew us all into the circle
Of your friendship with the realization
That we had also been in the presence of excellence,
And to know this excellence was the result
Of your dedication to music with your background
Of training from childhood through college
And, as Director of Music in radio,
With the ultimate involvement of your ministry
Through religious music as your crowning
Gift to God.
Thirty years of Thursday night practicing
By you and the choir reveals the rapport
Between you and those who were inspired
And committed, because you cared so deeply.
For the extra miles of effort to produce
The Easter, Christmas and other special programs,
For the high quality of our worship through music,
Your courage and ability to draw from the choir
By coaxing, inspiring and daring them to reach

Beyond their own estimation of their ability to sing,
For this excellence, devotion and tenacity of purpose,
We thank you.

So, to you Myrtle, our honored guest this day
We'd like to express our feelings in some simple way,
To pay homage to your excellence, to us you are a star;
We hope you know how much you're loved because you really are.

Fasten Your Seat Belts

There's a wedding the eighteenth of August this year
That will bring people together from far and near,
when Carolyn and Vance will walk down the isle
and for a moment, the whole world will smile.

Let's take a view of these two in advance
and check out the male partner in this romance.
The one who responds when his mother says "Vance!"

To get what he's getting he must be a charmer,
but from day one, this young man was a farmer.
He loved the land, the cattle, the mud and the rain,
to plant and cultivate and harvest the grain.

He'd hurry home from school to give Gary a hand.
Like a bees goes for clover, Vance loved the land.
This was his reason for being beyond any doubt.
Nothing could change that, wind, flood or drought.

He absorbed some values from his dad and Laurine
and he works his own special magic on any machine.
He can tickle a carb or adjust the ignition
and when he operates it, it's in fine tuned condition.

There are no fouled up plugs or a dirty fuel line
in his lawn mower, tractor or car, or giant combine.
His high sense of honor shows in work or in fun.
This world will be better for what he will have done.

I'm told he doesn't like chicken, but take it from me
Maybe I shouldn't pursue this, but its plain as can be,
His chick isn't a turkey, which even I can see.

She's pretty, she's cute, and curvaceous to boot.
Vance will have his hands full with all of that loot.
She likes camping and fishing and she goes canoeing.
She's a ten year 4H'er, that's a whole lot of doing.

You wonder what goes on under that head of hair.

Why, she caned a chair while at the State Fair.
This gifted girl had full scholarship for college.
There's a whole lot more that I have to acknowledge.

There was that moped, on which she'd head for the hills
and she will admit that there were some spills.
Sometimes when she tried to straighten some passes,
She wound up with some bruises and broken glasses.

That moped treated her worse than her pony.
I have to tell you about this and it isn't balogna.
Once she was tossed and she sailed though the sky
and her pastor confirmed her along with her black eye.

What she has done would take three to replace her.
She excels with clarinet and piano and is a pig chaser
I tell you this bomb shell is far more exciting
Than others, about whom, people have been writing,
like Cleopatra or Sheba, how about Joan of Arc.
What our girl has accomplished would fill a Ball Park.

How Vance and Carolyn became the Stars of this Show,
I have a few clues, but there's much I don't know.
If my memory's right, they met while taking a course
at an Experimental Farm, that's the extent of my source.

But they met and only the moon and the stars up above
know the wonder and joy of their unfolding true love.
We've had D Day and have put a man on the moon
and there's that dish that ran away with a spoon,
but nothing can top this gigantic collision
When those two lovers kissed to cinch their decision
to walk hand in hand whatever, in all kinds of weather
and share all their life's joys and problems together.

As they kissed, the roof's shingles sizzled and burned
The professor had left the room, but when he returned
he was quite dumfounded and worried, to say the least.
The sun turned around and went back down in the East
and that corn on the test plot grew forty feet high.
There was more but you'd think I was telling a lie.

The professor separated the two, he seemed quite harried.
He said, "Vance, don't kiss her again until you're married."

Vance likes his grandpa Herb and he adores Edna's pies
I guess you might say they are tops in his eyes
and it's quite possible if we sit back and wait,
they'll not only be tops, but also be "Great."

Let's give them love and best wishes for happiness,
good health and good crops, also, God Bless.

Fortieth

It's been forty years since Edna and Herb said I do for better or worse
So I'll try to do some remembering and put it down in this verse.
Before I get through with this exposure, Herb may knuckle my nose.
He has a right to retaliate because I'm gonna step on his toes.
It will take a little remembering to get this thing off the ground
And if you're bitten with curiosity, you'd better hang around.

Let's go back a few years to the time when Herb made his infant arrival.
A bouncing big boy who wanted it known that he believed in survival.
His mother looked at her little buzz saw and said, "We'll name him Herbert."
She started right out with a brand-new diet of railroad spikes mixed with
sherbet.
Of course you may not believe what I say, but you can take it from me
Herb grew so fast he was driving a truck when he was barely past three.

He grew to manhood with stars in his eyes and a heart as big as the sky.
I was lucky enough to be one of his friends - he was one heck of a guy.
One day he drove into the dairy and unloaded this truckload of cream
'Twas a pleasure to watch him handle those cans - he was right on the beam.
Then he went to the office to check out his totals and suddenly looked at a
girl.
He'd seen a few of the species before but this one made his head whirl.
It was easy to see why Herb was in trouble; that blue-eyed bombshell was
cute,
Pretty, vivacious, tantalizing, lovely, curvaceous and clever to boot.

Soon the two were going together and they were together a lot.
I don't know the degree of their romance, but that summer was really hot.
One day Edna's mother looked at her daughter and noticed that she was
pensive.
"Mother," she said, "I love that big bum; that's what makes me so appre-
hensive.
I think he likes me and I can't imagine going through life without Herb.
Sometimes I wonder if he's just spending my time and will soon leave me on
the curb."

Edna's mother said, "Honey now don't you worry. I think that boy's got it
bad.
He's about ready to pop the question so please try not to feel sad,

And I really don't mind that freeloading lout eating up most of our food. No man is good enough for my daughter, but he's about the best of the brood.

But I'm also very anxious to know if his intentions are perfectly clear, Somehow I have a strange intuition that there'll be a wedding this year." That night Edna was busily primping and getting dressed up for her date Because Herb had called, said he'd something to tell her and he'd be there about 8.

Edna's mother came into her room to see if she needed assistance Said, "If that boy's normal, that gown you're wearing will break down any resistance.

I don't think you'll need it, but here's some perfume made by Jones, Tanner & Ringo.

Guaranteed money back to get your man and the name of the perfume is Bingo.

Soon a car came up over the hill and as it came through the gate You could have set your clock with split-second timing. It was exactly 8. He sorta floated up to the door. He was long, lanky and lean. When he saw Edna his eyes lit up like the lights on a pinball machine. They got in the car and drove for a while, then Herb turned off the ignition. "Edna," he said, "I can't go on seeing you in my present condition. The other day I was thinking of you and almost totaled my truck. I gotta do something about this or I'm gonna run out of luck. One moment I'm high as a kite and then I'm down in the dumps and I feel kind of chokey and feverish like I did when I had the mumps. I normally am sure footed and agile, but now I'm a pretty sad case. When I try to jump over one little molehill, I fall flat on my face."

Herb looked at Edna and said, "That cute outfit you're wearing ain't helping at all

And when I get a whiff of that perfume it drives me right up the wall.

I think you and I ought to get married - baby, I hope you agree."

Edna said "Bingo" under her breath and then said, "It's O.K. with me."

Well, they got married , and you know what happens to people after they marry,

There was that stork bringing cute little bundles - Marcia, Betty and Gary.

And now there's another generation of youngsters for Herb to bounce on his knee.

It seems that things are progressing into a sizable family tree.
As you see, they look good together, though there have been bad times and
good
Lots of smooth sailing, sickness, sorrow, high winds, hailstorms and flood.
But through it all Edna's still the charmer, sweet as her apple pie.
And as for Herb, all I can say is that he's still one hack of a guy.

So it's time to say our best wishes, may there be much happiness.
It couldn't have happened to two nicer people, so we'll just say, "God bless."

Happy Birthday

I don't know when Lester
put on his best polyester
and swung on your front gate
when his heart began to palpitate.

Were you just sweet sixteen?
Some years have come in between,
since Lester came on the scene.
You're mother and grandmother too,
and should have your name in Who's Who,
We know why the stars in the sky
put that love twinkle in your eye.

Years may have rearranged you.
But they really haven't changed you.
I think you know what we mean.
To us you are still sweet sixteen.

Happy Trails

It wouldn't be fair to allow this Love Affair
not to be told in such depth and flair,
that as the story unfolds, you'll be aware
beyond a doubt, nothing else can ever compare.

Cleopatra and Mark were on the Nile in a bark.
We're told this meeting was more than a lark.
The Samson Delilah match would have burned up the Ark.
Compared to Al and Jan, theirs was just a small spark.

Now we know that what God does, He does very well
It disturbs Him when couples just don't seem to jell,
so he called in Cupid, the one who handles the darts
and said, "My boy you've been making too many false starts."

"Now, I've picked out two that I'm sure will do,
if you bungle the one, believe Me, you're through."
In the Burkinbine home, Al's mother looked at her son
and his dad said, "My dear that's a real noisy one."

Well, Al grew and became an exceptional lad,
with a purity of heart, like Sir Galahad,
but his affections seemed to be a mechanical factor.
He turned on at the purr of a truck or a tractor.

In the home of the Welsches, there was little Jan
and Love came from each corner as she skipped and ran.
Well, she grew and there wrapped in one little bun
was the loveliest female under the sun.

Her eyes danced like stars, under that wavy brown hair.
People warmed to her love as she went here and there.
Even God smiled as He looked at this creature so fair,
said to Cupid, "When Al sees her, he's going nowhere."

They met at Camp Wesley Wood, just before the sunset,
where heaven on earth is as close as it will get.
In a moment, an instant, our Al was on fire.
It was as though he grabbed a hot spark plug wire.

God and Cupid looked on and then Cupid said,
“This one’s a bell ringer, I’ll quit while ahead.
So I’ll retire, and I hope it was your intention
to give me the fringe benefits that I mention
like your tender care and a full pension.”

Then God said, “Cupid, you can’t do it that way,
because there’s going to be a Linda and Jay.
Jay will need a girl and Linda a guy.
You come up with the best or you’re going to fry.”

We want to honor this pair and their twenty-five years
We know, here’s something just as it appears.
They’re still in love way up to their ears

We’ve watched each mile as they’ve passed in Review,
Knowing God loves them and we love them too.
Of course we know you’ve had some trials and travails
but like Camp Wesley Wood, we wish you more Happy Trails.

My Fair Ladies

About his poetry club

I have this constant quandary
when I play golf or do the laundry,
that keeps my mental process in a whirl.
When the Alphas have their meetings
and we share our friendly greetings,
sometimes in the absence of Earle,
everyone else is a girl.

Now, I'm an ordinary man,
but I'll explain it if I can.
As we Cinquain or Haiku,
I'm not sure how this will strike you,
but I must admit I like you;
maybe that's why you can see
I wish there were more of me.

I'd like to do soft shoe with Sylpha,
or picnic in the park with Georgia Wade.
And I for one, think it would be fun
to wander with Virginia in the shade.

Imagine smelling lilacs with Lila
as we talked about the life-style of Thoreau.
Just to listen to our Carolyn play piano
wouldn't that be a lovely way to go?

Ethel is a pretty name
and the owner is the same.
She adds glowing coals to total flame.
Kathy has me slightly daffy,
because her smile is sweet as taffy;
Anyway you slice her, she's a treat.
Something else I'd like to do
on a bicycle for two,
Is pedal with Margo feet to feet.

I'd like to gaze at Lucy's bonnet

as she reads her silken sonnet
or hear the style and tone
of the poetry by Joan.
She handles the King's English
as though it were her very own.

Life would glitter with Goldie,
never could be old or moldy.
I would not be out of tune
if I traipsed along with June
and though Mary's moods may vary
from delightful to contrary,
wouldn't she be something with a moon.

If Elma's favor I could curry,
I would never have to worry
and Edith, for real,
has a definite appeal.
Yes, I'd like to share a meal
in the kitchen with Lucille.

Although it is no secret
that I really love my wife,
every Alpha member
has a portion of my life.

So, to each one of you
in this poetic space,
I love the way you handle phrases,
your nobility amazes,
here's a mental warm embrace.
I've grown accustomed to your friendliness,
your tolerance and grace,
accustomed to your face.

Phantom Fred

In the predawn winter morning
When the wind chill's minus fifty
And you cannot see your neighbors
For the drifts that block your sight.

From out of 1418
Comes a figure trim and nifty
Dressed in warm and cozy raiment
In the still and dark of the night.

Then from out of his faithful blower
Comes a loud and mighty roar
Makes the North Wind shriek and holler,
"One of us had got to go."

And I hear this welcome clamor
As this knight in shining armor
Clears the walks of Henderson
Of the stuff that's known as snow.

Thinking if I had my druther
I would rather almost smother
With my head beneath the cover
That be out there with our hero
In the chilly cold subzero.

Soon when morning light starts streaming
Wondering if I've been dreaming
I take a cautious gander
As I open up the shade.

Then I see that happy vision
Done with neatness and precision
See each well-defined incision
Phantom Fred had made his raid.

So I express appreciation
To the molder of creation
For this friendly, thoughtful guy next door.

I don't even want to know
Why Fred likes to blow the snow
But I know he'll be there when there's more.

Point of No Return

She was three when I first saw her
And watched her from afar.
Her mother dressed her prettily
Like a young movie star.
She soon called on the neighbors
And we were no exception;
Everywhere this little girl love
Would get a warm reception.
We had a grandchild just her age
But oh so far away
You might say we borrowed the one
Whom we could see every day.

One day she called me 'grandpa'
As she brought me a toy to fix.
Did she perceive I needed her
Or was it pure politics?
I opened the closet and showed her the things
That used to belong to our boys;
The games, the marbles, the wooden train
And their assortment of toys.

We played games and worked puzzles
Sometimes we'd read a story
Then hurry back to the closet
To make another foray.
With the toy sax and harmonica
We'd march through the house on parade
Taking time out for a moment
To make a cookie-jar raid.
Living it up in this little girl Loveland
Of make believe and charades.

Of course I knew it would happen.
Her family moved away;
Gone was the world of fantasy -
No little girl love came to play.
And when we met we'd say hello
And say things that strangers say.

Time went by and her family
Came to visit next door;
There was a knock - her eyes seemed to say,
“Let’s try it again once more.”

In she came and the toys came out
And we went through our routine;
Puzzles and games and riding the tractor
Pumping the sewing machine.
One thing I knew she wouldn’t omit
She just had to play store
My old typewriter, the register,
Canned goods all over the floor.
She would punch the prices
And I’d buy groceries galore.

But I sensed that she, too feverishly,
Was trying to play the game
She looked at me and I could tell
That somehow it wasn’t the same.

As I stooped down she kissed my cheek
With a delicate gentle touch
And we both knew our little girl love
Didn’t need me so much.

Pumpkin Chariot

I knew him since that time
His bald faced bull
Bulldozed our pasture fence
To get to Betsy May
Our cow.

From that first day
His thickened tongue told dad
About the fence he'd mend.
He was our friend,
Sam Dow.

Our dad called Sam a souse
With a proclivity
For getting to our house
Before inertia
Ended his activity.

He'd place my sister on his knee
As I stood by
And with his wild grape grin
He'd spin
His distilled fantasies.

Sam scared us half to death
As antiseptic breath
Told of the elves and giants,
Fairy princesses and kings,
Witches, hob-goblins and things.

We were a trinity
He our pumpkin chariot,
And we traversed a world
Of magic wonderment
In our affinity.

Sometimes he'd start to shake
As that six headed snake
Would torture him.

We'd cry my sis and I,
Afraid he'd die.

Came World War One
The letter said,
"We need you Sam."
And it was sad that day
He went away.

Sam didn't write a word
But soon we heard
He'd shot two fingers
Off his trigger hand.
They didn't understand
Sam.

He thought they'd send him home
Because of his condition,
But with some admonition
They just recycled him
To carry ammunition.

We read about the war,
The casualties - at night
We'd pray all this would end
Before -

It ended. Sam came home
We heard he had a wife
And joined the church.
We couldn't picture him
Without his liquid lurch.

It sobered sis and me
Gone was our trinity.
There was no reason
He should be
In our vicinity.

A Knock, there was Sam Dow,
Whooping, beholding us,

Stooping, enfolding us,
Strong arms holding us,
Our friend, Sam Dow.

Then suddenly
Sis was on his knee-
I close as could be-
“Hop Frog,” he said,
“Was big as your dog,
Kind hearted, wouldn’t eat
A fly.”
Then I heard the rumble of our
Pumpkin chariot,
Close by.

Three Score

Well, what do you know, it's been sixty years
since Ed and Ruth said their "I do's."
That's a long time and if you make it,
you get your name in the news.

I've compared them to some six or seven;
to what makes a relationship sound.
It seems Ed and Ruth had one foot in heaven
and one foot here on good solid ground.
If I'd judge this marriage, it rates at the top
and has kept its fizz like strawberry pop.

I was Ed's friend and he put up with me
through days that were good, bad or rough.
He's the kind of a friend that will pick you up
when you're down and find the going too rough.

We played handball a lot and played a lot more.
The YMCA should have Ed's name on the door
and if I haven't mentioned this before,
Ed and Ruth are winners, they know the score.

When I heard that Ed was going with Ruth,
I guessed this wasn't moonlight and star.
That pretty P.K. liked the new Chevrolet,
but she liked the driver better by far.

I wanted Ed to wind up with the best
and there was the Reverend's daughter.
I'm glad to say it turned out that way.
Ed reached for true love and he got her.

When I look back, I'm not very proud
of what we did that night that they wed.
Raines, Swanson, Rankin and someone named Elmer
messed their love nest and short-sheeted the bed.

Some years went by and I heard about Pat
and you know about this thing with a parent.

Letters and calls said, "Patty this, Patty that." I'm quite sure the affliction's inherent.

They loved and adored this little Queen
and I knew she was darling from pictures I'd seen.
But though the years would keep us apart,
I can tell you now that Pat's a real sweetheart.

About your sixtieth, what can I say,
but to wish you both much happiness.
You've proved where love is, there's a way,
so I'll just end up with, "God bless."

Chapter 7

Humorous

Of course, my favorite is My Grandson Dan. It is about how my grandpa would play with me all day – hard – when we would visit me. He would run after me and “grant my every whim” as he said in my poem. These are some of my earliest memories – of how much fun I would have with my grandpa.¹

Other favorites: Down Wind, Excruciation, No Fizz, On the Way to the Bathroom, Perish the Thought, Puppy Dog Tails, and Protocol.

¹My wonderful wife presented a framed version of this poem next to a picture of me and him as a gift and it is in our home.

A Little Knowledge

I approach my garden with some trepidation this year.
Somewhere I read that each minute clod contains
millions of micro-organisms
which, if further categorized,
would fill an encyclopedia
with their dissimilarities.

Now, as I spade and fork,
I know I'm beheading and disemboweling
as I attempt to create the velvet surface,
to receive the squash, corn, tomatoes,
beans, onions and the border ageratum.

When I was a little boy,
I thought mud was mud
and after every rain
I squished it between my toes
and laughed more easily in my
simpler level of comprehension.

Adam Confesses

God looked at the earth, the sky and sea.
"Not bad," he said.
"Now I will crown Creation
with its rarest jewel,
a woman.
This I must do with care."

He gleaned from every picture in His mind.
Sleek slenderness of the gazelle,
star twinkles in her eyes,
lips with a puckered smile,
Bosoms that undulated with each
lilac scented breath and of Himself,
he gave her His most precious gift,
a mother's love.

God reached out to touch her hair.
Shook mountains with His cry.
"I DID IT! Now she'll need someone
to charm and change."
Hurriedly He made a man.

Apropos

Artistic efforts, depicting
contemporary attitudes, are often seen
on panel trucks as they go whizzing by.
One example was this offering
that reached out to pluck my eye.
Its vivid revelation seemed to be right on,
with a picture of a fellow
sitting on the john.
It had this subtle caption
To dramatize my viewing,
“I’m the only one in Washington
that knows what he is doing.”

Australian Hind Sight

If Mother Nature makes mistakes,
the kangaroo should win sweepstakes.
They're known to leap near fifty feet
and look like something incomplete.
I think that it leaped out of sight
before Ma Nature got it right.

Yes, I have hugged a kangaroo,
not in the out-back, at a zoo.
I bought some Roo food, just to get
close enough to it to pet.
Its yen for food and response rates
with my most unfulfilling dates.

The one I hugged had bad B.O.
It doesn't rain much there, you know.
Comparing them, a skunk would smell
more like that perfume named Chanel.

Next time, I'll check the Media
or get the encyclopedia
and if I get the urge to roam,
I'll pop some corn and stay at home.

Before Bathing Suits

Our little creek was a focal point
for pre-teen boys in summer.
Each spring it overflowed and bulldozed
through our last year's dam of mud and rocks,
which we rebuilt again to belly high.
Like frogs, who shared the pool, we skinny-dipped.

A willow leaned across our pool
and when two boys climbed out on a limb,
'till it bent low, the farthest out let go
and he'd bare-bottom splash both banks,
as the other took a fast trip skyward.
From that high perch, he saw the country church,
close by our school, the farms and barns; our world.

One day, some girls came to our creek
to picnic, and we hoped, to swim.
We watched from our strategic hiding place,
but when they giggled to the pool,
they wore assorted under-things.
Our Adventureland was fun and free.

Behind Sight

I smarted under the debacle
of a ten on par five seventeen
and had to wait for the foursome ahead
to get off the eighteenth green,
when I remembered some advice I was given,
“Don’t stand when you can sit.”
So I sat on the grass and admired
the view of the State Capitol.

I finished the course with a par,
with a score I would try to forget
and sixteen chiggers, which I couldn’t.

Now I know, that along with trees, divots,
sand traps, ditches, tall grass and water,
golf has another hazard.
Also, the view of the Capitol
is much better, standing.

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Bug Off St. George²

Sometimes when I'm a bit uptight
from doing everything just right,
I have a room, my own retreat
where I can kick shoes off my feet.
My desk is cluttered and piled high,
even the curtains are awry.
When I look at this untidy mess
you think it would cause some distress,
but I like it this way, I confess.
There are some things tossed on the floor.
A dragon's in my dresser drawer.
He guards the clothes not folded right
and warns, "Hands off," or he might bite.

Before I leave my room, I comb my hair
and straighten out the things I wear,
and that prim image others see
Isn't the authentic me.

²Published in *Tasteberrries for Teens*

Bygone Daze

Years ago a child should be seen and not heard,
so I listened and what I heard seemed absurd.
People used words that didn't mean what they said:
when Bill Jones "kicked the bucket," I didn't know he was dead.

Then someone remarked that "Bill didn't cry
over spilt milk," and that's when I
thought about Lady, our cow.
When I milked her she seemed to manage somehow
to kick the bucket quite often. I didn't know it was news.
Would Bill Jones have cried if he'd been in my shoes
and had to walk to the house at twenty below,
with empty pail and wet pants, through three feet of snow?

Someone else said, "I've done some research.
When they 'carried him in,' it was his first time in church."
I wish I'd been there, I thought, I'll bet he put up a fight.
I'm forced to go every Sunday morning and night.
In my estimation, Bill Jones was all right.

Cambric Tea

To you it seems to make sense
To always be on the fence
With politics bland
You don't take a stand
or accomplish what you commence.

Because it's your forte to straddle
When someone hands you a paddle
You're so half hearted
You never get started
You don't row, you just dilly daddle.

You're so static you are a riddle
You part your hair in the middle
Your conscience is zero
Your hero is Nero
If your house was on fire, you'd just fiddle.

If you cogitate you will agree
That in what's written here you can see
Each word, every line
Each thought and design
Is a mirrored image of me.

Cold Facts

My early years contain some nostalgia,
but wintertime was a mental neuralgia.

What first comes to mind, is, that I froze.
I had cold feet and a runny nose.

I coughed and I sneezed, without relief,
with a much used inadequate handkerchief.

Those outdoor, subzero trips to the John,
at morning, noon, midnight or dawn,
made you cringe, but you had to absorb it,
and that icy rim, nearly put you in orbit.

Every day it was like taking a beating,
but I never really considered not eating.

That potbellied stove, that we stood near,
gave you a fried front and a frigid rear.

There was always that nightly dread
of climbing into that cold, cold bed.

In the morning, warm, you began to abhor,
putting your feet on that frosted floor.

Winters still psyche me to the core.
I shiver before I go out the door.

Dismissed

The right erudite Doctor Liz Aster,
concocted her own new reducing plaster.
Her forty inch hips stuck out like a shelf,
so she tried to use the stuff on herself.
She put it on, waited, then tried to peel,
but that plaster belt had hardened like steel.
She was entrapped and in dire distress,
so she called 911 to get out of the mess.

The emergency doctor used hack saw and chisel
and while Liz fretted her faulty fat fizzle,
the doctor pried off the plaster and more,
until what remained was a neat thirty four.
To make time go faster while she convalesced
and to keep herself from being depressed,
she wrote a best seller that will outlast her,
About the Liz Aster plaster disaster.

Down Wind

This may be called the Deodorant Age.
Television tells us relentlessly
that it's the pits.

It's no Secret that a concerted effort
is made to Ban that which keeps us from the Dry Idea.
We want to be Sure of our acceptance in elevators.
Everybody and the Irish Spring to aerobic cadences
and still feel Fresh and full of Zest.
A woman wants her Brut to put on Chaps.

If you are unhappy with your
present popularity poll,
Dial nine eleven to Safeguard you
and keep offending areas Arid.

So, Roll on with that Old Spice in your Lifebouy
and don't get too close to that old man
carrying a sign which says,
"Mennen women, keep your Right Guard up."
Head for Timborline.

Equal Rights for Halloween

Magic carpets ought to be
For anyone in the family
But it seems unfair to me
Why can't the one in the moon be a she?
Now whoever wrote a romantic tune
About a sexy blonde in the moon?

The general opinion that prevails
Is that broomstick riding is just for females
So if you own a traveling broom
And plan to take off into the gloom
You can make a gesture that's painless and quick,
Invite your man with you on the stick.

Et Tu Auden

This has preyed on my mind, so I will tell
of someone who wrote a villanelle.
The words poured out like the peal of a bell
and he seemed to be under some sort of spell.

He wrote two lines that rhymed rather well,
put one line between like bread with jell
and then like the farmer in the dell
he heigh ho'd and died and went to hell.

Satan said, Heavens, they come here pell mell
and most of them are so bad that they smell,
but this is too much, I've no place to dwell
for a man who's written a villanelle.

Excruciation

I've been a guinea pig for pain
Since back when I was young,
When leveled by a baseball,
A high fast curve that hung.

I've fallen off a ladder
And bounced on every rung.
If there's a bee within a mile,
I wind up getting stung.

I've even fallen off a horse
And landed in the dung.
The doctor banned my smoking
When he removed one lung.

But what annihilates me most
Is when I bite my tongue.

Fall Out

I try to love my neighbor,
But I find it rather hard.
She has a giant oak,
Its leaves are in my yard.

Famous Last Words

I'm a prize pig longer and leaner
I've done my last eatin' and rootin'
Seems sad a winner should wind up a weiner
I prefer to be called a pig newton.

For Pete Sake!

We had to watch out for Pete.
He had those oversized feet.
What he had in mind,
was to sneak up behind.
He was a pain in deceit.

Gee Whiz

Doc Gee was a legend with scalpel and pills.
His people came from out of the hills
And he cured them from their assortment of ills.
As a surgeon, there was no match at his trade.
His skillful techniques put the rest in the shade.

One night when he found he had nothing to do,
He decided to sample his favorite brew.
A storm came, it thundered, it lightnined, it blew,
And the rain hit the roof with a heavy tattoo.

Then in all this bedlam he heard a loud crash;
He went to the window and peered through the splash.
Saw the wreck of a plane right close to his sash.
He reached for his bag and was out in a minute,
Went to the plane, drug out the man who was in it,
Minus one hand and one foot, in shock and in pain,
Found missing members, brought him in from the rain
And soon had him all back together again.

The next morning he awoke to the first rays of sun,
His head seemed too large, the room tilted and spun,
And he knew by the bottle, he'd had more than one.
There was a man lying prone on the table,
Looking cheerful, alert, quite healthy and able.
Then Doc remembered what happened that night
And came over to check if he was all right.
Then came the shock at what he could see,
The foot was where the hand ought to be.
He pulled back the sheet to confirm what he knew.
There was the hand beside that big shoe.
The first thing the man said to Doc was, "I'll sue."

It took a long time before the case came to trial
And Doc had been worrying all the while,
When his patient returned and said with a smile,
"I'm just here to say that I'm dropping the case."
As he stood there, he put his foot in his face.
"I know I'm a freak but I don't give a hoot,

I now wear a Yankee baseball suit
Because no one can hit my famous upshoot.”

Doc reached for the bottle that he had stowed
And said, “How about one for the road.”
They had a few more and began to unglue.
Doc saw that foot where the hand ought to be.
He said, “There’s something wrong here that’s easy to see.”
His guest had reached that state beyond question
Where he was ready for any suggestion.
So Doc laid him out and when he was through
Hand and foot were in place good as new,
And when the man came to, he muttered, “I’ll sue.”

If There's Time

If there's time, I'll write a letter,
that has been long overdue.
I will stop and smell the roses
and appreciate the view.

If there's time, I'll wipe my nose,
before it drips on my new tie.
I will look up all the answers
and won't have to ask you why.

If there's time, I'll pen a jingle,
"Mary had a pretty calf,
Not a pig or dog or rabbit,
not a monkey or giraffe.

If there's time, I will explain,
what is plain as it can be.
Those short skirts that Mary wore,
also showed a shapely knee."

It's an Open and Shut Case

There's more than meets the eye with our front door.
Like me it creaks, its hinges seem to grind.
They just don't make doors like that any more any more.

It isn't burglar proof, its age, three score,
but I don't mind it's still one of a kind.
There's more than meets the eye with our front door.

The panes in it extend from top to floor.
It lets light in, the way it is designed.
They just don't make doors like that any more.

Someone may come whom we'd like to ignore.
Good foresight is much better than behind.
There's more than meets the eye with our front door.

Our sons slammed it so often in uproar,
but it endured their varied state of mind.
They just don't make doors like that any more.

We've shared life's going in and out and more.
For me to change you now would be unkind.
You're more than meets the eye to me, front door
They just don't make doors like that any more.

It's not Phony (Helens)

I've had this problem for much of my life.
It's about women who are friends of my wife
and it's not as simple as eating a melon,
when she tells me she has just talked to Helen.

It happens every time she hangs up the phone;
I think of five Helens and wonder which one.
Is it Carlson or Stubbs, Main, Nelson or Powell?
This limbo I'm in gives me a pain in the bowel.

I'm seeking a clue for who called and why.
I'm not a mind reader or clairvoyant guy.
My wife knows whom she's talking about;
if I had three guesses, I'd probably strike out.

If 'twas golf, I'd say we're not on the same course,
but, it's not enough to be grounds for divorce,
Powell or Carlson, Stubbs, Nelson, or Main,
Just who in the Hell'ens is calling again?

**Lacuta's Dance Studio
8th and Locust Street
Twenty-five cents**

I danced with girls
who came without male escort
and like a honey bee
I flit from flower to flower,
until I fluttered into Lori's arms.
Oh! she could dance.
Her nimble feet lent wings to mine
and we two waltzed right into Love.
But our time tables didn't coincide
And so I left part of my heart
and dancing feet,
at Eighth and Locust Street.

Life Insurance

I've always felt foolish just jogging around,
picking them up and putting them down.
There are some hazards, whenever one jogs,
like blisters, uneven side walks and dogs.
My sudden downfall came when I tripped
while ogling a pretty girl as I flipped.
My orbit was short, not much of a thrill.
My landing was the sad part of the spill.
Doc. said, "You old goose, you should be dead,
You have cracked ribs and a knot on your head."
Now, when I move, my rib muscles quake.
when I want to sleep they want to ache,
and I can't play golf for goodness sake.
Jogging does make a body trim.
I'm not too sure of the pep and the vim.
My advice to me for whatever it's worth,
is to eat a lot and increase my girth.
Then, when I lose my understanding,
I'll just make a belly landing.

My Grandson Dan

There he goes,
I'll miss that boy who waves at me,
My grandson who is three.
His short visit proved to be
A course in child psychology.
I've relearned words like "don't" and "do"
Are taboo.

His sister came but as of now
Equal rights don't work somehow.
I played his game and let him win
Just to see that happy grin.

I tried to grant his every whim,
But that's not good enough for him.
He blamed me when I wasn't there,
As he tumbled off his chair.

But somehow each of us survived
And he's going home alive.
I lift my hand to wave goodbye,
I'm too pooped to hold it high.

No Fizz

In childhood, time stood still like Brigadoon.
The sun made its snail trek across the sky.
Entranced, we watched the clouds form shapes, a face,
a herd of pachyderms, a sailing ship,
plucked daisies for their prophecy of love,
curled dandelion stems and stooped to find
a four leaf clover, waded in the creek
or climbed a tree to see the robin's eggs
and found wild grapes and berries, straw and black.
Green apples made our taste buds wince until
we learned to like that puckered punishment.
We stood in line as dad tossed us in air
and felt his stubbled beard against our cheeks
and wondered why the grown-ups sat and talked,
when we could skip and hop and somersault.

Why then, was every waking hour so long
and now, each catapulting year so short?
Gone now, is that fizz "bubbly" in our veins.
We watch our young ones hop and skip and shout
and wonder when and where our fire went out.

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North Intemperate Zone

It's summer in part of September
And winter comes in December
Two months have the gall
To be nothing but fall
But the most gall of all is November.

Nose Trouble

I try to keep it from Ralph Nader.
He'd have me recalled.
My nose runs below Fahrenheit fifty.
Three of my foursome on the golf course
have the same defect.
The other one reacts differently.
A missed putt keeps him warm
for at least nine holes.
Those who sell tissues
and handkerchiefs profit by it.
I feel this has been happening since Adam
and could be a planned inconvenience
to keep us on our nose.
I have some insight on the four letter word "Drip."
It's hard to ignore a problem
That hits you between the eyes.
As a last resort,
There's the forefinger and the thumb.

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Noses

A nose's contour may be long and distended.
It could be a neat little pug and upended,
and though the size and the shape may differ,
you seem to get like results from your sniffer.
It warns and it pleases, revolts and it teases;
we all know that it also drips and it sneezes.
It sticks out and reacts to most anything,
like the sweetened lilac breezes of Spring,
or the apple blossoms and the new mown hay,
the conglomerate aroma of Thanksgiving Day.
Without any prompting, your proboscis will quicken
at the tantalizing odor of French fries and chicken.
Then there's those dead fish left by the flood,
ripening rank in that sewage drenched mud,
and, when you pass that hot summer cattle lot,
like it or not, you get the stench and the rot;
but the rule of thumb doesn't work, if you please,
on onions and garlic and Limburger cheese.
Poets pen the rhodora, daffodil and the rose,
but none of those can smell like a nose.

Oh! Oh!

God had reservations about burnt offerings.
Recently, I pressed the wrong microwave time.
Scorched pizza reeked its halitosis through the house.
In the B.M. period, (before microwave), if you've
strayed, burnt cabbage, beans, spaghetti and
whatever, left their malodorous message.

When my wife put eggs on to boil and went
out to weed the garden, that burned feather
smell required professional help and air fresheners.
We enjoy company, but in those catastrophic
occasions, we didn't answer our door bell
to anyone but the paper boy who came to collect.
He'd give us his 'Garfield' grin, along with
his diagnosis, "BURNT CABBAGE!"

On the Way to the Bathroom

It's fun to remember life's youthful demands,
The dancing 'till dawn that I used to.
Now I get tired just washing my hands,
Think of what I've been reduced to.

Perish the Thought

Thinking can be dangerous,
Like the time I wondered how it would be
to know all the answers.

I could say, “Hey! You,
this is the way it is,”
because that’s the way it is.

This thought engenders another.
What would I rather have,
answers or friends?

Like gas on the stomach,
it was just a passing thought.

Protocol

Oh! Nurse,
When you come in
You talk so sweet
And bounce your bosom
Off my chin
When straightening my sheet.

I'm not a basket case
About to leave the human race,
I'm just an ordinary man.
Am I supposed to be a dead pan
Or show a spark of life within
And grin?

Puppy Dog Tails

How do you define a boy?
Would you say perpetual motion,
constant maker of commotion,
likes to pester and annoy?

Yes, the volumes you could write.
but minus the verbosity,
a boy is mostly appetite,
mixed with a subtle blend
of on the verge calamity,
and in the end, he will extend
his parents equanimity.
Let's consider one for instance.
At the circus his insistence
on junk food test your resistance.
Folks around think you're a meany,
won't even give your boy a weenie.
He begs until you're fully flustered
gets his hot dog flushed with mustard,
second course is frozen custard.

Soon, you get another prod,
when the popcorn gets the nod,
family size enough for six,
but it all goes down the mix.

Slops the slurry with some pop,
and you know he'll never stop,
until it's time to leave Big Top.
Inwardly it makes you shiver
as he annihilates his liver.

It's over, as you leave the tent,
you estimate what you have spent,
which brings the questioning lament.
Are boys really heaven sent?

Then you think, if there's a prize
for an appetite his size,

you have surely got a winner,
then he asks you "What's for dinner?"

At bedtime just before you pray,
you ask him how he liked his day.
At the circus, was he aware,
did he know what happened there?

Then he tells you everything.
what transpired in every ring,
elephants and their fanfare,
trapeze acts high in the air,

tumbling clowns and cycling bear,
horses prancing all around,
tells me every sight and sound.
Hands folded he says "Thanks for dad,
and for all the fun we had."

Then he looks at me with glee.
"Tomorrow, I'm gonna climb a tree."
Well, you tuck him into bed,
Leave, thoughts racing through your head,

"Climb a tree, which one, how high,
does he know he cannot fly,
can he tell how small a twig,
holds so little or so big?"

You hear footsteps at your back.
"Dad, we forgot my bedtime snack."

Satire on Life Style (Or, Bare Facts)

The way the women's styles have blown the lid,
they are inviting more than mere male stare.
That sequined corset cost a thousand quid.

Overexposed, there's very little hid
In men's defense, it really isn't fair,
the way the women's styles have blown the lid.

Remembering what just an ankle did,
to titillate male mind from way down there,
that sequined corset cost a thousand quid.

Is it female desire to just get rid
of all restraints, by showing all that bare,
the way the women's styles have blown the lid?

If this trend doesn't end, heaven forbid,
what's left will be what's under underwear.
that sequined corset cost one thousand quid.

Man's honor and respect will further skid.
To contemplate what's next, I wouldn't dare,
the way the women's styles have blown the lid.

That sequined corset cost a thousand quid.

Self Willed

My lawyer seemed happy until
I told him I'd made my own will.
He said, "No probate judge
knows plain English from fudge."
For that, he sends me a bill!

Slow Boat to Ararat

We don't know much about Noah's wife.
So let's blare the trumpet and finger the fife,
for the one who put some pizazz in his life.
She may have been a bit like our "Liz,"
romantic, sexy and pretty, that is.
I honor her with a feeling of awe.
It could be that she was my great grandma.

Now, a woman has that added mystique,
so the weaker sex just isn't that weak.
A nudge by God and Noah's wife's added tweak,
Made him build a boat that wouldn't leak.
Then he filled it with two of everything,
from elephants to little bees that sting.
If you read on, you'll find out that
it's printed there that Noah begat.
So, I assume, that it could be said,
They must have spent some time in bed.

For Smorgas Bord

I think it was nineteen fifty or fifty-one,
that our tenure with Union Park Church had begun.
Reverend Wells examined us and thought maybe we'd do
so Dorothy and I opted to try the Sunday School too.
We visited the Wesleyans and the Tri Delts to find
where to go, but really couldn't make up our mind.
Neither V.J. nor Doc Dahl had twisted our wrist.
But Bertha Spiller and Paul come up with the twist.
Bertha Spiller asked us to dinner and after one meal,
My stomach knew being a Wesleyan was the right deal.

The Wesleyans held their class in the kitchen,
and after a lot of moving, shoving and switchin',
they put up what you'd call a mobile bleacher,
and I sat by the sink to hear Doc our teacher.

Doc held our attention, didn't rant, rave, or holler
and I soon found that he was a scriptural scholar.
After class Doc said Smorgas Bord had a job for me
I'd met Len and Gladys, Margaret and George recently,
but hadn't met Smorgas and wondered who he could be.
Doc said, "I just got someone to do the tomatoes,
but we need your expertise for peeling potatoes.
Well, this rhyme's not funny as I'd like it to be
and peeling potatoes doesn't give one much glee
But I liked the friendly rapport of good company,
and, there were times if you'd just perk up an ear,
it was "the rest of the story", that you would hear.
So I'm still by the sink, standing on my bunions,
but I'm quite sure it's better than doing the onions.
I once hoped that maybe I'd work up to tomatoes,
but I know I'd miss my job of peeling potatoes.

The Other Cheek

In this fight we have today,
You tell me what you've thought of me.
I can't just turn and walk away,
You might kick the bottom of me.

The Refrigerator

You're like a woman in my life
and seem to draw me to you at your will.
When you turn on you still give me a chill.
Yes, I admire your satin smooth exterior,
but what intrigues me most is your interior.
Although I'm sure I never caught you smiling,
you have those hidden charms that are beguiling.
You always egg me on till I am goaded
and you're much more attractive when you're loaded.
I've tried to tell you, you and I are through,
but then you light up when I reach for you.
What do I do?
I just unglue
and finish off leftover stew.

Three Is a Crowd

My wife and I have traveled a bit.
We've enjoyed it where ever we've gone,
But we're happiest when we get back home
and it may not be that way from now on.

The reason is clear, there's a mouse in our house
and 'home sweet home' is no longer sung.
That creature has ruined our usual ho hum;
it would be better if I'd lost a lung.

We have no cat, which eliminates that
felines carnivorous protection
there's too much flap, so I'm getting a trap;
one of those that does vivisection.

We're taking a trip to Australia
To forget about our limited zoo.
It is a temporary solution,
My wife's not afraid of a kangaroo.

I've asked my neighbor to send me a wire,
on Mickey or Minnie's heart failure.
I may come back alone with a sad moan,
"I left my sweetheart in Australia."

Tiptoe through the Tulips

My wife just told me
that her aunt Flo
brightened her dinner table
with a bouquet of flowers
everyday.

That's roughly
three hundred sixty five days a year.

I wonder
If I'm the only one
crass enough to think
Aunt Flo overflowed
to her next door neighbors
in the graveyard.

To Tea (Adapted)

Adapted from the poem by Joseph Crosby Lincoln.

There's some goings on at our house.
Seems that we've done everything,
cleaning each and every corner,
dusting, scrubbing, polishing.
Well, of course there is a reason,
plain as anyone can see,
it's all because were gonna have
the minister to tea.

Sis is dressed up, neat and nifty,
and she's frizzin' up her bangs.
Ma's got on her best alpaca
and she's askin' how it hangs.
Pa has shaved as slick as can be,
and I'm rigged way up in – Gee
It's all because were gonna have
the minister to tea.

He will sit beside my sister.
Someone said he's up for grabs.
He will eat at least three helpings
and they're not just little dabs.
Ma'll apologize like fury
and say everything is bad,
and such awful luck with cookin',
she is sure she never had.
She's only talkin' that way,
it's as prime as it can be.
It's all because were gonna have
the minister to tea.

I kinda like to watch him pray.
I can see his eyelids flutter.
"Bless this food this day," he'll say
"Amen," Pa says, "Pass the butter."

Then right after the blessing,

that's when Ma brings in the turkey
stuffed with apple raisin dressing,
Ma can't hide her look of pride,
and the smell of that aroma
makes my stomach growl inside.

The preacher gets all the attention
and that's A-ok you see,
and if I upset my tumbler,
they won't say a word to me.
Yes, a boy can eat in comfort
with the minister to tea.

There's other stuff besides the turkey
bread and gravy, sweet potatoes,
green beans, slaw and ripe tomatoes,
pickles and the deviled egg.
Pa says the way the preacher eats,
he must have a hollow leg.
My Sister made the chocolate pie,
and I've been prewarned to be nice.
and let him have that extra slice.

Then it's to the living room,
where we'll sit and talk or rest,
and what happens is one thing
that I just must get off my chest.
Now, a minister you'd reckon,
wouldn't say what wasn't true,
but that ain't the way with ours,
and I can prove it too.
'Cause when Sis plays on the organ,
so it makes you wanna die,
he just sits and says it's lovely,
and that seems ter me a lie.

Maybe he isn't perfect,
but it's alright with me.
I'm really glad were gonna have
the minister to tea.

Twenty Bucks for that?

Recently I went to hear a man of reputed intellect, who began his talk by fielding questions.

When asked what he knew about a situation he said, "About that, I know 'diddly squat'." I'm sure he went on talking, but I stayed back there, trying to digest 'diddly squat'. The picture which came to mind, was that of taking our dog "Mamie" for a walk and the ensuing unlady-like maneuvers, that make one look around to see if anyone else is privy to these indelicate interims.

What I'm trying to say, is that 'diddly squat' was the high point of the speech. To use another non-Webster, maybe I should have brought my "scooper dooper."

Westward Ho!

I'll never forget my first bout with the Skywalks.
After parking at the Fifth and Walnut Ramp,
I immediately became confused and disoriented.
Even the familiar seemed misplaced.

I needed a map, a compass and someone to take my hand,
to lead the way through that second story maze.
I get the same feeling on the Freeway, sometimes.
Even when I can see where I want to go,

I know I can't get there from where I am.
Lewis and Clark had similar problems,
but they didn't have to meet a wife
at Younker's Pantyhose at three fifteen.

I finally asked a man for directions.
He was from Albuquerque and couldn't find a men's room.
I was no help and knew where he wanted me to go.
I made it down to street level near Fourth and Grand.
At last and at least, I knew where I was.

When More Is Less

I like pancakes and it's true,
that those who don't are very few,
but what I need to learn to do,
is get my stomach's point of view.
If I eat seven, the last two
are sawdust mixed with Elmer's glue.

Chapter 8

Literature

Elmer writes about the difficulty of writing poetry in *Iambic Futility*.

Apologies to Poe

Once a startling thought came to me, held me, thrilled me, filled me, drew me,
and its impact kept on churning with the magic of its lore.
It pierced my mental panorama with its insight, depth and drama,
like a wise Tibetan Lama, taking me behind a door,
to see scenes unseen before.

Thus enthralled I heard the phone ringing with incessant ding-a-linging;
The intrusion is was bringing jarred my senses to the core.
Then I heard a voice enticing, with the sweetness of an icing,
give a message so incising and with such a close rapport.
As she caught her breath I told her that I didn't need a storm door.

I leaned back to try reverting to those thoughts that had been skirting,
with a crisp ecstatic sharpness through my cranial corridor.
They were gone, completely shattered, nothing remained, torn and tattered,
yes, diffused, wiped out and splattered, with no inkling to explore.
That burning, yearning, churning, would return to me no more.

So, if you expect a closing, that's impressive and imposing,
remember, I was sidetracked I implore,
by a ding-a-ling, a sweet voice and a storm door.

Iambic Futility

I'm not a sonneteer, but I admit
that Shakespeare did it well, that noble Bard
poured out iambic lines of polished wit,
with rhythmic structure, sense and flow, regard.
I'd like to see my words leap from the page,
like rockets, bursting in a starlit sky.
Instead, I've only fizzled verbiage,
which spawns reactions of a stifled sigh.
A phalanx of ideas streak by my brain,
I find what I have picked from that thought train,
is just one of those empties going back.
Old Bard, you said, "to thine own self be true,"
so I will leave the sonneting to you.

Pandora?

Those who poetize
Follow thought patterns
Etching walled murals
Of the mind.
Sometimes the brain explodes
And races beyond
Its cloistered corridors
And in the quickening
You wonder
If the ink you see
Is yours
Or nudgings by Frost
Or Emerson
Or extrasensory rapport
With Poe's mad maelstrom.
Miseries
If true
It's obvious
I need a stronger antenna.

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Soliloquy to Shakespeare's Othello

I confess Desdemona, that I loved you,
before those succinct lines were through Act Two.
Beauteous rib, you charmed us all, even the Moor
relaxed his stiffened posture, by your attentive ear
and gentle conversation.

What man is there who hasn't been sweet mouthed,
a victim up some ploy up pretty sleeve, since Eve.

If this is wrong, someone should tell my wife.

I listened to Iago's slimy evilness, his lies,
but strait jacketed by time, permitted your demise.

How could blind regimented mind, define
that straying kerchief, to your elimination,
and stifle the pure symphony you were,
with his abrupt and mad crescendo?

Yet, had you lived, you would have been
one of the pretty faces, time erases.

Now, you adorn the intervening centuries, since born.

The printed page and stage proclaim your loveliness
to all eons of tomorrow,
and men will saddened, sigh, each time you die.

Chapter 9

Miscellaneous

All the Ships at Sea is about the Great Flood of 1993.

A Love Story

I used to row short distances
and pout at legal limits for my catch.
Today, the outboard churned six miles
to Bunday Bay, with minimal results.

But most things haven't changed.
The lake still beckons with its liquid arms,
the shoreline charms with tree-lined mystery
and the loon still flutes its shrill 'hill C'.

I am the one that's hooked.
Time hasn't dimmed the hope,
some lurking lunker likes my lure.

As I approach the dock, I can forgive
the pitying stares at three small fish,
because I'm the only one that knows,
my wife is making Sloppy Joes.

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A Pointed Request

Deep shadows smother distant streetlights
as quick footsteps are close behind.
I turn and step aside to let them by
and look into a handgun
inches from my eyes.
The voice is low, clipped, clear,
“Just one false move and I’ll blow out your brains.”
I’m shocked by this abrupt unreal reality,
feel trapped, stripped of my options to survive.
Thoughts race. Is he on drugs, perhaps so seeped
in hatred that his urge to kill precedes
his need to rob? Mixed fear and anger rise
as I stare at blue steel, a captive audience
to the finger on the trigger.
To him, I’m a commodity, disposable.
To me, his deranged world denies
each ordered precept that I hold.
He takes my billfold and backs off,
still pointing murder at my face.

All the Ships at Sea

I sat on the steps to my basement that was filled with eight inches of the “flood,” trying to get into my high top boots while looking at numerous cardboard boxes, that are filled with ‘yesterdays’, floating their waterlogged cargo toward the sump pump. There go my sons’ stored efforts of college and income tax reports, and one large heart-shaped birthday box, that once held chocolates, which our son Mark, when ten, had given to the one we loved, his mother.

Exhausted from struggling into my boots, I wondered what had happened to something else that seemed missing in my eighty-five year-old body..... my resilience.

All was Beauty

There is the place right over the hill
where what seems a long time ago,
there was a creek and our old swimming hole,
just a stone throw from the railroad tracks
where we went heaven bent on having fun
as we stretched our lungs to the summer sun.

We hung our clothes on a low oak limb
and dove in the pool in the raw;
then stood on the bank as the train went by,
ignoring the passenger's stare
as we waved at the engineer.
He'd doff his cap and split the air
with his whistle response, "Hi there! Hi there!"

The hill's still there but the place where we swam
is filled with refuse and toxic waste
The oak tree succumbed to the foul breath of death,
a skeletal ghoul stripped bare.
A specter of doom for all to see
with limbs outstretched in despair
and the train whistle wails, "Beware! Beware!"

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1999

At the Hoedown at Barkely Hall

We visit Rosella and Earle,
view the garden the mums and the roses,
nothing can compare as we congregate there,
and the Alpha Pi'ers rub noses.

CHORUS: And we laugh with glee as we drink pink tea,
and share poetry of our own.
we park our cares at the door and laugh some more
at the party that's always full blown.

We may get a chuckle from Moore,
from Lucile, some beautiful lyrics,
And you can bet, someone will get,
us into some kind of hysterics.

The Barkleys give us a preview
of the Place that is golden and pearly
we'll have a good time with free verse or rhyme,
and we won't go home 'till it's early.

Backyard

It's time to loosen your tie.
Perhaps have a picnic
on the Fourth of July,
or bike in Ragbrai.

Celebrate the Centennials,
or smell the perennials
and you can go boating.
Feel the wave motion.
Dab on a coating
of protective sun lotion.

You can take a nature hike
and look at a tree
that will give you the psyche
to write poetry,
or watch clouds in the sky
and pretty girls that go by.

If your name isn't "Chuck"
You're not out of luck.
There's a lot to enjoy
for an Iowa Boy.

Before Senility

I'm in my ninth decade and could say I've had my day.
I would have changed the script, if I'd had my way.
Now that I review my life, I think it could be said,
I've lived a thousand lives in books that I have read.

My early school day subjects gave no elation.
I majored in recess, day dreaming and vacation.
I read Horatio Alger, who published in plethora
and there, discovered life was more than fun and flora.

But I yearned for far horizons and those unknown trails
and found high adventure in the Leather Stocking Tales.
College made me study the Classics of Shakespeare.
I grew to like 'Yon Cassius,' 'Desdemona' and 'King Lear'.
I wasn't fond of Faulkner and I hope I'm not offending;
I must be an escapist, I prefer the happy ending.

Lately, I've ignored the Classics and enjoy Louis La'mour.
His pages leap with action and he wrote books by the score.
My literary appetite must be rather fast and loose.
Why just for pure enjoyment, give me Dr. Seuss.

Cinquain

She looks at me,
Smiling, alluring,
then tightens her stocking.
I am all eyes.

Dear Sis

Thoughts of you often fill my mind.
I miss you, but to tell the truth I find
that I am happy to be here with Jud.

The November chill creeps through the door,
but I wear more,
and in my oven is a pumpkin pie I made
to give to my dear Indian friend, a Cree.
She gave a turkey and some pemmican to me.

I wish you knew her, you would love her too.
Our's is a friendship that is tried and true.
Jud is picking our first crop of maize,
and I thank God for His watch care these days
and for my Jud, he's kind and good to me.
We laugh a lot and life just couldn't be
more full. I wish that you could see
our view of God's great virgin scenery.

Love to you all, your sister Jenny Lee

Des Moines, pop. 7000

Incidents in history color our language.
In 1886, mule-powered street cars
ran on track laid on the mud, dust and dung,
from Court Ave. to the base of Capitol Hill.
This, progress, met with dubious approval.
Often, passengers had to get off in the
questionable soil and fickle weather,
to get the car back on track.

Mules laid down at intervals, to get up
only when they decided to proceed.
Many discovered that walking was quicker,
less frustrating, cleaner, and more certain,
to get one to work on time.
Those mules could have authored the phrase,
“laying down on the job.”

Double Bogey Blues

Tomorrow I'll be up at the crack of dawn,
the sun won't be up, but I'll be long gone,
to try again out on the golf links,
to conquer my double bogey jinx.
My driver is wild, my putter stinks,
and somehow my chance for par never sinks,
my five-iron veers to the right or the left,
the green eludes me till I am bereft.
I figure the distance and pull out my wedge,
the ball flies over and out to the hedge.
I'm long on puts and short off the tee,
my partner looks with pit at me.
"I'll try a six-iron," I hear myself say,
he weakly smiles and then looks away,
as my ball slices straight to a tree.

I've pitched and I've chipped till my ego is altered;
my whole bag of clubs have fizzled and faltered.
Other sports I've mastered more than so-so,
so I've tried to get help, I've gone to a Pro.
After he has corrected my stance,
I miss the ball and fall on my pants.

Now, why don't I put my bag on the shelf?
Tell me why I punish myself.
To tell you the truth I can't answer this riddle,
I'm beat and confused and caught in the middle,
my self-respect's gone but I'm fit as a fiddle.
So I put up with the leers and effacement;
it still beats jogging or cleaning the basement.

Good Looking

At Eyely's we give you a new point of view.
Your life can become quite pleasing to you.
We have the glasses, you have the eyes
You'll come and see us if you are wise
If you are entrapped in an assortment of blues,
you ought try one of our tri-color hues.
These are made with a programmed distortion
and if dullness and ho-hum has been your portion
They'll light up your life with a definite glow
and make your wife look like Marilyn Monroe.
It will cost you more so bring in your deed
We'll help you fill out the mortgage you'll need.

Haiku

Sneaky mosquito
bites you and makes you wonder—
how did it get there?

Hear winged whirl of geese
come back to their summer home.
Nature's wonderment.

The pussy willows
don mittens to sway and play
in the frigid air.

My neighbor's pet squirrel
takes cookies from his hand
Prefers Oreos.

Bullfrogs don't hum
And they're really not croaking
They say, "Jug-o-rum."

Dreams; fragile fabric
Woven on fantasy's web
In technicolor.

Herbert Hoover & Henry Wallace

I'm not going to eulogize (if you want a verb)
these two VIP's, known as Hank and Herb.
They came on the scene about the same time,
when a dollar was worth more than a dime.
As I look back, I have it on memo,
that Herb was Republican, Hank was a Demo.
Both Herb and Hank were capable Joes,
who dug right in to assuage the World's woes
and served their Country with a clean nose.
Herb was a Quaker and did things quite well.
When he left office, he at least didn't smell.
Hank may have been more of a charmer.
He also edited the Wallace's Farmer.
It was there, he often blew his own horn,
Perhaps his best moment was his hybrid corn.
Now, they're up there swinging on a star.
Hank still blows his horn, Herb plays the guitar.

I Missed the Cue

A song.

1. Yes, I have loved again,
but there has never been
that matching fulfillment,
or sky so blue,
that gave each moment
that once only sweetness,
of the pure magic,
which came from you.

CHORUS: You were my life,
my reason and answer.
Each breath and heartbeat,
the world I knew.
Sunlight and song,
springtime and falling leaves,
each thought and each dream,
held only you.
I still can't believe
I missed the cue.

2. Time seemed to stand still
As I walked beside you
on a plateau of loving
so tender and true.
We needed no more
than to bask in love's sun
and the touch of your hand,
said, "I love you too."

3. Somehow we both sensed
that this was our kismet,
that time wouldn't dim
the wonder we knew.
Few have been given
that much of heaven,
but wise heads said, "Wait,
don't rush the 'I do.'"

4. Love isn't a faucet
that one can twist
to gush in full measure
with someone new.
It is a merging,
like rivers converging
to go on together,
one out of two.

Moo!

Although it crimps my ego
I'm admitting as of now,
on comprehending poetry
I'm something like a cow.

I have to chew and savor
each selected word or phrase
and mull it repetitiously
to clarify my haze.

By using this approach
I feel a little wiser,
to find the end result
is more than fertilizer.

No Excuse

Puce is a color usurper,
a deep red to dark grayish purple.
It makes me think of
a feverish mauve,
or maybe a bing cherry burple.

One Nation Under God

We're told that those who legislate cast their vote with a cupidity that reeks with stench of insincerity as each one wallows in the coated slime of his own perfidy. Yet they still sit and govern where governing once held a revered creed of righteousness.

Truth and honesty were ingrained in the hearts of those who served. Hallowed halls rebuked the ones who opted for the lesser road which detours us to a dead end. Are we so seeped in immorality, chicanery and lust, that we no longer are "One nation under God?" If we, the uninvolved majority now keep still, we share the guilt of our and God's crushed dreams.

Peer Power

I was drafted to help with the third grade,
at Daily Vacation Bible School.
My co-teacher brought her daughter Effie with her,
who, though much older, was stranded on third.

After fifteen minutes of combined assembly,
each class repaired to its allotted room.
The manual indicated that I should tell a story,
but before I could open my mouth, Effie opened hers.
“We’ve had enough about God,” she said, “let’s play games.”
That’s when I should have headed for the Canadian border.
With my best smile I said, “Let’s do the story first.”

Effie stiffed, ejected herself from her chair
and circled the room like a skunk with its tail on fire,
with her mother in hot but futile pursuit.
I felt I had set back religious education to the dark ages,
when the remaining seven bodies joined in the total mayhem.
Those little heathens cornered Effie, and told her to “Sit.”
Then seven ruffled angles and Effie sat with that
‘I’ve heard it before,’ look as I told about a miracle.
They didn’t know that one had just happened.

Shades of Childhood

Spring came to me this year
when the sighting of a barefoot boy
recalled mother giving in to my no shoes insistence.

Those first frolics with unfettered feet
brought delight that surpassed ice cream
or grandmother's cookies.

If that was heaven,
barefootedness also included tortures
that would qualify for a hideous hereafter,
such as stubbed toes, sharped rocks, hot roofs,
sand burrs, broken glass or a rusty nail.
Getting cows from the frosty pasture and cold feet
runs high in this compilation.

Those short reprieves of warm cow dung
didn't last 'till I limped tenderly to the house
where mother guarded the kitchen door
with a pan of water. I can still hear her say,
"Wash your feet if you want breakfast."

Still dreaming

In nineteen-thirty-four, I hauled coal for the County, to many who had no income, little hope and smokeless chimneys. I looked into frozen faces, staring from sub zero indoor temperatures, who thought I was an angel of mercy. One of my stops was the City dump. The air reeked with acrid smoke from fires fueled by old sofas, tires, paint and garbage. Rats overran the area, furtive, fertile and fat in the filth of a landscape of refusal.

I backed up to the door of a shack, slightly larger and less weather proof than the outhouse I still frequented. Inside, four unwashed men stood around a small potbelly stove, with scorched fronts and cold behinds, sharing a bottle of cheap wine, who met every car or truck to pick out anything salvageable. They were friendly and seemed happier than I, in the acceptance of the demise of their hopes and dreams. I was offered a drink from the bottle's multi-salivated mouth. The payment on my truck was overdue and I wasn't eating regularly, but I wasn't ready to share that bottle.

Strike Three

Hello,
I try to read your eyes,
surmise,
just what you think right now
behind that brow.

As you nod
do I seem odd?
You're not impressed at what you see;
I am a nonentity.

You're in a hurry to forget.
What made me second class?
I see I didn't pass
the standards you have set
for friends.

Our story ends.

The Edsel

I was quite aware of that vilified front grille,
'lemon lips', 'fish mouth', 'horse collar',
or that more derogatory equine quip.
To me, it was a Marilyn Monroe pucker.

Rich, my son, was sixteen and used caution
when the family was aboard, but the grapevine
told of speeds beyond one hundred M.P.H.,
of lost control into a median, the jolting halt,
just inches from a cement culvert,
a missed curve into a long snow bank
and those impromptu challenges to "drag."

Rich and his peers named it "The Beasts."
Was it Providence or luck that let them live
until some signs of sanity emerged?

At ninety thousand miles, I traded it,
unmarked and ready for much more.
It is a Classic now, like a rare coin,
and recently I saw one at a show,
which reaffirmed, that it's the one true love
of my vehicular romances.

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The Open End

In our life's span we've seen some changes dear.
Distance seems much closer all the time.
They used to say you can't get there from here.

A bumble bee can't fly says the engineer,
but none told the bee the reason or the rhyme.
In our life's span we've seen some changes dear.

Lover's still sigh at night's romantic sphere,
which makes them want to hear the church bells chime.
They used to say you can't there from here.

Now we can have breakfast in far off Tangier,
and then have luncheon in a polar clime.
In our life's span we've seen some changes dear.

Let's take a trip to Mars my dear, next year.
We'll picnic on its red sand dust and grime.
They used to say you can't get there from here.

When someone says that we die, I hear
that bumble bee and opt from the sublime.
For me, that option hasn't changed, my dear.
I like to think we can get There from here.

The Water's Fine

In memory, I go to you,
who once was me –
and both of us go back
to that old wooden bridge,
your own domain of privacy.

Underneath on soft green moss,
you give your apple core a toss –
hear wagon thundering across
to fade in its retreat.

Here by a slow moving stream
you lean, to think or dream.
Breezes, perfumed by wild rose
wafts by your nose.

Looking out, you see the sky.
Cloud patterns high, open the door
to all the storied lore
of dragons, or a charging boar,
sailing ships, or man'o'war.

As you assume the hero's role
and have each challenge in control,
you hear shouts from the swimming hole
around the bend.
Something in you whispers thanks,
as the tryst beneath those friendly planks
comes to an end.

There Must Be Another Way

Our ages were eighteen and ten.
I was his shadow as he shared
with brimming intensity the world he loved.
He showed me bluebird's nest, young quail,
where berries grew, straw, goose and black,
the tadpole darkened pool,
and tumble-bug's dung ball of eggs.

He taught me how to trill bird songs
on whittled willow whistle,
to skin a skunk, skip rocks across the pond,
breathe deep the apple blossomed spring,
and on that day the geese flew overhead, he said,
"You take god care of mom and dad.
I have to go help win the war."

I missed him, prayed for his safe return
and he came back. As he stepped from the train,
tall, trim and sharp in olive drab attire,
I ran to him in bursting ecstasy;
and then the sudden shock into reality
as he stooped down and groped for me.

When my World was New

Spring brings its resume of memories
when March removes its winter shoes
and barefoots on the greening earth.
The years roll back and I'm a boy again,
with simple chore to open pasture gate
and let the cows, heavy with milk, come through
to head straight for the barn for their relief.

Bossie was missing and nowhere in sight.
"She's probably somewhere having her calf.
Go find her," said Dad, "She may need our help."
I knew she would be by the creek. She was.
She seemed to be looking for me, to see
her new born babe, with red, brown, furry coat.

I watched it try to rise, fall back, then gain
its feet, to make first steps to its first meal,
and thought, "How could it know just where to go?"
I stroked its moist licked curls, Bossie seemed proud
and then I knew, Dad wanted me to have
this moment of new birth to be my own.

When saw we?

Driving south I lost my way.
You stood there by the country store
passing the time the only way you knew,
no job, a pittance errand now and then
kept down by inbred bias and no opportunity.

I felt the emptiness in you.
Black, bright, eager, and polite
you drew a picture of my plight.
I sensed the pleading prayer in your eyes
that I would take you from this trap
of nonexistence. What did I do?
I tipped you, smiled and drove away.

But I cannot erase you from my slate.
I failed my confrontation with your need,
knowing we might have been
each other's miracle.

Words

Words often confine the mind
The poet seeks the freedom of a colt
that leaps and capers in abandon
before its harnessing, losing its dash
and stretch by its controlled subjection.
There-in lies the challenge to make
structured vocabulary leap like lightning
across the page that rises above the
entrapment of word's inadequacy
and lets the soul's paint brush canvass
colorings of Love's heart beat yet unsung
that portrays images entombed in
mental history, and feels the tingling lilt
of unencumbered footsteps of a child
with his or her unique thesaurus.

XXII

If I were to act the Sage
Picking out a proper age
When the world is fresh and new
Sparkling like the morning dew,
I think I'd pick out 22.

Double X and add two I's
Kinda makes one realize
That you cut us down to size
The first day He brought you when
You were lovely 2 times 10.

Pretty, charming, neat it's true
But to stop there wouldn't do.
You're a winner through and through.
Wonder how you looked at seven,
You heart-stealing twice 11.

May each moment be alive
May much happiness arrive
In your next 365.
What a pleasant age to be,
2 times 2 plus 6 times 3.¹

¹Proud to see that grandpa knew his order of operations!

Chapter 10

Nature

A favorite of mine is *A Summer Vignette*.

A Summer Vignette

A little breeze sighed happily,
said, "Hi," and hurried by.
Its fluted tunes on leaves reminded me
of troubadour that sang of now,
of time long gone and days between.

Clouds covered sun and chased my muse away.
Bass drums of thunder rolled,
and pyrotechnics streaked the nimbus gray
as timpani of rain rap-tapped
its kettle drum routine.

The sun came through.
I watched the rainbow arc and wane,
and with it came rain's last tattoo,
as robin throated thanks for fauna fare
there on the glistening green.

And once again
that little breeze came by,
said, "Hi!"

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1987

At Odds in Eden

One more obstruction when I mow,
was my protest.
But my wife thinks she knows what's best
and plants a pin oak in our yard.

It seems I've lost another bout
but as I pout that little sprout
wiggles in leafy joy and earth's embrace.
Unaware of wind and rain and snow,
with an uncomplicated urge to grow.
Shows no concern when I mow near
and veer to honor its domain.

My petulance subsides, it seems to me
our baby's like that tender sprig.
She challenges each minute of her day
from her crib cockpit on this speeding sphere.
I mow and pray
she finds her loving space.

Brr

Today I watched a cardinal
sitting in our tree.

With snow in tree and yard 'n all,
I'm glad it's he, not me.

Cycle

I am a drop of dew.
If you look in me you'll see
some clouds amid the blue
and everything in view.

From my blade of grass
I see a 'hopper there
contemplating my abode
and me for breakfast fare.

The sun diminishes my size
which ends this cycle
and I rise
as vapor to the skies.

Now when you see
a waterfall
or flowing stream, it just might be
there's some of me on way to sea.

But I shall rise again
and maybe come anew,
where in the dew or rain,
you see a part of me.

Diminishing Returns

Last spring a robin staked his claim
up in our apple tree;
and loudly let the whole world know
he didn't care to share his love affair
which was to be.

Then came the nest, the eggs,
and soon the shells burst wide
to free a family of three.

They grew
as summer skipped into green apple time,
then pointed heads up toward the blue
in their first faltering flight.

They were the first to greet my waking yawn.
They trilled their cheery throats into the dawn
and feasted on the fauna in our lawn.

But as October's blaze
fade and fell, they left.

Today six starlings stalk our yard.
They leave me unimpressed;
no contest with our redbreast guest.

Etheree

Red
is the
rose that blooms
by my window.

Thorns guard your lifeline
that stems to earth bosom,
where your roots, like computer,
sends back the blush of your crimson
and the silk, velvet feel of your touch,
then perfumes the breeze with whispers of love.

Hot summer

We're subject to the Jet stream's fickle mood,
that withholds clouds and rain with unconcern,
and cannot blame the sun for actions rude;
its constancy is sure as its return.

We have a spark within that says survive,
which stays ignited when each dream and hope
are crushed and shattered, only then we strive
for deeper wells of strength that help us cope.

We look and see that everything's not wrong.
The hummingbird wing waltzes four o'clocks
and oak leaves flute their soft September song.
We cherish that last blood of hollyhocks,
and now, belatedly, renews the rain.
Though we are pawns, we too are green again.

June (Superstar)

It's here, the month of June
has pulled the plug
and let it all run out
in one great orgy of creation.

Each twig, each blade of grass and flower
diplays its finest hour,
in her full blossomed loveliness.

Cloud tapestries make laced designs
In layered lines above.
Crowned with a rose, her sigh
of scented breezes casts
A spell of love.

Each creature lends its tuneful cry
of rapt appreciation.

Sunrise, dew sparkled lawns,
and symphony of birds.
June's precocious pageantry
surpasses puny words.

Of Cabbages and Kings

There is a place right over the hill
where the deer fell in love with the daffodil,
which curtsied and bowed in the breeze on the brink
of that little brook where the deer came to drink.

As the deer drank his fill he continued to stare
at that delicate flower so innocent there.
Said the deer to the flower, "You're often a meal,
but somehow that isn't the feeling I feel."

The daffodil made her prettiest pose,
Then leaned and kissed the deer on his nose
and said, "Excuse me my dear for acting like this,
but something made me give you a kiss."

"It was when I looked in your limped brown eyes
love came to me like a bolt from the skies.
You are the one whose my darling, my life,
but how in the world can I be your wife?"

If you sit by the brook just over the hill,
you may hear that haunting refrain in its trill
of the deer and a flower who from that day
kept their tryst until they wasted away.

Prelude to Spring

When meadows feel March's first warm sun,
and little streams trickle between
perspiring banks of snow, and hear above,
winged whirl of eschelons in V,
by magic, there you are, your kittened
branches purring in the breeze, so
daintily arrayed amid the leafless shade.

But, you'll be here to hear the redbreast
loudly stake his claim, and feel
the warm lipped bliss of South Wind's kiss,
of lilac, blossomed pear, cherry, peach
and apple air, see running sap o'erflow,
to trigger unexplained chain chemistry of
quickened pulse. As you survey the sorcery
you start, you sway and play without dismay,
and as a final dart, before you part,
you fold your pretty paws and pray,
that love will find its way
into each heart.

Rhubarb Pachyderms

Like a huddled herd of elephants
they stare as my wife
plants her garden,
see it change from black
to green-ribbed symmetry.

In midsummer they stand high
to view some wayward vines come through,
like a small boy cluttering his room.
They ponder a family of wrens,
and hear the buzz of bees.
They drool when tomatoes cluster
in effusive red.

In autumn air when the robin leaves,
those pachyderms still standing strong,
still trumpet at the final curtain call
of the garden's scene of vinyl green
and yellow polka dots of squash.

Right Here

I've toured and surveyed other thrilling climes
from polar panorama to deep south,
which helps assure me that my special spot
is here within these walls I call my home.

The windows frame familiar changing scenes,
especially in spring when the sun's warm rays
renew the grass and make a fairy land
with petticoats on blossomed pear and peach.

The flowering crab begins its crimson blush
and a tulip tree in Cinderella gown
greet tulips red in bed below.
A robin wrestles with a worm and wins.

The lilacs bloom with their perfumed debut.
So, with iambic cadence, I can ask,
"Right now what other place could possibly
be better, than what I have here to see?"

Snowflake

Artistic excellence that dwarfs
a Rembrandt's stroke
in flawless creativity;
six rayed, each one is different
than its counterpart.

It covers sleeping grass
with a soft white kiss,
as though the Hand of Heaven
flourishes His brush
with breathless nonpareil
of winter's scene.

It falls on open palm
and as you look, its tapestried
perfection fades, reminding us,
it will be part of something
greater than itself, the sea,
and we, with immortality.

The Harvest Moon

It peeked through the trees,
orange red,
like the Great Pumpkin;
then started on its trek
across the sky.

It glowed softly on the ripening fields
and orchards leaning low,
bounced benign beams on banqueting bovines,
as a swooping owl expressed
its place in pyramid.

It leapfrogged with the clouds,
until the curtain of the night
pulled back.

Still riding high,
it gave the center stage,
reluctantly,
to the rising sun.

Chapter 11

Philosophical

So Sew and Another Lilac Time are two of my favorites. The latter is one of the last poems he wrote (as was noted in Helen's binder).

Almost Liquidated

Your mother had a dream for you
But the other six kept her uptight.
Your dad slopped up a six pack every night.

I thought I was your friend,
Because you asked me for advice
And once I wished I'd been your dad,
I wanted you to reach for the sky.
You went to school where no one cared
Enough to make you want to learn,
Or say you had to earn equality.

As an athlete you won games
And we who watched you cheered
Because you leaped so high.
They gave you a diploma just for being there,
Then you flunked your football scholarship.

Now you settle for low income mediocrity.
It seems I am taboo because I'm white
And you drown your ineptness
with a six pack every night.

Another Lilac Time

I've lived a while
Each decade's like a mountain peak
Where one stands briefly on the highest rim
Knowing he must descend again.

The falling rocks of life
Which play roulette
With each one's destiny,
Quicken the senses and the heart,
Enhances the cloud-flecked sky,
Bird songs and thoughts of love.

And yet I wonder why
I am allowed to view
And feel, while others
Climbing fewer peaks
Are gone.

I breathe the sweetened air,
Sweeter because it still is mine
To share.

Between the Lines

Mothers get their profuse share
of rich poetic sentiment,
but like a stick of gum,
words overused lose flavor.

Is there another muse
that portrays caring,
being there, the hug,
the kiss, your smile,
the faded apron,
dimmed by sibling tears
and night long vigils
in our illnesses?

These are oft spoken words.
Somewhere between the heart and pen,
thoughts, untailed unexpressed,
rise from the written page
to honor you anew.

Blackout

Sometimes within the midst
Of a well ordered thought
There comes a sudden insight
Some glimpse of revelation
A sharp lucid answer blazes
With crisp clarity
A subtle truth.
Just as suddenly, cloud curtains close
Leaving a mindless void
And though you pour through all
The stored horizons
Of your cranial stock pile,
That one pure thought eludes recall.
A star has fallen from the galaxy
Of consciousness – the world dims
As with impaired sight
And there's futility and loss
Like a last look at one you love.

Bravo!

Longevity is no great accomplishment,
But here I am with heels dug in the final slope,
Not ready to stop breathing.
For in the highs and lows of life,
I've known a high altitude of love
Writhed in despair with her rejection.
Shivered on glaciated polar cap,
Burned in hot sands,
I've been there when the fish were biting,
Cringed in war's fusillade of death,
Watched sunset over panoramic magnitude
That stretched the brain.
I've run the race and didn't finish first,
Or last, wept at dared dreams' demise,
Felt friendship's glow, tasted a tree-ripe peach,
Held our babies, shared their adult trek,
Thrilled to the sweet, soft sounds and breath of spring,
And when the curtain falls, I will applaud
The One who wrote the script.

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1984

Consider

A sparrow dies, no requiem is read,
but yet it had its day, its feathered nest
and saw some rising suns. It could be said
that all of us are here as transient guest.

Even the sparrow sings and who can say
that their winged choruses, like fife and flute,
have not brought cheer to someone as they play.
Would we prefer that God had made them mute?

We too, in our own unenlightened tour
have helped or hindered as we've passed along
and in the summing up, can we be sure
that no one ever listened to our song.

One thought intrigues, if more, will we fly free,
or sparrows be, with like non-entity.

Cry for Caribbean (Haiti)

Columbus saw sub-tropic Eden,
Lush woodlands and fruited hillsides
Followed, the plundering herds,
Who brought slavery and its inhuman demeaning.

They flattened the hillsides and forest
to raise sugar cane for gain.
Now back from exile, the President
Sits and sips on his Palace porch,
ignores the hunger and sorrow.
When just beyond his view
there's a family of twelve
without food enough for two.
Bare subsistence has sapped
their get up and go.
They beg steal and kill,
because they all know,
for them, there is no tomorrow.

Dec-28-78

At the appointed time
I watched,
And there was Venus
Nestled in the lunar lap
Adorning the sequined bosom
Of the predawn sky.
It seemed the Master Artisan
Had set a diamond
On moon's crescent curve
To make a pendant
For the noble neck of night.
In awe, I felt a kinship
With the Psalmist
Who in poetic contemplation
Surveyed the star studded scene,
And said, "He's mindful still."

Go Away, Conscience

A little child peers
From the television screen
With a background scene
Of hungry misery.
Empathy exhumes the best in me,
I want to clutch her from
Hew downhill destiny –
To give until it doesn't hurt.
Then I could hold my head high,
And make sense to questions why,
I am.

But I'm programmed to not get involved.
My lodge, two car garage and boat
Preempt this tragic need.
So I'll resist her poignant plea,
Although I know it's cowardly –
Smother my humanity,
Try lamely to deny
That I don't give
A damn.

Iowa's Wild Rose

Pink petaled pioneer,
Whose perfume puts to shame
Your more elite come-latelys,
I see you there
Amid the tangled tare and brush,
Where a bluebird shuns the encroaching
Shove of thoroughfare.

In this secluded hush
You pose with milkweed friend,
Still proud, unbowed.
But as your boundaries shrink,
I think your lot
Is like the red man's
Who once sensed your perfumed air
And as he stared at your deep blush,
He also thought of love.

Lake Reflections

These soft white sands,
Hugh boulders ravaged by
Millenniums, submerge my feet;
Each particle can tell of the brontosaurus
And the mighty mastodon, all leveled
By the myriad whirling seasons.

White capped chorus lines come dancing
'Cross my stage,
Singing liquid tunes of the days
The redman birched in reverent awe
To lake's full bosomed undulations.

Regressing further, when seething,
Brimming from within, burst through earth's skin,
To pock and fester till the cauldrons
Cooled and Neptune tipped the clouds
In thunderous inundation.

I've kinship with first algae, when Creation
Pondered step by step my own complexity
And creativity flowering feebly
In my frame, is from the same.

Let It All Out

If you cocoon yourself
And in smug safety
Leave a gap in that long line
Of those whose eyes
Look out beyond the near horizons,
You are a drone that hears
And sees the hum and flow
Without contributing.

Better to be dead than not to seek
Some yet untraveled trail
Or undone task.

There is a new frontier for you,
Which in ignoring, you will lose
That covered wagon thrill
Which beckons just beyond
The next long hill.

Love's Equation

Love isn't a four letter word and though
this world has bruised and trampled it,
like Phoenix, it rises in a golden glow,
unscathed and pure, no other word will fit.

This thing called Love that dwarfs Aladdin's lamp
and in its effervescence reaches out
to place contagious, warming, caring stamp
upon each heart that lingers round about.

It paints our clouds with rainbow tints and sends
the fibers of our being to great heights,
endures and laughs and weeps but never ends.
so, if Love never ends, it follows we
are captive in its arms eternally.

Myopia

The day ambled in,
reluctant to awaken the valley.
The moon paled,
galactic chandeliers blinked in retreat,
night sounds of the cricket and the owl
give way to the songbird's hymns of praise
for the emerging sun.

The valley yawns,
pours coffee and then blends
into the asphalt caravans,
which screech, honk and belch monoxide.

There's a mortgaged mind behind each wheel,
oblivious to Creation's multi-tinted clouds
above dew sequined sheen of green,
like one, whose new bride wears an enticing gown,
her pursed lips cannot pierce the financial page,
he gulps his pancakes
and frets at life's treadmill.

Our Lame Legacy to the Future

From the discussion panel came this inquiry,
“What’s wrong with those time tested tenants
Of right living, where honesty and decency,
Straight laced morality, inbuilt integrity
And industry, have been our strength,
Where deep emotional devotion
Brings tears to the eyes when a flag goes by?

Blasé life’s luster fades, we opt
For alternatives that earn no accolades.
We feed on greed’s corruptive need and fail
To heed the crippling aftermath of its undoing,
Enervating mind and spirit’s excellence.
We cry because we can’t have all the pie.

Reneging on mores, we outlaw God;
Replace with seamy anarchy of baser values
Surrendering the bright obsession of forebears
Who dreamed of a nation that wore goodness
Like a jeweled crown.
Must we admit to them and Her,
“We let them down.”

Pardon Me, Your Slip Is Showing

I can't make my male mind
Adjust to "freedoms" coinciding
With your equal rights.
My brainwashed puritanical resist
The change that spoils the golden thread
Of purity you wore,
Before you came into mainstream.
Is the price you paid so much,
That now in integrating, you slink
Down to the mangled mores of
Male mimicry, surrendering the mantle
Which befits the queenly role you abdicate?
You've been the glue that bonds our fabric
Of safe sanity. If you let go,
Men won't deny your wanton loveliness,
But lower standards further to comply,
Handwriting our decay.
Have your equality,
But know, our destiny
Has been and still is in your hands.

Put on a Happy Face

It's been a long time but I'll never forget
The day that I and the Mudgkin met.
Behind a bush there in the shade
A little person stared, dismayed.
He grinned at me and said, "Oh! Dear,
You're not supposed to find me here.
I am a Mudgkin if you please,
I am your friend, so be at ease."

Then he climbed upon my knee
And said, "I'm real, that you can see."
He smiled again from where he sat, Pointed ears and shoes and hat,
Dressed in blue to match the skies,
Also blue were his big round eyes.

"There are more of us on every star."
He said, "You see I travel far.
At night I slide down on a beam
To do my duty while you dream.
We gather up the daily tears
That fall because of pain and fears,
We scatter them to make the dew.
So when the sun comes up anew
It dries them up and takes away
The aches and trials of yesterday,
And that's one way of making room
For happiness in place of gloom."

He looked at me with a happy face,
Said, "I've some smiles here in my case.
We're hard to see in broad daylight
And we don't go home every night.
So as I wander all around
I place a smile where I see a frown.
If someone's loaded down with grief
I put some smiles in their handkerchief.
I hope you'll help, there's so much fret,
We need more help than we can get.
One thing I know, and that's if you

Make someone smile, you will smile too.”

Then he said, “Though this wasn’t the plan,
I’m glad we had a talk, man to man.”
He tipped his hat and bowed, polite,
Climbed from my knee, and walked out of sight.

Rewarding Futility

I'm humbled as I search for phrases beautiful
That titillate the mind
And sweep across my consciousness
Capturing celestial moods of joy and pathos
Lifting my inmost core of being
Like Mozart's music.
I seek the muse that walks the catacombs of Poesy
With its iambic foot, hoping I'll find
Word chords that set the soul afire
In rhythmic exaltation,
Winged excellence of timeless inspiration.

But my syllabic coup just slips
Beyond my mental finger tips
Yet, I have felt the glow
Of proximity with greatness
And am aware
If in my search, my end result is verbiage
My literary legacy, far from imposing
I've feasted on rich fare
In the exposing.

Published in *Lyrical Iowa*, 1978

Sea-duction

Sun slowly sets beyond sea's liquid rim,
tints stratus clouds above with paint brush hues,
so striking that it overpowers the brain—
and as soft breeze woos me Delilahly,
I think of sea's full-lipped incontinence.

Her changing moods, her flippant unconcern,
her smile, now so serene and beckoning,
the quick about-face turn to the violence
of angry wind whipped waves, that toss
the hapless, helpless craft 'gainst unseen rocks.

I hear the horror of the human screams
of victims who are caviar for sharks,
or stripped of flesh by barracuda teeth
and decorate the sea floor with skeletal remains
that stare in sightless prayer, ad infinitum.

The magnet tug of the sea siren's allure
dispels all but her shameless charms.
I leap into her waving arms— and swim.

So Sew

Each of us begins with a garment
Of different weave and design,
Which in time's passage
Becomes worn, washed, wrinkled,
Stained, soiled, stretched, shrunk,
Faded, frazzled, fragmented
And hung up.

But we are equipped with a capacity to mend
And with a colorful variety of patches.
It's up to us whether we wind up
Tattered, tangled, torn
And tossed,
Or become a pleasing example
Of patchwork artistry.

Some Observations

Why do we often opt for gloom
in place of laughter?
Although it's easier to smile than mope,
we listen to the doomsday prophets,
pull in our necks like turtles,
find satisfaction in forbodings
that sap initiative and hope.

We play solitaire instead of bridge
so no one knows the mistakes we make.
We won't write poetry.
That might expose our inner selves,
or tinkle high notes
on our mind's keyboard,
and we might stoop
to smell the flowers,
and suddenly come face to face
with God.

Someone Had to Say It

I have this problem with a TV Sport
that sponsors this message of prime import,
of our brightest youth, quoting as truth,
in their seeking for ultimate bliss.
“It couldn’t get any better than this.”

It seems insane to be frying your brain
and doing it again and again,
then appointing another to refrain,
to get you unloaded when you get loaded.
You pour and lift, you sip and you suds,
Your bladder gets full as your mind befuddles,
do you really think as you take a piss,
“It doesn’t get any better than this.”

Now they tell you to guzzle your ‘Light,’
it will cost you more to get just as tight.
If your priority is a bottle or can,
you know you’re a poor excuse for a man.
Why don’t you tell them that something’s amiss.
It has to be a lot better than this.

Sonnet

Only once does each feathered bough and flower
Give perfumed orchestration to each hour.
The clouds outlined by dimmer orb at night
And the lamb gamboling in nebulous delight
Enhances every scent and sound and sight
With dreams that reach beyond the far flung stars
And make each moment magic where they are,
When two and love view paradise ajar.
But let pass by is in a way to die,
Rapt consciousness of blossom, bird and sky
If dulled by poignant memories that remain
A hovering pall to ear and nose and eye.
Haunting that searching frenzy to regain
Access to that pure ecstasy in vain.

Square White Box

“Let’s tear it down.
It spoils the view.”
“Not now,” she said,
“I like the new,
But in there’s much
Of me and you.”
In solitude, sad eyes
Now look past elegant decor
Through open drapes it stands,
A square white box
With windows.

Sharp memories
Cut back the years
His strong arms
Light-hearted days and laughter
Time’s shingles danced
Above their plighted passions
Babies crawling after.

Spring’s roaring freshet, lowland flood,
Deep mud,
His need for her caress,
Scrub board and home made soap,
Hard toil and weariness.
Watching him plant the corn,
Patching the torn,
Mooing meadows munching
The crunch beneath.
Birthdays, picnicking
And baby teeth.

Pond beckoning
Children’s hook and line,
The picture of
Their first blue gill.

Night’s tuneful choruses;
A cricket timpani,

Bullfrog bass,
Flute whip-poor-will.

That autumn vigil
By daughter's side
Rendering dismembering
Of death.
Oak leaves bleeding
Their crimson eulogy
At her last breath.

Smell of sap soaked sawdust
From firewood nearby
To satisfy
That old pot belly.

Young ones "Can't waiting,"
For bread from the oven –
To smother
With butter and jelly.

Last minute dash
To sub-zero privy
Shivering to cold upstairs
Large eyes at Christmas
Popcorn and taffy
Mittens and long underwear.

This new house, their dream
But now
The nothingness
Of wall to wall
Unlived-in plush
Its coffin hush
Its vaulted beam
She'd trade in all – for any part
Of that white box
With windows.

Squirm

I sit myself aside and look at me
And ask, what dreams, what goals,
What mountains have you climbed,
What lies beneath that glib
Veneered
Exterior?

What happened, did all your guts fall out?
You had it going well, but smell
The dank decayed dust suffocated
Unread chapters, mute evidence
Of life
Inferior.

You with your garden hose backbone,
Your caterpillar aimlessness,
Squirming the days away in indirection;
I think the worm's
Superior.

Sunflower Spinner

In my neighbor's garden you spin
Matching the moods that I'm in.
Your gold petaled blades
In changing charades,
Turning, slowing, stopping,
Starting again in reverse,
Like the tempo of my thoughts,
Searching, conflicting, adverse.

You please the esthetic
And frighten the birds.
I sit in the sun
And conjure with words.

You don't need to take the aptitude test
To discover what you do and why.
I'd like to find what I can do best
Before life passes me by.

But for this moment I will not fret,
My options are not cut and dried.
Here comes a cloud, you will get wet,
I'm just going inside.

The Funny Page

Sometimes, we get a chuckle,
when Bumstead gets a knuckle
and the little boy above,
with his uniform and glove,
helps us remember with nostalgia
those young years before neuralgia.
But those times that were humorous
weren't very numerous.

So you strike out at the plate
and your fielding is second rate.
You miss that easy fly,
which makes you want to die.
You're the one who lost the game
and you feel the silent blame.
Though the day is bright and sunny,
the way you feel just isn't funny.

The Leaky Bucket

If you
Get a panoramic view
Of the trees, the clouds, the blue,
In a sun kissed drop of dew
Watch a robin leaning firm
Tugging at a gourmet worm
Hear the storm's protesting thunder
As the lightning tears asunder
Feel a sense of awe and wonder
Each reaction rapt and new
Like a child.

Then beguiled
By your sophistication
You decipher all creation
As a nebulous deviation
Man's a mere non-entity
Struggling in a shoreless sea
Love is just biology
Wonder is an aberration
Ain't that wild?

Think Little

There are those who say they're not
Elves and fairies — Tommy-rot.
Let them: but you who have a flair
For fantasy, please come with me
To seek and dwell among the people wee.
First, to Ireland 'cross the sea to see
And dance around a linden tree with a she
And with the morning find that time has rolled
A century of history. Or while you're there,
Grab a leprechaun and make him share
His pot of gold.
There's a side trip, where, I'm told
You can hob-nob it with a hobbit
Or hobgoblin.

On to England and fairy King Oberon
Where you hear the trumpets blare
As Pigwiggan, Queen Titania's favorite knight
Dons his hardware to make heads roll
Against the evil Troll
And the court jester, Puck,
Will make you laugh until you ache.

In Germany,
If you're a girl, you may get kissed
By a noisy, ghostly Poltergeist
But you must bake a cake.
Well – this is a sample run
Of tours that you can take.
If you don't think it's fun,
What do you want
For goodness sake?

This Could Get You Nowhere (Or, How Big Is Your Splash?)

Now as I look inward
I find that by comparison
I haven't jumped as high
Or made as large a splash
As others that I know.

I'm told
There is no face or mind
Like mine,
I am one of a kind.

And this makes me wonder
What another person
With the same frame,
Background and foibles
Would have done with it.

Thou Go Not

I couldn't just pass by.
From his wheel chair,
he looked at me and smiled,
and as I took his hand
he asked me, "How are you?"
He took complete command;
that hall of the outlived
became alive.

I tried to picture him before.
Was he a man of the cloth,
a salesman or in politics?
I felt that we were friends;
that smile of his shone through
the cloud of his receding.

Now, I cannot pass him by.
I have to see his face light up,
as his hand reaches out for mine.

When Will We Ever Learn?

Daughter of the moon, Nokomis,
From behind your timeless curtain,
As you view, once your dominion,
Can you give a frank opinion?

You, who see earth's wounds and raping,
and the rivers dying, gaping,
Is this, that we call progress,
Just a greed befuddled mess,
hurrying civilization's death
with it's poison, foul breath?
Moon daughter, are you watching waiting,
for the earth's renovating,
from man's crippling designs,
to, again primeval pines?

Will your great-grandsons and daughters
Glide in clean unbridled waters?
Will what has transpired before,
Then, swept clean, just close the door,
for the sages of new ages
to discover and explore?

Will Eden have it's new beginning?
Will man get another inning?
Will he ever learn that caring,
loving neighbor, giving, sharing,
letting God rule earth, His way,
will eliminate decay?

When will we ever learn?

Chapter 12

Spiritual

I like Ta-Da. The granddaughter in the story may be my sister Catherine.

A Star Shines Down

A Hymn to the tune of "How great thou art"

1. A Star shines down, upon that lowly manger,
Wherein a babe, God's Son, our Christ was born.
The shepherds bow before this infant stranger.
The wise men come to worship and adorn.

CHORUS: The Angels sing, glory to God on high,
Peace on the earth, good will to all.
The Angels sing, glory to God on high,
Peace on the earth, good will to all.

2. In rustic Shrine, he comes to us our Savior.
The world around could make no room for Him.
To tell God's love and pattern our behavior;
To show a light along our pathways dim.

CHORUS

3. The cattle low, a lamb lifts ear to listen,
To that new sound, a little baby's cry.
Mary holds Him, her eyes in wonder glisten,
Above, a dove coos His first lullaby.

CHORUS

Let us adore, Him, yes in every season.
Love isn't bound by sky or time of year.
Infinite love oe'r flows beyond all reason,
Lift up your hearts and you will surely hear.

CHORUS

This Christmas time, the bells ring out His coming,
And hallelujahs sound from every choir.
Within our heads are joyful carols humming.
So let us vocalize our deep desire.

FINAL CHORUS: Let us all sing glory to God on high,

Peace on the earth, good will to all.
Let us all sing glory to God on high,
Peace on the earth, good will to all.

A Step or Two

I knelt beside my mother's bed and wept.
The impact of her plight divesting me
of all reserve, so unashamed I cried.
This person who had loved me into life,
stricken and mute except one withered arm
which still gave slight response, reached out,
with crippled effort pulled me, drew me close.
One breath away from death yet loving me,
and there was joy in mingled misery.

The little toddler shuffling from his bed,
tousled and sleepy dropped his teddy bear
and with assistance climbed upon my knee.
And while I kissed his blonde and curly head
and held him close, he snuggled closer still.
Although the diapered part was quite suspect,
I wouldn't change a thing, and time it seemed
stood still; for in this moment of rapport,
the world was mine, I couldn't ask for more.

Love's mystery remains, but leaves a clue.
I think I've walked with God, a step or two.

Answered Prayer

I heard a flapping sound in a tree
and saw a robin hung by a piece of string,
a captive feathered pendulum,
fiffully beating the air.

I ran to extricate its weakened fluttering,
uncoiled the string around its neck
and held it hopefully until it stretched,
made one last gasp and then lay still.

Oh no! I prayed and worked wings out and in,
a reflex action of my deep despair,
until I felt it tremble in my hands,
a slow resurgence as it gaped and gaped.

Then in me came a gushing rush of joy,
because I'd helped to bring back life,
and in that thankful interlude I knew
that there was joy in heaven too.

The robin stretched its neck.
It kicked against my hand and flew.

Belated Appreciation

God –
I'm writing because I need your help.
It's been a long time since we've communicated.
I meant to keep in touch
but I've been busy keeping up the payments
on my house, two cars, and a boat
and playing golf.

Guess I'm one reason why your world's a mess.
Didn't help you much to make it better;
so I'm ashamed to ask you to even
read this letter.

But now I have two granddaughters
as you well know. They're beautiful,
your flowers, reaching for their tomorrows.
I wonder what their world will be
if most of us have been like me.

And though my promises
are long past due,
please God, for those dear two,
help me help you.

Cheering Section

We mortals talk about split-second timing.
Well, the sun came up this morning,
as it has for eons beyond mortal comprehension.
We hurtle in our orbit like a ball on string
with synchronized precision,
greeting the sun in unwavering constancy.

We ponder the Engineer, the Creator,
the Intelligence, that masterminds this miracle
of total, timeless perfection,
which may explain our existence.
Perhaps, He also needs us in the bleachers
to cheer His handiwork.

God, My Family and Me

God used to visit us now and then;
we'd let him in but we'd say when.
But now God came and decided to stay,
we figured it was better that way.
You don't look any different people will say,
but you know — Rome wasn't built in a day.
It may take a while to remold living clay
into something fit for eternity
now that we have permanent company.
God, my family and me.

In digging the ground we find a worm,
we watch it wiggle, slither, and squirm.
Here is life of low degree,
without it plant life would never be.
Just some of God's ingenuity
we've all made a discovery.
God, my family and me.

Help!

Trees are important to me,
like laughter, taste buds, love and sunsets.
Last year the borer infested our peach tree.
Jellied blobs of sap revealed their cancerous presence.
The tree doctor said it was a hopeless case,
“If you dig every spot with a wire,” he said,
“you have a slim chance.”

The supportive action seemed to come naturally.
How can one dig and not pray a little?
This year the peach tree is scarred but healthy.
In spring, we thrilled to see its pink petaled profusion.
And now, low leaning limbs, weighed down
with blushing lusciousness
give us their grateful offering.
It won't hurt to say, “Thanks.”

Maybe God Suffers by Definition

How can man view
unnumbered stars,
which steer their steady course
in intricate, yet ordered
and exact galactic pattern;
and in our minute minute,
say there is no mind
behind the great extravaganza?

This pulling deep within,
this passion and compassion,
that cries for excellence,
are they not integrals
of a Creative force
that worms us slowly
up the stem?

Is this called love,
some accidental offing,
or a pervading presence
that gives substance, sense and sanity
to being?

Psalm 100

In sonnet form.

If you love God, then let your voice speak out
to honor Him with joy that others see.
Go spread that Love contagion round about,
in song and action, share your ecstasy.
Know deep down in, that He is Lord and God.
We are His people, sheep within His fold,
made from the lowly clay on which we trod.
To Him, we are more precious than His gold.
Enter His Gates with reverence and praise,
give thanks to Him and bless His holy name.
Let His watch care be there through all our days
Ignite our spirits with His holy flame.
For God is Love, His faithfulness steadfast,
and for our children, when our day is past.

PSALM 100: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!
Serve the Lord with gladness, come into His presence with singing!
Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us and we are his. We are
his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks
to him, bless his name!
For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations."

Seven, Eight, Nine

I must admit I'm swayed by cults
like Vonnegut's,
who say that man must find his way
alone.

They defrock the Deity
and don the raiment
of omnipotence for themselves.
Yet in all honesty,
find their convictions splintered
as at times are mine.

So, I scurry back to God
and His fringe benefits,
because no finite mind,
without a doubt,
can count Him out.

Still Seeking

I wish I'd been a child,
when You walked the Judean hills.
You might have stopped
and placed your hand upon my head.

Out of pure joy,
I would have told my mother, my brother and my friends.
Have I not felt your hand upon my brow,
why don't I tell someone about You now?

If I had been that blind man
that You healed so he could see,
the trees, the birds, the sky
and faces of the ones He loved,
I would have told each one I met,
that You were God's anointed Son.
Why am I silent now?

I know why Peter followed You.
He saw in You God's Son,
Humanity above all humankind.
Yes, he denied you, so have I so many times,
But when he knew that You the risen Christ
still wanted him,
he spoke your Name and showed the world Your Way,
until his cruel death.
There must be some gift that I have
to offer You, 'till my last breath.

Ta-Da

She's only three,
and I, her grandpa, let go my years.
She jumps from the playground swing
and skips to the balance beam.
"Can you walk this?" I ask.
She reaches up to me and says, "I can – if you will hold my hand."
She starts across, I feel some fear.
She holds my hand
And her breath at near misstep.
She reaches the other end and says,
"Ta-Da!" And I reflect,
my God asks me if I can walk
His straight and narrow Way.
I too must reach up and say,
"I can – if You will hold my hand."

Take the High Road

I watch six cardinals on a peach tree's
barren branches by our window;
and wonder how this feathered crimson show,
against the drifted snow, could be,
without a thinking Creativity,
where flower, tree and skies
and that which walks, crawls and flies
astounds the eyes with its preview
of Paradise.

In face of this abundant evidence,
some still turn away and say
it's all chaotic accident.
But if some doubt this premise that I hold,
I'm glad I can believe that He
feels need to share with me,
His artistry.

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There is More

I look up at the stars on high,
while the world is sleeping,
watch the sheep as the world passes me by,
in my vigil keeping.

The owl in a tree points to the sky
and spreads its wings to fly;
it seems to me he flies so free;
I wonder why can't I?

What makes me want to soar,
tells me that there is more?
What is this feeling inside of me,
that tells me that there is more?

Are my eyes just for seeing,
is there some reason for being?
What is this feeling inside of me
that tells me there is more?
What is this feeling inside of me,
that tells me there is more?

I am still a shepherd boy,
but I've a story to tell.
A message to all of love and joy
and I must tell it well.

It's not like before;
heaven opened her door.
That's why I know, that's why I know,
that's why I know there is more.

An angel first spoke to me.
He said, "Go and see!"
That's why I know, that's why I know,
that's why I know there is more.

I heard angels sing.
I've seen Jesus our King.

That's why I know, oh yes I know,
that's why I know there is more.

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