

# **The House of Poetry**

Poetry Reading Session

2011

Linda Amos

*Mixed Up*

*She had to admit  
He was only the man  
Who had confused her heart  
When she was 16  
And all-the-way up to today.*

*She was, and probably  
Always would be  
Mixed-up about him!  
Because only he  
Could confuse her heart!*

Linda Amos

*Dream Lover*

*I loved you  
Before you knew it  
And if you ever choose  
To leave my life,  
Nothing will top me  
From loving you,  
Then, too.*

*- Inspired by*

*Mr. Ralph Robert "Randy" Amos, Deceased*

*[Excerpted from Country Living manuscript.]*

Linda Amos

*I can be all I can be*

*I have the ability  
To change disaster  
Into something good.*

*I can re-write my own history.*

*I can only imagine  
What is possible in my life,  
Tomorrow  
With God's help!*

*Questions Answered*

*One of the best things about you  
Is that when I look into your eyes,  
I see you looking back at me...  
In such an adoring way,  
I know that what you say is true, You do love me.*

Linda Banks

## Homecoming

*Where I come from is written in my heart.*

In the small Texas town, on a hot, dry July morning, the sidewalk in front of the shops on Main Street teems with celebration. It is Homecoming, annual migration of once-locals mingling with now-locals along the short block that is Downtown.

Vocalizations pass for conversation as flocks of friends shift and drift, arms flapping, meeting and greeting down the walkway.

Near 10 a.m., voices lower in expectation. Bodies move into formation, facing the street. Down the block, the Mayor's car leads the way, followed by other cars and bicycles decorated in red, white, and blue. Behind them, riders on horseback and local organizations on foot precede the floats pulled by trucks and tractors.

On the first float, members of the Class of 1960, celebrating their 50th reunion, sit or stand beneath a sign that says, *No old folks on this float*. Another float piggybacks the first. On the trailer, six empty rocking chairs memorialize classmates whose deaths left a large hole in this small group.

The rocking chairs move slowly back and forth to the rhythm of the ride. As the float passes, silence ripples through the crowd. They recognize what remaining class members know. How sorrow comes too often and too soon. Why, from near and far, they come home again.

~ Linda Banks

**Senior Class Picture**  
(1960)

Photograph  
in black and white:  
young faces  
with frozen smiles  
concealing dreams  
of wealth and fame,  
happiness forever,  
love that remains.

Were we really  
that naïve to think  
life would give  
everything  
we hoped for...  
and a little more?

Would we  
have smiled  
just the same  
had we known  
of the gain and loss  
our lives would net?

How young we were,  
so innocent.

~ Linda Banks

**Class Reunion**  
(2010)

A color photograph  
will mark  
this milestone  
in our lives,  
our smiles combined  
in quiet contemplation.

As we thumb  
through memories  
we share and try  
to bridge the gap  
of fifty years,  
we know  
that nothing  
can be changed  
of all that's past.

We are wiser now,  
lessons learned  
since graduation  
much harder than  
the ones we studied  
while in school.

This day  
once seemed  
so far away.

~ Linda Banks

### **Who We Were, Who We Are**

Most of us have not seen each other  
for fifty years. At the class reunion,  
we cross back and forth over the bridge  
that separates today from graduation day.

We know who we are,  
but are saddened by time's  
cruel adjustment to others'  
outward appearances.  
Still, we smile, reminded  
who we were  
by old snapshots  
and school yearbooks.

School-day experiences  
direct us into natural groupings  
with those whose friendships  
meant so much long ago.  
But we are not the same.  
Neither are they. So, we mingle,  
curious about the others, the ones  
we once ignored so easily.

Stories of success and failure  
swirl in a confusion of conversation.  
Tears and laughter bubble to the surface.  
We speak in soft tones of classmates  
who did not grow old.

Eventually, words come  
of old animosities,  
disappointments,  
broken hearts,  
old crushes  
that never flowered  
beyond the seed of longing.

How can we hurt for so long?  
How can we make up for fifty years  
in one afternoon? How can we  
let go of each other again?

~ Linda Banks

**Our Strange Synchronicity**

Jan Benson © 2010

I live in hollow logs  
bundling cattail pollen and sedges  
in calf-hide sewn with elk sinew.

My gait is lumbering and rude;  
leaving an illuminating path  
as reliable as Ursa Major.

Draping my throat, ropes of seeds  
and shells. I build low blue fires with  
henna-painted hands and

sprinkle sweet grass and sage  
over fading coals.  
Confetti and ash-embers drift into dust.

She arrives amid rolling thunder;  
a burst of butterflies  
springing from grass into

splintering sunlight wrapped  
in wonder and sagacity, to  
spangle my span.

Her legs; limbs of lightning.  
Her arms; wings of a ground dove.  
An asymmetrical aspect inhabits her expression.

Between us there is no distance;  
only space and mystery,  
and soft-yolk nights.



Jan Benson

**Snow Moon Prayer**

Jan Benson © December 2007

Dear Creator:

At 11 pm, let it begin

Slowly at first – no wind  
dropping through anorexic trees  
floating onto prickly grass outside my window

When midnight chimes  
let it drift  
like a two-year-old's sleeping breath

Wake me gently at 4 am  
standing forearm deep in my terry robe  
wrapped in your quiet glow

Barbara L. Berry

## TRIANGLE OF LOVE

Somewhere in the shadows a child waits  
cradled by the moon, comforted by the stars  
reaching out for a mother's love  
crying for a father's lullaby.  
That child is mine.

My arms wait to hold that flesh  
my fingers to stroke those sleeping eyes  
my lips wait to deliver whisper kisses  
upon velvet cheeks and petal lips.  
Where are you, my child?

Somewhere in the shadows unselfish love waits  
to bring you in this world, to hand you over to us  
reaching out for your future  
crying softly at her loss.  
That person is my friend.

God alone knows the ineradicable moment  
when you will be placed into my arms  
your gentle dreaming smile affirming us  
reaching out to bind our love portrait  
at last into a family.

*Barbara Lewie Berry -- ©1994*

Barbara L. Berry

## THE LIFE OF A ROSE

At first...  
a tiny seed  
to join love

then...  
a rosebud  
budding and blossoming

opening petals of life

manifesting an aroma  
of sweetness, shedding  
a fragrance of divinity

blessing those  
who gazed upon her  
magnificence.

In full bloom...  
flourishing, maturing,  
producing cradle  
buds of radiance  
to sustain life...

then weakening,  
withering, declining.

Crimson kisses  
fell upon her brow  
smoothing the thorns  
from her life...

until each proud  
petal unfolded itself  
into eternity with God.

*Barbara Lewie Berry©  
September 6, 2008*

Barbara L. Berry

### TIMELESS GIFT

Rough mauve basket,  
smooth white stones,  
spill them out so I can see  
remnants of their history.

Was it dew fall or river wash  
that bathed these fragments  
from ageless times?

Or did some ancient man splinter them  
from darkened cave and lay them down  
in altar form where fire removed their scabrous flesh?

Can they be pristine scraps of some great  
cosmic wash or primordial souvenirs  
from the land of Genesis?

Did they spew first as lava flow  
from volcano depths  
then wash along the ocean floor?

No, these polished pebbles  
spread before my curious eyes  
surpass all ancient mysteries,  
for these bookshelf treasures  
were gleaned by tiny hands  
as a special gift for Grandma  
from a little boy, age three.

*Barbara Lewie Berry*© - May 1997  
First Published in PST Book of the Year 1999

**Fishing Above the Bridge of My Nose**

Thoughts, like trout, once darted and winked,  
in a tumbled, golden patter;  
roiled my brain with every leap,  
snapped at words, grew sleek and fatter.  
sliced beneath concepts, rose again,  
amazed the sun with their spatter.

Now, a few slip sullen, slowly, deep  
in murky bottom matter;  
grope around a sunken hope,  
no longer sky-bound gadders,  
scarcely able to brush aside  
life's formless, algaed tatters.

I'd hoped to snare one to feed our chatter,  
but my net is frayed.

Why do I natter?

Chris Boldt

### Reflection on Three Questions Posed by Rouault's Miserere

As I engage Rouault's bleak, hurting world  
My heart with tens of restless questions swirls.  
But, in his endeavor to make viewers *perceive*,  
The artist himself has posed only three:  
"Are we not convicts?" "Do we not wear masks?"  
"My dear country, where are you?" he asks.  
To inquiries that I might make about  
Torture, apathy, ignorance, loss, drought,  
Addiction, war, hubris, greed, and cancers,  
he, in these prints, offers sufficient answers.

Each somber window into shame and loss  
evokes another station of the cross.  
He does not doubt his God's ingress  
into a world of plastic pointlessness.  
His own queries say, "Should you not leave the maze  
Of your false, over-wrought, self-wasting ways,  
to enter the world I have made you see,  
and for our broken, cadent Lord, to be  
Véronique still wiping suffering faces,  
the Jesus to be found in arid places."

Chris Boldt

### **Nomenclature**

*“Please, would you tell me what  
you call yourself?” [Alice} said timidly.*

*Lewis Carroll*

Spindle-legged and Disney-eyed,  
they viewed each other through the mesh.  
The human baby put his hands  
against the screen. “Dog,” he pronounced,  
misdubbing (as has been our species’ habit,  
since Adam got his naming rights)  
a gift that, one way and another,  
God had delivered to his very door.

I thought how men called Jesus  
Elijah, Jeremiah, John,  
believing that they honored Him,  
though those titles fell far short  
of what He would become.  
And I recognized, again, my charge  
to help this child name his world aright.  
I stood beside him as he watched;  
I whispered, “It’s a fawn.”  
My baby’s hand reached up for mine.  
He held it tight. “Fawn,” he breathed.  
We named the miracle together.

Roberta Pipes Bowman

### **Waiting for the Light**

Days swirl around me  
and babble with tongues  
pounding into swords  
slashing with injustice,  
there is the screech  
of squealing wheels  
as friend and loved ones  
depart this earthly journey.

At night, unwelcome guest  
tromp through my dreams  
while sanity sleeps.  
I am awash with the spray

Shall I be wrecked  
on the Isle of Loneliness,  
wary of intruders, fearful of danger?  
Where is the Star  
that rend the night?  
where is the sun  
driving shadows away?

I listen for as still small voice  
and wait for the light  
if only enough  
for one small step.



### **Vanilla Memories**

Flashing Lights, rocking music,  
zippy jean-clad teens in Red Robin  
make this ice cream parlor a haven  
of pleasure for the very young.  
Nostalgic pictures on the wall  
portray those slow and clumsy days.  
Posters and signs awake thoughts  
before A/C pasteboard boxed deserts.

In those old days when summer heat  
thrust its fury on folk they dreamed  
of icy hours and cooling drinks.  
the cedar ice cream freezer became  
a star kitchen gadget. Golden liquid  
Was poured into the tin bucket  
with wooden paddle, gears meshed,  
and crank secured. The strongest person  
Turned the crank that spun the can  
As ice and sat were packed around.  
Someone sat on the burlap covered ice  
and held the contraption still.  
At last this treasure was uncovered.  
A squabble to lick the paddle began,  
then scoops of frozen pleasure  
soothed hunger and eased  
the wish for winger's chill.

In this raucous room memory  
licks a sweet spoonful.

Roberta Pipes Bowman

**Roadrunner at Crescent Hotel**

*Eureka Springs, Arkansas*

How the bird got her no one knows.  
Roadrunners cannot fly at least  
not four stories up to a balcony jutting out over the town sitting  
in a bowl of blue mountains  
where a huge statue of Christ  
guard the horizon with arms  
outstretched as if to protect  
the whole word.

The hotel claims the bird is their mascot.  
It steps from window to window  
looking at customer as if appraising  
the diners and unafraid of those  
who venture to eat on the chilly porch.  
Perhaps scraps of food sustain him.  
there is not a lady bird for miles.  
He must be a people-bird.

Tourists will forget exotic roast beef.  
the massive antique bar, its mirror  
reflecting the black and silver coal stove  
not needed to drive out winter' chill.  
They will not forget the road-runner  
eyeing them and showing  
his red splash just below each eye.  
He seems to have a human trait  
of accomplishing the unusual  
for the balm of admiration.

Cassy Burleson

**Black Bird Resting in the Brave Bamboo**

By Cassy Burleson

(Written in May 2009 after the baby shower for the soon-to-be Tripp Edward Burleson)

Old poets have a strange sense of the macabre  
Within each of life's nonessential existential microcosms.  
For example, when I went outside tonight to plant red tulips  
I stumbled across a stiff and twisted bird - almost hidden  
Under a wall of bamboo that's often thick with chirping toward evening,  
Once prompting you to quote some snotty Englishwoman saying,  
"Birds! Birds! Dirty little things that leave nasty messes everywhere."  
We laughed, but I love birds. Live ones, that is ... Dead birds scare me.

But this bird's regal neck plumage would have put an Englishwoman's fur to shame.

So I buried it near the bamboo, even though I don't like bamboo because it comes up uninvited  
No matter how many times I mow it down, all the while saying small prayers for the clump of feathers,  
Hoping what I said would put things right somehow in whatever heavenly reward birds spirit off to,  
Worrying about what must have killed it while a zillion of its kinfolk gave it a wing-flapping send-off,  
Screeching their condolences in a cacophony of cackles that surely would have pleased Alfred Hitchcock.  
And then I went to plant my red tulips in the twilight, thinking of my nephew's new orders to Iraq.  
Hoping this bird was not a bad totem, this black grackle now resting peacefully in the brave bamboo.

Cassy Burleson

**Day of the Living Dead**

By Cassy Burleson

(Written Oct. 31, 2009)

Halloween is dead.

Maybe we've seen too many episodes of "CSI."

Too much reality TV, everyone racing to the top of the worm pile.

And I, for one, am sad to see Halloween go.

I'm having a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup right now.

Remembering when my daughter was a tiger and a fairy and a princess for a night.

But no one I know had a lot of trick-or-treat-ers on their doorsteps this bright night.

Not enough Tinker Bells shouting "I believe!" out there in the full moon.

Not enough Peter Pans to "come in for some hot chocolate" like we did in the old days.

Taking home candied apples oozing with caramel that made your whole face sticky.

Piling up the mound of candy on the living room linoleum when we got home.

Trading Tootsie Rolls for popcorn balls. We believed in something then. Almond Joy and free candy.

And now the goblins have got us tied down in disbelief and dressing as ordinary people.

Too bad about Halloween. It used to celebrate the dead.

And I think the dead liked that.

I know I did.

Cassy Burleson

**20/20 Vision**

By Cassy Burleson

(Written March 20, 2011)

Today I got up early and gave up the Internet - all day - for Lent  
Because I'm probably not strong enough to give up something MAJOR  
For as long as you have to ... for dates I'm not sure of ... in a year without ashes.  
Easter is later than usual this year. But today I gave up the Internet for LENT.

Which, since I capitalize it, is something you know I think is important.  
LENT that is, not the Internet ... which also requires a capital letter for starters.  
So instead of feasting on the Internet today, I cleaned out all my closets.  
I have many closets. Some of which I have not cleaned out for at least four years.

Maybe I should say I'm blessed by closets, but that sounds kind of materialistic, huh?  
And Lent is usually about giving up. Well, I did. Give up. I gave up clothes to someone I knew  
Would like them .... Now that's probably not really as Lent-ish as giving all your goods  
To feed poor strangers ... or giving away everything you have to help people you don't even know.

I'm such a sinner. Too self-absorbed. And disappointed in my self-reliant self, once again this year.  
I need to stop. Stop like Robert Frost. Stop like Anne Lamott. Stop. Just stop. Snowy woods or not ...

## **FAITHFUL WORKER**

**True salvation is repentance,  
Heart belief in Christ as Lord,  
Total turning in my living,  
Change of thought, of deed, and word.**

**When my heart is white as snow is,  
Then continues saving grace,  
While I sort, and keep or discard,  
Habits, words to show Christ's face.**

**Faithful was He, to the dying,  
Spotless sacrifice for me;  
So, I, faithful, must be growing  
Daily; Christ, the lost to see.**

**Working, growing, learning slowly,  
Rising when in sin I fall;  
With his living hand be lifted,  
Vows renewing to his call.**

**Till, at last, the night is closing  
On a soul well worn with love;  
Open wide Heaven's golden portals,  
Home to Paradise above.**

Shirley Carmichael

Shirley Carmichael

## **A LOSS OF FAITH**

**1975 Headline: 3 YEAR OLD KILLED IN FREAK ACCIDENT**

**The pastor stood beside the grave,  
to ease the pain of grief.  
His first born son was buried there.  
His stay brought faint relief.**

**He had passed the stage of numbness;  
now, was filled with anger's bile.  
He raised his fist and shouted, "God,  
Why did you take my child?"**

**If you are God, if you exist,"  
and to the ground, he fell;  
"I cannot serve a God like you!  
You can just go to hell."**

**That night in dream, Christ came to him,  
and took him by the hand.  
"Already Friend, I've been to hell;  
I followed God's command.**

**I gave my life for all mankind,  
preached to the souls in hell,  
and, taking up my life, insured  
your child in Heaven could dwell.**

**Trust God, dear Brother, in your grief.  
Have faith, His way is best.  
Though you see through a riddle here,  
someday you'll know the rest."**

**1992 Headline: PASTOR CELEBRATES 17<sup>TH</sup> YEAR AT  
GRACE CHURCH**

Shirley Carmichael

Shirley Carmichael

## **JUDAS**

**I fell down on my knees to pray,  
One, I called friend, had gone astray.  
He chose the world, forgot God's way;  
I felt betrayed, heartsick today.**

**I prayed for help to understand  
Why broken hearts are in His plan;  
I begged God give me light to see  
Why my close friend would betray me.**

**"My Child," God answered, with a sigh;  
"I sent my only Son to die;  
His tortured death was hard to see,  
But, betrayal, too, was agony.**

**I watched Him suffer and not sin;  
I heard denial from His friend.  
I had to turn my face away,  
When man dared judge My Son that day.**

**But, one would have the greater curse;  
That man who held the money purse;  
He who had watched My mighty plan  
Unfold as My Son walked with man.**

**I watched him with the Pharisees.  
He seemed so eager, them to please.  
For money he would deliver one,  
Who is My Only Begotten Son.**

**Betrayed he then, this righteous Man,  
Clutching with his shekels in his hand;  
Saying, Master, Master; and the signal gave,  
As he kissed His cheek – that wretched knave.**

**I know how you feel when you are betrayed;  
But, you are not alone; don't be afraid.  
Don't harden your heart toward this wayward friend.  
Pray for his soul – ere he pays for his sin."**

**Shirley Carmichael**



C. Wally Christian

Two Poems for Advent and Chistmastide:

Vigil

O, let us keep vigil  
Here, among the stars,  
Here, where the winds sigh softly  
And the distant horizon glows  
With lanterns and with candles.

Let us keep vigil in the darkness,  
In the comforting darkness,  
For darkness becomes mystery.  
It is the true milieu of God,

Let us keep vigil,  
With our senses honed  
To the night sounds about us.  
This is the night that  
annuls the rush of time.  
Listen: the wail of labor,  
The mewl of life aborning.  
Let us keep vigil;  
It is the night of nights.

(For Christmas Eve)

Daybreak

... And when the morning came  
And the Judean sunlight warmed the stable  
And the shepherds went their way  
Back to the hunching hills and to their sheep  
And the weary father rubbed his eyes,  
Gave one more loving look  
At the sleeping mother and her baby  
And slept as well,

C. Wally Christian

A child came shyly  
And peered into the stable,  
Fragrant with hay and the earthiness of life.  
She looked into the faces of the sleeping family.  
She stood for a moment  
Over the small, round visage  
In the cattle trough.  
She kissed the holy child  
And stole away.  
(For Christmas Day)

### Slavery

(August 9, 1952 - August 9, 2009)

You have entangled me within your tendrils,  
Yielding, demanding, supple, insistent  
Like jasmine that wraps its arms about a bole  
And becalms it with its fragrance.  
So I'm constrained within this apt embrace,  
This serfdom of your touch,  
These genial bands, this sweet captivity.  
I feel your tranquil breathing  
And your heartbeat as you nestle by my side  
Within the cloaking night.  
What fool would wish for manumission  
From this winsome and becoming slavery  
Or from the gentle eyes that warm me yet  
Like April sun upon the windowsill?  
I willed it at the first and will it still.

### A Dust of Snow

How could there be a better way  
At first light to enchant the day  
And banish the dull, brown status-quo  
Of a wintry dawn than a dust of snow

C. Wally Christian

It came down silently in the night,  
Edging the shivering elms in white.  
My mailbox sports a soft snow plume,  
Its head held high in the morning gloom.

And, Ah! From the sulky, leaden skies,  
To hear the cheeky, squealing cries  
Of waxwings, spiraling down to fill  
The holly bush at my windowsill!

No fool am I! I know full well  
The thawing wind that will break this spell,  
And the dust of snow on my close-cropped lawn,  
In half a morning, will all be gone.

But when tedious neighbors bring to mind  
The slush they fear will be left behind,  
I tell them to hold their tongues, for I  
Don't care a fig to demystify!

### **“Whose Little Girl Are You?”**

As I loaded my groceries in my car  
A tall young man approached,  
A pretty two-year-old  
Bouncing lightly on her father's shoulders.  
And as they passed I heard him say,  
“Whose little girl are you?”  
She held him tightly, arms about his brow.  
“Your little girl.” She said.

I played the very game.  
When I'd come home at night  
I'd scoop her in my arms and ask the question.  
And she would answer.  
Then I would laugh and ask the other question:  
“Whose Daddy am I?”  
With a treble squeal  
She'd throw her arms about my neck  
And joyfully proclaim,  
MY Daddy!”

I backed my Nissan free of the SUV,  
And blinking, waited for my eyes to clear.

(October, 2010)      (To LS, with appreciation)

Patricia Ferguson

**SEVEN STARS**  
**Patricia Ferguson**

If I could give you seven stars to count each night  
or all the gold in all the seven seas, I would,  
but since I can't, I'll give you red bud trees  
or dawn's pink cotton candy clouds above a still resting  
    Dew-damp earth,

The bird's aubade.

I'll give to you the scent of grass.

I'll give you laughter from my heart for all  
the misbegotten human race,  
if clowns will make you smile.

I'll give you rain that falls on snow-clad earth  
and freezing sheaths the black tree bark,  
glittering in the lamp light on the whitened earth  
like cold and deadly diamonds.

I'll give you leaf-strewn paths through autumn woods,  
bare branches stretching to a summer-hidden sky,  
free from the burden of their leaves.

I'll give you sweet gum trees, dewberries by the highway,  
the taste of sassafras.

I'll take you down the streets of mimosa's  
delicate perfume, through rows of box-like houses  
set in lawns streaked green and brown.

I'll give you the scent that heralds rain,  
the wind that cleanses us, the quietness  
that steals the thunder from the streets,  
the thunder that inspires us to sleep,  
the rains that nourish us.

I'll give you sunsets on the sea  
where to tint a flower God is testing  
His new colors every eve.

I'll give you common things:  
fields of clover, dandelions, bluebonnets,  
summer-night fritinancy.

I'll give you fireflies.

I'll show you where the sensitive plant grows  
and how the leaves curl at a touch.

I'll give you warm green summer days to dream away,  
my hope of heaven and the courage to live through hell.

I'll give you valleys from which to see the peaks  
and peaks to view the valleys.

Patricia Ferguson

## **SEVEN STARS con't**

Best of all, I'll hold for you a mirror,  
that you may see a true reflection of yourself,  
not perfect,  
but with the tiny flaw that makes the imperfect  
beautiful. You won't see cold perfection  
ugly in its flawlessness.  
I'll give you love to save or spend on what you will.

And then,

then if you still want the seven stars  
or all the gold that's in the seven seas,  
I'll send you on to find your destiny.

## **ALWAYS IN AUGUST**

**Patricia Ferguson**

In August,  
trees clutch their leaves  
hastily push out their fruit,  
as if to say,--  
How do they know?--  
this slant of sun  
light points to fall.

In August,  
geese nod their heads  
quickly fill their bills with weeds,  
as if to say,--  
as well they know--  
this slant of sun  
light points to fall.

In August,  
children stop a breath  
look to school and rush away,  
as if to say,--  
How well they know!--  
this slant of sun  
light points to fall.

Patricia Ferguson

## **ALWAYS IN AUGUST con't**

In August,  
the squirrels and I  
dash each day to store some light,  
some acorns for--  
No time to rest!--  
the slant of sun  
light points to fall.

In August,  
Remembering  
the earth spins on its poles  
and tilts away--  
I shudder when  
this slant of sun  
light points to fall.

In August,--  
Winter gray is coming soon--  
I am like the birds,  
squirrels, geese, trees,  
and children when  
this slant of sun  
light points to fall.

## **Walking the Dogs at Night. Patricia Ferguson**

I like the night, the friendly dark.  
It steals bright color from the blooms  
and muffles the sharp day-sounds of streets  
so we can hear the crickets sing  
and see the geometry of trees,  
undistracted by their green  
we view against the lighter city sky.  
Above, a star or two  
outshines the neon city lights.  
I like the night.

J. Paul Holcomb

## **I Call the Lead Goose Columbus**

Everyday on our afternoon walk  
we pass a pond inhabited by  
Canada Geese. I read that  
those birds hesitate to leave  
a place they prefer. They must  
like our pond. I heard them fly  
over our house last night, and  
I have heard them on similar journeys  
for the past five years, trips where  
the birds reconnoiter to the north,  
investigate other habitats,  
then honk their way home.

We have lived in this house  
seventeen years, leave a few times  
yearly to scout other locales,  
universes with no identical pond  
or geese. New Mexico mountains  
near Albuquerque became a favorite  
years ago, a place to encounter  
natural worlds without standing  
on tiptoe or another person's shoulder  
to observe. We tram our way to the top  
of Sandia Peak, frolic beneath piñon pine,  
smell the sweet aroma of a world  
still its own, not yet totally compromised  
to what is needed by humans. Then  
we honk our way home drifting to refuge  
of blackjack oak, post oak, and ten  
or twelve helloing Canada Geese.  
I wonder if while we are gone the birds  
continue to journey over our place or  
whether they use the chance to make  
other friends, reassure other neighbors  
the world is still good, there is still  
reason to investigate, visit other places  
and return again with news of a new world,  
another haven of opportunity and peace.

*J. Paul Holcomb*

Previously published in *A Book of the Year*, 2003, Poetry Society of Texas.

J. Paul Holcomb

### Like March Madness

*“Seventy kings with their thumbs and toes cut off  
used to pick up scraps under my table.... God has  
paid me back ....” Judges 1:7*

No team at all, those kings. Jump shots with no thumbs clank like bricks against rim and board; a fast-breaking man with no big toes heartily hobbles but is no scoring threat. Wait a generation or two though and Deborah will be the referee.

What the Israelites need is a woman’s hand.

But don’t ask Sisera for corroboration. He is no longer available for consultation since Jael hid him from pursuers, rolled him up in a rug, then put a tent peg through his temple when what he was really after was a simple time out.

Or if you go back in time you can find the half-time show where 76 trombones ( no, I think it was trumpets) so stunned Jericho that its walls fell flat, and Joshua’s men stormed in and took the place. And we think

Satchmo’s the only one who could make that instrument rock. And we naively think Karl Malone and Shaquille O’Neal are the only ones who can really mix it up.

*J. Paul Holcomb*



## Rock On

We smiled at each other  
when David announced  
in his sermon that  
the Apostle Peter's real name  
was Rock Johnson.  
He was, after all, the son of John  
and Jesus said  
he would build his church on this rock.

And on our way home  
from church when  
we found a turtle  
trying to cross the street  
and stopped for usual rescuing,  
rather than place it  
safely on the roadside  
we took the turtle home,  
set him free in our backyard  
and named him Rock Johnson.

But our Rock Johnson proved  
more advanced spiritually  
than we imagined.  
The rapture took him that very day,  
and he was lifted heavenward  
to spend eternity with true believers.

How else can we explain  
Rock's escape from a yard  
tightly enclosed with six feet  
of wooden fence?  
I checked for places he might crawl through.  
They were all sealed,  
and no one used the gate  
from acquisition to search.  
I know flying impossible;  
this turtle had no wings  
and little to thrust him skyward.  
Rapture is the only explanation,  
and to be perfectly frank  
I'm glad.  
Rock Johnson was a deserving turtle.

*J. Paul Holcomb*

Previously published in *New Texas* 2002.

**Lone Survivor**

The veteran trooper was hardened for this;  
it came with the job.  
This family almost made it home  
from vacation.  
The shattered bottle  
of cherry cider from Colorado  
mingled with blood,  
had stained the woman's blouse,  
colored the hummingbird feeder  
from the outside.  
The yellow fleshed melon,  
oozing untasted sweetness,  
added to stickiness on maps  
and the solar home book by the driver.  
He turned slightly when the lovely teenager  
was removed from her bed  
of pink granite and quartz on the floor.  
But it was with the removal  
of the last small body,  
that his stone face broke.  
For there, in the badly battered,  
splattered box on the little boy's lap,  
was a box turtle, alive and well.

Catherine L'Herisson

### **Only a Candle**

Lord, you are All Light.  
In your service are lesser lights—  
from floodlights  
that bring great illumination.  
to small nightlights  
that dispel fear in the darkness.  
And yet, I would count it a privilege  
to be only a candle.

### **Heart's Cry**

The night wind sighs  
as each haunting call  
of the whippoorwill,  
unanswered,  
grows fainter and farther away.  
Her heart cries and cries  
for a mate no longer here.  
If she could but wing her way  
through dark woods,  
pregnant with incense of pine,  
follow his path heavenward,  
she would...but she cannot.  
she is earthbound.  
It is not *her* time to fly.

Peggy Zuleika Lynch

### LYNDON, YOU ROSE ABOVE US

Ah, Lyndon,  
if you could  
only be here  
to see  
your boyhood home  
with these, your admirers,  
coming  
to "Oh" and "Ah"  
over your  
forebears:  
your dad  
your mother  
your grandfather  
your grandmother  
as well as  
your sisters  
your brother.  
Here  
under your trees  
I am writing  
these words  
of what  
is transpiring  
after your dying.  
How much more  
we would wish  
you were here

to touch our hearts  
with your laugh,  
your smile,  
your jolly  
worthwhile  
humor  
when visiting  
with your folks.  
It's no joke, Lyndon,  
you rose above us.  
You set your sight  
on the stars.  
You rose despite wars.  
Now you're  
in our hearts.  
We wish we could have  
told you so  
from the start.  
Well, you know how  
we people are.  
But this is our report.  
Are you listening?  
It comes from  
the glistening distilled  
droplets  
of humanity's heart.

Anne McCrady

## Ambitions

Like pelting hailstones  
of a downpour before dawn,  
they wake us from the soft posture  
of contented sleep.  
Before we even know why,  
we rise, stumble, shove  
our feet into shoes,  
hurry toward our hungers:

A new job. Another degree.  
A run for office.  
The perfect child.  
A move to the country...  
the city...the coast.  
A dog. A lover.  
An afterlife.

Oh, but what we leave: the lovely  
quilt of our patchwork memories,  
the flannel sheets of our deep beliefs,  
the pillows that know our imperfect shape,  
the body whose embrace holds us  
tenderly night after night,  
spooning our dreams.

If we let our lusts feed us,  
when the storm of our desires  
finally subsides, when the wind calms,  
when skies clear to reveal the here and now,  
given the gnaw of our ambitions,  
we can go back to bed...  
but how will we ever  
go back to sleep?

Anne McCrady

Anne McCrady

Cure

It was the year  
of treatments and trauma  
when everyone stopped her  
in the halls of the hospital  
to ask how things were going  
and all she wanted was make it  
outside one more time to fly  
the bright yellow kite  
of papery optimism, hope  
glued to a basswood box frame  
riding the exuberant blue  
sky of one-more-good-day.  
When asked about appointments,  
she said she wanted to hold  
the spool of her calendar as it fluttered,  
the pages zinging their way out  
so fast the twine became a blur  
in her astounded grasp,  
she wanted to laugh with abandon  
as the future dove and rose  
above her, dancing and drifting  
at the whim of an autumn wind.  
Most of all, she wanted to feel  
the rest of her life rise on wings,  
proving the real cure was still  
within her.

Anne McCrady

Anne McCrady

## Having Learned

Waking to light from a night  
not long enough for rest, you notice  
the sun, that scoundrel, has come back  
without a thought of apology  
for yesterday's poor showing:  
    a perfect date washed out  
    your best suit ruined  
    every flight cancelled.

It was a day of reminders  
that heaven and earth  
and all that breathes in between  
sometimes conspire to turn  
a day into despair:  
    a tire goes flat  
    the dog gets lost  
    an earring slips from its lobe.

Rising to meet the day's fate,  
you offer the sun forgiveness,  
having learned long ago  
that days both damp and dazzling  
offer sweet dispensations:  
    a word of kindness  
    the smile of a stranger  
    love, delicious and wild.

Anne McCrady

Jim McKeown

## Driving I-35 with the Buddha

Strapped into the  
passenger seat,  
the Buddha serenely  
smiled as we headed  
North to home.

His closed eyes  
and folded hands  
said comfort  
and inner peace  
despite my acceleration.

We stopped for a drink  
and something to eat.  
Without thinking,  
I ordered a hamburger.  
He declined.

He took no note  
of the birds, the signs  
the flowers, trees, and  
the people and towns  
we passed.

We turned the corner  
and entered the drive  
to his new home,  
a shady spot,  
under a flowering shrub.

He settled  
into the grass  
as though he always  
belonged there.  
Resting,

Each day  
he greets me  
with a nod  
and the same smile  
he seems to say  
“Welcome home.”



Jim McKeown

## Entropy

I never really understood this concept –  
learned, or rather heard, long ago  
in a physics class

But now I think I know as my life, my body  
begins to disintegrate before my  
bleary eyes in the mirror each morning

Fragments of the past drift to the floor, and I  
trip over them in the night as I wander  
in dreams and nightmares

Now-- oddly enough -- I begin to understand  
that nothing, nothing stays the same  
it all must end

Who knows how long until nothing remains –  
no memories, no breathe, no vision  
of any future.

## The Most Important Things

after Billy Collins

Billy glances over his weary shoulder,  
surprised I am still shoveling away,  
tossing small loads of snow into a  
powdery, crystal mound.  
He wonders how I came to be his helper.  
*Read Tolstoy, I say.*

I answer his puzzled look  
only with a smile. Yet he keeps  
on as we inch closer to the curb.  
He wonders which work of Count Leo's  
did I mean. I'll wait, in case he asks aloud,  
*Which one?*

He runs through titles dimly remembered  
from college long ago – he may have passed  
over the story or forgotten that winter day  
long ago, when he read it to his lover,  
snuggled close before a fire.

***That's wonderful!***

Tears ran down his cheeks, she touched them, and loved his tender nature.  
How could he forget that moment, when she really fell in love. When she knew he was the one, the only, the forevermore.  
*Read it again,* she asked between sniffles.

Suddenly, he stood, straight and confident.  
Ah, he remembered. He turned and looked with the slickest, slightest smile. I laughed, because I knew he would recall that night, that woman, that story, that love.  
*"The Three Questions," right?*

I nodded, he laughed, and he paused as if gathering all the details of that solemn moment, when the king sought answers to his questions. With certain pride, he turned and looked at me with certainty –  
*I remember well.*

*When is the right time to begin?  
Who is the most important person?  
What is the most important thing to do?*  
I nodded and laughed and posed another question for his list  
*Do you know the answers?*

*Now.  
The one you are with.  
The task at hand.*  
He has learned his lesson well,  
and I stuck the shovel in a mound.  
*Let's have that hot chocolate – now!*

**Meditation on *Cold Mountain***

Katydid's dipped low  
over the gloomy pond,  
shadows of tree trunks  
stretched and danced  
a slow waltz  
over the water –  
grief stricken  
at summer's end.

Naomi Stroud Simmons

**Summerlude**

I pride myself on macho tan  
and covet muscled forms  
I lust for a near perfect ten  
I'm angry if she scorns  
I gluttonize on summer fruit  
and envy other's cache  
By sloth I am completely ruled  
All virtue is abash

Humiliated by this scourge  
I settle into fall  
To practice new-found abstinence  
resisting Satan's call  
By spring propelled and sanctified  
complete with perfect Lent  
I rush back to my summer sin  
In fall I shall repent

Naomi Stroud Simmons

Published in Texas Poetry Calendar

Naomi Stroud Simmons

### **Tribal Dance**

For the ancient troupe of As-Soon-As  
I perform traditional dance,  
making my plans for the future,  
evoking the magic of chance.

While slowing the pendulum's circuit,  
I bow to the right and the left,  
then *rond de jambe* ever so slightly  
and steal a gay pirouette.

The metronomed-clock is persistent  
respecting no pauses or rest;  
perhaps if the time-winder drowns,  
there is time for a grand arabesque.

So apace I strive for position  
that will fit with appropriate grace  
and following cues from the Master,  
en pointe I twirl in my space.

From the ancient troupe of As-Soon-As,  
all lips chant traditional cant,  
but my heart sings the song of a Nomad  
as I dance, as I dance, as I dance.

Naomi Stroud Simmons  
Published in Mooncross, '03

Naomi Stroud Simmons

### **The Shoe Solution**

The problem is: what to do with one shoe  
No good at a garage sale  
If it wasn't a dress shoe  
I might ask the man who sells crutches  
if he knows someone who might use it  
but was cautioned people on crutches  
with only one foot on the ground  
need a more substantial shoe

So, I went to an acquaintance of an acquaintance  
who runs a spare part sort of place  
called prosthesis (I think)  
He knew a lady who might wear a seven narrow  
but not the left shoe and he offered  
no suggestions.

My grand kids would love it for dress up  
the rhinestones always attracted a lot of attention  
wherever I wore them. In fact I'll never forget  
how dazzling I felt in that sleek, black Dior  
I get sort of happy just thinking about it.

Then I remembered a mountain road in Arkansas  
and a squat oak called the "shoe tree" where  
people hang old shoes. I think a better name  
might be "direction tree" since you take the next left  
to go to Ted and Joyce's or if you want to go to the dam,  
oh, I forget the way but the whole community centers  
around that tree. Soooooooooo, I've decided to mail  
the shoe to them--but, no, I think I'll go myself, after all  
I don't know of a better place for singles to hang out.

Naomi Stroud Simmons  
Published *in Lucidity*

Jessica Ray

*Snapshots of Nature*

*River ripples in sunlight below  
purple irises, red buds glow -  
springs's magic*

~ ~ ~

*Chimes sing their own wind song  
mockingbirds sing along  
celebrating nature's rebirth*

~ ~ ~

*Regal in splendor,  
pear tree showered in white-laced pearls  
reaches heavenward*

*Under the Blue Umbrella*

*At times, cobalt blue colors our midnight skies  
its deepest and darkest hue,  
startles in infinity's arms.*

*It is the hue of intense despair and beauty,  
the color of the blue umbrella,  
Ruth's umbrella.*

*Tilted against the double doors of the cathedral,  
the blue umbrella lies open wide,  
becoming Ruth's home,  
as they become one -  
A shelter from the storm.*

*Usually open, the cathedral's imposing doors are locked.  
So Ruth waits, huddled under her umbrella.  
She waits - there is no where else to go.*

*Then at last, the doors open.  
Rebekah, the young minister, invites Ruth inside.  
They find their way to the basement  
where Rebekah makes a sandwich for Ruth.*

2

*After a few minutes of silence,*

*Ruth reaches into her pocket for a penny.*  
Jessica Ray

*Offering it to Rebekah  
in exchange for a sheet of paper and the use of her typewriter.  
With firm resolve, Ruth begins writing.*

*Curious, but waiting across the room,  
Rebekah wonders, "What is she writing . . .  
No margins, single spaced, covering the whole sheet!"*

*She knows Ruth's story of childhood abuse,  
of abuse all her life . . . poverty, addictions, losses . . .  
"Maybe that's it - her life story!"*

*Ruth is almost done,  
but takes a break.  
Alone, after a moment, Rebekah reflects,  
"Do I dare look?"  
But she can't resist reading Ruth's words . . .*

*"Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God,  
Your love finds its way in our hearts.*

*Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God,  
Your love finds its way in our hearts.*

3

*"Oh my God,  
Your love finds its way . . ."*

*Silently, in tears,  
Rebekah \*knows well as she reads Ruth's words,  
that she too has sought refuge  
under her own umbrella.  
She knows that love finds a way in our hearts.  
Ruth's shelter from the storm is our own.*

*~ Jessica Ray*

\* Rebekah Miles, *KMPU professor of religion*; used by permission, 2/27/2011

Jeannette L. Strother

### **Ode to Honeysuckle**

Golden blossoms  
cavorting on winds  
dance into the nose  
seeking out the brain,  
unblocking thought patterns  
ushering forth  
yesterdays sleeping  
memories.

Honeysuckle,  
tiny yellow white  
blossoms veining  
sweet heady profusion  
through trellis rails.

Nectar of Gods!  
Drawing eclectic motion  
buzzing bees  
swirling, collecting  
moist syrup centers  
feeding their queens;  
and we  
in self-defense  
swatting and batting

at these frenzy- blinded  
dervishes.

We inhale your giddy scent,  
nature's floral design  
small bright drops  
of moon and dew,  
wafting  
sweet profusion  
far beyond man's  
vain attempt to imitate  
a fragrance so refined.

Thus on evening wetness  
perfumed pollens  
lift and glide  
on soft warm breezes.  
We welcome  
gentle dreams  
wrapped and enveloped  
in blessed sweet smell  
of perfumed petals.



Jeannette L. Strother

### **Lost Shoes on the Highways**

Shoes are like lovers; they travel in pairs.  
One single shoe will not suffice  
unless its owner is an amputee.  
Surely, they would not be so callous  
as to simply toss the unneeded item  
onto the highway. They would  
make sure *that* one shoe be placed  
where it would be available  
for someone missing the opposite foot.

I cringe to think some kidnapped child  
struggling to be free has lost  
a shoe along strange territory  
far from home.

Reasons may never present themselves,  
for the many single shoes lying  
along busy highways and paths.  
Each time I glimpse  
those abandoned shoes  
I take a deep breath,  
sigh and wonder,  
what story could they tell.

Jeannette L. Strother

### **Briefest Span Of Time Alzheimer's Legacy**

She lived in her secret world of unseeing.  
She hears but presents no clue of perception.  
In her slackened face with eyes devoid of sparkle her lifeless arms rest  
having no reason to rise.

I sometimes wonder is there pain or sadness  
mixed together inside her empty shell. Does she  
have memory flashes of the good times we shared?

My ears hear the softest swish, the turning head,  
her weakened whisper, "Hello, is that you dear?"

I cannot describe the joy I felt at that very moment.  
For months, I have sat holding her hand,  
whispering our many stories of yesterday.  
With love in my heart,  
I turned to gaze into her remembering eyes,  
but I was too late the door had shut.

I will always treasure that brief span of time,  
just before she slipped into the permanent pool  
of Alzheimer's legacy.

*Life and Time*

Second by second,  
Minute to minute,  
Hour to hour,  
Day to day,  
Week to week,

Month to month,  
Season to season,  
Year to year,  
growing forward,

descending backward,  
still standing in ignorance,  
only in focus of the final,  
life is not full of finish lines,

we simply transform from  
one stage to the next,  
become one with your Passion,  
It shall not be that which is,

but you who are,  
life is more than "I'm here" Embrace!

Time is the most precious gift in our possession, for it is the most irrevocable.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Lloyd Weatherspoon III

*Hold Fast*

Hold fast to your dream,  
walking in confidence unseen.  
Eyes keen as a wolf in winter's hunt,  
like a hawk at soaring speed  
descending toward its victim.  
A past failure or poor result,  
possibly may zap one's desire  
like an unfaithful lover  
unquestioned, by his  
faithful, yet silent confidant.  
The past is the past,  
yet scars provide pillars of  
once lived experiences  
often invisible to  
her eyes like an ice berg that has melted.  
Who told you of the finish line?  
There is no finish line, its a myth!  
Actually, we do not reach a Telos (end point)  
we transform to another stage of life,  
at times only switching roles like an actor in a play.  
For I still hear a voice that once guided me  
in a most clear distinct reality of hearing,  
connected by blood, vigorously declaring,  
"Hold fast intentionally to your dream,  
envision, meditate and live toward the dream,  
for Life is not through with you yet, arise and go..."

*Jewel*

You're passion on fire,  
a sonnet lady,  
a rainbow of electricity,  
a story with no end,  
a line in Emily Dickinson  
I can not figure out.  
"The world was made for lovers..."  
An attraction,  
that does not fade.  
Your the deer that seeks  
fresh water in the morning.  
your a breath of fresh air,  
when the rest is stale  
and another day at work.  
Longing is your heart,  
like a distant run through  
Wicker Park, as light fog hovers above.  
Like a stranger among the masses  
and one well worth following.  
Like the memo read in disbelief  
and the psalm that is meditated on daily.

**Poems**

*I.*

Some record of living, not really of life,  
should stay past this joy, beyond  
any motion given to rest from elation.  
No accurate image to recreate the being  
can ever come of human formation,  
save the closeness of rebirth in a child.  
Yet, still I sit with wonder while  
my heart beats and I breathe.  
The lost wonderful activities of youth,  
those imaginings  
which filled pastures with playmates,  
recur from my childhood with saving grace,  
haunt me now like ghosts, like spirits I knew.  
So to the poem I take these hoary airs,  
one by one as they come.

*II.*

These, my changing friends,  
extensions of my soul, out  
into this world,  
toward this colder orb than the moon,  
I place with careful consideration,  
never satisfied until they cease struggles,  
onto the page,  
and I can leave them and revisit,  
share again whatever was brought  
to prudent print.  
I will leave them there and rejoin them  
in the fields of my youth.

*III.*

We shall run again and laugh with the wind.  
I will know that joy of call,  
that spring of fall,  
that happiness and all again.  
We can march once more to the shore,  
climb a sweet gum,  
or sit on the stile in triumph.  
Dragonflies, purple martins, and buzzards  
can layer the sky.  
Crawdads mounds, cow piles, and thistle  
may litter the ground like a magical maze,  
a handy selection for taking direction.

Patrick Allen Wright

*IV.*

From a field we might venture  
the trails of a wood,  
from clearing to thicket, to creek.  
On a dusty old road,  
across a rickety log bridge,  
with my entourage  
I can travel the pipeline from gully to glory.  
Past yellow bitterweed and pink buttercup,  
fire ant hills and stumps,  
trampling the path to kick up dust,  
we fly single file or several abreast,  
however our fancy ignites.

*V.*

When finally we get to the swinging bridge,  
we shall all cross in precarious fashion.  
On rusty cables and rotting planks,  
from anchor this side to the other,  
we tread slow but sure.  
Gray-rimmed clouds move the sky one way,  
and tall trees sway still another.  
I can return home.

### **A Gentle Spirit**

December dove, a rarity in woods about my home,  
and even more, a single bird to perch and not to roam—  
with predators like hawk above and cat on prowl below  
I wondered at this feathered chap who kept me from my woe.

He sat and preened and ruffled slow against the colder air,  
then seemed to sleep in comfort there outside my window bare.  
I took his grit to signify that nature will provide  
a time and place for each of us to set our fear aside.

The clouds turned gray to eventide, yet still the brave one slept;  
but had he met with quick demise, I know I would have wept.  
A bond I grew, he unaware, for parallel our lives—  
late autumn sadness all alone, and then this peace arrives.

Patrick Allen Wright

### **Late Spring Drought**

I pray for rain, yet still I suffer dry  
as blades fold up and blossoms drop aground.  
A breeze stirs not, and birds will climb not high

while on this day, an agony of sound  
peals from the church, a mile away the bell,  
for two young girls, one black, one white, late found

on Village Creek, entwined where last they fell  
in struggles with the waters rushing there,  
now chilling cold, their bodies under knell.

The town seems one today in mourning air  
as sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers cry  
that two best friends so gone unjust lay fair.

Oh God, please tell me why these babes did die.  
I pray for rain, yet still I suffer dry.

### **Aubade**

Upon a pond in shallow boat I ponder as I float  
these waters, dark and dearly deep, yet all about asleep.

The moon's reflective light beams bright, a round and giving sight,  
moves ripples from my little wake to wash past shoreline's break.

One falling star burns 'cross the sky, another flashes by,  
and soon in dawning's pinkish hue, night black fades into blue.

Some waterfowl come gliding in, no sign where they have been,  
to join me in this morning calm, this visual of psalm.

### **Splices**

Draw circles from the sands of time; make ripples in a pool.  
And celebrate a shooting star; in dewdrops find the jewel.  
Walk barefoot on the beach alone; throw kisses to the wind.  
Grab fistfuls of the mountain air; hold nature dear, a friend.



June Zaner

### **A Bad Year for Sea Turtles....**

the pamphlet from the museum said,  
"wear bright colors to heighten your chances of attracting butterflies...."  
and, at almost seventy-three, it finally clicked with me  
well, of course, I thought and bought a pair of red shoes, my first,  
and a yellow sun hat, and a lime green shirt, a walking symphony,  
in a vanilla-flavored room full of silent sparrows.....  
it is only my white, white hair that gives me away,  
and the fact my eyes have faded into tan, away from fudge  
and when I walk my veins turn blue and pulse loudly, frightening  
children and the frogs that once came to our pond -- they are gone now --  
not to mention the dragonflies that swooped among the grasses.

but I will continue with my colors as best I can and try, like the bees and  
like the turtle, to lessen my decline in nature, and, of course....  
to attract the beauty of the butterflies.  
it will be a good year for butterflies  
and a very bad year for sea turtles.....

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### **We may have stolen much from**

each other, to build our nests,  
drawing blood and buying time  
and counting feathers—  
each remembering, while there  
was remembering to be done,  
that none of us is here for long,  
and if we feel the need  
for touching  
it must be quiet, quick, and  
now.....  
there are no other nests to steal...

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### **She's Leaving.....**

in this world where women leave their men  
quiet lunches take place at nice restaurants  
there's less laundry to do and the children  
come around more often and suddenly  
the social calendar is full, in this world  
where women leave their men

the ashtrays are packed away and the  
whiskey bottles give way to cut glass,  
decanters full of Southern Comfort and all  
the little cheesy jiggers are tossed aside, the souvenirs  
of places like Key West, Tampa, Melbourne,  
and on that trip back west, Gallup, New Mexico.

on that last morning, when good-bye would have  
been redundant, excess chatter to his ear....she  
simply took her car keys and told him she'd be  
back one day, when she could, but not to wait up for her....as if  
he would...so when the coroner said she should  
return, the air was already quiet in the house

her flowers still bloomed, bright sprawling perennials,  
and there was a jar of peaches in the cupboard  
still safe to eat, for he had not liked peaches,  
all else was gone or ruined or used up, except the  
whiskey and the ashtrays. He'd left those, a final  
answer, hanging in the silent spaces of their home.

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### **Stricken...**

I woke up this morning full of God-stuff,  
My fingers stained pink with it, my toes  
Bright red from it and oozing from my palms

I had only meant to clean the flower bed, cut  
The roses, trim the hedge, but suddenly a blaze  
Of sun hit my head and brought me to my knees

And there was glory all around me.

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### **Dreaming of Colin Powell....**

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I was up all night worrying about Colin Powell somewhere in my nocturnal dream, my small date with the sandman, I heard someone say that Colin Powell had died. I didn't hear what took him but his face appeared in the night, like fog on a windshield giving his birth and death date. He was not in uniform, this hero who has risen as far as his talent and bravery and skin can take him. I woke in sadness to see I'd only slept an hour....the night would be very long.

When next I woke I seemed to have the phone in my hand and was speaking to my doctor about something that had gone wild in my body.....I think she said it had something to do with my private area, but her voice was far away and the phone slipped to my chest before I could hear her clearly. A friend had died this fall from something going wrong in that area; it seemed a frightening diagnosis that would surely send me to the my medical book as soon as sleep left my eyes.

Such bad news.....Colin Powell dying and then something with my privates....some strange something that seemed to be an illness with no cure, no treatment, something wicked. I will be glad when February has come and gone. Just last week Mae Jean passed away, wearing her yellow fiesta dress, her red hair curled improbably on her head, her lipstick dark and glowing in her coffin.....her earrings lying against her neck... the long ones, the ones that made her look like a gypsy. I hope it was her heart that fluttered and went quiet. I hate that she and Colin Powell would now never meet and that she might have died from a sudden case of appalling female trouble!

I only sleep now and then, but when I do, it is like a mama bear, full of cubs, dreaming of sunny fields and bunnies on a plate. My heart sloshes against my ribs and my dreams are peopled by newsreels that swirl in my mind and wake me to have a word or two. It has been a long winter this year and even Charlie Sheen and Lindsey Lohan have come to me with their troubles. I've had to tell them that I only take on historically important figures to worry about. They *seemed* to understand but went off muttering, each of them, as I pulled the covers higher in my sleep cave. I must learn to function with my female condition and see to the things Mae Jean left behind.....her fiesta dress, her dangling earrings. Perhaps I will have my ears pierced tomorrow...Colin would like that.

Richard Zaner

### **In Memoriam**

1.

Slow sun, slipping  
through the withered elbow of an ancient tree,  
splits spider-webbing on the branch  
of his great abundant nose, as his old man's  
old hand, grained as a winter sky,  
scratches his gnarled cheek.

He peers, owl-like, from eyes like wrinkled sleeves,  
shuffling through his mind for words of wisdom  
and solemn consolation to enclose the deed  
he must announce; he unfolds his left arm's length  
with particular care, discovers his worried mouth  
and, his eye on a hundred heavens, speaks:

2.

"This is God's land,  
and the Lord abides therein;  
The half-turned day had seen His coming,  
and the night prepared to receive His hand."

3.

— a small mouse, brown and gray as grief,  
Shuddered quickly as a sighing gasp  
Through a rigid bush and the yellow grass,  
To hide itself beneath one dark leaf —

4.

"The air grew quiet, calm, solemn  
As a blind man's eye; the children  
Of Job fell asleep — while the ceasing wind  
Softly spilled a pool with moving columns  
Of small waves — and all became still

In the land, and silent the whippoorwill."

5.

"This is the Lord's land, good Job,  
but God dwells therein forgotten  
by the flesh of your flesh;  
For from the East and out of the North  
came His terror and marched his fury,  
riding on the fist of an angry storm:  
And rains, red rains, came,  
smashing no particular thing  
and thus all things;  
And smote the four corners of that house  
wherein your children slept  
and it crumbled in on their small heads;  
And dead the jackal and the fawn:  
and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

6.

So saying, he lapsed into a curious calm,  
mumbling while tears fell slowly down  
His thin cheek; while he began to die,  
sighing to no one in particular,

7.

"God is death:  
and the Lord is a quick destruction,  
His hand a vengeful Hand."

**Sonnet, for Anyone**

When to the usual man in the street the lyric  
Irony of couches and cars is distant  
As the comedy of know and be; the trenchant  
Thunder of a field of wheat but satiric  
Nonsense of sheer plodding feet; and the tragedy  
Of a child's tears but fruit for therapy:  
Ah, then's the time for singing's celebration.

When singing's at an end, and mystery's gestation  
Seems vanished by the winds of puerile doctrine;  
When the workings of a madman are locked in  
Keyless phrases, and the movings of a lover  
But public coin for books behind whose covers  
Is the view that sex is only groin:  
Then singing must capture this in poem,

Leave nothing out, compose for all the folk;  
And, grinning, disclose the ancient joke.

**Birds**

Some birds just look like that:  
Pigeons perhaps, or crows  
With thin penciled wings, light  
Tendrils waving gracefully behind  
Closed beaks, heads cocked for flight  
Feathers spread, hung as though  
There were no need of wind or even  
Air to billow hollow bones aloft!  
These birds fly! Leaving  
Their peculiar stains, their own  
Marks flung from seven-  
Storied perches, any narrow stone  
Or wooden ledge enough to house  
Them as they contemplate the scene  
Below: strange birds, they carouse  
The skies, eyes alert and lean:  
Centurions of trash  
And other human things!