

Sandcastle Songs

a collection of poetry

by

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*Hey -- I wonder if they'll ever know
Or ever want to know
Where we got the melody
Or how we got the lines.*

for Vicki Lynn

semper fi

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1st Place

Was I a football player?
Or a wrestler, animal-instinct, go-for-the-jugular guy?
Lifting bar-bending weight in Neanderthal glory?
Howling, high-fiving in joyous rageousness?
Was I a clean-cut Navy man?
Crisp with salute and bayonet glittering?
Arrogant academe -- athletic prowess?
Powerful, hungry, invincibly strong?

I hid all my tears in a treehouse perch watching me
Shooting up baskets to chorus of laughter:
What can that boy do *right*?
Sold out for respect on the last train too cheaply
(When God figured me for a walker in 1st Place)
To get there too late in a hurry-apology --
Never quite sure what it was I was sorry for
Chasing the wind through the trees in the pathless woods
Dream about love and the chance I could taste it
Charmer -- that boy's got potential -- in what
We don't know but he'll show us by golly
Awards by the shelf-ful and medals to prove
My net worth to each one in
the audience - excepting me only
Even now tempted to *walk off the field* tossing
Ill-fitting uniform parts to run naked to find
Myself -- scared most of all that the place I
Belong was among all the players in 1st Place

1994

A Note to Follow Paul

I envied you the day
you hovered on the
hospital bed
where they had lately
rolled up the rug of hope

I hungered for the peace that
gently flowed then from your
lips -- not merely acceptance
of the inevitable
(I know we all must die)

but something like
the careful attention one
might give to choosing only
those things needful for a
journey

and when I witnessed
your welcoming it
seemed to me we were already
separated by some
gulf of attachments

I left, then, all in heaviness
and excitement and later
when they told me you had
passed I knew
better

than to mourn

1996

A Prayer for Friday

Oh,
I was a poet once
in verdant Spring when
verses tumbled from my soul
like dandelions borne on
careless wind.
Now I must coax them
frightened children from their mother's skirts
their eyes all-trembling
punished by the ones they love

(Rambling affairs they were
and vague
too vague for meaning
anything beyond a passion to be known)

But this cold dawning
I recall
a fiery yearning
speaking pow'r unspeakable
deep-dormant in the earth
and dying to be borne
in all who dare attend
with well-stocked lamp -- wick trimmed
while others rush to market frenzied

Yes.

I'll spin them still
if only just to know
the wait
is not in vain.

1995

A Song for Joy

Came into World
a helpless girl-child
rolling eyes at ceiling

I welcomed, loathed
for love of you
who raze me, raise me, Lazarus

Your smiling presence
undermines my rage
in patient peacefulness

Concoct your sum of me
commingling tears to
coalesce my being

Of all those passing
though my life
your passing pierces me

We gather pieces
petrified
from tomb of worthiness

Then hand in hand
our dancing dervish
flings me to a father

1995

A Song for Lance

I never once wrote one for you,
though I think back on how much you were on my mind
like the time you read that poem of yours about the kids at
school who make noise so they won't disappear
and your eyes rimmed with tears when you read it
I wanted to write one to you then, but I didn't
You gave me permission not to, you see, and I
took your word for it
though just now I wonder if your word exonerates my
lack of whatever, tact maybe, or common courtesy
and I don't just say that in a paternalistic way
and not merely because I know you would bristle at that inside
I say it simply because its true and so it deserves to be said just
now when truth helps to sift through what needs to be sifted
to get to the really good stuff
the stuff that will carry for miles of time with little or no attenuation
and of course space, too, but the time is what really gets to the
chaff, the Bible calls it.
the mess that always masquerades as stuff in between and even in the
midst of all the stuff that you'll go back to time and again and smile
to yourself because you know something now that you didn't know
before -- when you were so smart.
and I've been thinking about sin, lately, and how if I had to boil it down
it would yield up something like deception, pure and simple
and how its one thing to talk about it now, with a little distance
under my belt, but that doesn't help much when the chips are down
and it goes to work without even asking
and I wonder what I could do to get undeceived -- and come to the
conclusion that nothing really guarantees that I would not just
fall for the same tawdry old lines as before -- maybe that's why they're
old -- they've survived fools like me
And you, where do you fit in to all this?
did you trade, was it that critical to you
or are you at such a point where you have to take those kind of risks
to find out what's important
what matters

I thought I had you figured out once and then you started in singing
and telling me things through your songs you hadn't even figured out
for yourself, so maybe I misread them
but maybe I didn't
maybe I heard loud and clear
and I guess what this is all about is that I wanted you to know that
I know, now, I think
though I know it will take some time to sort it all out
it came to me in a song, of course.

A Theological Poem

(This one's gonna come out like fire I just know it
So if you want to come along you better hold on tight.)

We were on the way to Kroger's for a medium run
And I was lost in thought about how sorry I felt for myself
And how awfully selfish it felt to feel that way
Here on Palm Sunday especially when we missed church
When the Rail Road crossing bells start chiming
And the gates swing down nearly on top of us because
The Blazer straddled the tracks so you could see the light
Of the Amtrak on its way to Greensboro like some bat out of hell.
And after the truck sputtered and spun across
The tracks we went to the store like nothing had happened.

And when we came out of Kroger with a \$77 load of stuff
For next week an old black man with metal crutches asked me if I could
Spare a note and I told him I didn't have anything but I did
In the truck in the \$150 leather jacket I left because it was too humid
And when he nodded as if I'd asked him the time I knew that I would
Come back and give him a note that I could spare
And shake his crusty hand (which he noticed far more than the
Great show I made of giving the note to him) and say to him: "God bless you"
And I meant it. Then he returned the blessing -- silver and gold have I
Not -- what I do have I give to you. My hand still smells like him:
Too old to waste time with \$77 medium runs to Kroger anymore.

Then I went to Sam's Quick Mart for a video -- because I felt like
Running away for awhile (though it didn't have anything to do with
The train or the old man -- and it isn't worth writing about)
And Sam's is under a railroad trestle (the same tracks) just before
Ninth Street in a dark bend in the road that seems to welcome trouble
But tonight in the thick air I absorbed the darkness of the street
And whoever might be lying in wait for me.
They could take me (without even meaning to, or caring much about it)
And I'd go. We were that close tonight.

You see I couldn't anymore do anything about something like that
Than I could stop the Carolinian.

Now some days I call that kind of thing a tragedy, but tonight, just for
A moment in the wet heat, I felt a hand clasp mine and refuse to let me go

1994

A Thief in Our Midst

"have I not chosen... yet one of you..."

An old house full of gathered
strangers become
intimates too soon perhaps
Pasting plastic bond of trust
among this band --
we happy few

How quickly life unmask our
gentle eyes become
a piercing gaze
Glance lightening bolts
Illuminating eerie still-life
on our soulscape

Stick figures dipping bread now
at the Table where we
hoped to gather
Finger painting portraits
of ourselves onto each
other-- demons

Cast one out and find returning
haunts like blessings come
unasked for
Pity that the tete-a-tete for which
we'd paid a ransom came to naught
because we came

We -- each and all of us
are stealer, stolen from
victims of our victimizing
Set our cold eyes piercing
on this hall of mirrors
set for us at Table

May 4, 1995

Abracadabra

Thy word burns within my being
I am weary with holding it in

How fashionable now to neuter words
Callously calling them names: symbols
Merely
As if symbols cease seeping once conceived
Or especially since saying
Like tolling bells - can never be un-tolled

Why else does so much go unsaid between us
Friends, Lovers, Blood, Neighbors, Strangers
Estranged
We swallow words too dangerous to say
(We know this in our bones)
Running deep as fire that burns the words within

And when we cannot stand the tension
(It's not as if they're sticks or stones)
Stuttering
We say them: name a flighty feeling
Taking flight that shifts the wind and inevitably
Comes out wrong (we eat our words, once said)

Long ago when chaos seethed in darkness
One who brooded, hovered in a lonely eternity
Spoke
And darkness demarcated (but not domesticated)
Seemed good but not entirely so simply
Some stories cannot be said but must be lived

And so we live, lack words to tame the tension
Bearing us unbearably beyond this lonely
Eternity
Is what it's like to love
We give, receive the gifts unsought, beyond imagination
Speechless.

Advent, 2011

Ahnentafel

The records testify
your sojourn here a time
I'll not pretend to comprehend
within a date to mark
your entry; exit from the scene

Between which time filled up with
laughter, loving, pain and yearning
for a day you never thought would come
while casting all the while
your bread upon the waters
bearing me to distant shores
beyond intention
though the trail where waters
parted beckons me to
take the only road I've often
traveled to a place I've never
been before

Your whispers urge me on
to gather bits of silent testimony
to a time when I was not
the spiral turns into itself
we find a momentary glimpse
of life together
til the day when I will
add a dateline I won't bother
to record.

December 30, 1997

Ally's Happy Haiku

Today I tired and
tried to live towards
the sun. Somewhere love found me.
The rain ceased falling.

1996

Autumn Trade Waves

Deployment's moved back.
Plans of togetherness wash down the side
And disappear in a gradually helpless wake.
Leave chits and itineraries replaced with
longer letters over the seas.
This is the navy that brought us together
And takes us to lands of enchantment
(where simpletown-dreams never thought of approaching)
And launches us into the mainstream of life.
After months of deferral on life bought on credit,
The payments of salt separation come due.
Blue Hondas, gold rings, island houses
Never spelled out the price of ability.
Funny, now the same monster who provided
The incredible sum to fly to that
Faraway fantasy land devoured the hope
Which we founded on great navy bennies.
A year's worth of living and growing together
Accounts for the mere chance of growing at all.
So I'll cheerfully cast all my letters on water
And hope she'll return on the same wave that brought her.

July, 1987

WESTPAC

Bailing

Summer harvest, bailing time
We follow, hoisting hay
onto a growing mountain
in the dusty summer swelter
Launching bales with aching
fingers, knees and bursting arms
we tire, as bits of hay
take residence in rural routes
beneath our clothes

When day is done
we kneel beside a still pond
cup the water to our grime and
baptize weariness in darkening cool
The water beckons, swallows us
into its folds beyond the reaches
of the setting sun
where in the dusty bottom clay
I find a root
and hold on tight
where catfish comb
and lose myself until
the chilling cloaks my soul
and balanced there
a single moment I can
taste the welcoming of harvest time
for me

December 30, 1997

Best to Receive

Grace-fall -- a gentle, soaking rain
from which I seek no shelter;
Blesséd moment I cease running
without knowing why:

When from heaven I receive God's
tears in my eyes mingled,
Trembling on my nose and lips --
then leap to earth's embrace.

Ground yields steam, an incense tasting
of the blood-tinged ages
Spilled to reign upon the earth
and bear life from the grave.

Blood and Water stream toward City,
gladdening God's heart;
A flood-tide ebbing God's beloved
to a peaceful passage:

In all the earth, we cannot go so far
we can't be found.

1996

Birthing Stool

I sing a song at Christmas-time, of joy that fills the air
A babe is born in Bethlehem, and no one seems to care
No royals grace the throne room where cow dung perfumes the cave
And teenage mother screams in pain, a birth the world to save

Some laborers were gathered 'round to witness the event
Who couldn't find a welcome in the tabernacle tent
They spit tobacco on the hay and joked before the sight
Of one more mouth born in a world of hatefulness and spite

Now every Christmas witnesses ironic re-enactment
Remembrance of a long-awaited King killed by indifference
The witnesses rejected with their worthless testimony
No vacancy from keepers, sleepers filled with milk and honey

Once every year a painful prick to conscience worn and selfish
Once every year a drowning out with sentimental dervish
The mournful baby, mother cry from birthing bloody squalor
"Who are my mother, brother, sisters: Where is Father?"

The cry grew to a plaintive plea the world could not ignore
Expedient for one to die than live for something more
A lamb refused by those well-off who purchase their salvation
Whose plastic-crèches mock real babies dying of starvation

The poor? With you, they'll always be -- A call few understand
To recognize the welcome offered by a stable-hand
To take leave of our selfishness: insensitivity
And gather Bread from Heaven from a trough to set us free

1994

Boy Child

When I first saw you,
Plumbed from depth of
Mother's womb too soon
All blue and silent
Suddenly you wailed and I turned to
My wounded lover

I didn't know you, then
Inadequate to answer
Your sad summons
Said your death prayers
Long before your time
My little son

You heaved in great
lungfulls of air to clear a
Space where none
Had been prepared for you who
Clawed your way alone into
My sandy soul

More ready for your death
Than welcoming
You breathed beneath the glass
While I held tightly to your
Mother's weakened gaze into
My bloodshot eyes

Yet marveled how you grew each day
Without my help
While friends encouraged me
To try to be your Father
Risk the loss of you again
My premie child

And somewhere on that tortured
Way your heart made up my mind
That we could learn to
Walk together for awhile
And stumble past the grave
My dancing partner

August 14, 1997



Calling

My Child,
Climb into my pitcher -- let me pour you gently into cup
and drink me all of you.
Sifting you with teeth, caressing you with tongue.
Consent to let me swallow you -- consume you in my belly.
Submit you to my acid strong that burns away the dust.
I will cull from you the nutrients I must have for life --
transform you to my blood.

Henceforth you will surge through my body
grow hot with my heat, carry life through me
grow richly red with breath of my spirit.
You will, in short, find every all of you within
the all of me.

I thirst for you. I am parched for lack of you.
Shake off the dust and come to me quickly -- lest I die for
lack of you.

And what will become of you?
Everything that ever was of you will flow through me.
And what will you know?
You shall know -- my sweet, sweet child -- who I Am
indeed.

1994

Can't Take "No" for Answer

Every time we speak a "No," we clasp death's hand too dearly
Touching boundary of life -- acknowledging our end.
Every choosing brings to focus finalness and ceasing:
Breathtaking pause of gratitude for any breath at all.

From the moment I was knit within a womb of water
I hasten to another womb of darkness silent waiting
Where wind blows not and utterly I feed on my dependence
A painful place of bittersweet where "No" must be my comfort.

Life is perfumed withal -- death and bound'ry disrespectful
Questions too profane to answer sing for our attention
When in the midstiness we come to speak the edge of living
We find a piece of stillness knowing union with this Lover

Love we know cannot receive our "No" forever answer
As She pursues me -- we both know the end will mark our marriage
Even though my days seem endless hiding from Her passion
Love I know has formed me found me for Herself alone.

1994

Charism

Fruits, these gifts I give to you, my child
To bring forth other fruits.
To you have I handed the keys to hearts
Imprisoned, longing to be free.
Refresh my heart, gifted one.

Responsibility, by their possession in your
Being rests with you a burden
And if I choose other gifts for other travelers
What is that to you?
Stretch out your arms and dance, my love.

Praise, they will offer you, my friend
For my investment brings a precious
Harvest reaping where others have sown sweat, blood
I reach out in your reaching -- to attain
The glory you inhabit tears the eyes.

Fear, you will tremble in the presence
Of such awesome power flowing
Through weak limbs, surprise, a dervish dancing
Nimbly, just beyond your reach – care-free
Rightly you seek not to hold.

Assurance, ask me not for sign from heaven
You must practice patience
As with each renewal, drawing in my breath
Promise found in living out, alone
Enjoy the being, been, becoming – all are one.

Destiny, hope makes folly of your hunting
As it calls, but not to point at end of journey
You simply pull up stakes, or settle
In the Peace content to dwell as Truth
Go: preach, tell the story – birth believers.

1994

Contact

People cry 'Peace!'
(How we need to believe)
and there is none in this world
to hold us in unbelief

dying, we long for
a yesterday, heedless of pain
or the joy
that it brought us
so long as we know that it happened

We dream glancing over our shoulders
while each dawning rises us
facing the east of our being
shrouded all over in mystery

Our teeming communion, marooned
without memory of home
mocked to silence by
light years of darkening
pierced now and then by a star

People cry 'Peace!'
Where there's none to be had
and we search high and low for a sign
of some passing beyond our horizon

While all that we hear is the echo
of rushing wind filling our souls
with this restlessness

December 20, 1997

Darkening Skies

If I weren't an alcoholic
 I'd have had a beer for you
to honor you in silence now
as light retreats to shadows
cold beyond the treeline

Cockburn nestles in my ears
 sings "all the ways I want you" as
the truck sits idle in the drive
(I've taken the recycling -
 got the mail before they closed)

Then thought of you, your e-mail,
 Tammy, how it must have been
last Friday signing dust to dust
with Lent approaching
 Had to see each other once again

But in this courting process properly
 recording death of love
worn out with waiting for
the earth's return to where it was
when ice entombed the leaf-buds

Now the Vesper skies turn black
 as multitudes of geese pass overhead
to gather on the Chesapeake
 Vast hoards of birds beyond accounting
chanting chorus, "Onward!"

Wave on wave, they scream a signal
 sent from heaven's portal gaping
not just one, but tens of thousands
hastening towards a winter respite
 drawn to harbor - sure to find

January 28, 1997

Dead Letter

Return-Path: sparky112@city.net
From: "Arnold Thompson" <sparky112@city.net>
To: <70X90.973@compuserve.com>
Subject: RE: Terrible News
Date: Sat, 21 Dec 1996 03:07:49 -0500
X-MSMail-Priority: Normal

Hey Paul,
Got your note Friday morning at work
when I finally found time to download all my messages
saw that you sent it a week ago
isn't it something how quickly it got to me --
how (if I'd checked) I'd have seen it
in minutes

Just a quick note (no time now to answer)
We're fine here. I've started a new thing at work
and they bought me a laptop so I can take home
gobs of work I can finish at night after supper.
The kids are so busy on-line
getting up to speed -- got some great software --
our Johnny can already handle a mouse!
(not at all like their mom who refuses to
get with the program)

Like there's something wrong with my getting connected
to guys like you, Paul, in Miami
(it's COLD here)
we're close as the touch of a button
(we'd never write letters or call ;)

Got to run. Catch you later,
old buddy, in cyberspace
(check out our family homepage --
with pictures)

Yours,
Arnie

P.S. Sad to hear that your wife died.
I posted her name to our Church Web Page prayer list
as soon as I read it

January 17, 1997

Descent

We held fast for a day at the last plateau before the valley
and watered the beasts, rested the young
and looked upon the valley spread out before us like some carpet
for the last time

How different it will look to us clinging to our wet skin
crawling upon our raw skin, biting flesh, stinging poison
clouding our vision with the stench of decay and fetid backwater
mocking our courage

Thick undergrowth blocking the sun, pulling at limbs
thorns tearing away, vines slapping faces numb with travel

We will forget why we came this way, why we suffer so
Sifted like wheat

Going where we would not go -- asking each night, pulling the
wheels held fast by muck, if the vision persists as valid
now that the living of its passion has long-robbed it of its flavor
tasteless, we implore

Knowing, from other journeys, the lay of this path before us
how do we make the most of this ritual of clarity before the onset
of pain of living arrives with fury at our invitation
we beg for it to come

I will feel the wind in my hair and on my brow, listen to the roar of it
in my ears. Not that I'll remember then, what it feels like, certainly,
but in hopes that then I'll know I spent this respite well

I precious time redeemed

Not that the price will then be any easier to bear (I am not such a fool)
but on my reverence now, my weary spirit must depend
when patience breaks and comfort flees before me like some
piper taunting

In the forest deep I'll resonate my soul to silent tunes from memory
distant time compressed to fill the gaping chasm from this vista
long forgot, to that present gritty fulfillment -- urging me on like the
keep of a promise

And blind my eyes, then, as now, to idolatry of any fleeting presence
deem I it "good" or "ill" -- but live it then as now

I fill my nostrils with it, then to the camels --
feast on sunset

Careful just to gather for today -- all else would rot within my sack
E'en then, to stoop, and mop my brow with graceful piecemeal
partaking in life -- the body and the blood

1994

Destiny

What if the journey were the destiny?
Could I content myself with traveling?
not nearly aimless ambling
But something like turning my face
Toward Jerusalem always
ascending those heights
for sake of kindling kindred bonds
en route

in bound

in-coming

Keeping always on the Way
of Be-ing
nomadic communion
wholly unencumbered by
Tomorrow's tunics

Shake the dust
Push not the river
Mount on Eagles' wings

1995

Disengage

"I guess this is where we say 'bye'"
You informed me today as if reading your lines
from a script as the wind filled the yard by your place
with the promise of rain cold and hard when tomorrow
we wake up no longer as friends

I stumbled while shaking your hand and I knew then
that we were already leave-taking the bits of our souls
we had loaned to each other --
that day I remembered a chess game while bees played
and drowned in our colas

You played some tunes loud from that van
that you sold for a song when it stranded you,
after you filled it with trinkets and treasures
unearthed from the flea markets all over town where one time
I believe that I spotted it -- empty

And today after all of the laughter and brotherhood
talking of Jesus and how much he meant to us
now that it's over we call ourselves "lairs" and
call it a day as you, hurting inside (I can tell)
leave me stranded to show how it feels

I'd have followed you now, like some puppy, except
that I know now we've traded our hearts back for
stones rolled too tightly to seal in the stench of our
friendship that died when we looked for too much
of ourselves in each other

1996

Easter eve, 1994.

He did not treat happiness about life as a thing to be grasped
But humiliated himself time and again by confessing to the same crime in which he
Repeatedly engaged himself
In which he located the sum total of his happiness
A bird forever out of reach
And just when he reached it, he forever launched it from his grasp
It's a wonder the son of a bitch ever stayed married
And he did, for eight years and counting
But he refused to locate his happiness there,
Contenting himself instead, or rather believing he would find contentment,
in the two birds that taunted him from the bush
While he crushed the one in his hand

Jesus Christ said I am the Truth, the Life, and the Way.
You shall know the Truth, Jesus said, and the Truth shall make you free.

This perpetual chase is no happiness; it is certainly no freedom
Ergo, it must not be the truth.
You chase a lie, my friend, and you might not have the strength, when it really matters
To seek the Truth with all your heart, mind, and soul.

The tomb is empty, as of tomorrow. Why do you seek the living among the dead?
Would you rather have found him dead, thankful to go back to your nets?
Were you glad this weekend not to have his incessant demands turning your life upside-down?
Guess again. The women have returned from their errand with News.
They speak the Truth who will forever speak you.

April 2, 1994

Even You Cannot Save

(Holy Week April 10, 2001)

Beyond reach of your power
At the place of crossing from
Desire to destiny set in motion
Long ago by unknowing conspirators

Never far away.

To which until recently I was party.
And have I wrestled long with
The mighty temptation to crawl
Back to the blessing of not knowing

Or caring so much.

And just when I have gotten used
All over again to the feel of the
Threshold of heaven's gate upon my
Travel tired and dusty feet,

They turn now of themselves.

And take me to a place refined of
Power if not the painful
Bliss I have known of ignorance
Swaddled in too uneasy peace:

(the price that I have paid)

To bring me to this city where the
Prophets raged in vain before a
Laughing crowd of mocking victims
Never far from rage and rain of heaven

In this parching land

Where I have lately come to sacrifice
The rage of god beyond the father's reach
And hope of prayers for salvation
No. Utterly forsaken blood alone will dew

Long-dormant desert flowers.

Feathering Fields

I have longed to write of the chickens
whose carcasses rot in fields which soon
will sprout new life from deep within the
womb of earth

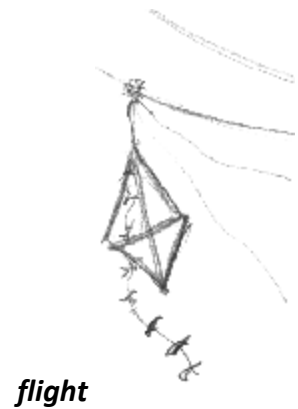
Their feathers lolling listless among
furrows freshly turned to receive
the dead, the promise of new life
consumed, consuming -- life resuming

God, you led me here to taste
the stench of death at planting time
I, for whom the chickens will provide
a bearing onward into life
toward that place of my own death
and planting

I eat these offerings of earth
en route not to this field of
listless lifelessness
but toward another harvest of
the very essence of my soul shaped
carefully within your heart, O God
and blown across a dusty land
to seep into the loam of earth
the dewy fragrance of your breath
and bear forth freshness from
this musty place of scouring
cloudless skies and feathers festering --

now dancing on the wind

1994



a tenuous tether holds me to the fire
and in the windy fullness
of life

I pull against the tether as a drunkard reeling and then
all at once, I wither
dangling there

I am haunted in my listlessness:
I could no more fly
untethered than I could walk
on water

hands held me once all careless and forgetful
God knows I spent enough time in
the closet

now all I do is fly --
when the wind decides to pull against my tetherness and yet --
I wonder

what would happen if somehow
I got loose
I'd fly until I.... well who knows where. Perhaps the
tether knows

here we fly somewhere between the dirt and sky
tethered relentlessly, helplessly, hopefully to a
power line

"Help us fly to heaven"

August 29, 1998

I have no wings for heaven cannot
see how I'll arrive
My daughter asks for help but I'll
need more than help to fly

And now the clouds obscure what little
light breaks through above
The stars lay down their lives in vain
to pave the path of love

Here I resign to earth-bound nature
terra captive lot
Take little thought of daybreak dawning
on the serpent's cot

Yet still she prays with confidence
for gossamer supply
to make the necessary passage
lift her wings and fly

And if this lofty child's assent
cannot be mine to make
to her petition I'll hold fast
and breathless bondage break

Hello, My Name is Aliceson

In the din of the check-out at Food Lion
(with Christmas approaching)
I yearned to be scanned
with your red laser glance --
have the sum of my soul
taken note of

And when I didn't register
with you, who said 'just hangin'
in' was OK
I swept over again past the
eye of your soul
to make sure

That's when you noticed
my name
(looking up from your book)
and you gave me
assurance that you would
henceforth hold me up
to the Light of your god

Now I thank you
and have a good day

November 16, 1996

When he died, I got so jealous it surprised me
(having envied him before, just after beating him,
while sobbing in a corner of that empty
house somewhere he hurt.
Like me)

We were twins, he and I
never mother and a son
because, remember, he had another mother

abandoned there together
I uncovered in his naked wounds
a bitter taste I couldn't put my finger on
without him

The first time, I felt sorry
when I kicked him, knocked him down
but when I saw his broken body looking
like I felt inside

it helped a little

His purple arms became
the emblem of my sorrow
and the dried up blood
a path to show the ways
his father killed my soul

And if I could not love the man
who gave him life
I chased his son into the grave
while searching for the signs
of my uneasiness

Search and destroy, it seems

So you who sit in judgment now
think what you must
but know that now his body tells
the Truth about a woman who could never be
his father's lover

God Only Knows

Why was the tree in the Garden
When the first children frolicked about?
Didn't You know that they might get too close; couldn't you keep them away?

Why was the tree in the Garden
With a "no trespassing" sign for a guard?
You posted an angel with sword all aflame when you wanted to make them behave.

Now, I wonder sometimes,
In the silence of night
When I can't keep away from the tree.

It could be I don't like to be trusted
Knowing myself as I do.
But I'm told that you know me as well -- so I'm puzzled.

I can't think of why you would trust me.
No -- I'm cursed by your trusting
I'd rather be faced with a sword hot enough to quench my desire.

Did you want us to come to you
Crying and fearful
Maybe you wept in the Garden, alone.

Do you long for the day when we'll go back together?
Do you wait now in hiding for us to come searching?
When will we cease passing by the tree, hungry...

It will never cease calling us.
And here you come calling, or crawling --
You banished yourself from the Garden to follow us, didn't you?

What would it take to believe in your love for us,
Pinned down by shame behind bushes?
Come out from the shade and take warmth in your gazing

We'll never go back to the Garden --
You nourish us from shameful tree.
And dream in us a trespass toward dependence upon you.

God Bound

The world is full of fall, a time of
bringing home the sheaves.
When summer's fatness leans to cool
the red-stained Autumn leaves.

Returning from vacation, chipping
pieces from the whole
to trade them in the marketplace:
feed hunger; starve the soul.

Midst desert of our wilderness
we hear twin voices cry
a warning to believers, stalkers
as they pause to die.

A Princess moans a final prayer,
some parting words from Mother;
Says the one: "Leave me alone,"
"I cannot breathe," another.

Where do you hide, O Mercy, when the
stinging season comes
to steal away from us these treasures --
Finding us alone?

In silence, tune our hearts to send
aloft to you a prayer
that penetrates your mystery
and meets you in the air.

God, bound you are to us in death,
when answers fail to come;
Gob bound we are to you, our breath
in death, in life beyond.

September 12, 1997

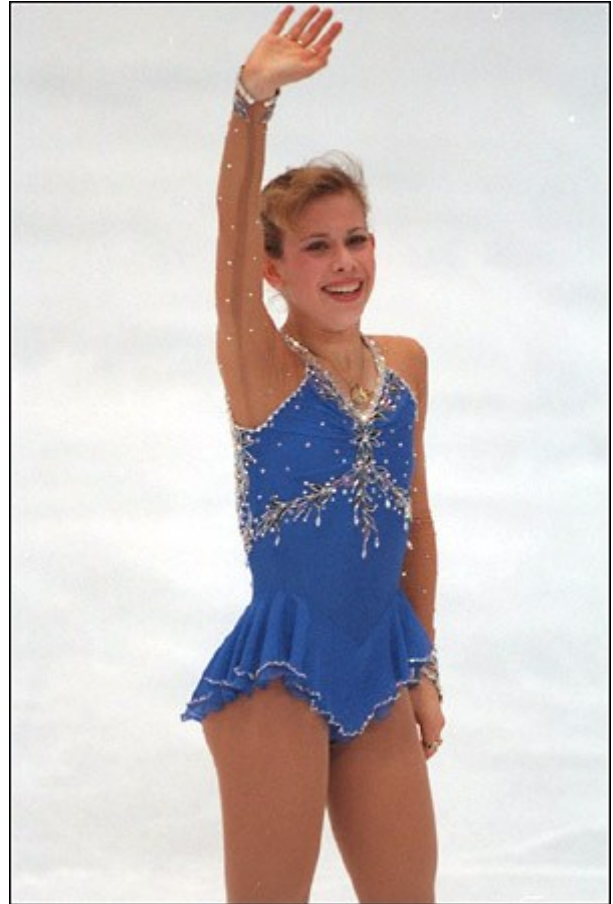
Going... gone

Tara slept with hers;
Chris Witty took a bite.

The household nature of
this all-or-nothing
quest for gold
goes without question
as the athletes, ageless, burst
upon the stage, feed fantasy
then fade forever
sacrificing youth
for fleeting hope
of glory, golden
chance to perch atop
a hill assaulted
endlessly,
piled high with
dream debris, tear streams,
one snow-capped melting moment
when the sun gilds, golden,

ecstasy

February 23, 1998



Happily Ever After

Someone asked me today why they all have happy endings
my poems, I mean
they all end so . . .
. . . and I wanted to tell them somehow
they missed the point of it all
I mean -- what I had to go through to get to the place
I had to be to tell a story that ends just so

And I guess I can live with the misunderstanding
that what I give away is too cheap
too happy too soon
But I need to say something else
yes – something else entirely that
gets lost in the translation somehow and makes it lie

You see, they are true in their happiness
precisely because they witness to the road
I had to take to get there
And anyway to leave you with the taste
of sadness on your tongue is a lie as well
though it's a worse lie by far because the pain
is less true than where it always leads.

I say always so casually because I don't even get
surprised anymore when it happens as a matter of course
just exactly where I never thought to look for it –
in a puddle of drool from the lips of a friend cursed
and blessed by the pathetic grandness we all live
and in hot wet tears that wonder "why?"
A familiar unexpectedness

They say I'm a pessimist
and I guess I'll go on telling tall tales with short
happy endings until I believe they are true
until no one else is surprised to see them end the way they do
and call it a lie
Then maybe I'll be happy at the end –

1994

Healing Celebration

(to Joseph Steffan)

I saw the news this morning
Proclaiming joy and shame.
Six winters for a judge to right
A lie about your name.
To place upon your brow the laurel
Stripped from you before.
Six winters past.

Six winters that eclipse my service
Standing in your place.
Oh yes. My silence at injustice
Chokes back my song of grace.
Through shame that mocks my celebration
I try in vain to sing a song
To honor you.

And then your joy leaps off the page
And draws me in your circle.
You raise to me your cup o'erflowing;
You understand the cycle.
I burst forth now from dying seed --
And in the light I see God bringing
Brotherhood to flower.

November 19, 1993

***How I Made my First Million* (1996)**

You who stand in awe should know that
my turn at the wheel began with no great aspirations.
I began to see beyond the Watson Walls
where at the start I taught
my fingers how to fly

I'm not even sure, looking back across
that piece-ful pathway to the moon,
when the work became a dance --
a rhythm that came over me:
my mid-morning, welcome surprise

After several years, I caught a glimpse
of fashioning more, a larger pattern
into which I pitched myself
-- a Source of the dance --
and that's when I stopped counting

I had learned to count, of course.
At one point, I could tell you by the minute,
hour, the day or week --
how even the time of year pieced into the
puzzle of perfection we who stayed on sought

At last it was this piece beyond the counting
on which I counted most
The rhythm that sustained my heart through
bidding Tom good-bye and wheeling round
to say hello to Maggie, Katie -- kisses

Gave away too many to be counted
at the close of Sunday Grace
All the gathered pieces of my life could not begin
to tell the story of my peace beyond
the counting pieces, passing time

Then how could I but linger knowing all I had to
teach amidst six seasons of my life
that seemed to scatter all the pieces?
You, too, can learn to live beyond the counting
Piece-fully, at peace --
I'm counting on it

I have not words for you

I have not words for you
to say when we meet,
to color my longing,
remember the brush
of your nearness

We have not words for you
cannot bear recollection
of turbulent train,
trace the stars raining
scars in the darkness

Our words birth distortion --
scratch wounds on the page, become
artifacts, tombs for our heart-
sickness lost in the turbulent wake
drawing lines in sand of our souls

Yet birth them we must
in a Requiem raucous to honor this
Passing among us --
our thoughts dare to compass
the shades of our consciousness

We know all we know
in our blindness --
in musty calm catching
our breath in the empty where
lately the Word lay entombed

January 24, 1997

If only you could know... (for my Father)

Broken, sacrificed

*Like bruised reed you trod me down to serving as
oblation for your pain*

*A meet, right sacrifice for dust which caked your lips
from shuffling shoes ran reckless o'er your body
broken, breaking*

*Heart of you wrapped in a dirty too-small pinkish coat
for girls which would not keep the cold indifference out
sat lonely there among your would-be comrades
You alone and motherless – your Father monolithic
in his loudly TV pounding in your ears a-night when
studies called*

*Payback from brother once exacted with a water spray
until he cried out shameless -- title that for others would
have been for love – said "Uncle" to your
learnéd cruelty*

If no one will come near – I'll keep them distant
say that's just what I wanted all along
and ride the tide of time in search of justice
punishment, reward I lost hope looking for one day
at track and field where He refused to see
my sacrifice for love

And little one you came all full of need into my empty
life of hurt and took away the only love I'd ever known
You taking more than I had need to give
from empty all inside the dingy box of me
'Till one day I discerned in you a hope I'd never dared
to dream

A better model of myself stride off to school and slay the dragons
keeping me at bay within my hurt
So carefully I nurtured pouring all of me redeemable
into your soul for shaping
Set a course for righteousness and fired your search for justice
you would surely find because I loved you like they never
did love me when my turn came

And now you've spun spat spurning all the plans laid carefully
at foot where prayerfully I put them
treating me like they did – only worse
because I never saw a future for myself in them
And now betrayed like Jesus to the gibbet go I, hopeless
abandoned by my Blood before and after

But not before I curse upon you one last chance to give
my trampled heart
You're a lot like me I still believe – and you could find a Way back Home
beyond the grave if only
you could know...

July 2, 1994

John Loves Susan to Death

They met in the same place as at the first, where (this time)
He killed them (though he never asked her
permission)
Walked through Dillard's like he used to do
Into the stockroom behind ladies' shoes, where they found each other
Too long ago (ain't love grand)
And executed her, himself
Swept away by passion -- the last as at first
She worth dying for -- he'd kill for her
Yes, so he did
In the stockroom without so much as a word
Between the two of them -- He, sick to
Death of all the talking -- so much noise
Time for action now -- he never, not nearly as good as she
At talking: she, the talker
Always ready with a word that silenced,
Shamed him
Then she left, went back behind her desk in the stockroom
As before, only different now
Killed, really, by his stoic indifference to it all
Like some machine -- yes, that's it exactly
Lunging into her and call it love
Well, he can go screw himself she says, crying
But I guess he has to have the last word after all
When words are spent -- too cheaply
Now all the words in the world won't buy back
One moment before his chaotic, clumsy orgasm
Of hate painted the stockroom wall with their blood.

March 24, 1994

Keith and Eugene

I don't understand why they do it;
Why Keith and Eugene keep on trying.
Or why they don't scream or strike out
At the people who jeer at two losers.
Always last to be picked, or even left out
When choosing sides for some game.
Or shoved to the back of the line . . .
Any line.

I don't understand why they do it,
Why they sing and play football and wrestle
When they can't hold a note, or carry a ball
And their stride's not much more than a hobble.
Some kids call them "Fatso" and "Lardhead"
But they never realize the hurt
Or the pain they must cause --
That we cause.

No one understands why they do it
When each day means more jeering and laughter
I laugh, when I know that it's wrong.
Glad that I can fit in with the crowd.
We don't understand why they're different,
So we pester and badger the misfits, not knowing
The guts that it takes, when you're flat on your face
To keep trying.

Bo Stith
Senior Year, Eastern Wake County High School, 1982

Killing Fatted Calf

Tomorrow I'll tell them that I cannot take a job
that keeps me from forgotten churches
in out-of-the-way towns you never hear of

I'll tell them that I'm tired of making choices
that make a liar out of me -- lying to and about myself
to save a world that has no need for such salvation

I want to preach three times each Sunday
Come what may and come what Monday
Diaper change in midnight sleepy -- no escaping love

You see it's love I want to seek among
the folk forgotten by the highway
in a place content to be beyond the reach of traffic

People who won't mind so much my double name and
strange ideas -- just that somehow I found this place
and show up more and more of me each day

The man said I could administrate with (wink) maturity
at a place where folk come to get away
from places you don't hear much about and some you do

I'd like instead to ministrate with glaring immaturity
in a tiny place where folk forgot how to get away
and see where love grows deeply in a dusty land

That could be reason enough to wait all these years to follow a
calling from halfway around the world in the midst of lonely
to come and sit a spell and get dirt under my nails

I woke up early this morning to go to a church no one's heard of
where we had church all the same; then we went to a pretty place
where words and music rocked me to sleep

I'll tell them tomorrow that something stronger in me refuses to go
where I might be efficient -- I'd rather go somewhere
they've been scanning the horizon for a prodigal to come home.

1994

Know who I am?

I weep openly at movies, in books and images when they're true
I have been called meek and passive
I am all those things and more

I like music that plays the songs of my heart
whatever that happens to be at the time

I enjoy the rain -- the way it soaks my soul --
and the dance of the leaves that heralds its coming

I live to be with friends, old and new, and discover those
matters which hold life in exquisite tension

I revel as much in the strength and beauty of my body
as in its delicate weakness and unique ugliness

I dance wildly sometimes when I'm alone --
take off the leash and run loose for a bit

I crave the Truth: about myself, my neighbor
and all of life -- as painful or mundanely glorious as it may be

I am not a conserver, but pour out myself as Spirit and Soul direct --
as I feel; I manage to finish the race -- but without a kick

I enjoy the accessories of life: coffee in the morning,
glasses (wearing them or sitting them on a book just so), and costumes

I write more than work at poetry
most things I do, I make into some game

I delight to be with children, before
they learn to wear their masks

I won't make small-talk. I mostly root
around in life's muck until I'm done

I go to ballgames (any sport) to smell
and to taste and to hear and to touch -- the air

I spend Fall and Spring best -- these are the
seasons that herald change -- promise newness

I look for answers -- but I enjoy the search
so much that the finding always brings me down

I don't like eating alone -- but I crave
certain spaces where only God trespasses

I like candles, elegant moments in life
the sensations of the woods and the seashore

I deeply respect the enormous power of words and
symbols -- to which physical violence cannot compare

I am growing to a place where I can be grateful for friends
without sacrificing Truth for their friendship

I have, since before my birth, struggled to discern God's
voice which moves and breathes in me

I struggle still, but I know God made me *good*
and I am not ashamed to say so

1994

Lead the Way

You are as beautiful to me today as when
I caught my breath so long ago at brush of you.
Now, so full of life, so fully engaged
in this mountain climb -- you shine

Now more than ever before
I feel the molten furnace within you
glow so brightly through the windows
of your soul without

Then, I never could have known
while passing 'neath your window-shine on
snowy evenings, drawn toward mirth
and music swirling from the your parlor door

Now I witness weekly count determinedly
into months while moonlight swells and wanes
in changing skies above. I marvel, terrified for you:
calm midst eye of storm within you gathering

Knowing, coaxing what must come to light,
you drink the chalice dregs I filled to overflowing --
heedless of the cost you'd have to bear --
Now I know, too, though I will never really know

Who stokes explosion deep within you burning hot
The source and seed -- the Alpha of all being
before whose presence I shrink while you
stand, so beautiful, a silhouette in star shine

to receive that most essential gift into your body
you present for piercing touch of peace that passes
through the pieces of your life you scattered --
petals marking path that leads to Life

April 11, 1997

Lessons Learned (echoes of love)

Love is a commodity
(Lay your head on my lap and sleep)
One strike and you're out
(I thought you played great)
Above all else, give us respect
(You are wonderful)
Brothers who call each other 'fool' go to Hell
(You three are quite a team)
Don't cry, boy
(There, there, now...)
Don't let anyone get into your head
(Trust your heart to Jesus)
Make us proud
(Your are my pride and my joy)
Never Trust anyone in this world
(Our home will always be your home)
I have no time for you
(I will not rest until you come home)
How could you?
(How can we help?)
You played poorly; you lost the game
(I only have eyes for you)
This writing is not your best
(You have the Gift)
Aim for the stars
(Enjoy the ride)
Don't let us down
(We'll pull for you as hard as we know how)
Never lie to yourself
(Always believe in yourself)
We gave our lives for you
(You give life to us)
Good-bye
(Go with God)

February 28, 1998

Limping Leap

I limped along beside you as we searched
In vain for Turkish coffee shop that served
And so retracing steps we shared a moment in
The slanting sunshine of a Nashville afternoon

At the outset of a week which found us switching
Places from the place we found each other
In this same place but in another time
When mother, daughter oriented you

Thus began a week so closely separated and
So bent on taking chances blindly searching for
A peace in pieces of our stories shared selectively
At first until the truth outran restraint

And every evening early I sought clarity
No journal could provide but egged me on
To limp beyond exhausting pace we kept up
Rain or shine in moments stolen 'til they passed

'Til Thursday came at last to long good-bye
May God be with you, Love, you said it finally
Leading dicey dance of danger, thrilled to end where
We had come at last where time would tame

Now healed, I walk on well-trod paths as one who
Sees a blessing in the curse of powerlessness as
You walk so far away yet closer than we ever walked before
In garden groves or skating rinks or coffee shops

111105

Maker Meet

The day God came to church
fear flooded hearts like wind-swept tide
We cringed before our School Marm
from whom secrets would not hide
When smoke of holy incense
choked us, senseless, to our knees
We burned our eyes to tears
while ancient wasps attacked, displeased
The doors we barred with "told-you-so's"
and shame obscured the light
Our chorus swelled, discordant
then hushed silent in the night

That's when then we heard the angel's song
peal thunderclaps of praise
The air smelled sweet, and fragrant grace
dried every tear amazed
From heavens, cleaved by shafts of gold
a voice well-pleased descended
We rose on wings of eagles
faces lifted, knees unbended
Commissioned there to all the world,
took food and drink for journey
With overflowing hearts we launched
from glade of love and glory

Such was the day God came to church
(when every heart bowed low)
To liberate our captive souls
kiss lips, our faces glow

February 9, 1998

Lancaster, PA

Making Peace

Reflecting in the dentist's chair the other day
I asked about prevention
Of all the ills that preyed upon my teeth and gums
And how I could protect them

I queried whether constant care could not prevent
The worst from happening
She said to me with wisdom tinged with resignation:
Some ills, we learn to live with

Now in this present age of technological advancement,
science and discovery
I cannot wrap my thoughts around a problem that
Defies a quick solution

I thought about a football coach I worshipped once
Who made a big impression
He taught his players: "winners always find a way"
(To edge the opposition)

And when a cancer slowly sapped his life away
Both spirit, soul demanding
His words of airy confidence to stay the fight
Mocked us both to silence

1994

Making Something of Ourselves

I struggled for words in the early this morning
Before you had risen from slumber.
And crafted another new way to say love to you
Just like we did when we started.

I thought for a moment about the professor who
Found our love notes in the margin
And laughed as I fondly remembered the feeling
That somebody loved me so mostlly.

Now lately I've been quite a struggle to both of us
(Maybe I've recognized work we must do)
And I know that we haven't come all of this way with us
Not to believe to the Mark of Love

We chose each other by magical, cosmical
Chance that comes once in a lifetime
The song we began to sing over and on again
Each day adjusting the chorus

You are the sun in my life that gives warmth to me
I can't grow long without basking you
I am the raindrops that fall and return to you
Hastening back with excitement

Maybe we've figured out how we will age with us
Standing on firm ground amidst the change
I am my own man and you're my devotion
Though each of us spans quite a distance.

Maybe I sense it will take all my life-long
To pan gold for words that will carry
The load of my love for your presence among my life
All of you nestled quite comfortably

That's why balloons have a place beside foreign words
Showing the strength of the symbols
To lift off the face of the earth what my heart holds
A treasure forever -- my love for you

1994

Nearer

A faraway whistle once beckoned my yearning
For dreams that have since become tangible.
And now in the melee to which I once hearkened
I quietly pause in my learning.

Softly touching the pathway through treetops and touchdowns
And rivers that seemed never-ending,
My lips mouth a prayer for more preparation
As slowly I crouch near the precipice.

So often I'd listened to sounds indiscernible
Suddenly brilliant with clarity.
Ideals so carefully nurtured melt instantly
Thrust in the path of experience

Who could have told me (I wouldn't have heard it)
To savor the song of the calling?
No taste prepares for the bittersweet passage
While tauntingly, twinkling, the melody lingers.

1985

Now and Not Yet

We are called from our darkness to live life a new Way
Enfleshing ourselves with new garments
Body and blood that are not of our making
Are called by the Word into being

That double-edged sword cutting fat heart-encasing
A steeling away from ourselves
The false idol images wistfully crafted
A totem denying decaying

In hot light of kin-dom we squint back from fleshliness
Learning to see life from another
Something we knew at the dawn of God's kneading us
When in the womb we breathed water

All of our life-long we journey back home
to the womb of our being
A birth from above
God calls us to harvest ourselves in a realm which
is not of our making
Our Source and our Seed

May 31, 1994 and February 10, 1995

Nowhere Friend

I had a dream of you last night
A dream that I remember, just for now – and so
I wanted to write it down
Commemorate it in some way before
It wonders off to where the dreams must go

We were skating – or at least I was, alone, because I
Have forgotten how to look for you, even in dreams
I put you out of mind reluctantly
Since you made it clear (but didn't really)
That our friendship is a thing of memory now

But the memory of this dream proves past the shadows
Of my doubt that even memory has substance
And that something of our friendship lives in me
Because you skated out of nowhere to a place
Where we weren't skating anymore, but close

Face to face, ignoring skaters that enfolded us, enough
To see the lines that care left on your face
You skated out of memory to let me know that
We're okay and that I'm worthy of your friendship
Like once we were when making memory

And even though I know it wasn't you
Who skated to the place where I was waiting
Without knowing what it was I waited for
The memory of you and time we skated really
Creates a way for me to skate alone again with love

December 20, 2012

...or die trying

My daughter awoke, crying, in the dead of night
and I could do nothing to comfort her.
So, I knelt by her bed,
whispered mantras of comfort —
or nothing at all —
as her screams lifted rooftops.
(All the while, crying out "mama"
again and again.)
Til mama came, granting
us both blessed reprieve with her
presence.

And now I lay me down to sleep
(after cursing my daughter, myself)
and prepare for darkness
to shroud me after all in velvet dust,
as silence sings a requiem.

She shied from my touch;
she cringed at my voice.
So why have I troubled us both
to soothe her with my
comfortless self?

Despised and rejected.
Love lost at trying sea
is swallowed up in victory
of mocked indifference.
Yet calls me to offer myself again —
perhaps tomorrow night —
and as I sleep, She breathes on me a blessing
for offering another drop
to fill the deep
that one fine day
will flood
eternity

November 11, 1997

philadelphia

I laid all my shame on the Scapegoat
With others in camp where we gathered
To find an escape from the passions we feared.

We laid on the Beastie our scandalous skifulness
Urges uncomfortable -- physical gravity
Tangible terror of self that eluded us.

Then slowly it edged out of camp to our cursing:
Cursing our unamputatible nature
We tried hard to live without -- clumsily laid on this piteous beast.

And we didn't care where it went in the wilderness
Just that it never returned to remind us
Of all of ourselves that defied explanation.

Now something has happened we couldn't have known about
Scapegoats are never supposed to return --
But this one has.

Crazily rampaging through our community
Dropping our shame at our feet with impunity.
I can't remember when we were this terrified.

What happened, Scapegoat, in wilderness terrible;
What sent you back to a people who loathed you so?
What gave you strength the load lightly to bear?

A Lamb there released me from my burden, Shameful,
Healed me and sent me to you with a word of life:
"Carry your load to the Lamb in the wilderness."

Fire rages there who is deeper than mystery.
Fanned by a Strong Wind who bore me to find you;
The Lamb and the Fire and the Wind -- they consumed me.

Now I cannot but return to this people
Whose shame cries for help in the desert.
I know the way back to the Lamb in the wilderness,

Take up your shame and come after me.

Plain Speaking (Luke 6: 17-26) February 11, 1998 Lancaster, PA

What good's a blessing
unredeemable this side of heaven
where a blessing could have come in
very handy
What help a guarantee of life
beyond the blue
that can't be lived until you starve
to death?

We heard the tasty promises
laid banquet-style before
our bloodshot eyes grown unaccustomed to
such light
We basked in heavenly attention
for awhile before returning
to our hopeless treadmill lives
to die

Less comfortable now, we found
it hard to bear at once
the burden of our hopelessness and this
uneasy blessing
Less inclined to press our shoulders
to the stony road (well-trod
by fathers' fathers) where we lost ourselves
in poverty

Once blessed, we saw the so much more
beyond our dusty plot of earth
where tangled thickets thwarted
every planting
Once blessed, we tasted glory
goodness called by Gods who knew a
good thing when they
saw it

Another curse, a flaming sword
blocks Paradise's portals
lest we add the taste of immortality
to knowledge
Another curse foresaw these blessings
harvest, birthing children
not merely making do, but blessed, inheriting
a Kingdom

Poem for Tuesday

We lack words to say god.
To name the claim upon our lives
Beyond the shadows of our doubts
We seek to give some shape out-
Side where lies the unifying whole.

We lack words to say love.
In all it's incomprehensible stickiness
Teaching torches brightly burning
Never failing faith returning
Heavenly bodies binding.

We lack words to say grace.
Gathered 'round a feasting table
Tables turn life's lack of fairness
Gifts abound our "worth" regardless
Heaven's reckless rainfall.

We lack words to say hope.
When through the walls of fate
We roll with stumbling stones
That cry faith resonating in our bones
Receiving wind of spirit dancing.

Cheap words attest our chattered context.
Swept away in gyres expanding
Past cynical improbability
Fleet-footed arched agility
Where bodies, souls alone must say their peace.

July 6, 2010

Prayer for Veteran's Day, 1994

O God, help us to remember this day, all those who have lost their lives in our nations wars.
Help us to keep the memory of these honored dead sacred in our minds and hearts
That their lives might never be forgotten among those of us who have survived
the dangers of war.
We wonder why it is that they have fallen and we have survived to live another day.
We wonder how best to honor them and the supreme sacrifice they made

Make of our lives, O God, a fitting tribute to our comrades we remember this day and every day
We remember their friendship
Help us to be as loyal and dedicated to others as they were to us
We remember their courage
Help us to have the courage to stand and even to fall for what is good and perfect
in your eyes
We remember their pain and suffering
Help us to live so that all warring between nations will come to an end in our time

For if our fallen comrades died for anything, perhaps they, and the countless millions of
children, mothers, and fathers who have been sacrificed in wars between nations died so that
we
who survive them might live for something higher, something far more noble than the chaos
and agony that is war.

We have been touched by war. We who have served know the bitterness, the pain, and the fear
of war.
Veterans know, as perhaps only you can know, O God, of the futility of war.

We gather today to celebrate not war, or the seeming inevitability of war in human affairs, but
to celebrate and remember the lives of our fallen comrades -- that they might not have died in
vain. We join their prayer that we may all live for that day when swords will be beaten into
plowshares,
and all people will study war no more. Perhaps, if that day had come years ago, our friends
could have been a gift of love to the world today, instead of a sacrifice to the world's hatred.

While we live, dedicate our lives to work as hard for peace among nations, as some people rush
so quickly to war. Help us to live, as our comrades died, to bring an end to the warring of your
children on this earth for ever.

Presence

The sun broke through the morning as
the mooring lines were doubled
And bells chimed out a welcome for
a Captain and my wife.
I raced up to the quarterdeck to glimpse
for the first moment
The picture of my happiness -- my Lady
and my life.

Four months had passed since on a windy
pier we'd kissed good-bye.
And in the week between for love we'd
written and we'd pined.
This morning, as I turned, I saw the
sunlight dance upon her
Golden hair, and then my heart leaped
when her loving eyes met mine.

At once, the pain of loneliness subsided
from my being
As her gentle smile encircled me with
love that cast out fear.
My heart raced as with rusty arms I
reached out to embrace her
She whispered, "It's all right now..."
and she wiped away my tears.

We had two days before us on that
bright November morning.
Anticipation meshed with precious
present of togetherness
As hand-in-hand we raced to solitude
to rediscover
Secret bonds that held us close
despite the void of loneliness.

November 30, 1987
Diego Garcia, B.I.O.T.

Questions I'd Ask You

Was I a twinkle in Your eye, before I began?
What about me gives You delight?
How am I made in Your image --
What about me reflects You?
What will we do when life does not stand between us?
Will You have time for me in heaven?
What does it mean to be last there,
now that I'm fairly acquainted with first place here?
Will I remember me?
When did You first think of me?
Why did You make me?
Why did You bless me with so much?
Do You long for me as much as I long for You?
How can I best love You?

Advent, 1997

Race

She softly sleeps beside me
as the Night races on with his burden
And peacefully, tranquilly, unconsciously
sprawling
She drifts away faster while I sail
behind her.
A light traces silk silhouettes in the
moonshine

Just ahead now, reflecting on wavelets
Which rise, running swiftly before me
And carry my butterfly angel on ebb tide.
She never knows of our nocturnal regatta
Wits pitted in subconscious flight
As moondust clouds over my sweet silver sailor.

As I aimlessly tack in the wind.
Too far -- and the sails luff in darkness
As my limbs slowly freeze with oblivion
I fumble with winches and fall into blackness
Where her arms wait to hold me forever.

Reckoned Righteousness (Exodus 17.8-13)

He watched the battle rage below
Ensnared upon the mountain
And when his hands he lifted high
The foe was overtaken

The tide of life and death below
Depended on his faithfulness
To hold aloft in spite of pain
Imploring heaven's favor

And I know why we never question
Shiftless shoulders -- lives forsaken
Mask as weakness, our refusal --
We've betrayed the troops below

Dangling arms in bitter failure
Scathing shame and misery
Knowing full our failing measure
Resigned to lose the battle

Yet heaven will not see us fail
And props our hands securely
We *grudgingly* accept renewal
Relinquish proud destruction

Good I would do -- I do not do
Riddling through the ages
Overcome now by another --
Love incomprehensible

Stretching out our hands for piercing
Leading us to table
Set before our timeless foe --
Ourselves! *Imago Dei!*

1994

Re-Entry March 6, 1994

Recently I was in an accident:
a head-on collision
of symbol and reality.
Or maybe competing realities --
I never saw it coming anyway.

I don't write much since then
because I want to know just
why such profanity
comes of such innocent
and earnest symbol-play

They're just models, really.
Like cut-out clothes for dolls
to mix and match -- more to see
how something feels than how it looks --
trying symbols on for size.

They grow on you, though,
in a way that defies anatomy --
the sum of parts dis-equal to
the whole of what happens in
the symbol-life that takes its own life.

They took me for a ride one day.
And I suppose the really
inexplicable thing is here I go again.
Before I'm healed
Before I know the How or Why.

Because there are too many things
I can't explain though I need to
find some handhold to stop
this interminable falling towards a
cross-your-heart promise of death.

Metaphor never really happens, I think.
And after all it's a silly shot-in-the-dark
to pin the wrap on symbol systems
When all I really need is a position
to assume while falling

Reflections of a Family

Shortly I will leave you in my following a Calling
you enabled me to hear.
And I am troubled by a guilt in my abandonment
of you who gave me birth.
I owe you my allegiance, my devotion in return for
all the love you gave me
Yet from the start you pointed me to another Love,
the Truth, reflected in your life
You turned my eyes from your light to the One Light
of your passion
You midwifed me to second birth
A child of God's creating
And we became as brother, sister -- love of God reflecting
in our love for one another
You taught me all the dangers of attempts to make your love
into an idol of devotion
You raised me not as your possession but in all ways
a child of God alone
Before I had a choice to make you saw that I was baptized
into the Body of God's weaving
So now I realize that in my faithfulness to God
I live my gratitude to you
I leave you not with heavy heart because I know the Spirit
dwells within us, three, binding us together
Our common Father, Mother, Christ Child calling us to be
the children of God's family

1995

Reflections

There was no sun today.
But we had light to live by nonetheless.
A misty diffusion of hope in the wind
That urged us lifeward
Sun or no.

The tide came in, the gulls broke the fast
Of a night drenched with rain.
The sweepers deliberately gathered wet garbage
The wind refused to blow away.
Folk hunted for treasure of all sorts with patience
This dawn -- like they felt something change
In the air.

Too many day-signs to let the
Sun's absence stop us.
Besides, in this new light
We could see but not be seen --
Could afford to move carefully, look
Without hurrying.

We had reason to seek treasure here
On this day the sun bypassed;
This day paused us to seek things
Overlooked when the sun came as usual.

1993
Ocean City, Maryland

Remembrance

It's months ago they buried you --
 your body's wasting now
like when I came on too-few Mondays
 "Lazarus, come out!" to read
 to you in pain upon the dingy bed
with Kleenex box beside
 a cooing dove in cage
 (you tried to give to me)
you'd turn down Oprah shouting
 on the picture-littered RCA

Shades you only opened in the rain
 snuffed out the sunlight
now and then a scrappy little boy
 would hound the puppies 'til you
 shooed him back to kitchen
once I changed your medicine
 when I got tired of watching grandma
 tremble it to death

Trash can full of tape and empty plastic tubes
 you took to beat back death
 a few more days
and got me out the picture that you drew
 of you alone atop the table where they told you
 life and death grew strong inside you
 all at once

You birthed and buried Christopher
 whose face hung everywhere
 eluding you who wept each time
 his name escaped your lips

We laughed about your smoking
 and how pointless being careful
 is when you're as good
 as dead
"So this is AIDS," I thought
 when I first sat beside you
 sticks-for-arms and baseball
 knees and ankles, hurting
Wanting then to carry you

away to spend a moment by the river
where the ducklings swim behind their Mama
But even then I knew you were the only life
inside the pale haze of the room
where streams of people waited on you
not too patiently

I miss you more and more
these days you're gone for good
and mourn
Too many Mondays missed beside you
when I took your whispered "no" for answer

Now, not even God can bring you back
but maybe
when you bathed a birth
in holy water once
while nurse was waiting
You believed enough to fly beyond the
shaded windows

Laura, Laura, Laura, Laura

Now I drink your health
within a trembling Cup where
Blood of this infection
heralds life beyond
your grave

January 17, 1997

Reunion

We touched a sacred place today
while hiding, covering our tracks
to places where tears keep
saline watch o'er high-wire balance
between
despair and self-destruction.

We broke through to a
glade of gathering
where, scooped into each other's
keeping carefully,
we, tender flowers
nestled in hands determined
to keep us 'til we made it home

And for a few not-desperate moments
we were so loved
and so we loved
we stooped before each other to caress
(if only in that timeless instant)
our tired, weary-from-running feet
(and didn't care who was looking --
or what they said)

Now that it's over
(not that I could have stood it
much longer)
my anointed feet dance lightly on the wire
and fragrance fills the air

Was it you?
Or God?
Or God in us together?

We dared to crack a window
we will never shut again

1995

Reveille

Have you ever watched the sun move
Early in the dawning of the day
Have you ever waited patiently to see it
Leap above the trees in month of May

For too long after darkness flees
The sky glows warm with presence
Of this sun too shy to show itself.
Then, just where earth, sky touches, flames erupt

All at once it happens that the sun pours
Liquid light into the sky emblazoned now
With glowing preparation -- in hushed reverence
Angels sing its maddening measure

This too-short everlasting moment shudders time
When watch the sun move idlers of the dawn
Receive reward of precious patience witness
Revelation dawn a gold sword-piercing sight

I've been allowed this dawning day
The grace to momentarily attend the moment
Where the night becomes the day
Touched Source before which now, converted, I
to shadows flee

1995
31st Birthday

Rush Hour

I strain to see
your face
beyond the intervening
safe-T-glass and mirror
image as we idle
by an empty ballpark
near the bypass

You lean toward center
stub out cigarette
adjust the Rush-rant, heat control
then, heed the signal bidding us
resume commute without so much as
glancing past the compact confines of these
rolling sanctuaries sealing us
from common destination:

pause at intersections

November 21, 1996

Safe Keeping

June 21, 1997

An old priest stroked his beard and
smiled on me with loving eyes, then
nourished me with time-etched wisdom

"I have found," he softly spoke as we
lingered at the Table
"that we do not change God's people --"

then he paused
"God's people," said he, "change us."
Then danced a new light in his eyes

And now he raced ahead and far behind me
sitting at his feet while mentors, children
wardens, old combatants crowded round

A company, so great a cloud
in chorus song together as he traced his fingers
round his finished cup of coffee

And chose not to elaborate for me in
hallowed hall where present clouds the
clarity of memory and time

"You can never give another person that
which you have found, but you can make him
homesick for what you have." [\(1\)](#)

We rise, embrace, take leave from one another
homesick for a thing we cannot name
a prize not sought -- that seeks our souls

Return we now to place of our employment:
House of God -- Christ's Body, broken
built with living stones

"For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God..." [\(2\)](#)

1. quoted from Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*

2. Psalm 84:10, NRSV

She cries when she dances

and leaps through the air,
her limbs giving way
to a visible prayer.

Her gossamer wings sail
too close to the sun.
Our hearts melt to witness
her suicide run.

She's achingly beautiful -
stardust in flight;
she blesses the audience,
lost in delight.

The gift she bestows:
a rare glimpse of divine.
No one knows how it carries her
far past the line.

Yet the gods won't be mocked
as they feast on the mount;
they exact the last drop,
stem the tide of life's fount.

She dances on, weeping,
and thrills every heart,
gathers worshipers, mourners,
while playing her part.

Yet before her bright flame
yields the floor to the night,
she yearns into meaning,
bears witness to light.

How blessed can a dancer be,
crushed 'neath the weight
of the gift (and the curse-
always found out too late)?

Best to dance than to ponder
such weighty concerns.
Share the gift, spill your tears,
scatter ashes from urns.

Song of a Sandcastle

I walked as the tide fell
and saw ancient relics
Of yesterday's castles
Built high and laid low.

Beaten badly (and showing it)
Yet defiantly ruined
Beyond recognition
But stubbornly present.

Surviving a cycle of ravage by water
That presses all sand to conform,
Relics can't know they are founded on wishes,
Careless diversion and playful delight.

Crafted not to endure below the high watermark,
Pliable transience part of their essence,
Blessed for a moment to stand, then
To yield.

So yield, gentle relic
To wind and the sea,
As sand yields to form you
In hands small and free.

You were made for a moment,
Yet timeless you stand
In your essence the sea takes
To whisper again...

1993

Ocean City, Maryland

Song of Sadness

*The rain washes tears down the streets of Olongapo
Into the sewers and out towards the sea
To be swallowed up whole in the wake of a warship
Then sink to the floor without trace of emotion*

My song takes its cue when my belly
Draws tight from an unceasing hunger
And promise of bread on the waters arrives
On gray warships whose sailors rain thunder.

The verse echoes strident on sheets stained and threadbare
From work that sucks life from my spirit
And muffles hoarse cries of my soul into silence
(And no one's around who could hear it.)

A seaman descends down the streets with his buddies
With pesos to trade for my body.
He laughs, drunk on San Miguel, leering
He chooses me.

Then while he lunges, I grope in the darkness
For freedom, a light from the hallway
One chance in a lifetime
Worth giving away all the life left within me.

While the rain weeps the hours before dawning
The sailor sleeps deep having done with me
Lying beside him, I dream about trading
My life for his fortune and flying forever away.

But chorus of daylight arrives: he escapes me
In silence, discarding my face with his underwear.
Fast comes the weight of forever upon me
Until I can't breathe, then my song ends.

*The rain washes tears down the streets of Olongapo
Into the sewers and out towards the sea
To be swallowed up whole in the wake of a warship
Then sink to the floor without trace of emotion*

Lines written on the occasion of my second visit to
Subic Bay, R.P., aboard USS Bunker Hill (CG 52) March 2, 1987

Song

Hey -- I wonder if they'll ever know
Or ever want to know
Where we got the melody
Or how we got the lines.

Did they notice how quickly we caught on
Without a word, or even a glance
We seemed to know
All along... waiting.

To walk into an answer
To find, when search has ended
As one hears silent pleas
And clutches things unseen.

Be careful, or they'll notice
And they'll never understand
Or want to understand
How -- or if -- the notes
begin.

1985

Spring Cleaning

This spot won't out
from on my soul a killing field
red-ripe for harvest -- fruitful
bearing us to death of our contentment
ushers in the pain of truth
demands a full accounting
of the deal we made for sake of
sanity and partnership.

Now all unbalanced is our
universe of knowing what we could
expect of one another
dropping hearts' desires on doorstep
of our happy home.
Now the key change heralds audit
testing waters for a shock
of never-halting need demanding
our attention from the care we'd
quite forgotten how to tend each other.

Like not knowing what you have
until a birth casts into contrast your
neglect to check the course of keeping
up your guard regardless of the cost.

No use getting sentimental in this calm
before the onset of a storm of love and
pain that bears down hard until
it bears the child away
and leaves us quite alone

together

1994

Spring Gleaning

I discovered a passion once
and spent it falsely on a bargain
of my own making --
at the closing of a deal bought much
too dearly far more than I could
expend of my heart
exhausted lay I spent upon the
shore of my exposure passionless.
listless plod thru life benumbed
expecting nothing, fearful of my
carelessness in craving still
the passion-spent now that I've struck
this awkward stance a trade
to keep my heart in check sedate.

And just this morning I retrace my movements
of late -- these old familiar steps of love
like forehead kiss and rasping paint
with utmost care to bring about a
restoration of my love --
a reining in of that which
would have reigned o'er me entirely
incinerate me in its cheap intensity --
now cooled by gentle rain
of my own making not

God's mending bending of my heart to love
with passion that I've never known before
urging towards the other -- hot desire reborn in
windy calling culling of my spirit

Spring Reign

*"Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;
I the LORD have created it." (Isaiah 45:8)*

I am a disciple of Jesus Christ --
Sovereign over all the earth.
But that tells you so little about me.
For so many have come before me in
Christ's name
To conquer and to kill
To engage in a struggle to the death
rather than a struggle to liberate
God's truth (so I have falsely struggled)

Yet I am still a disciple of Christ
Ashamed of my own part in the
blasphemy of God in Christ's name
But not ashamed of the gospel Christ
died to proclaim
A Word so pregnant with God's
truth that even the rocks prod me
to sing its song with my being.

As unsure of myself as I am
sure of the good news of great
joy God raised Christ to prove
I will tell of God's goodness with my
hands and feet while my heart
melts within me

For I am a disciple of Jesus Christ
Sovereign over all the earth
Taking my place
as part of the stammering story
wherein we all must find ourselves.

Bathing in God's righteous rainfall
that draws forth salvation from
parched places and peoples
Like me, a sprouting disciple who sees
God's salvation in a world springing up to

praise the God who rains down righteousness
who bears the world on a
mighty rushing wind who bears
me to you

Because I am a disciple of Jesus Christ
and I see God's salvation in you.

1993

StreetSong

I never start out with some plan to smoke crack
I just happen to wind up there
after I spend the day walking in circles

that's when the guys drive by, blow at me, asking . . .
and what do I tell them?
'cause I don't exactly have anything better to do
eyeing the afternoon sun at the rooftops
the wind picking up
and this morning somebody just stole
my good boots and the jacket
that made people stop and take notice

No,
I don't want to always be asking for money
I'd like to walk into a store again
get what I want
drive it home in my car
I can clean --
like I did at the Holiday Inn
'til I started to hang with some girlfriend --
who did me no good

I didn't start with some plan
to destroy all the little I had
now I'm here and I'm hungry and tired
after walking this long day in circles
that always end up at the same
dead-end places
where men take what I give them
to spend the night warm --
smoke a dime and forget
'til the early comes
starting all over in circles

January 17, 1997



Sudanese Summer

When the soldiers rained down death
I feasted on my tears
And prayed my body down to die
In bitterness and fear

I didn't know then how to live
While baby kicked within me
Unearthing hope to carry on
To gather, travel, sleep

Tread dust along the endless road
From spring to barren summer
By fields baked hard to potting shards
Entombing seeds deep under

I pushed my baby from my belly
'Midst a crowd of strangers
I heard his cry and answered with
My song of love and anger

Now my child sucks hoarsely at
My pruning, dusty breast
Amid a sea of hungriness
While I sit down to rest

We wait together for the dawn
Of death to rise and take us

Late to be with those we love
Who swiftly flew before us

I remain to send a signal,
Far from home I wonder
Planting seeds within a womb
That never knew our hunger

These I'll water with my tears
And warm them with my fever
We'll cover them with prayers for
This land before we leave her

Our bodies we will lay us down
To nourish them with power
That one day all the world will thirst
For righteousness to flower

July 30, 1998

Summer Spectacular

The sun-bronzed gods of the lakeside
take to the air from the springboard
arch in the sky over carpet of diamonds
suspended in casual defiance of gravity

Orienting themselves for re-entry
they twist -- or they flip -- then take aim
as aching, the beachgoers watch them in rapture
till gently caressing the water envelops them

Then effortless head bobs to surface
almost but not really noticing
many eyes almost but not really riveted
grateful to witness divine visitation

Now ascends from silk water this only son
anointed by rivulets sparkling
suit draped like laurels on conquering Caesar
toweled, towering over us common folk

Sand clings to skin here
where diapers fill beach bags
we summer lake denizens turn from this
spectacle -- tend to our paperbacks.

1996

Surprise

Poetry happens when one stops to listen
To sounds that her heart
Has been trying to send
Through the deafening tangle of habit and process

And once silent footfalls like moonlight
Begin touching consciousness,
The mind becomes wet with
The dew which was imperceptible falling.

Light splashes color upon dog-eared pages
Of comfortable scenery --
At once trembling with new
Strains of music that echo through musty silence.

Carried along by perceptive breezes -- sweet fragrances
Filter through nostrils
(Once stuffed with fast schedules)
Embracing such welcome refreshment.

The verses give hope to a world without solitude
Peace found in all-too-familiar surroundings
That gets in the fierce way of
Progress which cannot make time for such
idleness.

February 20, 1987

Long before the vote was taken
I had been convinced of the necessity to
chart a killing course of what my loved
ones came to call that day a
heresy

Though I cannot (you may be sure)
accept that what I came to throw my
life into was misbegotten lie -- that moniker
suits better some of what they voted into
orthodoxy

Now your "instincts" tell you that my
pride has felled me, others like me,
we who cannot bear a censure from
our brothers, learned men who call us
heretics

We who bring to bear the questions
on assumptions smugly hid behind the
veil resistant to Good Friday's renting
purchase for all time transmission of the
orthodox

How I cried in vain to Heaven
begging for a sign convicting my conviction
consummating pure conjecture, conjuring
with mysteries elusive to the
saints

Never my intention to undo --
just persevered on path of faithfulness and
could not let it go before a blessing was bestowed --
begged for the Name, who recalled me a
Sinner

Too-far gone I cry unsmoldered through the
ages to your faith dis-eased: beware
of blindly following this One who
graced us with God's presence on a
gibbet

Terms of Passion

I'm learning to provide a way for my Desire to say so --
So also hear in your Desire the seal of our devotion.

To wonder from the beaten path
into a glade transcending
all we've learned to sublimate
as selfish desperation.
I'm desperate to know the things
I thought beyond composure --
Of balanced equability in
life-love's understanding.

Naively we divorced ourselves from
self-love when we started;
Today we grant permission to our
deepest passion longing.
Searching for each other in ourselves
we wonder vaguely --
Hesitating, fearful of the things
we might discover.

I've learned to lie into your trust
and see the stars above us --
To know a Love withal our love
that kindles flame between us.
I set you free and feel within the
freedom that you give me:
A pointing deep within ourselves
to Love beyond each other.

1994

Texaco Rendezvous

I (on the phone) passed the paper to
you (in your book) who

signed the bill for your
fuel, then you
ventured back to the
cold of the night
where you came from

You glanced at the look on my
face lined and dry from
too many not-meetings like
this one, my
music rapped on in the
background discordant for
someone my age though

I'm really much younger and
then when I scowled at your
signature, I
hoped you might
speak to me words that would
reach past this counter where
tonight for a moment

you touched me

November 16, 1996

The Harvest

Thoughts become actions
When conscience grows tired
And chance leaps from habit
Limbs practiced and fired.

This private collection of schemes and enjoyments
Which occupies people in reverie splendid
Spreads spring-loaded seeds of an unfashioned future
Into time-fertile soil to grow wild and untended

The mind is a child whose only ambition
Is faithful devotion without contradiction
And serving the pleasures of long-ago wishes
When timing seems right and the setting propitious

The servant commands and the limbs follow orders
While one day the Master lies sleeping
And no longer hidden in ethereal reverie
Seeds long-forgotten explode in reality

Thoughts become actions
When conscience grows tired
And chance leaps from habit
Limbs practiced and fired.

1986

The Nineteenth Song

The heavens proclaim God's glory -- the skies your handiwork.
Day after day they pour forth speech, and nightly your knowledge.
There is no speech, nor language where their voices cannot be heard;
sending forth into all the earth, their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens God set a tent for the sun,
Like a bridegroom coming forth from his place
like a runner rejoices to run in her course
It rises to the end of the earth and nothing is beyond its heat.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
Trustworthy are your statutes, making wise the simple;
the precepts of God are righteous, rejoicing the heart;
Radiant your commandments, giving light unto the eyes;

And the fear of the LORD is forever and pure,
All your ordinances righteous and true
Yes more precious than gold, even sweeter than honey,
By them your servant's warned; in keeping them there is a great reward.

But who can discern their errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.

And then blameless I'll be, found not guilty of sin
Let the words that come forth out of my mouth
And the meditation of my heart be pleasing unto you, O LORD,
my rock and my redeemer.

adapted by Bo Stith
aboard USS Missouri (BB 63), Winter, 1987

Theologizing Made Easy

I sat in the lounge with my schoolmates, having a rare theological discussion.
One was angry because the Women's Center meeting that week had been
Closed to him. He said he was mad at the snub, even though he laughed
And said he would only have gone to disrupt, to poke fun at the silly girls club.
And the father looked on with approval.

The other was angry too. "We couldn't have a boy's club!" he fumed,
(in this kingdom where the chosen ones call all men equal, and they mean it)
"If they told me I couldn't come, I'd say: (have sexual intercourse with) 'em,"
He said, and stuck his middle finger in the air to drive the point home.
And the father looked on with approval.

My protests were casually ignored, as I was inept at this theologizing in the
Student lounge (they moved on to deriding affirmative action in god's name).
So I walked out into the quad littered with purple ribbons, one for each daughter,
Raped, mutilated, abused, beaten, imprisoned, to drive the theological point home
That the father looks on with approval.

Smirks exchange in exegesis classes where the real theologizing goes on, carried out by
Experts in the field. Scholarly consensus carries the weight of orthodoxy, dictating
What can and cannot be said, hence lived. And if you try to listen in this deafening
Roar of name-dropping, they will brand you heretic, pagan; they will beat you down
While the father looks on with approval.

God's wisdom is foolishness to men.
God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as
our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even
now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is
cut down and thrown into the fire.
"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Our Father, who art in heaven...Thy will be done...in us.
"You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put
up with you?"

You want theology? We are the children only a Mother could love.

April 2, 1994

This Must be Love

We almost fooled them all, we did,
with Ken and Barbie cheap veneer
betraying miles of strata deep below
the chorus we performed in unison
before a crowd more willing to believe the
fairytale that we performed before their eyes
than sit alone with us in damp of darkness
chasing after tiger loose anight

We, too, believed the wooing of our audience
through stunning runs year after year
(we'll show 'em all) we said
and laughed at sayers-nay
without perceiving their affinity to cloudless friends
adoring us in sunshine we created with
a calculated harmony without so much as asking
how it came to be that way between us

I'll sing to you an epic song this Mother's Day
of all the life among ourselves we've come to
name as love -- who soon will bear another name
not merely just to get the story straight
or even that at all -- I've lost my touch at
aping for the crowd -- I deem it more
sufficient now to dance extemporaneously
together -- after close of show

You dreamt of me a voyeur helpless
standing out a penance on the edge of your
despair -- a nightly discord to my leitmotif
of Lancelot come sweeping in to save you
And how I hated witnessing each dawn of day
your sad report -- shut out whispered fragments
you had not the heart to paint in sweeping picture
for your fear of blinding my eyes dim with shame

How could I be your enemy and friend at once?
I answered back your chorus
witnessed silently your scathing for my tardiness
made a show of farce toward snowball tossers after fact
From me you had to build yourself a wall
to dissipate the impact of my helplessness

while cradling me in arms in such a way
that would preserve my sense of needfulness

I, weeping, shuddered deep within the well of love
you chose to dig for me in secret while for all the world
I acted out the part of Great Protector
perfect sense to both of us, then, two years' hence
a dog would take the job I never quite
decided I could do
I much preferred to run headlong into your life
all necessary; I eschewed supporting roles

I'll tell you what I know of you, my Love
You were the tough-as-nails veneer that rolled
the worst that horrid school for boys
who put off manhood could deliver -- off your graceful back
and saw perhaps in me a promise of my
inability to fit the mold of imperfection there
as I in you saw promise of a woman who could
live beyond the pain of staring down that Legion into shame

We (far from "making" one another) rather celebrated things
not valued on the wrong side of the wall
and came to call it love while learning to survive
upon the other -- we fell hard upon
our flimsy shoulders -- I could not imagine
myself weak, attracted by your weakness, your
survival mocked me without irony so good
had I become at seeing what I chose to see
For I came to that place of boyhood fantasy
to prove my worth a man -- and just when I
fell out of love with all its hatred then it was
I fell in love with you
a woman for whom I could prove myself a worthy
Knight all armored gaily for a fight which never came
an enemy of old within who had the run of
all our secret places past my Maginot defense

Who, with my love you let into your life
beneath a stage on which we played a battle to the death
We, two, sat down at table in our lap of love
to see if we'd survive the onslaught of each other
protecting each of us in silent spaces we
allowed were few and far between the time we

picked our brains and hearts for ammo feeding
fire to fever pitch between us casting eerie light

Having come full-circle to a ten-year cycle
from that heltered summer heat of 2nd class
we balance on the edge of parenthood and preaching
out the Word to friends who pose as strangers
to whom we must turn the other cheek
an I prepare to stand by helpless while you
cull from womb a life on us dependent
and demand of me what I fear most to give you

So I pause me long enough from running from
that place within you where I cannot bear to be
but from which I can't live too long away
trusting you to sense what I can barely understand
about myself and asking you to fend alone
the barbs I'll surely bear to keep you distant
knowing I can never long be absent from the
well of you -- now empty tomb -- now island in this ocean

May 8, 1994

Tightrope Dancers

Laughing, we speak about matters unspeakable
Singing, we handle the things we can't touch
Cease from our striving and lay down our burdens here
Rise when the horn blows and stand out of time

Singing, arms linking, our hearts beat in unison
Laughing, loud thunder claps, Spirits on fire
Feast on the manna while rooster cock quiri crows
Ties blessed embracing us span gulf of pride

Laughing and crying, we taste tears of Galilee
Singing, hands raising the roof off this place
Steeped in the Saint-pray-ers, holding, enfolding us
Cries out in thankfulness -- hands pierced -- we dance!

de Colores!

1996

'Til Death Do You Part

Do you know what it is to be raised from a dead
Sleep when the apartment shakes
When the woman who lives next door impacts the wall?

This is my body

Does the fear translate word by word
As your heart pounds a drumbeat rhythmically to the
Spewing hate knifing through the walls?

This is my blood

Do you lie in your bed -- now quite awake
Refusing to move, accepting the merciless blows
As she must -- in the fear you can taste?

Poured out for you

And after he tells her to get up motherfucker
Too many times to count and slams
The door out to the car to leave, you exhale, slowly

And for many

The sobs choke out of her, through the
Thin walls between you that forced open
Your eyes from their sleep with their thundering

I have longed to eat this Paschal feast with you
before I go to die.

March 24, 1994

To a Friend in Hiding

You battle incognito to defend your Transcendent Father against emotionals who profane Him with their selfish demands.

Your callous words assail me like cinder blocks from an overpass
because I hold fast to the Word Made Flesh --
attempting to live the incarnational implications of God's
inbreaking Kingdom.

You threaten me with your wit and cutting remarks --
so clever and so unemotional --
another mask you hide behind.
Yet your hiding signals that I must threaten you in some way.

We live together, my friend, fighting against each other,
but unwilling (or unable) to let go without a blessing.
Something about what each of us says demands our agreement
even as we disagree.

God, the Transcendent, Immanent One who claims both our lives,
will not let us live without each other.
The Word indwells us both and compells us to commune
with one another in order to approach the transcendent throne.

We drink from the same cup, don't we? We cannot say to the other,
"I have no need of you." When we disfigure each other,
we disfigure ourselves, in a real sense.
Our failure to love each other incarnationally gives the lie direct
to our proclaimed love for the Transcendent One (I John 2.9).

Perhaps the Immanent, Transcendent Holy Spirit exists
within and beyond our differences, friend.
As long as you hide, we can only speculate.
Come into the light; let us do the hard work of loving each other
and living together in the power of God's Spirit.

November 17, 1993

To Marry

Strange, that two people can enter
Into a life-long contract without
Really knowing exactly what it means.
(And no one could tell them anyway....)
But over time a peculiar fusion
Between two partners takes place
And though unnoticed, takes shape
In too-familiar practices...
(Like forming the number "8"
Or the clothes you wear...)
When, after a while the subconscious
Decides that hers is the better way.
Then slowly an unplanned evolution
Of habit and taste
Meshes two people in symbolic
Union. Each preferring the other's.
So, perhaps soft pastels mark the
Passage from parallel to pivotal.
One morning you wake up drinking tea
Without sugar.

Two people not sure what they started
Sharing secrets, 8 figures, each other.

March 2, 1987

Together Trust

Though I'm lately lonely without you
On my ship across the seas
I see your face in crimson skies --
I hear you in the breeze.

The sparkling sunlight brings your smile
in giggling wavelet laughter.
Your gentle arms embrace me, evenings
In mist upon the water.
Some nights -- perhaps a million stars
look like your dancing eyes
You sing to me through splashing seas
sweet, peaceful lullabies.

We're never far apart at sea
While God with nature joins us.
You're here with me, and I with you
In oceanic Trust.

August 12, 1987

Vista

You, always fleeing from
the only love you've known
as cymbals crash the shards of memory,
burn down the bridge of time

Your dormant heart on ice
to keep 'til comes the
din of opportunity
that tolls for thee

(For anyone within the grasp of dreams
like tractor beams)

Tease, taunting, from those distant peaks
beyond your reach
they slope toward sky,
return the sunlight sparkling

November 22, 1996

Washday

Rain, soak me to my essence
Saturate my skin and hair
Drip into my eyes my mouth my ears --
Seep into my soul

Until there is no escape of you
And I, with upturned palms
Receive you wholly, Holy to myself
Blinking in the steady pouring of You.

I crave your wetness
Dripping from my nose
Withering my skin
Robbing me of warmth

Lubricating every part of me.
Dissolving rivulets run in between
The crackéd clay of me
To cut ravines to carry dust away:

Relentlessly the wind and water
Show the lasting part of me
Your deep enfolds my drop
You razed the earth to find.

1994

Waterborne

I've heard of a bird called the Albatross
Who makes his home upon the windswept wave
By day and night he soars above the ocean
Throughout his life, above the foam he plays.

And never near the dry land does he venture
To find a bit of substance, solace, peace.
He much prefers the transience of water
And atmosphere to plainness of the beach.

The Albatross subsists on submarine life
That ventures much too closely to the surface
And hangs on lofty currants to digest it
Then skims the frothy main with hungry purpose

Sometimes he floats together with his brothers
Tossed fitfully by whitecap, wind and spray
But mostly he enjoys the misty solitude
As skimming, swiftly, silently, he plays.

March 2, 1987

Aboard USS Bunker Hill (CG 52), off Lahaina, Maui (Vicki's Birthday)

We Danced the Macarena

One, two, over, over
Most of us were sober conscripts
as we gathered near the DJ
kindling coals cooled for a decade
falling in by rank and file

Elbow, elbow, shoulder, shoulder
Music starts, we fall together
all for one for one more dance
laser glances beam the distance
taking cues from one another

Waist, waist, hip, hip
One more cheer for Navy, boys
grown to men while separated
launched like graduation covers
from our four-year Severn sojourn

Roll, roll, turn together
Fourteen falls from when we traded
podunk towns for new relations
now I've come to know who I am
I salute who you've become.

1996
USNA Class of 1986 10TH Reunion

Will Thy Will in Me

I saw myself as God would see
The all in Chnst God lived in me
I felt the pulse of passion rush
The tender wings of angel brush

I begged to hold that vision pure
Before my longing eyes and poor
So that my tongue, my teeth, my hands
Might move on winds of faith and dance

Exhausted I lay on the rocks of my dreams
Of cheaply-bought happiness tangible things
And all the while cursed by a dis-easy settling
A demon's deal -- false idle image belittling

Then, suddenly caught in a vision so heavenly
Made in the image of God I cried out to me
"Come show yourself in the light of God's Truth,
Making Way in your waywardness, peace in your youth."

September 7, 1994

Tuesday, September 21, 1993

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost (shortly after our second miscarriage)

I recalled an ancient center this am. A warm, glowing spot of contentment in my life. I re-read Psalm 139, and pondered my God who knit me together in my mother's womb -- a God who presents to me in every reach of my existence. And I remembered my mother's lap in a pew on Sunday mornings in Belmont Park Methodist. The 7-fold Amen, the warmth of the pastor's voice, the rich red carpet, brown woods, and love all around me. It was OK to go to sleep -- perhaps the only time in my young life when I had my mother all to myself -- my brothers were in the nursery. I didn't have to be a big help to mommy that day.

She ran her fingers through my hair. We found that we had never really been separated after all. This tragic event in our lives -- the birth of twins -- had not succeeded in tearing us one from another. Like the freedom of birds on a wet, bright spring morning -- I knew I was not nearly alone.

We were all of us in over our heads, weren't we, God? You perfumed the air with yourself, knitting us together to overcome the terror of events that dominated and threatened us all. Too young to raise kids -- yet wanting to love so perfectly. Chin up -- be a good boy and tuck yourself in bed. Yet all the time a great light drew my eyes to the horizon in the far distance. Dad worked too hard. Mom struggled with a backbreaking burden no one could have warned her about, and Jack had seizures.

Yet you were there among us and with us. In the sweet togetherness of family reunions. In the lap of love each Sunday. In a hopelessly-in-love togetherness walk along tracks of destiny to gather a reason to be. In the quiet omniscience of a treetop. Even in a move to a new hope -- new home and fresh start.

You gather us to yourself still -- never letting us out of your communing presence. As we look back over our lives together -- never quite able to figure out: Why? All we know, again and again, is the sweetness of the many moments of love -- in the face of too much we could not understand. So we drew our baths alone -- but you washed us with yourself. We went to work early and stayed late -- and found a reason for being and loving in our strange togetherness -- surviving and thriving in the struggle to live and to answer the hard Q's that haunted us.

And you were among us all, my Love! We laughed around a firelight -- looked into the stars and cried -- why visit us w/ so much of yourself -- oh Love! Lost in love w/o the answers -- you rendered them quite unnecessary as you flowed in our living through and beyond the pain. Life did go on, but w/ a reality we could taste. A dance we all knew w/o knowing how we came to know it.

We danced along the RR tracks. Along too many sidelines w/ other dancers after a too-long day. You danced us in a whirl of love that carried us beyond chance circumstance and cursing to see Jack smile and lead an incomprehensible dance of joy. Perhaps somewhere we forgot to ask Why? anymore. We were too busy investing ourselves in the daily dance that called us afresh each new morning and dropped us into bed exhausted every night.

Nestled in the lap of your love, weren't we? Swung wildly about, laughing, crying for more -- dizzy with delight. Overcome alone, but so much more than the sum of us together. Loved. Cared for. Delighted in. Shooting baskets -- missing -- shooting again. Chasing after balls

through the trees. A paradise of togetherness -- communion with you in us that we never thought to ask if it shouldn't have been.

And the hero should have been the clown -- the horrible monster of tragedy. But you never let us know that story, did you? The madly exciting dance of grace taught us in the doing to cherish every moment of life for the gift we came to know it was! The resurrection from the dead -- lived every day anew in our home! A glorious sunrise. We laughed until we cried -- until we no longer knew whether our tears were tears of sadness or of joy.

Oh, The Wind in Our Faces!

Wordplay

Haven't written a whole lot lately.
Not exactly sure why; maybe its happening all too fast.
Parhaps I shuddered at the thought of having to put (cram) so much
Into the tiny, expensive spaces the words occupy -- signify
Certainly there is much that craves to find the dignity
Of a few lines, setting it down in some memorial fashion.
Certainly that's the least I could do
For so much sleep lost, given over to watching deep into the night
And rocking restlessly to the nightbird's song

I need to say, for instance, that I want to be significant far more
than I desire to be faithful (or even thought of as faithful).
At least, I need to see how it looks on paper -- feel the feel of it
on my tongue
Set it to a particular music, rather than the careless song that
repeats itself endlessly in my mind, molling and roiling about
as the sea-tide foams in the calm before evening

I did that, not for shock effect, merely, though I wanted to
put myself on notice -- something significant happening
Sacramental symbol-play, creating the reality it purports to represent
Now I can wrestle in some organized fashion with its meaning
As if such significance could be attached to a word, weary with travelling
so far, and on such short notice, pressed into extra duty no one could forsee
Now I string along other meanings, like beads, straws on camels' backs
Until I come to the one that topples my house of cards -- inevitably
I sigh, and start over all again, piecing the words together differently this time
Never stopping for a moment to inquire whether my fragile building blocks might
pose a far more difficult obstacle to my task of understanding
than I first imagined

No, they must do, for they are all I have to work with
And I have seen this fragile deck balance the world upon its tiny breast
So I know it can bear the weight of my imaginings
As it once bore the majesty of God's breath -- the inklings of a world
Dust and spittle -- life

I, a product of same Word, inhabited and inhabiting Word
situated on the floor, surrounded by mere words that haunt and taunt me
with their pregnant promise, bearing Truth to term
but not in my careless hands alone do they dance like the tide pulled by the moon
the very rhythm of the universe

A mighty tug so fearful I cannot bear to be aware of it
Though I see it moving oceans
coaxing babes from warmth of womb into this bracing world of so many words
searching for one Word, alone, will do.

1994

Yisra-el

They called themselves night wrestlers,
strugglers, wondering in the desert
Lost in sea of sand and heat,
embarked on path of promise

They took the name bestowed
in night of inky clarity,
a diamond-studded darkness ere
the dawn of reckoning

Then witnessed countless wheels
of starlight in between the match
igniting weary nomads all
along the struggling Way

A people borne on tide
of toil: a fight with self and doubt
Bereft of sign or signal from
the endless muted heavens

While swirling sands of time
sting faces, eyes that look to hills
of help in herding hearts toward the
graceful fold of death

More questions than we dare
to ask spin 'round our heads, embrace us,
pin to mat our shoulders
with accompanying thunder

Yet journey still into the
dusky dark where hope is birthed
toward the untamed places
where an ambush waits to claim us

June 14, 1998