



Caution:
Poetry can be a dangerous
matter
uneasy the lines, can

undo a hidden lifetime

**Poems selected from
Scattering of dust: some favorite readings
The Leaping-Stepper and other poems
Above the Wind
and unpublished manuscripts**



**Our Knapp Hall
Eighth Grade Class**

~ Page 2 ~



**Our Junior Class Officers -- the
last year I lived at Berea**

~ Page 3 ~



**Stylized memories
of Porter Moore's
taken from the Chimes**



How memories, especially
of faraway childhood
dissolve into something
else
a reordering, restructuring
of what was, of
how we have become who
we are today
ghosts of those persons
we once were
are semi-opaque versions
of visions
who we were, who
we might have become yet

in semi-dark twilight of
earth
in this form clarity comes
shining down
as harvest moon our
hearts have ever
beaten steady to the same
gentle
rhythm of stars circling
beyond our skies

Written following a
conversation with
Bruce Robertson in



September 2000

Falling into Jackson Street memory
finding hidden in backyard oak familiar
corn cob pipe, cherry blend, fresh
as for our Scouting hikes across the bluegrass

thirty-six miles in two days once
to Keeneland track along rows of straight white boards
demarcation for thoroughbred lines

~ Page 6 ~

isn't usually the walking but the resting
recalled, lighting up that pipe
swapping little sins (we were not yet worn down in this
world)

imagining perhaps being asleep in some other place
and dreaming you guys and these summer breezes
blowing down through miles of green woods

Was it ever real, any of it, even then?
And where are we now, if not gone
down onto solo pillows?

We will walk a lonesome road
into the sky someday each by ourselves

as the savior did

wonder if in the hereafter
we can be children again
or live that awkward, perfect
in-between when we were friends.

~ Page 7 ~

The path

finding it again
from places
we promised never to go
long ago
behind the walls
rose and wood, granite hills
chalice of moon, scent of
sandalwood
discourse in dappled woods
gypsy moths gathered around the light
sure-footed for the ever to come

And here and now
down in the valleys
where the pale light
comes slow dripping
again, eyes wide
to the shine, to the
way
we always knew

Doubtful that this blasphemous journal excerpt comes
out of our (shared) Foundation School Latin class
experience (Per deos immortales!), but who knows?

Telling time off
pissing off the gods
“Quid deos immortales cognovisti?”
And the reflections in our eyes
are we blind
to the life of the pond
or centers of civilization
northside Chicago
Old Town
or Haight-Ashbury in the ‘60s

when we spread our wings
angels
of the redwood grove
flying high above the wind

what we cherished was the all
to which poets yearn
toward which science leans

perhaps it was on sand bar shores
their spawn first filled the pail
an ocean away from Appalachia
where we hiked the cliffs
and yelled "Per deos immortales!"

here, inside the hush,
their songs emanate
radiate
through dancing limbs
and shout out of eyes

going to the easel
spitting out poetry
in acrylics
symbols for words
to be misunderstood

the canvas alone is pure

~ Page 10 ~

not, i think therefore am
but, i dream therefore am
and if i dream the dance
the dancer i become

Errand

Vortex
crass pathway
barely touching, crossing thin
fleeting
flimsiest excuse for pawn of lust

Gabriel was sent upon an errand
never has returned
years ago

Looking out ramshackle window
debris strewn streets
bodies piled high by henchmen rogues
crematorium loads

~ Page 11 ~

Has not returned
still waiting
for a
sign

The motorcycle engine revs
shadow rider under leather

comes
for setting
matters
straight
to pull the
bullets
out
of
guns

(For Dr. Roscoe "Rusty" Giffin)

Tiptoe

She walks on tiptoe border line
Juliet in glowing eyes.
No disguise could ever hide
candle glaring through the night
sung in round before first light.

She walks the tiptoe border line
around and round tempting wine
but never does she enter in
no way inside to cheer her friend;
though I dreamed I saw her smile.

If she never calls again
old doors come crashing down
to splinters gone for sure.
No matter where the wind swirls flow;
though I believe I saw her smile.

Three main acts of tragedy
fill the corners of the stage
where reckless arms collided once;
now are only leaves that rustle
in a hot and restless wind.

Tethered Climber

(Epilogue)

Up so high the cottonwood sings
her trunk the melody
branches harmony wings

Back down on earth
things are different there
distinct lay of land
of seasons, wounded chorus

Belay the line below the climb
tied off to someone else's hands
a gypsy's perhaps, see the tattoo
wonder whether or not to trust
lifeline tied off stretched taut

Climber of inward heights
hanging on by subtle thread
to source and root and mother of us all
through one not known but hope is true
tied off with knotted cord
must not release until

the episode has ended
and sky attained
then will face
whose hands have held
the line
(for Bruce and "Spider")

Shadows pummel side of silver speeding train
Rushing seasons past to metronome of railroad track
No peace inside this ride
Broken schemes
The weather's been too long too bad
Eyes are dull, are sad

Seated warm in a station house
Somewhere along this line
Refreshed, a fellow journeyer
Ponders the joy
Reward for insight —
Weather for both having been the same

He came awake singing in an alien language
Words shimmering, expanding into galaxies
Splayed across the bedroom wall
Then imploding, contracting into tight spheres
Before one final explosion sent them, broken stars,
Out into space.

Where had he been in this dream
This storm of sweet fury?
Crawling from comfortable covers
To greet another day:
“Where,
where am I?”

I recall, years ago, a song
Once we sang together
I've forgotten the words
But remember the melody
Will remember the melody
Beyond the horizons
Beyond the old words
That lost their meaning anyway

Symbols without substance
Ghost forms holding vast emptiness
But the tune carries the mathematics
Of stars crossing, coursing
Toward pulsars, centers of universes

shout down a fear,
a thousand more may come around

embrace the fear, a child,
and grow upon its food

until you reach the ledge
face a mirrored world

come to know you are
the bright one
immanuel

Discovering joy and sadness

Joy and sadness as one:

joy is lover rushing to meet beloved
in dance beyond secluded stream;
sadness is lover returning
taste of encounter
a memory on the lips and tongue

Or twin planets orbiting, dancing
about this dream of you and I

Heart rising, heart falling
heart filled, heart empty
is the same, our drum, beating
cadence to stars crossing overhead

An American mom

American mom loving child,
loving pet

woman, mid thirties
angry, shopping
slams cat litter, cat food,

juice for her child --
a little five-or-six year-old
gal with wild flying hair
just like the mom's, pretty -
into the trunk

the girl hides
crawling into back seat
mom who loves the child, the pet
so much buying them
all this shit
slams trunk lid
after slamming in shit
for her loved ones

slides into front seat
slams the fucking door
takes off quick
from crowded parking lot
at shopping mall

The Visit

I came down the coastal cemetery
to see our headstones
they were still there

Knelt down, pulled a few weeds
alongside perennials were growing too, budding
about to turn to flowers

Mamas and the Pappas were singin'
California Dreamin'
everywhere
blasting upward from the earth,
out of bushes
out of trees

Paid my respects
with due respect considering the season

Shadow crossed these sacred grounds, looked up
squinting into sky
at flights coming and going
out over the ocean

Until it all turned crimson, I blinked
and everything was gone
again

Back in Toledo
or is this Kansas?
I struggle to know where ever I am

Only wanted to write to let you know
I had been there
visiting our resting places

(Any other hippies among my Berea classmates?)

years the poetry
failed

or was it
the other way
around

a failing
to listen

Self

Are you the
you who
wrote down
these words,
or the you
who is
reading them

and what's
the difference

and afterwards
who are
you now

“I’ve never had any friends
like the ones I had when I was 12.
Hell, does anybody?”
(Stephen King,
excerpt from
The Body.)

We Knew

In those days we kicked up clouds of dust
from the twisting string of road
and ran behind wide red barns
to hide from really big dust clouds
the wind blew down our necks from far hills.

We were younger then but knew
what it was all about -- the sky and fields
and all the folks.

People were machines
that worked the fields and the dung
which made the beans grow tall and
more than that -- they were the angels
who lived in the sky
when autumn was done.

The Woods

. . . spindly lookin' trees
as if you could breathe too loud
and knock `em down
like paper matchsticks
but there are so many . . .

a man could get lost
inside them.

(Written on a Greyhound bus on the way to Berea, first
visit back in 1965.)

Leaf to Petal

Leaf to petal, petal to leaf
watch as the day wears on unfolding

closing and
coming back together.

Nature
owns a rhythm
never pausing
even at passionate
words, or at the shame
in our eyes.

No,
she does not work like people do.

Uncle Kyle's Cabin

Up the dusty, scarce-used trail
then ford the creek
along raspberry fields

At the gate
feeding wild ponies apples
plucked from valley limbs

Down the wood fence line
fire's on inside logcabin doors welcome mat
trailing blue smoke into blue hills

North Carolina seems so far away

Some summer old Kyle will lead us again
up the dusty trail

(Written about a summer vacation at Maggie Valley and
staying in a cabin owned by Ernestine Upchurch's
Uncle Kyle.)

Woman of the Dulcimer

Appalachian roads
unchanged for a hundred years:
the rains falling from bluegray skies
are the same ones
that fell upon the mountains
when we were children.

Destiny is piecemeal bone and severed flesh
northward into fog of steel cities;
or hanging upon deserted mountain paths;
the life we knew is gone.

These bluegray rains are ours,
but we are gone --
some into day,
others into
night.

Sing again
woman of the dulcimer.
Dance one more round.
Call back the daisy wraps
wild rose buttons.

The sky folds backward
below the edge of the Cumberlands
every evening;
it's just that
we are no longer there
to watch.

Sing again
woman of the dulcimer.
Dance one more round.
Call back the daisy wraps
wild rose buttons.

Friends

Lonely rivers that never cross
ivy grown apart
never twined
Separates wake in middle
of the night
hearing the call but
no way to act upon it
at all
too shy for love
too lonely for words
their hearts won't mend

Broken, friends forever
never consummating
love
they're too shy to
ever admit
feelings
never spoken of
carried
to burying ground.

Walking Past a Vacant House

Idiot society
chews `em up, spits `em out
broken, scattered like dust in the wind, no
not dust chunks

of gravel and granite
discharged and
propelled by forces
not their own
to destinations
never intended in beginning
ending up living lives
not ever imagined in a million years
under the veil before the altar
swearing to God and
everybody promises
now unkept.

Winter's Pedestrian Watchers

The sky performs ritual of snow
kicking it down in trough and basin
pedestrians run, trying to kick it
back to where it comes from.

Frost draws childlike circles on windowpane
we sit on windowledge
wishing to be down in the snow
playing like we were
cherry-faced donut and cocoa kids
red mittens and earmuffs.

The morning's coming on, splashing
in trough and basin, waiting
for us to come on down
from windowledge to play like kids.

When it's fully day and stars
melt down like snow which melts
to gutter drains, let's walk just walk
kicking what's left of snow from streets
back to wherever it comes from, and

gazing between steps
into each other's
eyes.

Berea

Ode to vincit qui patitur school, Protestant
alma mater, mother
of Jesus, where are you? Saw yellow
banded-wing blackbirds mating
(which one on top?) side of road, then
from the sky out of nowhere
seemed too cold, no fire
couldn't tell
(but don't people always get it confused)
above, up high silver
mirage flashed an instant like walking the
Appalachian trail used to do
the amphitheater Pilot Knob it was
God beside me again
Jesus, it was so good for awhile
anyway

A Land Never Seen Before

I walk upon a land
I've never seen before:
step lightly! for
someone lives here
someone is loved.

Sturdy fenceposts --
a strong arm dug them where they stand.
And rows of sweet corn -- who
planted the seed in God's sight to grow?

I walk upon a land
I've never seen before.

Back to the Cumberland Hills

I'm goin' back to my home in the hills,
I'm goin' back to the ones I love.
I'm goin' back to the Cumberland hills
high above Kentucky, high above Kentucky.

And I'm leavin' the smoke of the city.
I'm leavin' her lights behind.
And I'm leavin' a broken heart
in that city of broken dreams.

I'm goin' back to my home in the hills,
I'm goin' back to the ones I love.
I'm goin' back to the Cumberland hills
high above Kentucky, high above Kentucky.

Travelin' Song

I'm travelin' down a lonesome road.
I've been by this way before.
I'll come by again.
Love is like an eagle flyin' in the wind.
And I'll be by this way again, my friend.

I'm goin' back to my home in the hills,
I'm goin' back to the ones I love.
I'm goin' back to the Cumberland hills
high above Kentucky, high above Kentucky.

Heartache's All I Get for Lovin' You

I keep lookin' for a magic key to open up your heart.
Are there words and rhymes to sing
to show how much I care?
And if they ever reach your ears
would you like to sing along?
No, heartache's all I get for lovin' you.

Like a thirstin' plant waits for the rain
I've waited for your arms
to wind around and hold me tight
as in my dreams they've done.
But every time we get together
you vanish in the wind.
And heartache's all I get for lovin' you.

Next time I really do believe
you'll fall in love with me.
We'll travel down Kentucky trails
to see the wildflowers bloom
then climb up Pilot Knob
to see forever in the sky.
No, heartache's all I get for lovin' you.
(Another shattered dream . . . all she wrote!)

Smoky Mountain Memory

The good times are gone.
Good songs all sung.
Nashville man took my girl
away with a line.
He'd put her voice on records,
her name in neon signs.
She'll never sing these love songs
with me again.

She's my Smoky Mountain memory.
My Smoky Mountain memory.
In the Smoky Mountain rain I see
her face again.
In the Smoky Mountain rain I hear
her voice again.

Although she is gone now
to be a star
maybe she'll see
those bright lights go dark.
Then she will come back
into my arms
and sing these mountain songs
with me again.

Blue Ridge Mountain Rain

In the Blue Ridge Mountain rain I see
her long dark hair flowin' down.
In the Blue Ridge Mountain rain I hear
her sweet words of love one more time.

In the Blue Ridge Mountain rain I learned
the lessons of love in her arms.
But the Blue Ridge Mountains stole my dream,
and I've been away a long time.

One night in the rain
on a piny hill road
she left this old world behind
and a lover who'll never recover
his heart he left behind
in those hills.

I See Forever in Your Eyes

Our time together seems short
yet somehow I see forever in your eyes.
God has called us to be love
for one another all our days.
And though our time together seems so short
I will always see forever in your eyes.

God's love is greater than the world's.
It asks nothing for itself.
It's patient, kind, and understanding,
hates evil and loves the truth.
His love will never fail us.

Once I thought love was a game,
win or lose, play to a draw.
To take away the gifts of someone else's heart.
But love can never be love
unless it's given away.

Where Have You Been

Where have you been and where are you goin', my
friend

Have you been to London, have you seen the world
Have you loved and cried your tears
Have you seen the sunshine
and walked in the rain . . .
Or has life passed you by

Lines to Helen

Don't ask, "What ocean crossed? what
deck lamp lit in the ocean night?"

I was so far that I knew no bounds;
I was so far that I knew no growth;
I was so far that I knew no God;
I was so far that I knew no love,
nor fire, nor feeling, nor touch, nor sentiment;
outside the circle of conclusions and bounds,
beyond even freedom, I was an unsacred thing

fallen into the bright which lured me
to California and compelled me, a fool,
into a nebulous hole --
my own folly, no one else's.

There must be a million ships
that sail this world around -- I look
toward the sea and watch them come and go.
Sometimes I recognize faces at the railings
and recall passages made together.

I belong to the land now.
So, sail on, ships.
I turn my face toward the land of birth.

What happens when a man reaches the sun?
His wings melt in the flame and
he falls back to the dust of earth
to breathe again.

(From a letter to Helen Hovey, who understood tragedy
and joy.)

Lord, help all who seek;
all who seek rain into the roots.

I go from poem to poem
like a blind man sometimes,
like a fool sometimes.
“Life drifts between a fool and a blind man
until the end. “
Yet I seek release
from foolishness and blindness.

I repeat the prayer:
Lord, help all who seek;
all who seek rain into the roots.

Another Song

Another verse, another verse, another song.
I came from boxcar fantasies and
a woman's willow-branch arms I never found waving
for me.

The mountain is so
still with a hush of meaning
while I go over old journeys in my mind.

Such a song this morning. In the hush
where birds' mouths wait -- it is there . . .
Come lie awake all the days of life and listen . . .
another verse, another verse, another song.

A new year's song

The nighttime rider sang
the song was pure but I do not believe
I can do her justice by telling you of it
the words were in an unknown language
can say only the rhythm, rhyme and
musical chords made me
picture a birth
when blankets of an old century are
turned down a final night
the infant cries out

I waited on a far hillside
for her to come riding a pony
the moon was round and brilliant
calling down for children to come outside
and dance

As hoofbeats, faint but steady, came
from the east, a man's face constructed from smoke
above firestones in the west
even though my eyes were closed
I saw him there laughing
speaking in that same language

Looking down to his outstretched hands
he cradled burning coals
sparkling, I saw in them, deep inside,
stars circling, galaxies
again his laugh then
he disappeared

The rider came on her gentle horse
singing and I would share the song with you
if I could

Please look out tonight and the next and next
wait on hillsides of sleep
she will come and sing into your soul
the song you will know
by the harmony that comes
from out your own mouth
without conscious thought at all

Dec. 1999

Veiled Under Work space

dreaming

the jobs

day upon day

layering life

into

little pastries

where are the

mechanics

of grand viewing

above the engines

and towers and

smoke

what tools

would you use

pliers and wire to

write down history

of the ages

or

lasso and chaps

for solving equations

tracking stars across

maybe taking

wrong tools

is a choice

for watery

workers

splashing against

shores we don't

really want

to breach

would cause too much

stir in the soul

would have to

admit

who we are

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